VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882-1941)

LIFE

Affluent house-hold

The *Bloomsbury Group*

Love, anguish & suicide

Born Adeline Virginia Stephen, the 7th child in a *blended* family of eight – home-schooled – at 13 lost her mother: **first mental breakdown** – sexual abuses from her half-brothers..

Contacts with the women's rights movement – began writing – at 22 lost her father: **second mental breakdown** – moved to Bloomsbury & formed an artistic & literary group.

Married Leonard Woolf: a passionate love – depression & **attempted suicide** – successful publications – other losses & the London Blitz: increased anguish – **suicide** by drowning.

WORKS

Mrs Dalloway (1925)

A pioneering novel on the English middle classes in the aftermath of the 1914–18 war.

To the Lighthouse (1927)

An analysis of the subtext of human relationships through the lives of the Ramsay family.

Orlando (1928)

A fantastic historical biography inspired by her romantic relationship with Vita Sackville-West

KEY POINTS

An *impressionistic* novel

The novel as *an "emotion which you feel"* so *d*etermined to *re-form* it – result: *impressionistic* novel with point of view inside characters' minds through *flashbacks/associations of ideas.*

A new narrative mode

The **stream-of-consciousness**: perception is fluid, interior monologues interweave with events & actions – narratives move between inner and outer & between characters.

A progressive attitude

Rejected Victorian ideals & supported gay rights, women in the arts, pacifism, free love.

A NEW IDEA OF NOVEL

MRS DALLOWAY

Structure & content

A single day, June 13, 1923, & **two narratives**:1. *Clarissa Dalloway*, a middle-aged society lady preparing to throw a party;; 2. *Septimus Warren Smith*, a mentally damaged war veteran.

Features & style

The sane & the insane: exist side by side/merge and connect through the ***tunnelling technique***.

Style: free alternation of *omniscient description, indirect interior monologue, soliloquy.*

Joyce vs Woolf

Inspired by her reading of (the first chapters of) Joyce's *Ulysses* but **NO mythology or epic**: through characters' *thoughts, memories, anxieties,* and *epiphanies* **a cross section of London**, a **condemnation of militarism & war**, issues of **feminism, homosexuality & mental illness**.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Structure & content

A tripartite structure: I- the Ramsays & 8 children in their summer home; II- the empty house over a 10.year hiatus (death of Mrs R + 2 children); III- Mr Ramsay + teenage children back.

Features & themes

Shifting perspectives like the rotating beams of a lighthouse – little dialogue, almost no action.

Themes: *loss, subjectivity, the problem of perception* & *the nature and function of art*.

Woolf vs Joyce

Woolf **controls flow of characters' thoughts** & **maintains logical/grammatical organization**.

Joyce lets characters show thoughts directly (through *interior monologue*) even incoherently.

ORLANDO

Structure & content

The **fantastic story** of a character who lives from Elizabethan times through the 18th c. as a man, then becomes female & lives into the 20th c, experiencing debilitating gender constraints.

Central theme & style

Gender differences: gender roles NOT biological but societal, artificial & imposed.

Style: subtitle *A Biography* but actually a novel which mixes fact & fiction, history & invention.

Joyce vs Woolf

Joyce's *epiphany: a* sudden spiritual manifestation through something trivial and banal which leads to self-realization vs Woolf's **moment of being**: a rare moment of **insight** during daily life which allows to see **reality behind appearances**.