

Realism(s)

Lecture 5: The Turn of the Novel

1) From Realism to Modernism

2) The Turn of the Novel

3) The Novel Today

1) From Realism to Modernism

The Degree Zero of Discourse in Realist Fiction (‘synthesis’, cf. Dentith 2010:

- **voice/narration:**
heterodiegetic narrator, withdrawing for long passages but with the potential for becoming overt in order to employ the whole range of narratorial functions (presentation, direct and general commentary, reflexivity); the narrative moves casually between narrator’s discourse (summary, access to characters’ consciousnesses) and scenic presentation; later free indirect discourse is added to represent the main characters’ perspectives more completely and facilitate a synthesis which assimilates subjective character perspectives into the ‘objective’ narrator perspective/discourse
- **focalisation:**
flexible movement between narrator’s and characters’ perspectives
(Genette: zero focalisation = external + internal focalisation)
→ omniscience, omnipresence
→ authorial narration

Plot in Realist Fiction:

- chronologically presented except for events not mentioned, which are then presented retrospectively in characters' speech
- loosely ('realistically') structured, but hints at 'deeper' coherence (prophetic statements by narrator or characters; symptomatic or representative constellation of central characters, around which the other characters are 'realistically' associated through social ties (family etc.); coincidence is frequently drawn upon)
- closed ending (e.g. marriage) vs. open reality
- reality is meaningful because sympathy, goodwill, tolerance etc. exist

Reflexivity in Realist Fiction:

**George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859)
Book II, Chapter XVII:
In which the Story Pauses a Little**

"THIS Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!" I hear one of my readers exclaim. "How much more edifying it would have been if you had made him give Arthur some truly spiritual advice! You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things—quite as good as reading a sermon."

Certainly I could, if I held it the highest vocation of the novelist to represent things as they never have been and never will be. Then, of course, I might refashion life and character entirely after my own liking; I might select the most unexceptionable type of clergyman and put my own admirable opinions into his mouth on all occasions. But it happens, on the contrary, that my strongest effort is to avoid any such arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath. [...]

It is so very rarely that facts hit that nice medium required by our own enlightened opinions and refined taste. [...]

These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people--amongst whom your life is passed--that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire--for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields—on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice.

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things seem better than they were; dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity, which, in spite of one's best efforts, there is reason to dread. Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin--the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings--much harder than to say something fine about them which is NOT the exact truth. [...]

All honour and reverence to the divine beauty of form! Let us cultivate it to the utmost in men, women, and children--in our gardens and in our houses. But let us love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret of proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. Paint us an angel, if you can [...] but do not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands, those heavy clowns taking holiday in a dingy pot-house, those rounded backs and stupid weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world--those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs, and their clusters of onions. In this world there are so many of these common coarse people, who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! It is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes. Therefore, let Art always remind us of them; therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things--men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them. There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my every-day fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the great multitude, whose faces I know, whose hands I touch for whom I have to make way with kindly courtesy. [...]

It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar in a vilely assorted cravat and waistcoat, than with the handsomest rascal in red scarf and green feathers [...] whom I shall never know except by hearsay, or at the sublimest abstract of all clerical graces that was ever conceived by an able novelist.

Modernism:

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.

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

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!

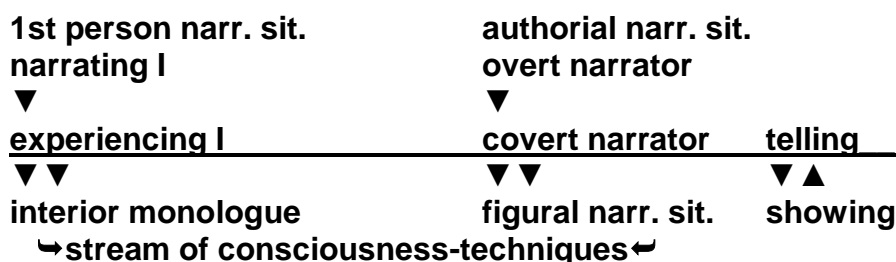
“Good-morning to you, Clarissa!” said Hugh, rather extravagantly, for they had known each other as children. “Where are you off to?” “I love walking in London,” said Mrs. Dalloway. “Really it’s better than walking in the country.”

**‘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



2) 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)

('interrupted dialogues', cf. Leslie 2010)

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 2017, 3-4).

3) 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 (US: ‘dirty realism’)
3. US (documentary, new journalism, ‘new sincerity’), 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, 21978: 84-110/“The Novelist Today: Still at the Crossroads.” In: Malcolm Bradbury, Judy Cooke, eds., *New Writing*. London: Minerva, 1992: 203-215.

Interestingly, recent (and mostly American) debates about the possibility of a post-postmodernism under the banner of a new sincerity [...] of ‘post-irony’ [...] seem to mirror B.S. Johnson’s engagement with the realist tradition to a certain extent, only that this time around the charge of falsification is not directed against fiction per se but rather against irony and self-reflexivity, i.e. constitutive features of modernism and postmodernism. So history keeps repeating itself, and David Shield’s 2010 manifesto *Reality Hunger*, which announces that the “novel is dead. Long live the anti-novel, built from scraps” [...] in his favoured genre, the lyrical essay, does not seem to be fully convincing in the narrowness of its suggestions, even if, at the end of the day, everything, even a fully-fledged fictional and self-reflexive novel might qualify as a lyrical essay if it is read with strict reference to its author’s relationship with reality. But wasn’t this what novels emancipated themselves from in their long history? A more optimistic reading of Shield’s manifesto would probably insist that *Reality Hunger* is a symptom of the cultural persistence of exactly that worldliness that the novel has thriven on from the beginning.

(Reinfandt 2017, 15)

**Salman Rushdie
The Satanic Verses
(1988)**

part	title
I	The Angel Gibreel
II	<i>Mahound</i>
III	Elloven Deeowen
IV	<i>Ayesha</i>
V	A City Visible but Unseen
VI	<i>Return to Jahilia</i>
VII	The Angel Azraeel
VIII	<i>The Parting of the Arabian Sea</i>
IX	A Wonderful Lamp

"To be born again," sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, "first you have to die. Hoji! Hoji! To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly. Tat-taa! Taka-thun! How to ever smile again, if first you won't cry? How to win the darling's love, mister, without a sigh? Baba, if you want to get born again ..." Just before dawn one winter's morning, New Year's Day or thereabouts, two real, full-grown, living men fell from a great height, twenty-nine thousand and two feet, towards the English Channel, without benefit of parachutes or wings, out of a clear sky.

"I tell you, you must die, I tell you, I tell you," and thusly and so beneath a moon of alabaster until a loud cry crossed the night, "To the devil with your tunes," the words hanging crystalline in the iced white night, "in the movies you only mimed to playback singers, so spare me these infernal noises now."

Gibreel, the tuneless soloist, had been cavorting in moonlight as he sang his impromptu gazal, swimming in air, butterfly-stroke, breast-stroke, bunching himself into a ball, spreadeagling himself against the almost-infinity of the almost-dawn, adopting heraldic postures, rampant, couchant, pitting levity against gravity. Now he rolled happily towards the sardonic voice. "Ohé, Salad baba, it's you, too good. What-ho, old Chumch." At which the other, a fastidious shadow falling headfirst in a grey suit with all the jacket buttons done up, arms by his sides, taking for granted the improbability of the bowler hat on his head, pulled a nickname-hater's face. "Hey, Spoono," Gibreel yelled, eliciting a second inverted wince, "Proper London, bhail! Here we come! Those bastards down there won't know what hit them. Meteor or lightning or vengeance of God. Out of thin air, baby.

Dharrraamm! Wham, na? What an entrance, yaar. I swear: splat."

Out of thin air: a big bang, followed by falling stars. A universal beginning, a miniature echo of the birth of time . . . the jumbo jet Bostan, Flight AI-420, blew apart without any warning, high above the great, rotting, beautiful, snow-white, illuminated city, Mahagonny, Babylon, Alphaville. But Gibreel has already named it, I mustn't interfere: Proper London, capital of Vilayet, winked blinked nodded in the night. While at Himalayan height a brief and premature sun burst into the powdery January air, a blip vanished from radar screens, and the thin air was full of bodies, descending from the Everest of the catastrophe to the milky paleness of the sea.

Who am I?

Who else is there?

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