

Twentieth-Century Fiction I

October 25. Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway* (2).

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Review

1. Woolf's difficulty and the stream of consciousness
 - a. syntactic fragmentation
 - b. parataxis (again)
 - c. cyclic form: repetition with elaboration
 - d. multipersonal narration (more on this later)
2. The comparison to Austen
 - a. demarcation of narrator from characters
 - b. status of narratorial voice
3. The sense of proportion
 - a. what is big and what is small?
 - b. Woolf's feminist structure of attention?
4. Where is the moral/political center of gravity?

The War was over

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...but it was over; thank Heaven—over. It was June. The King and Queen were at the Palace. (5)

but it was over

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?
—only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Owen, “Anthem for Doomed Youth” (1917)

1914 opens the age of massacre.

...The British lost a generation—half a million men under the age of thirty.

Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012), *The Age of Extremes* (1994)

but it was over

Why not? Really it was a miracle thinking of the War, and thousands of poor chaps, with all their lives before them, shovelled together, already half forgotten; it was a miracle. Here he [Mr. Dalloway] was walking across London to say to Clarissa in so many words that he loved her. (115)

but it was over

Those five years—1918 to 1923—had been, he suspected, somehow very important. People looked different. Newspapers seemed different. Now for instance there was a man writing quite openly in one of the respectable weeklies about water-closets. (71)

Boys in uniform, carrying guns, marched with their eyes ahead of them, marched, their arms stiff...

It is, thought Peter Walsh, beginning to keep step with them, a very fine training. (51)

but it was over

Septimus was one of the first to volunteer. He went to France to save an England which consisted almost entirely of Shakespeare's plays and Miss Isabel Pole in a green dress walking in a square. (86)

but it was over

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est" (1917)

but it was over

Something happened which threw out many of Mr. Brewer's calculations, took away his ablest young fellows, and eventually, so prying and insidious were the fingers of the European war, smashed a plaster cast of Ceres, ploughed a hole in the geranium beds, and utterly ruined the cook's nerves at Mr. Brewer's establishment at Muswell Hill. (86)

but it was over

“The War?” the patient asked. The European War—that little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder? Had he served with distinction? He really forgot. In the War itself he had failed. (96)

[She had failed him, once at Constantinople. (118)]

but it was over

They were talking about his [Mr. Dalloway's] Bill. Some case, Sir William was mentioning, lowering his voice. It had its bearing upon what he was saying about the deferred effects of shell shock. There must be some provision in the Bill. (183)

but it was over

(but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) (4)

It rasped her, though, to have stirring about in her this brutal monster!...never to be content quite, or quite secure, for at any moment the brute would be stirring, this hatred, which, especially since her illness, had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred! (12)

but it was over

1918 influenza pandemic (“Spanish flu”):
30–50 million dead (2.3M Europe, 26M–36M Asia)

compare the war:

10M war dead, 21M wounded

Discussion

Is it over?

Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.

Analysis goes a step further still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is *real* in our life fines itself down.

Pater, Conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1868)

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.

Pater, Conclusion to *The Renaissance* (1868)

a single moment

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. (3)

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Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!—when old Joseph and Peter faced them. (35–36)

a single moment

June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. (36–37)

a single moment

A puff of wind...

Calmly and competently, Elizabeth Dalloway mounted the Westminster omnibus. (138–139)

Discussion

What linguistic techniques does Woolf use to expand Elizabeth's moment of experience? What becomes important in that moment? What becomes indistinct? Is that the same as what becomes unimportant?

teaser

Next: the metropolis and mental life, or, shopping!