

# Realism, Anti-Realism & Reality

**Realism was a literary movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that attempted to represent the bourgeoisie & working class modern lives.**

- Realists didn't write about exotic times and places, but the here and now, with a focus on material things, modes of work, everyday forms of speech & topical subjects such as sexuality and heredity.
- By using a plain style & focusing on the materiality of life, the realists tried to make their work seem objective.
- The modernists, who came after the realists & reacted against them, often are described as anti realist.
- Instead of trying to give the illusion of a shared objective reality, the modernists instead focused on the fragmented, subjected & hidden experiences of ordinary life.
- The modernists used techniques such as stream of consciousness and collage that are often described as anti-realist, but they are not uninterested in reality. Many modernists are obsessed with the nature of everyday reality. Moderns were in fact trying to find a more nuanced way of representing reality.
- Mrs. Dalloway is a fictional representation of reality; many modernists were obsessed with the nature of everyday reality. Mrs. Dalloway is different forms reality, from various points of views, from various individuals

## I. Virginia Woolf & Mrs. Dalloway

### Background – Virginia Woolf

Father was eminent biographer of prominent British figures. Mother, a famous beauty, died when Virginia was 13. Half sister Stella took over maternal role; died 2 years later. V's first mental breakdown soon after

- 1882-1941
- Suffered manic depression
- Attended Cambridge
- Married Leonard Woolf in 1912.
- Had relationship with married writer Vita Sackville-West in 1920s.
- Committed suicide by drowning.
- During 1921, VW had suffered hallucinations & also had the flu.
- With Mrs. Dalloway she created “a study of the world seen by the sane & the insane side by side” – Suppose the idea of the book is the contrast between life and death'

### Eliot and Woolf

- Woolf sent “Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street” to Eliot's journal, *The Criterion*, and wrote to him: “I should very much like to be edited by you, but you know how ticklish these things are... I promise that I shall respect you all the more for tearing me up and throwing me in the wastepaper basket. When are we to see your poem [The Waste Land] -and then I can have a fling at you,”

### Mrs. Dalloway: Un Unlikely Heroine

- Mrs. Dalloway takes place over a single hot summer day, a Wednesday in 1923. Post-war.

- Experiments with clock time of a psychological time (time in the mind), latter **mixes past & present, memory & perception.**
  - Novel first called "the hours" Woolf envisaged it initially as a series of chapters marked by the hours but decided to give the narrative a more continuous flow.
  - Middle aged (52), married to a conservative politician and has a grown up daughter.
  - Physically unwell: suffering unspecified illness: Menopause? Nerves? Had headaches even as a young woman.
  - Clarissa was characterized by Woolf as "tinsely": sense of superficiality, decorative, fragility, the pleasure of the moment: "She frittered her time away, lunching dining, giving these incessant parties of hers, talking nonsense, saying things she didn't mean, blunting the edge of her mind, losing her discrimination".
  - Little language: "she knew nothing; no language, no history; she scarcely read a book now."
  - Epitomizes conventions of femininity
  - Is a limited character. Also vain, worried about what people think, snobbish. Cannot empathize with the socially marginal like Ellie Henderson who is written of as "dull".
  - Prudish – shocked as young woman to find new wife of neighboring squire has had a baby before marriage
  - Peter Walsh: "she had always, even as a girl, a sort of timidity, which in middle age becomes conventionality"
  - Compare to her friend Sally Seton: who is sexually seductive, runs naked down passages, smokes cigars, is outspoken: "**The new woman**"
  - Clarissa's happiest, most "exquisite" moment in life is a kiss with Sally.
  - As a young woman, she is courted by 2 men; Peter Walsh: a romantic, critical of institutional order, pretensions.
  - Chooses instead to marry Richard Dalloway who represents stability & predictability. So as to "fear no more"
  - Clarissa becomes known through her identity as a wife. Described as having "a touch of the bird about her" - Sense of being caged through her upbringing & marriage? Is she experiencing a "death of the soul"
  - Loss of individuality & borders: "she would not say of herself, I am this I am that". With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard."
  - Communications between husband & wife focuses on the trivial
  - Individuality as subject further reduced by age:
- "She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more children now, but only this astonishing & rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway, not even Clarissa anymore; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway."

### **Clarissa's Strengths**

- Ability to live in the moment, plunges herself into sensations/emotions and experiences them fully.
- Her parties are an attempt to find release from weight of WW1 aftermath. Symbolize a moment of enjoyment, even celebration of life. Analogy between unhinging the doors & opening the room to fresh air as a movement of opening self to new 'fresh' experiences rather than always contained, under control.
- Possibility for metamorphosis into something vital, beautiful, coming out of her cocoon.