

# The Novel Today: Recent British Fiction

## Lecture 3:

### The Novelist at the Crossroads: A Map of Modes and Orientations

- 1) The Development of Modern Fiction and the 'Turn of the Novel'
- 2) Modern Fiction and Modern Literature
- 3) The Novelist at the Crossroads

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- 1) The Development of Modern Fiction and the 'Turn of the Novel'

#### Realist Novels (1)

##### a) Synthesis > Reflexivity

- Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)  
*Emma* (1816)
- Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley* or *'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814)
- William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair, or, A Novel Without a Hero* (1848)
- George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859),  
*Middlemarch. A Study in Provincial Life* (1871/72),  
*Daniel Deronda* (1876)

## Realist Novels (2)

### b) Subjective Emphasis

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (1847)
- Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1849/50)  
*Great Expectations* (1860/61)
- Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

## Realist Novels (3)

### c) Condition of England Novels (“obj.”)

- Benjamin Disraeli, *The Young England Trilogy*:  
*Coningsby, or The New Generation* (1844)  
*Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845)  
*Tancred, or The New Crusade* (1847)
- Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton. A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848)  
*North and South* (1855)
- Charles Dickens, *Hard Times. For These Times* (1854)

## The Evolution of Realism

### 1. “Objective” Reality?

- “objectivity”, science, naturalism
- the marginality of naturalism in England
- Thomas Hardy as an example for the preservation of literary meaning on a naturalistic basis.

## 2. The Subjective Perception of Reality

- the discontinuity of consciousness and reality
- Henry James's anatomy of subjective identities cut loose from social context/community (e.g. Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* 1880/81)
- the subjectivization of narrative acts (e.g. Joseph Conrad, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* 1897, *The Heart of Darkness* 1902)
- limitations of narrative authority are compensated by artistic self-confidence

## 3. The Literary Representation of Reality

- synthesis as an effect of literary conventions
- problems of accessibility/difficulty
- literature as one specialized discourse among others, but still claiming general significance

### Virginia Woolf, "Modern Fiction" (1919)

So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the [realistic] story is not only labour thrown away but labour misplaced [...] The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability [...] But sometimes, more and more often as time goes by, we suspect a momentary doubt, a spasm of rebellion, as the pages fill themselves in the customary way. Is life like this? Must novels be like this?

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions [...] From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old. [...] We are not merely pleading for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.

[...] Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.

**Virginia Woolf**  
***Mrs Dalloway***  
**(1925)**

Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning — fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had always seemed to her, when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh said, "Musing among the vegetables?" — was that it? — "I prefer men to cauliflowers" — was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace — Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished — how strange it was! — a few sayings like this about cabbages.

She stiffened a little on the kerb, waiting for Durtnall's van to pass. A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her (knowing her as one does know people who live next door to one in Westminster); a touch of the bird about her, of the jay, blue-green, light, vivacious, though she was over fifty, and grown very white since her illness. There she perched, never seeing him, waiting to cross, very upright.

For having lived in Westminster — how many years now? over twenty, — one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There!

Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

For it was the middle of June. The War was over, except for some one like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven — over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace. And everywhere, though it was still so early, there was a beating, a

stirring of galloping ponies, tapping of cricket bats; Lords, Ascot, Ranelagh and all the rest of it; wrapped in the soft mesh of the grey-blue morning air, which, as the day wore on, would unwind them, and set down on their lawns and pitches the bouncing ponies, whose forefeet just struck the ground and up they sprung, the whirling young men, and laughing girls in their transparent muslins who, even now, after dancing all night, were taking their absurd woolly dogs for a run; and even now, at this hour, discreet old dowagers were shooting out in their motor cars on errands of mystery; and the shopkeepers were fidgeting in their windows with their paste and diamonds, their lovely old sea-green brooches in eighteenth-century settings to tempt Americans (but one must economise, not buy things rashly for Elizabeth), and she, too, loving it as she did with an absurd and faithful passion, being part of it, since her people were courtiers once in the time of the Georges, she, too, was going that very night to kindle and illuminate; to give her party. But how strange, on entering the Park, the silence; the mist; the hum; the slow-swimming happy ducks; the pouched birds waddling; and who should be coming along with his back against the Government buildings, most appropriately, carrying a despatch box stamped with the Royal Arms, who but Hugh Whitbread; her old friend Hugh — the admirable Hugh!

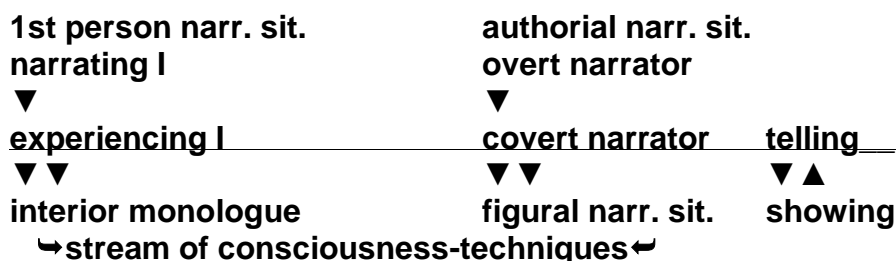
“Good-morning to you, Clarissa!” said Hugh, rather extravagantly, for they had known each other as children. “Where are you off to?” “I love walking in London,” said Mrs. Dalloway. “Really it’s better than walking in the country.”

**‘Neutralized’ Authorial Narration** (Stanzel: Figural Narrative Situation)

- covert/withdrawn heterodiegetic narrator (voice only)
- dominance of internal focalization through character-focalizers (Stanzel: reflector figures)
- omniscience/omnipresence still prerequisite, but narratorial functions limited to presentation of story world through the eyes, perceptions etc. of characters in the story
- no narratorial commentary
- extended free indirect discourse (“dual voice”)

**Franz K. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* (1979)**

1st person vs. 3rd person  
 internal perspective vs. external perspective  
 teller vs. reflector



## > The Turn of the Novel

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer.

Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" (1884, 1888)

It has arrived, in truth, the novel, late at self-consciousness: but it has done its utmost ever since to make up for lost opportunities.

Henry James, "The Future of the Novel" (1899)

### **B.S. Johnson, Introduction to *Aren't You Rather Young to Be Writing Your Memoirs?* (1973)**

Joyce is the Einstein of the novel. His subject-matter in *Ulysses* was available to anyone, the events of one day in one place; but by means of form, style and technique in language, he made it into something very much more, a novel, not a story about anything. What happens is nothing like as important as how it is written, as the medium of the words and form through which it is made to happen for the reader. And for style alone *Ulysses* would have been a revolution. Or, rather, styles. For Joyce saw that such a huge range of subject-matter could not be conveyed in one style, and accordingly used many. Just in this one innovation (and there are many others) lie [sic] a great advance and freedom offered to subsequent generations of writers.

### **Alan Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* (1966)**

The shift to which I refer was gradual, but it took place [...] with the greatest velocity at the turn of this century [i.e. from the 19th to the 20th century] [...] It was not merely plot, or characterization, or technique, or point of view, or thought, or symbolic organization that changed; it was not a matter of irreconcilable meanings, conflicting themes, or difficult problems. The change in the novel took place at a more fundamental level than these [...] The process which underlay the novel was itself disrupted and reorganized. The new flux of experience insisted on a new vision of existence; it stressed an ethical vision of continual expansion and virtually unrelieved openness in the experience of life.

### Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (1994):

The modern change that came to fiction was not always so revolutionary, and was much more complicated [...] There were key **social reasons**: the growth of urban populations, the acceleration of technological change, the coming of improved education and literacy, the shifting relation of the classes, the expansion of leisure, the gradual increase in personal wealth. There were crucial **intellectual reasons**: the decline of a religious teleology and of the confident, theocentric, progressive Victorian world view, the rise of science and secular philosophies like sociology and psychology, the coming of a more material vision of life. There were important **psychological reasons**, as changing notions of the nature of the individual, social life, sex and gender relations, and rising awareness of the distinctive, increasingly mobile and fast-changing nature of experience in a modernizing age gave a new, more fluid view of consciousness and identity.

There were important **changes in the role of literature itself**: the dying of the Victorian 'three-decker' novel, designed for libraries and associated with moral uplift, the rise of the literary marketplace and the development of the book as an item of purchase, the restratification of the cultural hierarchies in an age of increasing democracy [...] [H]owever we explain the change, the effects are apparent. The established form of the novel – fictional prose narrative – was acquiring a different kind of writer, a different kind of subject, a different kind of writing process, a different kind of reader, a different social and economic foundation. It was altering in length, appearance, price, and in social moral and commercial purpose. It was multiplying, dividing its audience, reaching into new kinds of expression [...]: new rights to social and sexual frankness, new complexities of discourse and form. Over the course of the twentieth century [...] this transformation would continue [...]

Changing, subdividing, [...] the novel would assume many roles. It would become a relaxing toy of leisure and fantasy, *and* a complex mechanism for imaginative and artistic discovery. It would serve as naïve popular entertainment, and would transmit radical, often outrageous or surprising, visions and opinions. Above all it would become a central literary prototype, taking an importance it had never had as *the* literary medium of the age, dislodging poetry, to some degree even sidelining drama – until, later in the century, its dominance was in turn challenged by new technological media that promised or threatened to replace book-based culture with something more immediate, visual and serial. [...]

But the break was never really to become complete. Many of the Victorian conventions and myths continued to haunt the radical surprise of the modern novel, and Victorian fiction – with its omniscient and godlike voice, its weighty realism, its chronological plotting, its presiding moral confidence, its role as the bourgeois epic – leaves its lasting imprint on British fiction to this moment. [...]

The modern novel came, but the Victorian novel did not entirely go away; and that is one of the essential secrets of the modern novel. (3-5)

In what sense did the novel come into its own at the end of the nineteenth century? Beginning with Ian Watt's identification of 'formal realism' as the central formal principle of the early novel in his classic study *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), the history of the novel up to this point has frequently been described as the emergence of a genre predicated on its realism, and this focus on the genre's particular propensity for engaging with reality under evolving modern conditions (see, for example, Hans Blumenberg's seminal essay "The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel" 1979 [1964]) has remained central to many theories of the novel to this day. However, the worldliness of the novel severely affected the genre's standing in the emerging Romantic and post-Romantic validation of 'autonomous' art and literature: Can a world-saturated genre like the realist novel genuinely aspire to autonomy from the very conditions with which it is filled? [...] The answer to this challenge must surely lie in the genre's modes of world-engagement, and there the continuity of realist modes of representation with the audience's accustomed ways of making sense of the world poses a problem, even if (or perhaps especially if) it is the fundamental requirement for realism's seeming transparency of representation, which in turn results in accessibility and ideological efficacy. For being genuinely 'autonomous' and thus recognizably 'literary', this continuity had to be reconfigured, and this is exactly what the turn of the novel was about.

(Reinfandt, "Introduction", 3-4).

### **The Development of Modern Fiction in terms of telling vs. showing (diegesis vs. mimesis)**

<b>18th/19th Century:</b>	<b>m ↔ d</b>	<b>realism</b>
<b>early 20th Century:</b>	<b>m (d)</b>	<b>modernism</b>
<b>late 20th Century:</b>	<b>(m) d</b>	<b>postmodernism</b>

Cf. David Lodge, "Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction." In: David Lodge, *After Bakhtin. Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London: Routledge, 1990: 25-44.



## 2) Modern Fiction and Modern Literature

### Periods of Modern Literature (Plumpe 1995)

[S = Systemreferenz; U = Umweltreferenz]

1) Romanticism [S vs. (U)]



2) Realism [U]



3) Aestheticism [S]



4) Avantgarde [U vs. (S)]



5) 'Postism' [S ⇔ U]

### Periods of Modern Literature (Reinfandt 1997)

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1) Romanticism [S vs. (U)]



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Aestheticism [S] ⇔ Avantgarde [U vs. (S)]



3) Modernism [S]



4) 'Postism' [S ⇔ U]

## Periods of Modern Fiction and Orientations of Meaning

### [U <> S]

1) The Rise of the Novel	obj.	(subj.)	(lit.)
2) Sentiment/Sensibility; Gothic Fiction etc.	(obj.)	subj.	lit.
3) Realism	obj.	subj.	(lit.)
3) Modernism	(obj.)	subj.	lit.
[a] Aestheticism	(obj.)	(subj.)	lit.]
[b] Avantgarde	obj.	(subj.)	(lit.)]

(cf. Reinfandt 1997, 225)

## 3) The Novelist at the Crossroads:

	↪	1) fabulation
realism	⇒	2) "a modest affirmation of faith"
	↪	3) non-fictional narrative

+ integrative element: metafiction

- 1) esp. U.S., post-colonial writing
- 2) esp. GB (U.S.: 'dirty realism')
- 3) esp. US (doc., 'new journalism', 'new sincerity'), later GB (travel, biography)

David Lodge, "The Novelist at the Crossroads" [1969]. In: Malcolm Bradbury, ed., *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1978: 84-110/ "The Novelist Today: Still at the Crossroads." In: Malcolm Bradbury, Judy Cooke, eds., *New Writing*. London: Minerva, 1992: 203-215.

## Genre (cf. Eaglestone 2013, 25-36; Reinfandt, "Genres")

'literary fiction' vs. 'genre fiction' (e.g. historical novels, thrillers/crime fiction, science fiction, fantasy fiction ...)

> the problem of popularity

> the genre-dissolving potential of literature, especially under the auspices of postmodernism

vs.

genre-based marketing

> 'open', unrestricted fiction vs. 'closed', restricted fiction

### A Map of (Post-)Modern Fiction

Modes:	Documentary Fiction	Realist Fiction	Revisionist Fiction	Implicit Metafiction	Explicit Metafiction
<b>Scales:</b>	external/environmental reference  illusion  'real' comm./ character comm.	←	→	internal/systemic ref.	auto-referentiality  anti-illusion  lit. comm./ narr. comm.
<b>'Programs':</b>	(Avantgarde) ↑	Realism	Romanticism →	Modernism	← Aestheticism ↑
<b>Orientations of Meaning:</b>	obj. (subj.) [(lit.)]	obj. subj. (lit.)	(obj.) subj. lit.	(obj.) subj. lit. → lit.	[(obj.)] (subj.) lit.

(cf. Reinfandt 1997, 240)

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