

## Lecture 7: Realism and the Novel

### The Development of realism

The foundations of early bourgeois realism were laid by Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift, but their novels, though of a new type and with a new hero, were based on imaginary voyages and adventures supposed to take place far from England.

Gradually the readers' tastes changed. They wanted to find more and more of their own life reflected in literature, their everyday life of a bourgeois family with its joys and sorrows.

These demands were satisfied when the great novels of Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollet appeared one after another.

### Sympathy for the Common Man

The greatest merit of these novelists lies in their deep sympathy for the common man, the man in the street, who had become the central figure of the new bourgeois world. ❖

The common man is shown in his actual surroundings, which makes him so convincing, believable, and true to life. ❖

### Realism in the Victorian Novel

Realist writers sought to narrate their novels from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the story. ❖

They became masters at psychological characterization, detailed descriptions of everyday life in realistic settings, and dialogue that captures the idioms of natural human speech. ❖

The realists endeavored to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life. ❖

Thus, realist writers often addressed themes of socioeconomic conflict by contrasting the living conditions of the poor with those of the upper classes in urban as well as rural societies. ❖

Realist writers are widely celebrated for their mastery of objective, third-person narration. ❖

Many realist novels are considered to be reliable sociocultural documents of nineteenth-century society. ❖

Critics consistently praise the realists for their success in accurately representing all aspects of society, culture, and politics contemporary to their own. ❖

Realism has exerted a profound and widespread impact on many aspects of twentieth-century thought, including religion, philosophy, and psychology. ❖

### **Characteristics of the Realist Novel**

The linear flow of narrative ❖

The unity and coherence of plot and character and the cause and effect development ❖

The moral and philosophical meaning of literary action ❖

The advocacy of bourgeois rationality ❖

Rational, public, objective discourse ❖

The Realist novel of the nineteenth century was written in opposition to the Romance of medieval times ❖

Representation of “real life” experiences and characters versus ideal love, ideal moral codes ideal characters (nobility), and fixed social values ❖

### **Sources and Further Reading**

Raymond Williams, ‘Realism’, in *Keywords* (1976) ❖