The Modern Novel
A Short Introduction

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CHAPTER 3

New Forms: Reshaping the Novel

If giving the feel of immediate reality meant reshaping fiction's plots and procedures, it also meant taking a new approach to *character*. Character changed, we have noted, along with "reality": once writers saw reality as something made up differently by different kinds of people, they put character into flux, for it became necessary to explore the very foundations of selfhood. Character became a question of the strange processes of consciousness, the unclear boundaries of the self, the vagaries of human perception. No certainties could say what constituted character, and so it, too, became subject to "smashing and crashing." Its foundations – in heroism, stereotype, virtue, social norms – were attacked, too, and replaced by uncertainties more true to modern experience.

Characters in modern novels are not heroes: they are rarely singled out for their superior traits, and they rarely achieve much. If anything, they are worse than normal – less beautiful, less accomplished, less intelligent, and less likely than the average person to overcome adversity. In the larger scheme of things, there is a long and steep descent from the epic heroes of myth and legend to the *anti-heroes* of modern fiction. The former were far better than average, superior to their environments, and destined for triumph; the latter are weak, disaffected, and passive, undone by circumstance, and lucky to make it through at all. Quentin Compson, in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, is a good example. In some sense, he is the hero of his family: smart enough to go to Harvard and noble in outlook, he seems good enough material for a heroical story. But in fact his advantages are disadvantages, because his intelligence and sensitivity make him tortured and passive,

and ultimately he is so beset by troubles that he takes his own life. He is an anti-hero – remarkable not for his positive traits and accomplishments but for his negative ones.

Being an anti-hero, however, does not make a character unlikable, uninteresting, or absurd. There is real heroism in anti-heroism, in an unheroic world. As Lionel Trilling puts it, "Nothing is more characteristic of the literature of our time than the replacement of the hero by what has come to be called the anti-hero, in whose indifference to or hatred of ethical nobility there is presumed to lie a special authenticity."[1] If the modern world disallows heroic action – and that is one way to define the problem of modernity – then truth demands unheroic characters. Moreover, it champions them, because it sees the heroism in even the simplest daily acts of survival. And so modern writers see heroism in ordinary thoughts and actions. In, for example, the ordinary thoughts and actions of Leopold Bloom, Joyce gives us the modern version of the epic heroism of Ulysses. Bloom is a kind of *everyman*: he is no better or worse than anyone else. He submits unimpressively to the fact that his wife is cheating on him; he takes embarrassing pleasure in the base physical activities of eating and excreting; he shies away from tough situations, and seems well disliked by many of his fellow Dubliners. But all this makes him a modern kind of hero; modern writers began to find much to like in just such passivity, weakness, and failure. These traits came to seem more truly heroical, in a way, than classic heroical ones, because they showed people shouldering the stranger burden of modern futility.

And so we get a host of other such anti-heroes, in the boozing irresponsibility of Jake in *The Sun Also Rises*, or the arrogant violence of the men in *Women in Love*. Compared to the bullfighters he heroicizes, Jake is not much of a man; he drinks and brawls and cries, has been somehow castrated by a war-wound, and is well summed up by a friend who says, "You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed with sex. You spend all your time talking, not working." But there is tragic modern glory in all this inadequacy. And in *Women in Love*, there is a new kind of heroism in aggressive postures that once might have been a sign of villainy. In one famous scene, Gerald Crich forces his horse to stand close to a passing train. It bucks in terror, but he holds it fast, "his face shining with fixed amusement," with a "mechanical relentlessess," "calm as a ray of cold sunshine." His cruelty reflect a

new kind of anti-heroism: one in which brutal urges are recognized for their particular integrity.

In a way, all modern characters are anti-heroes, because no modern character can connect perfectly to society as a whole. To be a hero in the old sense, a character not only has to represent his or her culture's best powers and features. He or she must live in a world in which individuals belong, in which the individual's needs can match up with those of society at large. But with the coming of modernity such a relationship became more and more difficult. A sense of connection gave way to a sense of *alienation*. Social norms seemed out of sync with individual needs, as social wholes grew more vast, impersonal, mechanistic, and oppressive. Individual character, it seemed, could no longer be defined in terms of its affiliation with the group. Instead, alienation became definitive; character came to be something defined in terms of opposition to society.

Alienation was both a good and a bad thing. On the one hand, the individual came to feel less a part of the social whole, as fiction writers saw it, because the whole had lost touch with its ideals and better values. Social life had gone cold, materialistic, haphazard, and so the decent person could only feel isolated from it. In *Portrait of the Artist*, for example, Stephen Dedalus feels always that "his sensitive nature" is poorly served by an "undivined and squalid way of life," that "his soul was still disquieted and cast down by the dull phenomenon of Dublin." But then again this alienation is also an effect of modern freedom. Modern prosperity, modern psychology, and modern art had enabled and justified unprecedented self-determination and self-esteem. And so Stephen Dedalus can also fancy himself estranged in a good way – a kind of cultural savior. He leaves Dublin at the end of *Portrait* because he cannot stay there, but he goes to find in the wide world the means to redeem what he leaves behind: "Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race." Presenting individual potential this way, too, modern fiction writers have a kind of double view of modern estrangement. Characters became more isolated, alienated, detached, and had more and more to be defined internally: less affiliated with outer social doings, they could no longer be well defined by them. But by that same token they could become heroical in new ways. Almost just by being, they were

rebels, fighting the system, and they took on the glamor and power always associated with people who do so.

And then their plots were different, too. Novels of the past were very often concerned to show how such rebels eventually and positively can fit back into society – how, for example, a headstrong young woman would ultimately decide to soften, conform, and marry. But modern novels had to show just how much more difficult such reconciliations had become. More and more they had to emphasize the impossibility of reconciliation – stressing instead the widening breadth of the gap between the individual and society.

The plot most critically changed was that of the *bildungsroman*. A bildungsroman is a story of a protagonist's growth from youth to adulthood, with emphasis on how rebellious individualism gives way to mature, productive, responsible participation in society. As Franco Moretti notes in *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, it is all about "the conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization," usually with the former leading to and enriching the latter.[2] The plot of the bildungsroman had been crucial to novels of the past, if and when individuals could happily grow up to become a secure part of some social whole. When it no longer seemed that an individual could do so – once we enter the modern world of alienation – then the plot of the bildungsroman comes to seem false and forced. In the modern reversal of the bildungsroman, characters often grow from conformity to rebellion, and end not in happy oneness with society at large but in intense and often destructive rejections of it.

Such is the plot of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919). Anderson tells a connected group of stories about modern small-town life. What once might have been a happy community is now a stultified one, bleak and repressive and full of people whose frustrations have turned them into grotesques. Threaded through the stories are the experiences of Tom Willard – a boy not yet beaten down by the drudgeries and miseries that have wrecked the adults around him. Ultimately, Tom escapes, and that outcome makes *Winesburg, Ohio* a kind of bildungsroman in reverse. For the standard plot would have had the rebellious Tom mature into someone able to find a happy place in his world. But in fact he only becomes more certain that inevitable alienation must drive him away. He finally "[takes] hold of the thing that makes the mature life of men and women in the modern world

possible," but this means he must leave. Maturity here means departure, and as Tom sits on the train that will take him to Chicago or New York, "the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood."

Such alienation is at its most extreme when even selfhood is in question – when, for example, insanity is at issue. *Madness* is a prominent feature of the modern novel, and one reason for its prominence is the modern wish to push modern alienation to its most revelatory and most painful extremes. Septimus Smith, the anti-hero of *Mrs Dalloway*, has been shell-shocked by his experiences fighting in World War I. Now he has become unable to see the world plainly. But Septimus's extreme condition only emphasizes the typical difference between society's conventions and the true experiences of the modern self. And his madness is not all bad. Ironically, it makes him a kind of visionary. The world's beauty literally explodes all around him; his thoughts run to pure poetry; his estrangement enables him to see through things, and to see the realities behind appearances, so that he seems to understand things other people cannot. "He lay very high, on the back of the world. The earth thrilled beneath him. Red flowers grew through his flesh"; when he hears the simple word, "time," "the word . . . split its husk; poured its riches over him; and from his lips fell like shells, like shavings from a plane, without his making them, hard, white, imperishable words, and flew to attach themselves to their places in an ode to Time; an immortal ode to Time." This is a psychotic break – but it is also genius, of a kind, due to the way a modern novelist like Woolf might associate madness with creativity. In this case, madness is also a positive kind of rebellion against norms, and it is the psychological epitome of the enterprise of the modern novel.

This interest in the estranged individual partakes of the modern novel's general need to question reality. Modern novels never want to go with received wisdom, consensus, or old ideas. A main part of their effort at experimental innovation is a belief that conventions get things wrong, and that the individual mind, the mind posed against society's definitions of the good, the heroical, the worthwhile, is more likely to be right, exciting, and interesting. We take this kind of thinking so much for granted now that it is easy to forget that it has not always been with us – that the modernist outlook (building upon Romantic

anti-heroism) largely created it. Modern novels tend to suggest that personal truth outdoes received wisdom; and they tend to take pains to show how the painful struggle of anti-heroical *subjective* consciousness leads to the greatest insights, the truest truths.

There are problems, however, with this fondness for the subjective, anti-social mind of the estranged individual. If it goes too far, it can lead to *solipsism* – the situation in which the individual self has no awareness or knowledge of anything beyond itself. If it goes too far in another direction, it can create a *dispersed* self, in which no stable identity can take hold. And finally it can lead to characters that seem hardly to exist at all.

Solipsism separates a character so much from the outer world that subjective reality becomes no reality at all. Able to know only itself, the solipsistic self winnows away. Even modern novels rarely take things to this extreme, but some readers have thought that they come too close. That is, to some readers, *subjective* characters are too often defined too much in terms of their own dubious perceptions rather than their relations to others and to society at large. The protagonist of *The Good Soldier*, for example, verges on solipsism, when he concludes finally that he has little chance of knowing anything true about the world around him: "I know nothing – nothing in the world – of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone – horribly alone." To some readers, Ford here has taken things to an extreme – exaggerating the extent to which reality is an exclusively subjective phenomenon.

When emphasis on the subjective qualities of character seem to imply that selfhood is always changing, always in flux, then another problem arises: there seems no basis for character at all, since identity is exploded by the sheer diversity that makes up the self. Selfhood gets so dispersed – through the changing phases of subjective perceptions, moods, and situations – that it has no constant character. Some readers accuse Woolf's novels of this excessive dispersal of selfhood, and they say that it makes her characters too vague, too elusive, too thin; traditional character is too thoroughly destroyed. Her people, that is, are not at all characters in the conventional sense – and to some readers they are so much like essences that they seem to have no existence at all. But there was a powerful justification for this approach. Dissolving selfhood seemed a fact of modern life, as one writer painfully reflected: Hugo Von Hofmannsthal expressed the very popular sense

that the human self had broken up and dispersed, that although he had once felt whole and "everywhere. . . . at the center," now "everything fell into fragments for me, the fragments into further fragments, until it seemed possible to contain anything at all within a single concept."[3] If modern character no longer seemed to "contain anything," it was because so many writers felt this "limitless transmutation," this loss of integrity.

Here we come to the farthest extremes of modern character – these ghostly presences so dispersed or solipsistic that they hardly seem alive. Along with anti-heroes, everymen, and outsiders, they people the extreme reaches of the modern novel. Under new conditions of estrangement, madness, rebellion, and subjectivity, they feature forth the new possibilities for identity and self-destruction that the modern novel helped to make available to the world.

Perfect heroes, artificial plots, false endings, and excessive detail were banished from the modern novel, but there was one thing many modern writers were even more eager to rule out: the *omniscient narrator*. For years the typical narrator had been a detached *third-person* voice, all-knowing and all seeing, able to tell a perfect story. But in a world of subjective realities, skeptical questions, and false appearances, who could really know everything? Who could realistically be objective or omniscient – and how could a story told in such a fashion immerse a reader in real experience? Wouldn't it be far more realistic and far more effective to have the story told from within? Better yet, wouldn't it be most intense and immediate to do without a narrator – and just directly present the lives and thoughts of characters without any mediator at all?

Rather than try for objectivity, modern novels emphasized *perspective*. Rather than try for some fully correct, neutral, finished version of a story, they limited their stories to some haphazard, incomplete, mistaken, or limited point of view. They did so in order to get at experiential truth. An objective narrator – apart from the action, fully informed – might get the whole truth, but the truth could not feel real, because no real person ever gets the whole truth. Much better to give the partial truth, because in real life truth is always only partial. So the omniscient, panoramic, impersonal standpoint gave way to the limited, focused, personal point of view. Objectivity gave way to focalization; the flawed perspective became the hallmark of truth.

Faulkner announced the change most boldly by beginning *The Sound and the Fury* from the point of view of the mentally retarded Benjy Compson:

> Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hunting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out, and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence . . . and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass.

The information we get is hopelessly limited. Nothing could be further from omniscience, there is no measure of distance from the experience in question, and the story that results has nothing of the form an objective narrator could provide. But it feels real. We feel we are getting Benjy's experience directly, without mediation, and to the modern novelist, that kind of truth was far more important than the "real," objective truth of the situation.

Another advantage in perspective is the fact that it can be multiple. It can, in other words, combine individual experience with something like the fuller knowledge of omniscience, by presenting the perspectives of many different characters. In *The Sound and the Fury*, we may begin in the very deficient perspective of Benjy, but then we proceed to other points of view, and something like omniscient narration develops, because we get the different facets with which to piece together a whole story. But we still get unmediated experiences, and we also get involved in the process of narration. For we have to do the work an omniscient narrator would otherwise have done for us, and the participation gives objective knowledge the feel of subjective involvement.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, the narrator at first seems very much to be objective, omniscient, but soon it becomes clear that the narrator presents the world from Mrs Dalloway's point of view. And then it becomes clear that the narrator migrates into the heads of other characters, as well; Woolf's narrator is detached just enough to leap from mind to mind, but never so detached that objectivity mutes experience. So we get a full range of perspectives, woven together into a kind of web, and as in the case of Faulkner the web ultimately combines the advan-

tages of objective and subjective report. There is a fullness of information, and a panoramic view, but then also the feel of immediate experience, and the individuation that perspective provides.

There are different motivations at work here. The main one is *epistemological*: Woolf, Faulkner, and other perspectival writers want to find a better way to show how knowledge, understanding, and perception really take place. But the motivation is also *aesthetic*. Omniscient narration, it seems, was too clumsy and bland; perspectival narration, by contrast, encouraged subtle variations and graceful nuance. And finally there is the *ethical* motivation – which, to some people, is ultimately the most important. For us truly to understand, sympathize with, and appreciate other kinds of people, and for us really to appreciate what it is that makes them different from us, perspectival narration may be essential. It may be the means through which narrative can make us put aside our own ways of thinking and seeing and take on those of people truly unlike ourselves. In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Erich Auerbach goes as far as to say that these effects of perspectival narration (as he saw them in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* [1927]) are vitally linked to true democracy in politics: "It is still a long way to a common life of mankind on earth, but the goal begins to be visible. And it is most concretely visible now in the unprejudiced, precise, interior and exterior representations of the random moment in the lives of different people."[4]

Precise interior representations demanded new reaches into "consciousness." As we have noted, the modern novel mainly began with new efforts to explore the depths of the human mind. In Flaubert and in James, novelistic realism became a matter of psychological realism, of close focus on the "fine awareness" of minds immersed in the complexities of modern life. Psychological realism intensified as the modern novel developed; "internality" seemed more and more to become the main location of modern fiction, as writers continued to transform narration in whatever ways necessary to get fully inside the mind.

This movement into the depths of consciousness arrived finally at modern fiction's most characteristic narrative style: *stream of consciousness*. William James, we have seen, had influentially redefined the mind, as a site of plural flows rather than units of thought. This new view – and others like it – changed the way writers described what

went on in the heads of their characters. It meant that interior life demanded styles of description very different from those practiced upon the exterior world. Interior life was all flux, all seamless minglings of memories, perceptions, and desires – always "going on," as James put it, and remaking personal identity at every moment. To evoke this flux of interior life, novelists had to innovate similarly dynamic styles of attention, and do so in defiance of those norms of grammar, logic, and sentence structure that give false, coherent shape to consciousness. The result was stream of consciousness: when writers let free associations run roughshod over the divisions and distinctions of standard punctuation, when they let outer reality dissolve into the chaos of real mental life, and when they tried to follow out the strange evolutions whereby sights and sounds and theories blend and scatter and pursue themselves on into ever new formations, then they helped to develop this most distinctive of modern narratorial styles.

Stream of consciousness could take many forms. The main goal – the "unmediated" discourse of the mind itself – could be reached in different ways depending on the state of the mind in question, or the "level" at which a writer had chosen to pitch narration, or a writer's theory about where to locate the mind's most basic activity. Stream of consciousness might mean a very random jumble of perceptions and imaginings, or it might mean a very direct pursuit of some train of thought, as long as its narration proceeds as if unprocessed by any authorial intervention. It might look like this passage from Joyce's *Ulysses*:

> Prrprr.
> Must be the bur.
> Fff. Oo. Rrpr.
> *Nations of all the earth.* No-one behind. She's passed. *Then and not till then.* Tram. Kran, kran, kran. Good oppor. Coming. Krandlkrankran. I'm sure it's the burgud. Yes. One, two. *Let my epitaph be.* Karaaaaaaaa. *Written. I have.*
> Pprrpffrrppfff.
> *Done.*

Here Joyce gives us the contents of Leopold Bloom's consciousness in a moment of agitation and mental disarray. Leaving a boisterous bar, his guts churning with food and wine, dizzied and disoriented and

preoccupied at once by his flatulence, a passing tram, grand political avowals, and his own next move, Bloom is in a particularly chaotic state of mind. For Joyce, such a state is a perfect opportunity to press stream-of-consciousness narration to an extreme, by making the various contents of Bloom's mind tumble together into nearly incomprehensible confusion. But such confusion is not in play at all when stream-of-consciousness narration takes us into the mind of Bloom's wife, Molly, as she lies awake ruminating at the end of the novel:

> Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the *City Arms* hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting to that old faggot Mrs Riordan that he thought he had a great leg of and she never left us a farthing all for masses for herself and her soul greater miser ever was.

Molly's thoughts here are unstructured and flowing but not therefore confused; in fact, they follow out focused lines of thought vigorously, if purposelessly. This, too, is stream-of-consciousness narration, however, for it has in common with the prior example a psychological immediacy. In both cases we have the contents of consciousness directly presented, without apparent authorial intervention, in the interest of making narration more true to the actual and very various movements of the mind.

Such psychological immediacy and the flux and fluidity it tended to present were the hallmarks of the modern novel, but they were by no means its only narratorial achievements. Modern writers may have wanted to let the human mind speak for itself, but they also wanted to find similar ways to speak for any possible situation: they tried in general to suit narration to all possible mixtures of inner and outer life, and to all combinations of close and distant perspectives, and so they made narration better able to run the whole range of possibilities from stream of consciousness to its very opposite.

To begin to appreciate this range, let us presume that narrative possibilities run from inward to outward – from the stream of consciousness at the most interior level to the more standard, completely detached, and impersonal kind of writing which with we are most familiar. The most typical kind of narration tends toward "outer" detachment; it tends to come from a disembodied voice, not a part of

the action, who seems to know everything but never becomes itself a character. This voice speaks in the *third person* – referring to the characters as "he" and "she," and never speaking of itself as "I" – and by knowing everything, this voice seems to be omniscient. And since this voice is not that of a person involved in the story, it tends to be *objective* – with none of the subjective elements that would be so plentiful in stream-of-consciousness narration. This third-person, objective, omniscient narration would stand at the opposite end of a spectrum from the stream-of-consciousness narration. On this spectrum are many intervening possibilities – and modern fiction makes use of all of them.

If "stream of consciousness" describes the kind of narration that gives the full chaos of what goes on most deeply and immediately in the mind, the next step "outward" would take us to a kind of narration that is more deliberate, comprehensible, and coherent. This next level would be *interior monologue*, in which we feel like we are listening in on a person's running self-description. These thoughts would still not be wholly coherent, but they wouldn't descend so much into the irrational, the unconscious, or the nonverbal. Joyce described such interior monologue as a situation in which "the reader finds himself established, from the first lines, in the thoughts of the principal personage, and the uninterrupted unrolling of that thought, replacing the usual form of narrative, conveys to us what this personage is doing and what is happening to him."[5] Joyce used interior monologue in *Ulysses* principally for the self-consciously dramatic thoughts of Stephen Dedalus, which often proceed as if spoken internally for purposes of self-justification.

Once a character begins telling his or her own story – once we depart from things that seem simply thought out into things that sound externally spoken, or thought out loud – we are in the realm of *exterior monologue*. And if the story told involves the person telling it, we might call this exterior monologue *involved* (another, more technical term for this is *homodiegetic*, which refers to the way a person would be one with his or her story). If the person apparently thinking out loud is giving us a story of which he or she is not part, then the exterior monologue has become more detached (or *heterodiegetic*).

From there, before we move from *first-person* narration to third-person narration, there is an interesting middle possibility. Sometimes,

we get what sounds like third-person narration, but which nevertheless seems directly in tune with some particular character's thoughts and feelings. This combination of the two – in which the third-person narrator speaks with the emotional rhythms of the thoughts and feelings of the person he or she describes – is sometimes called *free indirect discourse*, because in this case the narrator is indirectly speaking the character's mind, and doing so free of the restraint of quotes and other distinctions. As we then move more fully "outward," into the voice of someone speaking from a distance, we find that there are different possible degrees of such distance. Sometimes, third-person narrators don't just tell you what is going on; they also evaluate, comment, and even directly address the reader. In such situations, third-person narrators are perhaps intrusively involved, despite their distance from their characters. Then, there are unintrusive narrators, and, beyond that, those who seem so much in another world that they have full knowledge and full objectivity. They are not limited, and not subject to any of the subjective involvements that come with being a part of a story even to a limited degree.

Now, there may be other forms of narration within this range, and there may be other ways to describe the range – ways other than this distinction between inward and outward. It may make more sense to say that the range here goes from extreme immediacy to extreme intervention, or from the apparently unstructured to the deliberately shaped. But this range and these distinctions do help us appreciate the narrative innovations inspired by the modern writer's broadest psychological concerns. Joyce, for example, dips with unusual frequency into the lowest stream of consciousness, presenting his characters' most inchoate, nonverbal sensations; but just as often he tends "outward," toward external monologue, and even toward objective, omniscient narration. Moreover, he creates new styles of "outward" narration as experimentally chaotic as stream-of-consciousness narration. Sometimes in *Ulysses*, the world itself seems to speak, so objectively that no person seems to be involved at all. Joyce runs this range from inchoate personal sensation to public discourse in order to get at the different qualities our thoughts and feelings have at different times: sometimes (in moments of relaxation, or in moments of anxiety) our thoughts run into "streams," but sometimes they feel almost dictated to us in highly structured ways by whatever external circumstances

we are in (when, for example, we are taking exams, or involved in ceremonies). Fully to capture the full range of thought and feeling, Joyce runs up and down the scale of available narrative styles.

As does Dorothy Richardson, another modern novelist known for her stream-of-consciousness style. Richardson's *Pilgrimage* (a long *roman-fleuve* – a novel or sequence of novels about the same characters over a period – in thirteen parts [1915–38]) is written in what appears to be free indirect discourse modified by streaming dissolution:

> Why did the hanging garments remind her of All Saints Church and Mr Brough? . . . she must tell Harriet that in her letter . . . that day they suddenly decided to help in the church decorations . . . she remembered the smell of the soot on the holly . . .

The first sentence here combines the voice of some omniscient narrator with Miriam's own thoughts, in the style of free indirect discourse, but the *ellipses* and the flow from thought to thought indicate the flux of thinking characteristic of stream of consciousness. The combination of the two modes shows Richardson making use of the flexibility sought in the modern novelist's quest for new narrative modes.

It is this flexibility that really galvanized modern fiction. Through it, fiction developed endlessly subtle ways to characterize mental process – to recognize all the different factors that make it up. The questions to ask, then, about any particular style of narration you might encounter in modern fiction, are these: who is speaking, and how, and why? What aspect of mental life is explored by the writer's choice of narrative levels? And, perhaps most importantly, how is the writer developing a unique mode of narration by combining different levels – by finding some unique way to move up and down the scale that runs from the most inward narration to the most outward?

Flexible narration enabled writers not only to move inward but to experiment with all possible relations among inner and outer life. The main goal may have been to explore interiority, to delve into consciousness, but it was as important to test the links between the individual consciousness and its outer, social, practical worlds. To mix narrations from within and without became the most exciting endeavor, as writers came to equate modernity itself with just such a

mixture. Ambiguity, plurality, heterogeneity: these in general came to seem the pattern of modern life and therefore the form for modern fiction. No single view or style of explanation could ever be adequate to the diversity of modern experience, and fiction therefore evolved toward greater inclusiveness, greater variety, and greater versatility. Such heterogeneity even diversified the very languages of fiction.

Since its inception, the novel has been a forum for different voices. Whereas other literary forms have seemed to try for unity of expression – staying with one style, one kind of talk – the novel has thrived by throwing different styles of expression together. High styles and low, big talk and small, native and foreign voices have all come together within the novel. They have come together to make novels better registers of social life, and they have come together in order to enable the novel to test the different claims made by different *discourses*. Other literary forms may stay within a single discourse – a single way of voicing cultural priorities – but the novel has gone for something more heterogeneous, a mix of priorities, something vocally diverse. In the words of Mikhail Bakhtin, the novel has always been a forum for "heteroglossia," a multitude of voices, patterning diversity into the very form of fiction. Bakhtin defined the novel as "a diversity of social speech types . . . and a diversity of individual voices artistically organized." The "internal stratification" of any nation's language – its "professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and passing fashions" – is the "indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre." The novel is a matter of the "compositional unities" that help this heteroglossia speak in structured form to the world.[6]

Heteroglossia happens in the novel when different values, arguments, and cultures are put into conflict and community through their different styles of speaking. It has been a way for novelists to test new social arrangements, to show how different cultural presumptions are encoded into the languages that express them, and to reflect the diversity which has been more and more a part of collective social life. And in the modern novel what had long been a tendency becomes more deliberate and more chaotic, as writers try hard to innovate "compositional unities" more aggressively given to diversity. *Ulysses* is the best example here. Joyce just lets all different kinds of people speak at once; moreover, he lets each chapter of *Ulysses* voice a different way of

talking about the world. The various voices of Dublin send up a cacophonous chorus of aspirations and attitudes (nationalist pride; sexual longing; aesthetic idealism; religious intolerance). The voices of each of the novel's chapters speak from some different level of Irish culture (its ladies' magazines; its pub life; its literary history). The diversity here makes us think about the ways different styles of language inherently express different cultural values. And it makes us see how modern culture puts these into constant conflict and collaboration. Finally, we see how language evolves. We see linguistic creativity in action as the different voices lend to each other their various energies, or draw strength and conviction as they speak against one another.

Heteroglossia shows us language breaking up. What we might have presumed to be a single thing – the language shared by people of the same nation and culture – emerges as something plural, and discordantly so. We get variation where there had been unity. And when this variation gets most extreme, we get a texture, once again, of fragmentation. In this case, however, the fragments can be pieces of a richly progressive social plurality. Not only are the parts of the story broken apart from one another; acts of speaking break out of unified discourses into broken parts of speech. And if we combine this kind of fragmentation with that of narration, we might now get a full sense of the way fragmentation characterizes modern fiction. Narration, too, no longer proceeds in consistent patterns. Instead, as we have seen, it mixes streams of consciousness with omniscient narrators – third persons with first, and inner with outer perspectives. That inconsistency is psychological; heteroglossia, by contrast, is an inconsistency at the level of language, and, by extension, at the level of social outlook; and finally, the fragmentation we first encountered is that of structural discontinuity. Together, these fragmentations create the disjointed, wholly random and undone worlds of the modern novel. Together, they give us perhaps the clearest sense of just how the modern novel reformed itself to match the deformations of modernity.