

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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October 6, 2025. Woolf (2).

review: the literary field

- ▶ paper due October 16: plan, draft, revise
- ▶ literary modernity: relations in the field
 - ▶ restricted vs. large-scale production
 - ▶ artistic renown vs. economic rewards (but nobody is pure)
 - ▶ class-bound audiences? it's complicated
 - ▶ purist taste is characteristic of “dominated fraction of the dominant class” (Bourdieu again)
 - ▶ “genre” tastes are stigmatized, but they acquire niche discriminations
- ▶ Woolf mapping the field in “Modern Fiction”
 - ▶ claiming the cutting edge
 - ▶ “if a writer were a free man and not a slave”
 - ▶ “an ordinary mind on an ordinary day” / “semi-transparent envelope”

review: through the window

- ▶ layered times and anachrony (including repetitions)
- ▶ metonymic or associative logic
- ▶ layered and chained focalization
- ▶ citation and irony (again)
- ▶ just what matters?

Let us not take for granted that life exists more fully in what it is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small. ("Modern Fiction," 190)

(parenthesis)

She [Lily] felt herself transfixed by the intensity of her perception; it was his [Mr. Bankes's] severity; his goodness. I respect you (she addressed silently him in person) in every atom; you are not vain; you are entirely impersonal; you are finer than Mr. Ramsay; you are the finest human being that I know; you have neither wife nor child (without any sexual feeling, she longed to cherish that loneliness), you live for science (involuntarily, sections of potatoes rose before her eyes); praise would be an insult to you; generous, pure-hearted, heroic man! But simultaneously, she remembered how he had brought a valet all the way up here; objected to dogs on chairs; would prose for hours (until Mr. Ramsay slammed out of the room) about salt in vegetables and the iniquity of English cooks. (27–28)

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bang!

All of this danced up and down, like a company of gnats, each separate but all marvellously controlled in an invisible elastic net—danced up and down in Lily's mind, in and about the branches of the pear tree, where still hung in effigy the scrubbed kitchen table, symbol of her profound respect for Mr. Ramsay's mind, until her thought which had spun quicker and quicker exploded of its own intensity; she felt released; a shot went off close at hand, and there came, flying from its fragments, frightened, effusive, tumultuous, a flock of starlings. (28)

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if thought is....

For if thought is like the keyboard of a piano...or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind had no sort of difficulty in running over those letters one by one, firmly and accurately, until it had reached, say, the letter Q....

A shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter R. (37)

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How then, she [Lily] had asked herself, did one know one thing or another thing about people, sealed as they were? Only like a bee, drawn by some sweetness or sharpness in the air intangible to touch or taste, one haunted the dome-shaped hive (54)

but are they sealed?

“Will you take me, Mr. Tansley?” said Lily, quickly, kindly, for, of course, if Mrs. Ramsay said to her, as in effect she did, “I am drowning, my dear, in seas of fire. Unless you apply some balm to the anguish of this hour and say something nice to that young man there, life will run upon the rocks”.... Of course for the hundred and fiftieth time Lily Briscoe had to renounce the experiment—what happens if one is not nice to that young man there, and be nice. (94)

epiphany à la Woolf

Of such moments, she thought, the thing is made that endures. (107)

- ▶ Working as a group, consider all the layers of meaning in the paragraph that ends with this sentence (106–7). What endures?

next

- ▶ Woolf, 1–165 (“Time Passes” and three sections of “The Lighthouse”)