

Virginia Woolf: How Should One Read a Book?

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:47

In Virginia Woolf's essay "How Should One Read a Book", she outlines six key elements, that one should ensue to apprehend the highest highs of reading. Apart from the six, three particular elements intrigued me the most. The prominent three elements, how to follow your instincts, interpretations of reading, and expanding your repertoire, will be clearly emphasized in this essay.

After reading Virginia Woolf's essay, "How Should One Read a Book", I came to grasp an abundance of essential points in which Virginia Woolf emphasizes. Nevertheless, the most prominent one being that "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 conclusion". Immediately following the reading of the essay, I came to grasp and clearly understood what Virginia Woolf was emphasizing. Her theory is that, one is not best suited to accept advice from another on how literature should or should not be read, because the best advice originates within your instincts. This component of Virginia Woolf's essay is very appealing to me as a student and as a reader considering the years of 'advice' that had been administered to me.

Novelists, most frequently achieve their goal in bringing a reader into a state of mind in which they are taken into the world of that novel. Interpretations of readers derive from their personal history. The ethnicity, gender, age, and life experiences are few of the innumerable characteristics that contribute to the overall interpretations of a reader. This is another concept Virginia Woolf placed into her essay. When one manages to "banish all such preconceptions" before and when they read, is when one receives the fullest possible value from literature. If you "open our mind as widely as possible" and become the author of the novel, you will then be in "the presence of a human being unlike any other" and only then... will you be taken into the novel.

Virginia Woolf: How Should One Read a Book?

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:47

In modern day culture, people judge books upon their appearance and not the value contained within the covers. We should not "refuse to read books because they are not 'art'?" on the contrary, we should "read them in a different way, with a different aim?" This is Virginia Woolf's emphasis on how one should expand their repertoire, be curious and "satisfy that curiosity which possesses" them. To give "rubbish-reading" a chance, to find the "beautiful humor and pathos" contained within it. Essentially, Virginia Woolf is saying, "you should not judge a book by its cover".

Virginia Woolf spoke about many essential components to aid a reader into wreaking the fullest value from literature. From reading her essay I have come to grasp how literature should and should not be read. Reading is a lifelong process. One shouldn't read for the sake reading, but they should read for the love of reading.

After mentioning that the fastest way to appreciate the task a novelist faces is to try and write about some event in your life, Woolf says:

But also we can read such books with another aim, not to throw light on literature, not to become familiar with famous people, but to refresh and exercise our own creative powers. Is there not an open window on the right hand of the bookcase? How delightful to stop reading and look out! How stimulating scene is, in its unconsciousness, its irrelevance, and its perpetual movement—the colts galloping round the field, the woman filling her pail at the well, the donkey throwing back his head and emitting his long, acrid moan. The greater part of any library is nothing but the record of such fleeting moments in the lives of men, women, and donkeys.

Woolf outlines the two processes in reading: reading as closely as possible, then comparing

Virginia Woolf: How Should One Read a Book?

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:47

with other works.

It would be foolish, then, to pretend that the second part of reading, to judge, to compare, is as simple as the first—to open the mind wide to the fast flocking of innumerable impressions. To continue reading without the book before you, to hold one shadow-shape against another, to have read widely enough and with enough understanding to make such comparisons alive and illumination – that is difficult; it is still more difficult to press further and to say, “Not only is the book of this sort, but it is of this value; here it fails; here it succeeds; this is bad; this is good”. To carry out this part of a reader’s duty needs such imagination, insight, and learning that it is hard to conceive any one mind sufficiently endowed; impossible for the most self-confident to find more than the seed of such powers in himself.

By triggering these sensors and somewhat emotional queries within us, an author causes a clock work cycle to commence which will enlighten our reading and eventually create enjoyment and furthering interests with the book. This is what Virginia Woolf focuses her composition about and emphasizes so very clearly.

After reading her essay, I came to grasp and understand her theory that one is best not to accept advice from another on how to read literature, since the best advice is no advice at all. Woolf expresses the conception that when one begins to read literature he begins to enter different stages of interpretation that will ultimately improve his pleasure and satisfaction. It was obvious to me that I had in fact indulged in forms of interpretation when reading literature, but it had never dawned on me until reading Woolf’s essay. Whenever I am subjected to something in literature that is not fully comprehensive, I begin to engage in several different forms of interpretation. The first stage would reflect much of the philosophy composed in the essay ‘Against Interpretation’ whereas I, the reader, would observe the content and then translate the form. Literature includes the reader to use his experience and memories to comprehend what a person; place or thing is and then interpret it. The second stage would involve translation where one begins a comparison sequence trying to link their past knowledge with the subject introduced by the author. It is this comparison which creates a variation of ways in which every person reads or understands literature. Therefore, each individual is different in respect to forms of interpretation based on their past experiences and knowledge. It can be true to say that every man is only made up of his memories. I would therefore agree with Woolf’s analogy that there is no greater gift than that of literature. Somehow, I felt illuminated by obtaining an insight from Woolf in respect to how man must remain a reader and not a critic. Every person in this world develops, is raised and educated differently and it is this difference that makes

Virginia Woolf: How Should One Read a Book?

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:47

literature so enigmatic and complex.

I often find myself so deeply absorbed into a novel that the world constructed within my mind, through my unique form of interpretation, is so terribly realistic I cannot stop reading the book. My entire being is enthralled by the work of this particular author who, through his style and form of writing, has managed to throw me into an abyss of subconscious interpretation. Woolf stresses the importance of how each individual creates different visions and reactions to literature that read to a conclusion brought upon their own methods of interpretation. Although my own method of reading has not been altered after reading her essay, it allows me to put the whole concept of literature into perspective and how it affects me in life. I have begun contemplating the different characteristics involved in creative writing and how every person who reads literature will analyze it. After all, this is what Virginia Woolf was so willing to express in her own literature on the rewards of reading a book without discriminating or creating standards for something that involves freedom, imaginations and judgment.

It is simple enough to say that since books have classes – fiction, biography, and poetry – we should separate them and take from each what it is right they should give us. Yet few people ask from books what books can give us. Most commonly we come to books with blurred and divided minds, asking of fiction that it shall be true, of poetry that it shall be false, of biography that it shall be flattering, of history that it shall enforce our own prejudices.

If we could banish all such preconceptions when we read, what would be an admirable beginning? Do not dictate to your author; try to become him. Be his fellow-worker and accomplice. If you hang back, and reserve and criticize at first, you are preventing yourself from getting the fullest possible value from what you read. But if you open your mind as widely as possible, then signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences, will bring you into the presence of a human being unlike any other.

Virginia Woolf: How Should One Read a Book?

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:47

In "How One Should Read a Book" Virginia Woolf talks about how she views reading a book as a personal experience for everyone. She views reading as a thing of liberty and freedom, where you can escape and not be bothered by what everyone else thinks. I think Woolf's feelings about reading influenced her writing: she wrote whatever she wanted and never censored her thoughts. She also wants to change the way we see certain literature: we see fiction as mere amusement and poetry as false. She describes poetry and biography extensively and uses examples from other writers. This reading is teaching us, what Woolf thinks, is the proper way to read a book. But she believes that even if we read something a hundred times we will never be able to truly criticize or understand it, because literature is so deep and profound.

In the first paragraph Woolf says, "the only advice, 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". I think she is trying to say that no one views and imagines a book the same way. We don't even imagine a book the way the writer intended us to. So maybe in a way we are also the writer since we come up with our own conclusions. It's like when a book becomes a movie: the director shows the way that he viewed the book; he may even change certain events and characters for the movie. The writer may argue against this but they can do nothing about it, since the director has made it his own. She also argues that one cannot truly say that one book is better than another. "Romeo and Juliet" may be viewed as one of the greatest books of all time, but to whom? We all see it a certain way and Shakespeare certainly isn't around to discuss it with us.

I also found it ironic that Woolf is saying that we shouldn't be told how to read a book since it takes away our freedom, but later on she is telling us how we should read a book. She tells us not to dictate the author but to try and become him. I think she is trying to say that we shouldn't say, "Why would the character do that? I would have made them do so and so". We should respect the author's choice and try to understand why he/she wrote that. She also thinks that takes away from us truly enjoying the novel. She thinks that when we read we are in a different world, and when we read we shouldn't let things from our current world influence the way we are seeing the book. It also seems like Woolf is questioning the intelligence of the readers. She seems to believe that one must be an intellectual and college-educated person in order to fully

Virginia Woolf: How Should One Read a Book?

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:45 - Last Updated Wednesday, 05 May 2010 15:47

appreciate a book. I don't agree with her, if a five-year old can read, he/she can enjoy and appreciate a book. May be even more than an adult, since his/her imaginations are less limited.

I think the end of the essay shows how much Virginia Woolf loved and valued reading. She looks at it as a kind of holy thing that will get you into Heaven. She thinks that people with books under their arms will get into heave, before the lawyers and the statesmen. She thinks that we not only read for pleasure but because it is good thing to do. Woolf is right, I don't think she's right about reading getting us into Heaven, but about it being a good thing to do. Reading strengthens and influences the mind.