

Youtube clip "The Lady in the Looking Glass"

You tube clip

In Woolf's works, we see thematic topics such as:

- women / roles
- appearance
- reality
- imagination
 - a repeated word in her work
 - an issue in many of her stories is:
 - *the ability to accurately perceive one's surrounding world
 - *the imagination's perception of people / self (who and what individuals really are)
- identity

We also see:

- mirror / object used as a method of female depiction
- light / color imagery
- surprise, ironic reversal created at the end
- her stories emphasize not action but character and motivation (psychological components)

Issues/topics seen in works

--Woolf made some famous critical remarks about the Edwardian novelists, who she argues are obsessed with the material details of their characters' lives and who lose sight of their interior, spiritual presences

- Here, W provides us w/ the trappings of the woman, but the woman herself remains absent.
- The narrator can imagine Isabella's petty dinner-table conversation, but her spiritual side—"her profounder state of being . . . what one calls happiness or unhappiness" (110)—remains elusive

Oct 11-7:42 AM

Narrator

- Story told by an seemingly "invisible" narrator—note distance and detachment from the character Isabella

Find examples in the text:

the narrator

Narrator cont'd:

Isabella, when she enters the room, is reduced and fixed to the way she is perceived within culture—the mirror plays a crucial role in this reduction

("at once the looking-glass began to pour over her a light that seemed to fix her" (111))

- narrator seems to warn against society's gaze, its power to intrude, judge, and police. How? Where in the text?
- Could the narrator be Woolf herself? As a mere observer of human experience, or a moment? A way for the reader to get an objective yet limited view of this character Isabella as a means of determining truths for ourselves?
- Woolf was preoccupied w/ the representation of reality made up of fleeting moments ("the incessant shower of innumerable atoms" as she put it)
 - It led her to deal extensively w/ the passing of time and the changes that measure it—whether it's a day or many years
 - She viewed / depicted Truth a) as a perception and b) that it's relative, which is a rather postmodern concept

Questions: Consider and Respond

Can even our own power of observation be limited or our "truths" about ourselves tremble "between one's eyes and truth"?

Can the narrator of the story—detached, distanced, withdrawn—be **unreliable** based on this postmodern theory?

Can you ever really know or understand a person based on one facet? We get a subjective view of Isabella from the narrator, the mirror reveals Isabella's identity; however, can a superficial critique such as these reveal all of a person or only dimensions of the whole?

How can her view of truth be shaped by her personal experiences as a woman, writer, wife, personal life?

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Look at the piece in a **social context** and the central image of the looking glass:

How Victorian women are perceived in the British culture—how this British culture recognizes a woman who doesn't embody the roles of wife, mother? Women are categorized according to a social category—through which they could become valued and recognized—wife, mother. If women in the Victorian period are themselves a metaphor—reflections of men, their husbands.

Q: Can British culture actually recognize a woman who doesn't embody the roles of wife and mother, the roles through which she mirrors patriarchy's power? How does the opening sentence link the mirror to and what does it suggest? (links it to written documents, suggests that Isabella will be exposed, punished even?)

Look at the conclusion—based on these ideas, what might Woolf be commenting on?

The reflection of Isabella is harsh, pitiless gaze that renders an older woman w/out children as someone "perfectly empty".

Questions:

- What does the sharp contrast between the liveliness inside the room and the fixed stillness of the garden as seen through the mirror possibly signify? (one might attempt to instill a sense of order and stability through representative means; however, "nothing stay[s] the same for two seconds together" (109).
- How can the work be seen as a look at the underlying psychology of the character? What might the piece say about the emotional motives of Isabella?

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In your text, find examples of the following ideas--write and cite

What is truth / reality

The act of concealing or hiding

"Nothing stayed the same for two seconds together" (108) / new reality

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Questions:

1. What does the sharp contrast between the liveliness inside the room and the fixed stillness of the garden as seen through the mirror possibly signify?
 - (one might attempt to instill a sense of order and stability through representative means; however, "nothing stay[s] the same for two seconds together" (109).
2. How can the work be seen as a look at the underlying psychology of the character?
 - What might the piece say about the emotional motives of Isabella? (does she want / feel compelled to portray this image? Is it society that is the cause of her "nothing"ness or is it her that feels this way?)
3. Find 3 quotes that suggest the **arrator's distance** or distance knowledge of the main character
4. Discuss the irony at the end. How does Woolf offer a concluding reversal and how is this technique similar to the other stories?
 - What other similarities do you find between this story and the others? (psychological)

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