

Inter Wars Years literature

UK

A large, dark blue, diagonal shape that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the slide.

Period of disillusionment

- WWI had caused huge losses
- Wall Street Crash
- Rising of the Commonwealth and dissolution of the Empire



changed the notion of imperial supremacy and racial superiority

New Theories

- SIGMUND FREUD

Interpretation of Dreams (1900): revolutionary work that explored the idea of unconscious and how it affects behaviour → man's action can be justified/explained/driven by irrational and unconscious forces he is not aware of.

Exploration of the character psyche

- EINSTEIN

Theory of Relativity: completely changed the idea of time and space → world lost its stability and foundation

- Philosophical influence: Nietzsche, Marx, Bergson

Modernism

Artistic and cultural movement that involved all form of arts: writing, poetry, theatre and art.

Not only in England but the whole Europe

- **Time and space are distorted concept** → change in the traditional narration techniques
- **Perception of reality is uncertain** → everyone perceives reality in a different way, so perception of reality is subjected to subjectivity. No more omniscient third person narrator in favour of a limited narrator and **stream of consciousness/interior monologue**
- **Reality cannot be interpreted in an absolute way**
- **Importance of unconscious** life and how this affect behaviour
- **Revelation given by an isolated moment of enlightenment**

3 groups

- Psychological Novelists (Conrad)
- Novelists that experimented with subjective narrative techniques (James Joyce and Virginia Woolf)
- Novelists committed to social and political problems (Orwell, Golding)

Modern Novel

- **New Narrative techniques:**

Rejection of the omniscient third person narrator

Shift from the outside world to the inner world in the character's mind

Stream of consciousness and **interior monologue** → it was impossible to reproduce human's mind in a traditional way so the author needed a new technique. It is the verbal expression of the stream of consciousness which is a psychic phenomenon

- Indirect interior monologue → the author is a filter and maintains coherence and grammatical organisation (Woolf, Svevo)
- Direct interior monologue → the characters' thoughts flow freely often without coherence (Joyce)

- **Different use of time:**

Being time and reality influenced by subjectivity there is no need for a well-structured plot that follows a linear timeline

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)

- Born in London, wealthy family
- Very strict Victorian education and home education
- Lived in Hyde Park but her favourite place was the summer house in Cornwall
- 1895 her mother died and one of her sister had some psychiatric problem → triggered her first mental breakdown starting a depression that never left her
- Period of isolation
- 1904 her father died → tried to kill herself for the first time

- Sold the house and moved to Bloomsbury → very vibrant and intellectual district (Bloomsbury Group)
- Very involved in the suffragette movement
- She got married and moved away from London
- They founded a small publishing house → published *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925
- Despite the success she still suffered from depression
- Deep friendship with an architect Vita Sackville West → independent modern woman
- Never cured her depression (in the countryside was even worse)
- With the bombing of London her health worsened very fast and in 1941 she drowned herself

Features and Themes

- Criticised the Victorians → only focused on in presenting the characters from the outside (action and speech) → what we do and say may not correspond to what we are



to give a truthful portrait of a character the writer must turn inside, so deal with what the character feels, thinks, remembers

- No traditional structure or traditional plot → follows the life of the characters' minds
- MOMENT OF BEING → little moments of great intensity and perception that strike the mind of the characters
- INDIRECT INTERIOR MONOLOGUE
- TIME → story takes place in a compressed time (12 hours, 2 days). The inner time is different from the outer time.

Mrs Dalloway

- Portraits the subjective reality of the characters on an ordinary day in the post-war London (12 hours)
- 1923 mid-june Wednesday → late spring, period when life starts again
- Period of great social changes
- The main protagonist is a woman → a modern woman
- No real plot → made of memories, flashbacks, thoughts. It follows the stream of consciousness of the characters
- TIME → the only reference is the striking of the hours. At first the title was *The Hours* because the characters are obsessed with the passing of time.

Characters

CLARISSA DALLOWAY: one of the 2 protagonists. She is a wealthy woman and belongs to the upper middle class. She is believed to be very superficial and simple while she actually is a very complex human being. She received a very strict Victorian education and was taught to repress her feelings, but in her youth she had some rebellious moments (she had a romantic affair with a woman) and she fell in love with **Peter Walsh**. They broke up because Peter wanted her to share her feelings with him and she didn't know how to do it, so she decided to go with an easier choice and married **Richard**, who is a very boring man. She is obsessed with her mortality and is afraid to die with remorse.

SEPTIMUS WARREN SMITH: 30 years old, veteran from WWI. Suffers from Shell Shock (PTSD). He is currently being cured but he is hunted by the image of his friend who died in front of him. Before the war he wanted to be a poet and joined the war as volunteer, but lived long enough to understand that his patriotic idea was stupid. When his friend died he was so broken that he couldn't feel anything. He married **Lucrezia** not out of love, but because he hoped to feel something again. He is very sensitive and lives with hallucinations, he talks by himself and is haunted by his sense of guilt. He is obsessed with death

Plot

- Clarissa Dalloway is preparing a party for the night. She needs some flowers so she goes out and walk along the street in the centre of London
While she walks, she thinks about her daughter, her teachers and Peter Walsh, the man she used to love and that she left to marry her husband.
- At some point she sees Septimus Warren Smith and Lucrezia, his wife. They have an appointment with a new doctor and are going to the park. Lucrezia is worried but Septimus doesn't really want to be helped.
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- Mrs Dalloway goes back home and Peter Walsh unexpectedly shows up at her door. While they catch up Clarissa thinks of their past, their love, and why she decided to dump him for Richard. She decides to invite him to her party.
- Richard comes back home with flowers. He would like to tell Clarissa how much he loves her but he is unable to do it, so he remains silent and just give her the flowers.

Plot

- Peter leaves the house and sits in the park where he sees Septimus and Lucrezia arguing. He thinks that it is a love quarrel because he doesn't know that Septimus is actually talking about suicide.
- Septimus and Lucrezia go to the Doctor's office who advise for a period of rest. He doesn't really understand Septimus' condition.
- Peter is going to the party when he sees an ambulance. Septimus has jumped out of window, killing himself.
- The Doctor and his wife go to the party too but they are late because of what happened. Clarissa is shocked not just because he killed himself, but because she may understand why and she is the only one. She thinks that Septimus understood that doctors are manipulative and don't really want to help the patient, so he preferred to kill himself than to be in their hands.
- Septimus ended his life while Clarissa is celebrating that same life with the party

Themes

Clarissa and Septimus are connected

- Extremely sensitive
- React physically to external stimulation
- marriage based on necessity not love
- obsessed by the idea of death

Inability to communicate

None of characters understand the others and none feel understood. → result of the Victorian education, they don't know how to talk to others.

Sometimes it's easier to frame a person based on stereotypes than trying to understand them (Clarissa, Septimus).

The only one trying to communicate is Septimus → people think is a lunatic

Misleading nature of appearances

Since they don't communicate they often misunderstand each other.

- The interior monologue shows the reality