

**R417 Aspects of the Novel 9.30 - 11am**  
**OLLI Fall Session 2012 - Reston**  
**Kay Menchel**

**Class 4 - Tuesday 10/09/12**

**Sense of Time**

While the present century was in its teens, and on one sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, on Chiswick Mall, a large family coach, with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four miles an hour. A black servant, who reposed on the box besides the fat coachman, uncurled his bandy legs as soon as the equipage drew up opposite Miss Pinkerton's shining brass plate, and as he pulled the bell, at least a score of young heads were seen peering out of the narrow windows of the stately old brick house.

**William Makepeace Thackeray *Vanity Fair***

Wilhelm's old Pontiac was parked in the street. Formerly, when on an expense account, he had always put it up in a garage. Now he was afraid to move the car from riverside drive lest he lose his space, and he used it only on Saturdays when the Dodgers were playing in Ebbets Field and he took his boys to the game. Last Sunday when the Dodgers were out of town, he had gone out to visit his mother's grave.

Dr. Adler had refused to go along. He couldn't bear his son's driving. Forgetfully, Wilhelm traveled for miles in second gear; he was seldom in the right lane and he neither gave signals nor watched for lights. The upholstery of his Pontiac was filthy with grease and ashes. One cigarette burned in the ashtray, another in his hand, a third on the floor with maps and other waste paper and Coca-Cola bottles. He dreamed at the wheel or argued or gestured, and therefore the old doctor would not ride with him.

**Saul Bellow *Seize the Day***

Eighty-some years previous, through a town that was to flourish and past a farm that would disappear, the river slid - all that happened began with that flow of water. The town on its banks was very new and its main street was a long curved road that followed the will of a muddy river full of brush, silt and oxbows that threw the whole town off the strict clean grid laid out by the railroad plat. The river flooded each spring and dragged local backyards into its roil, even though the banks were strengthened with riprap and piled high with rocks torn from reconstructed walls and foundations. It was a hopelessly complicated river, one that froze deceptively, broke rough, drowned one or two every year in its icy run. It was a dead river in some places, one that harbored only carp and bullheads. Wild in others, it lured moose down from Canada into the town limits. When the land along its banks was newly broken, paddleboats and barges of grain moved grandly from its source to Winnipeg, for the river flowed inscrutably north. Across from what would become church land and the town park, over on the Minnesota side, a farm spread generously up and down the river and back into wide hot fields.

**Louise Erdrich *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse***

Just as the clock strikes two, the mayor steps up to the podium and begins to read. It's the same story every year. He tells of the story of Panem, the country that rose up out of the ashes of a place that was once called North America. He lists the disasters, the droughts, the storms, the fires, the encroaching seas that swallowed up so much of the land, the brutal war for what little sustenance remained. The result was Panem, a shining Capitol ringed by thirteen districts, which brought peace and prosperity to its citizens. Then came the Dark Days, the uprising of the districts against the Capitol. Twelve were defeated, the thirteenth obliterated. The Treaty of Treason gave us the new laws to guarantee peace and, as our yearly reminder that the Dark days must never be repeated, it gave us the Hunger Games.

**Suzanne Collins** *The Hunger Games*

## **Sense of Place**

The road rose again, to a scene like a painted backdrop. Notched into a cut of red clay crowned with oaks the road appeared to stop short off, like a cut ribbon. Beside it a weathered church lifted its crazy steeple like a painted church, and the whole scene was as flat and without perspective as a painted cardboard set upon the ultimate edge of the flat earth, against the windy sunlight of space and April and a midmorning filled with bells.

**William Faulkner** *The Sound and the Fury*

And when the next day we left at noon, the crowd, of whose presence behind the curtain of trees I had been acutely conscious all the time, flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering bronze bodies. I steamed up a bit, then swung down-stream, and two thousand eyes followed the evolutions of the splashing, thumping, fierce river-demon beating the water with its terrible tail and breathing black smoke into the air. In front of the first rank, along the river, three men, plastered with bright red earth from head to foot, strutted to and fro restlessly. When we came abreast again, they faced the river, stamped their feet, nodded their horned heads, swayed their scarlet bodies; they shook towards the same river-demon a bunch of black feathers, a spotted skin with a pendent tail – something that looked like a dried gourd; they shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany.

**Joseph Conrad** *The Heart of Darkness*

It was late June, almost July, when Corey took up his life in Boston again, where the summer slips away so easily. If you go out of town early, it seems a very long summer when you come back in October; but if you stay, it passes swiftly, and, seen foreshortened in its flight, seems scarcely a month's length. It has its days of heat, when it is very hot, but for the most part it is cool, with baths of the east wind that seem to saturate the soul with delicious freshness. Then there are stretches of gray, westerly weather, when the air is full of the sentiment of early autumn, and the frying of the grasshopper in the blossomed weed of the vacant lots on the Back Bay is intershot with the carol of crickets; and the yellowing leaf on the long slope of Mt. Vernon street smites the sauntering observer with tender melancholy. The caterpillar, gorged with the spoil of the lindens on Chestnut, and weaving his own shroud about him in his lodgement on the brickwork, records the passing of summer by mid-July; and if after that comes August, its breath is thick and short, and September is upon the sojourner before he has fairly had time to philosophize the character of the town out of season.

**William Dean Howells** *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

## **Weather**

The evening of this day was very long, and melancholy, at Hartfield. The weather added what it could of gloom. A cold stormy rain set in, and nothing of July appeared but in the trees and shrubs, which the wind was despoiling, and the length of the day, which only made such cruel sights the longer visible.

### **Jane Austen *Emma***

So with all the lamps put out, the moon sunk, and a thin rain drumming on the roof a downpouring of immense darkness began. Nothing, it seemed, could survive the flood, the profusion of darkness which, creeping in at keyholes and crevices, stole round window blinds, came into bedrooms, swallowed up here a jug and basin, there a bowl of red and yellow dahlias, there the sharp edges and firm bulk of a chest of drawers. Not only was furniture confounded; there was scarcely anything left of body or mind by which one could say, "This is he" or "This is she."

The nights now are full of wind and destruction; the trees plunge and bend and their leaves fly helter skelter until the lawn is plastered with them and they lie packed in gutters and choke rain-pipes and scatter damp paths.

### **Virginia Woolf *To The Lighthouse***

## **Time Shift**

I spin in circles and shoot and shoot and shoot. I keep pulling the triggers until the bank guard shoots me in the back of the head. I am still alive when I start to fall, but I die before I hit the floor.

"Wake up, kid; come on, it's time to go."

I open my eyes. I'm lying in a hospital bed. No. I'm in a motel-room bed, a small and cheap and filthy motel room. A room where a million ugly people have done a million ugly things. There are stains on the walls, and you don't even want to guess what caused them.

### **Sherman Alexie *Flight***

It is not fashionable anymore, I suppose, to have a regard for one's mother in the way my brother and I had then, in the mid-1950's, when the noise outside the window was mostly wind and sea chime. One looks for the chink in the armor, the leg of the piano stool shorter than the other, the sadness that would detach us from her, but the truth is we enjoyed each other, all three of us, and never so evidently as those Sundays when the rain fell gray over Dublin Bay and the squalls blew fresh against the windowpane.

I saw my rap sheet, its yellow with fifty-four entries. Typed up not so neat. You see your life with carbon copies. Kept in a file. Hunts Point, Lex and Forty-ninth, West Side Highway, all the way back to Cleveland. Loitering. Prostitution Offense. Class A misdemeanor. Criminal possession controlled substance 7<sup>th</sup> degree. Criminal trespass 2<sup>nd</sup> degree. Criminal possession narcotic drug, Class E felony. Prostitution solicitation, Class A, Misdemeanor Degree o.

The cops musta got a D in spelling.

The ones in the Bronx write worse than anyone. They get an F in everything except pulling us up on our prop'rties.

### **Colum McCann *Let The Great World Spin***