



The Second Common Reader

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Here, in twenty-six essays, Woolf writes of English literature in its various forms, including the poetry of Donne; the novels of Defoe, Sterne, Meredith, and Hardy; Lord Chesterfield's letters and De Quincey's autobiography. She writes, too, about the life and art of women. Edited and with an Introduction by Andrew McNeillie; Index.

The Second Common Reader Details

Date : Published January 13th 2003 by Mariner Books (first published 1932)

ISBN : 9780156028165

Author : Virginia Woolf , Andrew McNeillie (Editor)

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Writing, Essays, Nonfiction, Books About Books, Criticism, Literary Criticism

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David Gross says

I hadn't read any Virginia Woolf until earlier this year, when I enjoyed *The Lighthouse*. That encouraged me to pick up this paperback at a library booksale. One of the things that I found very attractive about *The Lighthouse* also applies to this book of critical essays: even when Woolf does not like a character (or an author), she *cares about* him or her and tries to faithfully and patiently carve for herself the mask that character (or author) looks through to see and make sense of the world, then tries it on herself and shows us how the world looks through those eyes.

James says

A collection of excellent, relatively short essays on various literary topics by Virginia Woolf. I'm surprised I haven't heard as much about Woolf's essays, because they're all pretty great. My personal favorites were her analysis of Thomas Hardy's novels, and her answer to the question, "Why read a book?"

Patricia says

This time, my favorites were the essays on *Arcadia* and on *Fanny Burney*. Woolf brilliantly captures the mingled fascination and dismay of picking up Sidney's hefty, intricate, and purpley-prosed romance. The *Burney* essay sympathetically highlights Burney's inventive love of words, and the last anecdote reads like a short story.

J. Watson (aka umberto) says

3.5 stars

Last year I came across *The Common Reader Vol. I* at a Kinokuniya Bookstore in Bangkok and ordered *Vol. II* immediately. In fact, these famed two volumes have been published in various editions since 1932 and I've tried to buy them for a long time. Enticed by the simple title, I've since decided to read them all as soon as I can own them. I think her "How Should One Read a Book?" is definitely worth reading and applying into our reading since we can learn a lot from its 13 pages and, definitely, few scholars can surpass her unique views, exposition and brilliance. For instance,

The only advice, indeed, that one person can give another about reading is to take no advice, to follow your own instincts, to use your own reason, to come to your own conclusions. (p. 258)

If we could banish all such preconceptions when we read, that would be an admirable beginning. Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. (p. 259)

The first process, to receive impressions with the utmost understanding, is only half the process of reading; it must be completed, if we are to get the whole pleasure from a book, by another....

But not directly. Wait for the dust of reading to settle; for the conflict and the questioning to die down; walk, talk, pull the dead petals from a rose, of all asleep. (p. 266)
etc.

I'd like to conclude this review by my note written at the essay's last sentence: i.e. loving reading is a reward itself!

Michael says

I haven't been reading a lot of essays recently, and typically what I would read in that vein these days are more the longer form newspaper or magazine articles that usually look at contemporary events and topics. The closest to *The Common Readers* in what I usually read would be the essays in the *London Review of Books*, my subscription to which I let lapse primarily due to a lack of time. However, reading the essays in particular in Volume II has sparked a renewed interest for me in that form of writing; not just in reading more contemporary essay writing but also looking back at some renowned essay writers like Montaigne and Addison.

I found that Volume II had a much more coherent sense of a consistent thread compared to the First. The focus was clearly on English literature, as it was in Volume I, but Volume II went more clearly not just from early English writers - starting looking at the Elizabethans - but through common associations, using stepping stones of time and place and relationships between writers. The effect given is to provide clarity to the interconnected nature of the writing world, of influences and contemporaries, and of how they can shape either either. So when Woolf writes about Donne, she also mentions Spenser and Sidney after covering them in relationship and comparison to Gabriel Harvey in the previous essay, before looking at Sidney more closely in the following essay on *Arcadia*. Then the essay on Defoe starts immediately with a reference to Sidney's death and *Arcadia*, and Donne serves to illustrate an example in the essay on Dorothy Osborne. So follows through the rest of the collection, providing a great sense of not just reading a grab-bag of essays on figures in English literature, but ones carefully chosen to span from the 16th century to the early 20th through an unbroken series of links. This was no doubt helped by the fact that the first three essays were written for and published for the first time in this collection (along with the essay on 'De Quincey's Autobiography' midway through).

The essays in Volume I occasionally feel incomplete - like they end abruptly - and perhaps that they don't necessarily have a clear goal in mind behind each. They can feel occasionally like a surface exploration of an author or a novel that don't reach out enough to fill out the background to place it fully in context, or a vehicle to illustrate a not quite overt or fully formed point. In contrast, in Volume II each essay draws a complete picture of the writer or writers covered. A number of the essays cover memoirs or letters, and Woolf uses these as a basis to build a view into the time period, the writer's life and relationships, and the landscape of English literature at that time.

In one way - and perhaps this is entirely superficial - Volume II reminded me of *Orlando*: the span of time covered, the window into the evolution of English life. The beauty of the prose, of course, which certainly cannot be taken for granted, also helps reinforce the comparison.

The two more generalist essays - 'The Niece of an Earl' and 'How Should One Read A Book?' - are particularly interesting in providing context for the critical understanding of English literature, looking in the first at class and its impact throughout on what a novelist can convincingly tackle, and in the second at what the reader should bring to the table in order to fully appreciate what they are reading. They both end on great notes, with a question (particularly now we can look back nearly a century in the light of what has happened

since) on where English novel writing will go as class evolves through a democratic age, and with a beautiful dream for readers:

I have sometimes dreamt, at least, that when the Day of Judgment dawns and the great conquerors and lawyers and statesmen come to receive their rewards - their crowns, their laurels, their names carved indelibly upon imperishable marble - the Almighty will turn to Peter and will say, not without a certain envy when He sees us coming with our books under our arms, 'Look, these need no reward. We have nothing to give them here. They have loved reading.'

Eric says

An ideal critic, humane and intimate reader. I like that these essays read like a lifelong reading journal; we get the moody responsiveness, the tactility of encounter. This book immediately conjures Virginia Stephen, the young girl educating herself in her father's library.

Samuel Maina says

On the second collection of articles by Virginia Woolf, I was under the impression that she was big on Victorian writing. The Elizabethan age is distinct and pungent in all her articles collection. Some notable authors make a comeback here and when someone appears twice in two collections we have to pay attention.

I see Virginia Woolf loved reading Autobiographies, especially with an aim to learn what influences people had in their lives. It is easier to learn from someone's life through their experiences and the learnings made from their mistakes.

Letter writing seems to have been a form of occupation back then. People knew how to communicate better back then through writing than we do nowadays with the advance in technology. Plain old letter writing was a great tool for communication.

The leaning towards poetry is unmistakable. This collection made me feel like I need to revisit all Thomas Hardy, William Hazlitt and George Meredith books. Not forgetting Elizabeth Barrett Browning

On how to read a book, that write up basically opened a can of worms. It was the intention of that article to make the reader query the mind of the writer and not be quick to make judgments and or compare books by different writers. While we must be forced to compare, compare good books with good books at the very least.

I would also like to know more about George Gissing

The Times literary supplement, Life and Letters, The Nation, Vogue, The New York Herald, The Yale Review, and Figaro seemed to have good articles back then. I hope they still do.

A worthy read.

Morgan says

Even though this was like the first Common Reader, I thought this one was kind of boring. There were a lot of authors I have to look up because I have no clue what she was talking about. However, there are some good essays in this one, but not as many as the first volume. There is no order to these books, but I'd skip this one unless you want to read everything Woolf. I've read almost all her novels (except *Night and Day*) and a list of non-fiction too. I've read all the books I own of hers too (16 to be exact). Will I read more Woolf? Yes, if I find books I don't own I'll most likely get them. When will this happen? Who knows. Kind of glad I saved this one for last. Now to my goal for her is to reread some of her books when I'm in the mood to reread books.

Wilson says

What a mind as never is Virginia Woolf's!

incipit mania says

Incipit

È molto divertente immaginare di poter tornare indietro ...

<http://www.incipitmania.com/incipit-p...>

Gail says

The title is self-explanatory. Not as engaging as the first volume. Three favorite essays from this book are "Aurora Leigh", a complete, not to say exhaustive, treatment of Elizabeth Browning's poem; "The Novels of Thomas Hardy", and "How Should One Read a Book?"

An interesting technique employed here: a book or the work of a particular author will be presented in a distinctly negative way, with appropriate evidence. Ms. Woolf then will reverse her position totally, and point out precisely why the work being considered is indeed worthwhile. I don't know it's a tour-de-force, a bit of showing off, or both. It's very well done, though, and engaging, in an odd sort of way.

R?zvan Molea says

Woolf abordeaz? problema prejudec??ilor pe care majoritatea cititorilor o au fa?? de c?r?i; fa?? de poezie – s? fie fals?, fa?? de autobiografii – s? fie m?gulitoare, fa?? de proz? – s? fie adev?rat? (sau cel pu?in s? par??), fa?? de c?r?ile de istorie – s? ne satisfac? vanitatea ?i sim?ul patriotic. Întotdeauna avem a?tept?ri, de multe ori nejustificate, care stric? toat? experien?a lecturii.

Solu?ia, afirm? Woolf, este s? înl?turi bagajul de idei preconcepute ?i s? accep?i exact ceea ce are de oferit cartea respectiv?. Fair enough, right? Doar c? nu facem asta mereu (este o meteahn? de care suf?r ?i eu).

Acesta ar fi un început bun.

Woolf susține că dacă n-ai încerca să te detașezi de carte și să-ți cauți nod în papură la fiecare pas (ca atunci când vii cu idei preconcepute care e o carte proastă – că nu-ți place autorul, că ultima lui carte pe care ai citit-o te-a făcut să regreti că ai cumpărat-o, că nu-ți plac cărțile cât un dicționar, etc), să o critici, ci mai degrabă să devii ”complicele” autorului - adică să nu stăi deoparte. Căci dacă alegi să îți deschizi mintea, atunci semne și aluzii de o finețe aproape imperceptibilă, întoarceri de propoziții, te vor aduce în prezența unei *minți deosebite*. Cu toate acestea, este foarte dificil să ne afundăm propria identitate în ceea ce citim, rezonând cu sentimentele și emoțiile evocate în pagini. Oricât de mult ne-am strădui, nu putem să ne afundăm cu totul, fiindcă mereu va exista în noi acel demon care șoptește, ”I hate, I love”, și pe acesta nu-l putem reduce la tăcere.

Dacă prima parte a cititului îndeamnă cititorii să-ți deschidă mintea la infinitatea de impresii subtile din pagină, atunci cea de-a doua este cea de a judeca, de a compara – sarcină deloc ușoară. Să continui să citeți o carte fără să o ai în față, să fi citit considerabil și cu suficientă înțelegere de-a lungul timpului pentru a face comparații edificatoare și pertinente – asta e dificil; este, totuși, mult mai dificil să mergi mai departe și să spui: ”Nu numai că romanul/poezia cutare e de felul ăsta, dar e și de felul ăsta; aici reușește, aici dă chix; asta-i bine; asta-i rău.” Pentru a reuși într-o astfel de sarcină, un cititor are nevoie de atât de multă imaginație, bună cunoaștere și cunoștințe, încât este greu de conceput că cineva este într-atât de înzestrat pentru a o duce la capăt.

Woolf încheie astfel esul:

”I have sometimes dreamt, at least, that when the Day of Judgment dawns and the great conquerors and lawyers and statesmen come to receive their rewards – their crowns, their laurels, their names carved indelibly upon impersihable marble – the Almighty will turn to Peter and will say, not without a certain envy and when He sees us coming with our books under our arms, ”Look, these need no reward. We have nothing to give them here. They have loved reading.”

Ellen says

In her second tour de force in literary criticism, Woolf's collection of book reviews and essays upon authors and their failures and successes astounds the reader with her perceptive and sensitive reading of books and clear understanding of authors' personalities, ambitions, and histories. Each essay is moving in its own way, and as I read through the book I sometimes felt overwhelmed by Woolf's phrasing and poetic style. I could go on for pages, citing incidences of essays that moved me to tears, or angered me that a particular author that I find excellent is severely ridiculed by the critics of his/her day but there's just not enough space here for me to do so.

If you are a lover of books, British literature, literary criticism, and of course, the writing of Virginia Woolf, you must not pass up an opportunity to read this collection. In my opinion, it is more well-written than her first collection, "The Common Reader". You may be inspired, as I was, to find copies of some of the books reviewed here and read them, thus discovering new writers whose works you'll want to plunder. Yes, these are old books, some quite out of date with our times, but as a reader I find that these books offer new ideas about society and its changes, and better comprehension of human nature and its vagaries.

Go for it! You won't regret reading this!

Sherwood Smith says

Here's the thing about Woolf. Even if you disagree with her (as I do over Chesterfield, for example), you can hold a mental conversation with her, and you sense that she will listen sympathetically. She's rarely snide, and never petty in these essays; she doesn't always have all the facts, and sometimes betrays the limitations of her time, but who doesn't?

One essay over breakfast is a wonderful way to begin the day.

T.E. says

Very very very good
