

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

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October 8, 2025. Woolf (3).

review (I)

- ▶ thought is like...a lot of different things
 - ▶ highly gendered differentiation: A to Z vs. bee
 - ▶ no secret that Ramsay, Mr. Thought himself, is kind of ridiculous
 - ▶ whereas Lily and Mrs. R, more diffuse and unpredictable, get somewhere
- ▶ telepathy happens all the time
 - ▶ thanks to (coercive) social convention or “common ground” (Olufemi Taiwo)
 - ▶ thanks to intimacy
 - ▶ thanks to the fact that our thoughts are not purely ours in the first place
 - ▶ “We are in the hands of the Lord” (66)

review (2)

- ▶ epiphany: Joyce's cabbages vs. Woolf's beef stew
 - ▶ Mrs. Ramsay's dinner party: the "thing that endures"
 - ▶ attenuation of outer world by shared and protected *social* experience
 - ▶ unmistakably dependent on the same oppressive social convention
 - ▶ (and servant labor too: who cooked?)

from epiphany to satire

But what have I done with my life? thought Mrs. Ramsay (85)

(The Boeuf en Daube was a perfect triumph.) (107)

And he wondered what she was reading, and exaggerated her ignorance, her simplicity, for he liked to think that she was not clever, not book-learned at all. He wondered if she understood what she reading. Probably not, he thought. She was astonishingly beautiful. (123)

(thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness)— (126)

parenthesis (continued)

- ▶ What is in parentheses in “Time Passes”? With what effect?

parenthesis (continued)

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[Mr. Ramsay, stumbling along a passage one dark morning, stretched his arms out, but Mrs. Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, his arms, though stretched out, remained empty.] (132)

(continued)

[Prue Ramsay died that summer in some illness connected with child-birth, which was indeed a tragedy, people said, everything, they said, had promised so well.] (136)

If he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. ("Modern Fiction," 189)

(mercifully)

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The Great War, 1914–1918

[The Western front was] a machine for massacre such as had probably never before been seen in the history of warfare. Millions of men faced each other across the sandbagged parapets of the trenches under which they lived like, and with, rats and lice. From time to time their generals would seek to break out of the deadlock. Days, even weeks of unceasing artillery bombardment...were to 'soften up' the enemy and drive him underground, until at the right moment waves of men climbed over the parapet, usually protected by coils and webs of barbed wire, into 'no-man's land', a chaos of waterlogged shell-craters, ruined tree-stumps, mud and abandoned corpses, to advance into the machine-guns that mowed them down. As they knew they would. The attempt of the Germans to break through at Verdun in 1916 was a battle of 2 millions, with 1 million casualties. It failed.

Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 24–25.

“twenty or thirty”

The troops left home shouting, “Back by Christmas!”... During this war, just more than 60 million men were mobilized into the armed forces. The dead in action numbered 9.2 million, more than 15 million were wounded, and almost 8 million were listed as either prisoners of war (POWs) or missing....The small Balkan countries suffered the highest proportion killed – Serbia lost 37 percent of its soldier; between 15 percent and 20 percent of German, Austrian, Russian, and French troops were killed; and between 10 percent and 15 percent of British Empire, Italian, and Ottoman troops died....

In modern warfare, elites fight for their own honor with the lives of others; spectator-sport militarism is easy to do. We should take one principal lesson from this war: we should never allow the militaristic culture of that civilization to be made legitimate again so that mass slaughter might be regarded as once again either worthy or necessary.

Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 3, *Global empires and revolution, 1890–1945* (Cambridge UP, 2012), 140, 166, [Cambridge CORE](#).

- ▶ If not the family, then what is the center of attention in “Time Passes”?

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And now in the heat of summer the wind sent its spies about the house again. (136)

But there was a force working; something not highly conscious; something that leered; something that lurched; something not inspired to go about its work with dignified ritual or solemn chanting. Mrs. McNab groaned; Mrs. Bast creaked. (143)

next

- ▶ finish the novel
- ▶ read Auerbach (Canvas)