

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925): The Turn of the Novel

Outline

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1) 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. [...]

2) The Turn of the Novel

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.

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. [...]

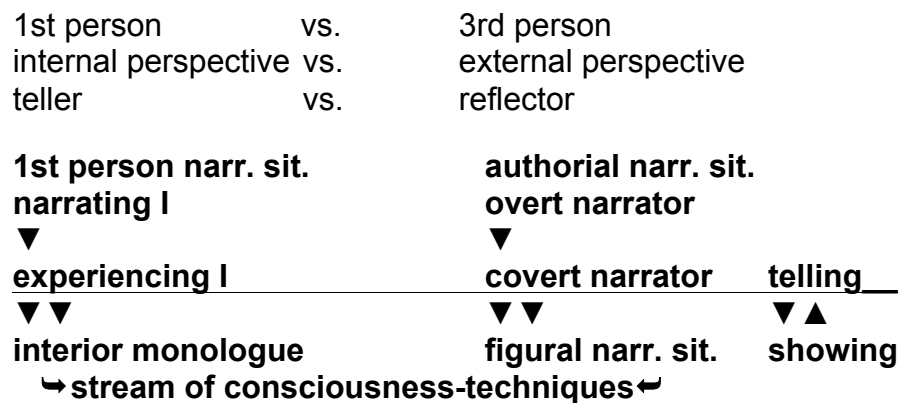
But the break was never really to become complete. Many of the Victorian conventions and myths continued to haunt the radical surprise of the modern novel, and Victorian fiction – with its omniscient and godlike voice, its weighty realism, its chronological plotting, its presiding moral confidence, its 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)

3) The History of Modern Fiction: A Sketch

a) Narrative Situations

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



b) Realism into Modernism: The Withdrawal of the Authorial Narrator

Speech and Thought in Narrative (1)

Basic possibilities:

- 1) narrative report of speech and thought acts
(> telling/diegetic discourse; summary)
 - She spoke at length about her future prospects.
 - She sat down and thought long and hard about the future.
- 2) quotation of characters' speech and thought
(> showing/mimetic discourse; scenic presentation)
 - [She said,] "At present I'm making plans for my future. It seems to me that ..."
 - [She thought,] "What will I do in the future? Oh my god, it is all so hopeless ..."

Speech and Thought in Narrative (2):

Additional possibilities: indirect modes of (re-)presentation

- [She said that] at that moment she was making plans for her future. It seemed to her that ...
- [She asked herself] what would she do in the future? Oh god, it was all so hopeless ...

Markers of indirect speech and thought:

- tense shift (present tense > past tense, present perfect > past perfect, future tense > conditional ...)
- subject shift (1st person > third person), shifting referential frame of place (here > there ...), time (now > then ...) and relation (this > that ...)

Speech and Thought in Narrative (3)

DIEGETIC DISCOURSE

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MIMETIC DISCOURSE

(telling)

(showing)

narrator's voice

'dual voice'

character's voice

Report – tagged i.d. – free i.d. – tagged d.d. – free d.d.

'tagged' = including introductory verb/clause
free = without introductory verb/clause
i.d. = indirect discourse
d.d. = direct discourse

c) The Novel Today

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

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

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

The Novelist at the Crossroads (Lodge):

	↪	fabulation
realism	→	"a modest affirmation of faith"
	↩	non-fictional narrative

+ integrative element: metafiction

1. esp. U.S., post-colonial writing
2. esp. GB
3. esp. US (doc.), later GB (travel)

David Lodge, "The Novelist at the Crossroads" [1969]. In: Malcolm Bradbury, ed., *The Novel Today: Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*. Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 21978: 84-110/"The Novelist Today: Still at the Crossroads." In: Malcolm Bradbury, Judy Cooke, eds., *New Writing*. London: Minerva, 1992: 203-215.

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