

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction

andrewgoldstone.com/e20fic25

Professor Andrew Goldstone (andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

Office hours: Mondays 12:30–1:30 in Murray 040A

TA: Cassie Schiffman (cassie.schifman@rutgers.edu)

Office hours: Thursdays 12:30–1:30 in Murray 101A

October 13, 2025. Woolf (4).

her mind on her money and her money on her mind

[April 18, 1926] Yesterday I finished the first part of *To the Lighthouse*, & today began the second. I cannot make it out—here is the most difficult abstract piece of writing—I have to give an empty house, no people's characters, the passage of time, all eyeless & featureless with nothing to cling to; well, I rush at it, & at once scatter out two pages. Is it nonsense, is it brilliance? Why I am so flown with words, & apparently free to do exactly what I like?

[July 27, 1927] Thus I shall have made £120 over my proper sum [i.e., £500 a year] by September. That is I shall have made £320 by journalism, & I suppose at least £300 by my movel this year. I have thought too much, though on purpose, with my eyes open, of making money; & once we have each a nest egg I should like to let that sink into my sub-consciousness, & earn easily what we need.

The Diary of Virginia Woolf, vol. 3, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 75–76, 147.

review

- ▶ [...]
 - ▶ “big” plot events relegated to background
 - ▶ but ordinary minds on an ordinary day are not (aesthetically) enough
 - ▶ the house and the wind become “characters”: impersonal forces, entropy
- ▶ [A shell exploded.]
 - ▶ arbitrariness and incomprehensible scale
 - ▶ ironic account of WWI
 - ▶ continuity and reproduction appear to be entirely destroyed, but...
- ▶ Mrs. McNab
 - ▶ anti-entropic force: not Mrs. Ramsay anymore, but a “vulgar” figure
 - ▶ irony tips over into bathos
 - ▶ or: class relations have adjusted but not been revolutionized
 - ▶ (Woolf has a problem with masses)

Auerbach

The essential characteristic of the technique represented by Virginia Woolf is that we are given not merely one person whose consciousness (that is, the impressions it receives) is rendered, but many persons, with frequent shifts from one to the other.... The multiplicity of persons suggests that we are here after all confronted with an endeavor to investigate an objective reality, that is, specifically, the “real” Mrs. Ramsay. (536)

Exterior events have actually lost their hegemony, they serve to release and interpret inner events. (538)

A transfer of confidence: the great exterior turning points and blows of fate are granted less importance; they are credited with less power of yielding decisive information concerning the subject; on the other hand there is confidence that in any random fragment plucked from the course of a life at any time the totality of its fate is contained and can be portrayed. (547)



“Julia Jackson (my favorite picture)” Julia Margaret Cameron, albumen print, 1867, [Art Institute of Chicago](#); “Julia Stephen,” photographer unknown, silver print, 1894, [Mortimer Rare Book Collection](#), [Smith College](#).



Virginia Woolf [1927], Harvard Theater Collection.

1882	Virginia Stephen b. London; privately educated
1885–91	Leslie Stephen, ed., <i>Dictionary of National Biography</i> (London: Smith, Elder)
1895	Julia Stephen d. at age 49
1904	Leslie Stephen d.
1905–7	teaches night school
1907	Bloomsbury group forms (Vanessa Bell, E.M. Forster, J.M. Keynes)
1909	m. Leonard Woolf
1914	World War I begins
1915	<i>The Voyage Out</i> (London: Duckworth)
1917	“Woolves” found Hogarth Press at home in Richmond
1918	World War I ends, November 11 (Treaty of Versailles, 1919)
1919	“Modern Novels,” <i>TLS</i> , April 10 (rev. as “Modern Fiction,” 1925)
1925	<i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> (London: Hogarth)
1925	love affair with Vita Sackville-West
1926	General Strike in England (May)
1927	<i>To the Lighthouse</i> (Hogarth; New York: Harcourt)
1928	<i>Orlando: A Biography</i> (Hogarth)
	UK universal women’s suffrage
1929	<i>A Room of One’s Own</i> (Hogarth)
1931	<i>The Waves</i> (Hogarth)
1938	<i>Three Guineas</i> (Hogarth)
1941	d.

pop quiz

What is the meaning of life?

pop quiz

What is the meaning of life? (164)

The great revelation had never come....Instead there were little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark. (164)

the alternative

There it was—her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. She looked at the steps; they were empty; she looked at her canvas; it was blurred. With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. (211)

- What does Lily's picture look like? Find more evidence, draw.

proto-Pollock

The brush descended. It flickered brown over the white canvas; it left a running mark. A second time she did—a third time. And so pausing and so flickering, she attained a dancing rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another, and all were related; and so, lightly and swiftly pausing, striking, she scored her canvas with brown running nervous lines which had no sooner settled there than they enclosed (she felt it looming out at her) a space. (161–62)

process

What did she wish to indicate by the triangular purple shape, “just there”? he asked.

It was Mrs. Ramsay reading to James, she said. She knew his objection—that no one could tell it for a human shape. But she had made no attempt at likeness, she said. (55)

She took up the salt cellar and put it down again on a flower in pattern in the table-cloth, so as to remind herself to move the tree. (87)

obstacles

She set her clean canvas firmly upon the easel, as a barrier, frail, but she hoped sufficiently substantial to ward off Mr. Ramsay and his exactingness. She did her best to look, when his back was turned, at her picture; that line here, that mass there. (153)

One wanted fifty pairs of eyes to see with, she reflected. Fifty pairs of eyes were not enough to get round that one woman with, she thought. Among them, must be one that was stone blind to her beauty. (201)

what's at stake?

It was a question, she remembered, how to connect this mass on the right hand with that on the left. She might do it by bringing the line of the branch across so; or break the vacancy in the foreground by an object (James perhaps) so. But the danger was that by doing that the unity of the whole might be broken. (56–57)

One line placed on the canvas committed her to innumerable risks, to frequent and irrevocable decisions. (161)

The question was of some relation between those masses. She had borne it in her mind all these years. It seemed as if the solution had come to her: she knew now what she wanted to do. (151)

success?

I have had my vision. (211: the end)

Yet it would be hung in the attics, she thought; it would be rolled up and flung under a sofa; yet even so, even of a picture like that, it was true....

“Mrs. Ramsay!” she said aloud, “Mrs. Ramsay!” The tears ran down her face. (182–83)

“There is no God” (210: who?)

next

- ▶ Larsen, *Passing*, pt. I.