

## IDEOLOGY and STYLE

Adapted from < [http://keynes.scuole.bo.it/ipertesti/movie\\_minds/Mrs.Dalloway/ideology%20and%20style.htm](http://keynes.scuole.bo.it/ipertesti/movie_minds/Mrs.Dalloway/ideology%20and%20style.htm) >

Virginia Woolf is probably **the greatest *avant-gard* writer of the 20th century**. She loved Proust, who had been proposed to her by the Bloomsbury group, for his ability in the description, **transformation and psychological analysis of the characters**, who were elusive in their inwardness. She hated Joyce for his “whirls of obscenity”. **She practised an intense and continue critical activity, that brought her to think about the problems of literature and the reasons of her poetics**. She compared her works with the traditional English literature and **she believed that the traditional novel of the 19th century was suitable no more, because of the changes of the society and of the man of her contemporary age**. The Voyage Out and Night and Day represented **a challenge to the great realistic novel of Tolstoj**: was she able to handle the classic realistic tradition of the English novel? These novels must be considered as two moments of the process of self-realization of Virginia as a writer.

**During her illnesses and psychological diseases, she always fought to build a strong artistic identity, by using her creativity**. From 1915 to 1922 she transformed herself in a real writer. Even if her first novels were linked to the traditional literature she was already in great conflict with herself. **Virginia considered the plot of a novel as a vulgarity, especially if it was captivating**.

**Her first experimental step can be found in Jacob's Room**, where she decided **to break the plot**. This novel was written in order **to demonstrate the unknowability of the principal character**. She considered **human beings as shadows who love shadows and whose destiny is to vanish as shadows**. We live thanks to fragments.

**In 1920 Virginia Woolf developed her own vision of life and ego**, which determined **the formal choice of the interior monologue, the fluidification of the rigid realistic structure and the humanization of the characters, whose inner-life could be more easily penetrated**. The exterior appearance of people, that is interested in the physical and social world, is responsible for the concealment of the characters' inwardness. In Virginia Woolf's opinion, **the external shell of every ego, shaped by personal and familiar passions, was also modified by the influences of Time and Experience**. The border of ego is fluid and inconstant, whereas the protagonists of the traditional realistic novel were built on a quite superficial notion of the human ego. **Virginia Woolf's characters are rarely held by a precise profile, they are surrounded by a sense of inexplicability and mystery**. The writer wanted to express continuity and mutability of the individual identity at the same time (To the Lighthouse, Mrs. Dalloway, The Waves ). As in the works of Joyce, whom Virginia Woolf continued to despise, **the principal innovations of her novels are the interior monologue and the stream of consciousness**, which enabled her **to explore memories, desires, dreams of her characters, who could be observed in their external and interior appearance**.

This way of handling the protagonists of her works was even deeper than that of Joyce. Whereas **Joyce examined the depths of the Es**, she decided to avoid its muddy puddles, since **she did not like psychoanalysis**. **She never let her characters' thoughts flow out of control, she maintained logical and grammatical organization**. Her technique was based on **the fusion of streams of**

thought into a third-person, past tense narrative. She gave the impression of simultaneous connections between the inner and the outer world, the past and the present, speech and silence. "Moments of being" are rare moments of insight during her characters' daily lives when they can see reality behind appearances.

In **Modern Fiction** Virginia Woolf says:

*... "Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions- trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. 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; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, 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, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it. Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? We are not pleading merely for courage and sincerity; we are suggesting that the proper stuff of fiction is a little other than custom would have us believe it.*

*The proper stuff of fiction does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured."*

In 1924 Virginia Woolf reached the highest point of her rebellion against the traditional male novel and she became aware of her poetical and lyrical female talent: she wrote in order to make real the drawing hidden behind the appearances of everyday life through words. Every human being belongs to this drawing: we are the words and the music of a work of art represented by the world. She had been thinking about the character of Clarissa Dalloway for several years. **Mrs. Dalloway was an important point of Virginia's career. It was the first novel in which she used her whole female experience, without any kind of inferiority complex. She used her sense of ecstasy towards life and her awareness of the importance of every moment lived.** In this novel she unveiled her original way of narrating: **the incessant impressionistic shower of innumerable atoms on the human mind.**

**To the Lighthouse** is considered her masterpiece, while in **Orlando** she broke the social link between sexual identity and role, through a fantastic satire. In this novel Virginia Woolf described the life of **Orlando, a character inspired by the lesbian aristocrat Vita Sackville-West, in order to defend the androgyny of human beings, our sexual ambiguity, the male and female aspects that coexist in every person.** Orlando was rich in irony and echoes from the English Elizabethan

literature onwards. **Virginia Woolf supported the emancipation of women, she told them to search for an economic independence and for a room of their own in order to find the concentration to write.** She exhorted them to write as women but they had to remember that **the artist's mind is androgenic.** The feminist writer was born: she still suffered for her exclusion and oppression as a girl, she hated the patriarchal system and she considered herself as a victim of this kind of society. **The Waves is a novel based on mental spaces, on recitatives or dramatic monologues.** Everyone is inseparable from the rest of mankind, everyone is a wave in the stream of life and eternity. **Virginia Woolf spoke about the sense of life, of time and changes, of mortality. Only in the novel The Years,** the writer had to use facts, probably because of the impending menace of the II WW, while in **Three Guineas** she underlined the existence of **a female culture, different and separated from the male one.** The exclusion of women from the social and political life preserved them from corruption. For this reason their diversity had to be transformed into a positive one. Virginia Woolf is considered today as the **“Spiritual mother” of the modern movement of cultured women.**

**The images Virginia Woolf uses establish her idea of true reality and reject a whole tradition of literature:** they are chosen so as to have an air of modernity, to seem intangible, vague and shapeless. The events that traditionally make up a story are no longer important. What matters is the impression they make on the characters who experience them. In Woolf's novels the omniscient narrator disappears and the point of view shifts inside the characters' minds through flashbacks, associations of ideas, and momentary impressions presented as a continuous flux.

**Woolf's technique** has also been defined as **“impressionist” in her attempt to seize the impressions of the individual consciousness,** in the use of light and colours. **Her use of words is almost poetic; they are allusive and emotional. Rhyme, refrain and metaphor are the main features of Woolf's poetic style, together with fluidity; in other words that quality of language which flows following the most intricate thoughts and stretches to express the most intimate feelings.**

### **Woolf's Use of Narrative**

Woolf achieves the suitable flow of the storyline in these ways:

**Indirect Interior Monologue-** This occurs in the way **she captures the private thoughts of her characters.** It allows her to vacillate and **move easily from one character to the next, and allows the reader insight into each character's mind.** The narrative leaves one mind and enters another, hovering between the minds of the characters. Human consciousness transcends the limitations of individual minds.

**The 20th – century writers understood it was impossible to reproduce the complexity of the human mind using traditional techniques, and looked for more suitable means of expression.** They adopted the interior monologue to represent, in a novel, the unspoken activity of the mind before it is ordered in speech. **INTERIOR MONOLOGUE IS OFTEN CONFUSED WITH THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS, ALTHOUGH THEY ARE QUITE DIFFERENT.**

## Interior monologue

The former is the verbal expression of a psychic phenomenon, while the latter (The Stream Of Consciousness) is the psychic phenomenon itself. It is its immediacy which distinguishes the internal monologue from both the soliloquy and the dramatic monologue, which are formal speeches respecting conventional syntax. This "immediate speech" is freed from introductory expressions like "He thought, he remembered, he said", from formal structures, and from logical and chronological order.

It is necessary to distinguish between four kinds of interior monologue:

1. **The indirect interior monologue**, where the narrator never lets the character's thoughts flow without control, and maintains logical and grammatical organisation; (VIRGINIA WOOLF)
2. **The interior monologue**, characterises by two levels of narration: **one external to the character's mind, the other internal**;
3. **The interior monologue where the character's thoughts flow freely, not interrupted by external elements**;
4. **The extreme interior monologue**, where words fuse into others to create new expressions.

**The indirect interior monologue** is also characterised by the following devices:

- a) **the narrator is present within the narration**; the character's thoughts can be presented both directly and by adding descriptions, appropriate comments and explanatory or introductory phrases to guide the reader through the narration.
- b) **The character stays fixed in space while his/her consciousness moves freely in time**: in the character's mind, however, everything happens in the present, which can extend to infinity or contract to a moment. This concept of "**inner time**", which is irregular and disrupted with respect to the conventional conception of time, is preferred to "external time", since **it shows the relativism of a subjective experience**.