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“Human Character Changed”:

Virginia Woolf’s Conceptualisation of Literary Change in the 21st Century

“[O]n or about December 1910 human character changed.”¹ This famous assertion by Virginia Woolf has often been quoted in order to explain the author’s plea for new forms of writing in the period of modernism. The setting of a date is, of course, highly arbitrary, and Woolf hastened to add that the developments she refers to already began in the late nineteenth century. Many events and tendencies have been mentioned in connection with the emergence of modernist ways of writing, such as the translations of Freud’s works or the first exhibition of Post-Impressionist paintings in London, which took place in December 1910.² However, the point that Woolf makes goes beyond the marking of a particular milestone in the history of literature. Instead, it is part of a full-fledged theory of literary change, which is based on her conception of literature as a means of communication. Literary works are written by authors in order to be read, and fictional prose is intricately tied to human nature in many ways: to what writers believe to be human nature and human life, to the expectations of readers, and to the subject matter of literature.

If one contextualises Woolf’s remarks and tries to understand them in the light of her historical and critical essays, it becomes clear that she had very complex and pertinent ideas about literary change and its connections to cultural developments. Throughout her life, Woolf published hundreds of essays, most of which are now available in standard collections of five or six volumes.³ Her biographical and historical essays reveal a deep interest in and awareness of the importance of differences between cultural periods. In the two volumes of her essays which she edited herself, *The Common Reader* (first

¹ Virginia Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” [1924] *The Captain’s Death Bed and Other Essays* (London: Hogarth, 1950), 91.

² See Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 65, 86; Jane Goldman, “Virginia Woolf and Modernist Aesthetics,” *Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010), 38f.; Stephen Matthews, *Modernism: A Sourcebook* (London: Palgrave, 2008), 181.

³ Andrew McNeillie and Stuart Clarke edited the most recent collection in six volumes; this essay, however, uses the editions published by the Hogarth Press, the first two of which were published by Virginia Woolf herself.

and second series), she took great care to place historical pieces next to essays dealing with literature. In her critical essays on literature, she more often than not drew readers' attention to the historical and cultural characteristics of a broad range of periods. At the same time, she was aware of historical contingencies, and of the variety of influences on particular works of literature: "But let us always remember – influences are infinitely numerous; writers are infinitely sensitive; each writer has a different sensibility. That is why literature is always changing [...]. Yet there are groups."⁴

Woolf's wariness of undue generalisations, her dislike of authority and of teaching literature in abstract terms, her ingenious way of developing metaphors and the sheer number of her statements on literature have led the great majority of the few critics who deal with her essays and her conceptualisation of literature to assume that Woolf was "fundamentally resistant towards the systematising of rational thought,"⁵ as, among others, Deborah Parsons believes. Numerous scholars have characterised Woolf's criticism as "impressionistic,"⁶ an adjective which was at first used to belittle it as unimportant. Later feminist criticism has re-evaluated this 'impressionist' procedure as a positive quality, but retained the characterisation of Woolf as a stimulating, interesting essayist who does not use any fixed categories for conceptualising and evaluating literature at all, let alone consistent ones.⁷ A number of recent studies show the coherence of particular

⁴ "The Leaning Tower," [1940] *The Moment* (London: Hogarth, 1947), 106.

⁵ Deborah Parsons, *Theorists of the Modernist Novel: James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf*, Routledge Critical Thinkers (London: Routledge, 2007), 14; Hermione Lee, "Virginia Woolf's Essays," *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, eds. Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 2000, 91-108), 101, also stresses the lack of analytical thinking in Woolf's essays; she thinks that "scene-making [...]" is at the heart of her critical method" (ibid. 100).

⁶ For feminist criticism on the 'feminine' quality of Woolf's style, see for instance, Elsie F. Mayer, "Literary Criticism with a Human Face: Virginia Woolf and The Common Reader," *Private Voices, Public Lives: Women Speak on the Literary Life*, ed. Nancy Owen Nelson (Denton: U of North Texas Press, 1995), 288f., and Leila Brosnan, *Reading Virginia Woolf's Essays and Journalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1997), 88. For an earlier, negative evaluation of Woolf's 'impressionistic' feminist criticism see Maggie Humm, "Virginia Woolf," *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics*, ed. Maggie Humm (Brighton: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1986), 124.

⁷ For a brief review of the academic reception of Woolf's essays, which have recently become the focus of several book-length studies, see Katerina Koutsantoni, *Virginia Woolf's Common Reader* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 10-14, and Randi Saloman, *Virginia Woolf's Essayism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2012), 6-8. Saloman also stresses that many recent studies treat Woolf's essays as a starting point for an understanding of her novels.

aspects of Woolf's aesthetics, but these often focus on her fictional works rather than on her essays.⁸

In the following, I will argue against this image of Woolf as an essayist incapable of or averse to logical thinking and try to show that Woolf not only asked her readers to employ their intellect, their emotions and their imagination in order to understand and evaluate literary works, but also linked these resources to formulate her own views on literary texts. What is more, the style of her essays is characterised by these resources and by her beliefs regarding the tasks of authors, readers and critics. Although her conceptualisation of fiction and of literary change is developed and refined throughout the decades, and though the emphasis shifts, the key tenets remain; Woolf did not contradict herself.⁹ Her principles are not easy to recognise, however, since Woolf abhorred apodictic preaching and did not believe in teaching literature by using abstract or theoretical language. Her hatred of preaching corresponds to her rejection of authorities, particularly in the field of reading, which can be found in several essays, from her introduction to *The Common Reader I* (1925) up to the unfinished manuscript of an essay called "The Reader" written in 1940/1941.¹⁰

In my discussion of Woolf's aesthetics I will single out three factors that, according to her, influence literary change: First, factors attributable to the historical and cultural context, particularly cultural beliefs prevalent at the time of production; second, aspects inherent in literature, above all literary traditions and changing genre conventions; and, third, worldviews and preferences of individual authors. After this exploration of Woolf's ideas, I will look at her practice of literary historiography in the light of modern conceptualisations of literary history. Finally, I want to take stock of some

⁸ See, for instance, Linden Peach, "Virginia Woolf and Realist Aesthetics," *The Edinburgh Companion to Virginia Woolf and the Arts*, ed. Maggie Humm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP 2010), 104-117, who concentrates on *Night and Day*, *Flush* and *The Years*, and Adriana C. Duban, "The Mark on the Wall of Fiction: Virginia Woolf's *Ars Poetica*," *Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies* 3.5 (2011): 99-102, who focuses on the short story "Mark on the Wall." In a discerning chapter on Woolf's conception of 'literary geography,' Andrea Zengulys, *Modernism and the Locations of Literary Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) also mentions some key features of Woolf's aesthetics.

⁹ For a detailed delineation of Woolf's aesthetics, see my *Die Ästhetik Virginia Woolfs: Eine Rekonstruktion ihrer philosophischen und ästhetischen Grundanschauungen auf der Basis ihrer nichtfiktionalen Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1990). Koutsantoni, *Woolf's Common Reader*, 41, stresses that Woolf raises "even more unanswered questions" in her *Common Reader II*, than in *Common Reader I*.

¹⁰ See her desire "to free ourselves from all the impositions of authority & the dominion of what is customary" ("'Anon' and 'The Reader': Virginia Woolf's Last Essays," ed. Brenda R. Silver, *Twentieth Century Literature* 25.3/4 (1979): 369-441, 434). For her "hatred" of preaching, see Woolf, "Defoe" [1919], *The Common Reader I* [1925] (London: Hogarth, 1984), 92, and: "Here again my hatred of preaching pops out and barks" [25.6.1935], *Letters*, vol. V, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth, 1979), 408.

aspects of Woolf's poetics that can be further explicated or enriched with the help of narrative theory and psychology.

1 Cultural Beliefs of Authors and Readers

Woolf started from the premise that writers want to communicate their individual visions of human life to readers. The vicissitudes of human lives, the slow growth of feelings and the development of human relations are at the centre of fictional works, which explore what it is like to be a human being.¹¹ Novels, specifically, deal with characters, and Woolf emphasised that it is often difficult to describe, let alone to understand the life of characters. She illustrates this difficulty by imagining meeting a woman who asks her to be included in a novel: "My name is Brown. Catch me if you can."¹² In this as well as other essays, Woolf uses fictional scene making in order to illustrate her point, describing a situation in which she attempts to capture the life of a person she meets. Her example is Mrs. Brown, a little elderly lady, whom she observes sitting in a corner in a train. But though it is easy to depict her appearance or to point out where she lives, it is difficult to understand her, let alone to commit her to paper. What is essential for Woolf, "life or spirit, truth or reality,"¹³ is highly elusive.

In addition to being elusive, beliefs about human nature, reality, life and truth are susceptible to historical change, which in turn fosters literary change. Woolf does not cease to emphasise that different periods have different views about what is real, natural and important. In her essays, she often referred to general knowledge and implicit cultural beliefs related to the time of production of literary works. She spent great care to raise readers' awareness, for instance, of the specifics of cultural beliefs and social conduct in the times of Chaucer, Elizabeth I, and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The differences between cultures are profound, according to Woolf, and her own contemporaries and those of John Evelyn in the seventeenth century "rate the same things at different values [...]. [T]here is enough discrepancy between his view of pain and ours to make us wonder whether we see any fact with the same eyes [...] or judge any conduct by the

¹¹ "I believe that all novels [...] deal with character, and that it is to express character [...] that the form of the novel [...] has been evolved" ("Mr. Bennett," 97). See also her more elaborate statement: "The novel is the only form of art which seeks to make us believe that it is giving a full and truthful record of the life of a real person," "Phases of Fiction" [1929], *Granite and Rainbow* (London: Hogarth, 1958), 141. See also "writing is a method of communication," "The Patron and the Crocus," *Common Reader I*, 207.

¹² Woolf, "Mr. Bennett," 90.

¹³ "Modern Fiction," first published under the title "Modern Novels" in 1919, revised and retitled 1925, *Common Reader I*, 149.

same standards."¹⁴ In order to be able to understand and fully engage with the fictional worlds of former periods, Woolf stressed, it is necessary to adjust one's own beliefs of what is real to those prevalent in the period.¹⁵

To be in a position to appreciate Elizabethan and seventeenth-century literature, Woolf therefore advised her readers to adjust their own 'sense of reality.' Twentieth century expectations concerning 'human nature' or 'reality,' she suggests, diverge in many ways from Elizabethan beliefs:

The reality to which we have grown accustomed is, speaking roughly, based upon the life and death of some knight called Smith, who succeeded his father in the family business, [...] did much for the poor of Liverpool, and died last Wednesday of pneumonia while on a visit to his son at Muswell Hill.¹⁶

That a character succeeding his father in the family business and dying of pneumonia would have fulfilled readers' expectations of a life-like character at the beginning of the twentieth century affirms Woolf's observation by demonstrating the rapidity of changes in the sense of what is real. In the twenty-first century, with its precarious working conditions, financial crises and climate change, such a character, presented by Woolf as stock example of what is regarded as 'real,' would appear to be nearly as unreal as an Elizabethan nobleman.

Woolf was deeply aware of the impact that changes in people's 'sense of reality' had on literary developments. She noted that in Elizabethan times, travellers coming back from the New World told tales about incredibly strange flowers and animals - about American natives and their wondrous beliefs and behaviours - and about headless people, unicorns and other marvels. These cultural beliefs influenced many Elizabethan plays, which feature characters "who spend their lives in murder and intrigue, dress up as men if they are women, as women if they are men, see ghosts, run mad, and die in the greatest profusion on the slightest provocation"¹⁷ - and this leaves modern readers in despair, because they search in vain for some connection to Smith, or to London and the world they know. In the Renaissance, people thought and felt differently, and dukes and other grandees were expected to

¹⁴ "Rambling Round Evelyn," [1920] *Common Reader I*, 80f. Sally Greene, "Entering Woolf's Renaissance Imaginary: A Second Look at *The Second Common Reader*," *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*, eds. Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 81-95, 88 stresses that Woolf used "the process of defamiliarizing her readers, opening their minds to a time before the course of literary history was set so that they might imagine other directions it could have taken."

¹⁵ Zemgulys, *Modernism and the Locations of Literary Heritage*, 157, also emphasises that Woolf wrote literary criticism in order to "shape the tastes and understandings of a wide public of readers."

¹⁶ "Notes on an Elizabethan Play," *Common Reader I*, 48-67, 48f.

¹⁷ "Notes on an Elizabethan Play," 49.

use language that was "long-winded and abstract and full of metaphors."¹⁸ Readers have to be aware of the prevalent cultural beliefs; Woolf maintains that they have to adjust their sense of what to expect from any given text with regard to the particular time in which it was published. They should not judge books without taking the cultural presuppositions and the dominant narrative or poetic techniques at the time of their publication into account.

Changes in implicit and explicit cultural beliefs are therefore among the driving forces of literary change. As Woolf's example of the characters in Elizabethan plays, of their behaviour, their emotions and their language shows, variations of what is held to be 'real' or 'human nature' influence just about every aspect of literary works, ranging from the conceptualisation of characters to plotlines and style. Sociological factors have a part to play in this, too, and Woolf was convinced that they would continue to be significant in the future. Even in the twentieth century, she suggested, the English novel was still young and very much bound up with the middle class. Any future levelling of the differences between classes, and the disappearance of the British class system would have a great impact on the development of fiction in England:

But what will happen to English fiction when it has come to pass that there are neither Generals, nieces, Earls, nor coats, we cannot imagine. It may change its character so that we no longer know it. It may become extinct. [...] The art of a truly democratic age will be - what?¹⁹

Far from being the elitist aesthete solely concerned with the subtle depiction of human consciousness and formal aspects of writing, Woolf acknowledged the importance of cultural and sociological changes for the development of literature.

2 Literary Traditions and Genre Conventions

The second important group of factors influencing literary change was, according to Woolf, intrinsic to literature. She put great store by literary traditions and genre conventions, but her evaluation of their impact on authors and readers was ambivalent. On the one hand, she appreciated the influence of traditions. As she famously claimed in *A Room of One's Own*, "we think back through our mothers if we are women,"²⁰ and the lack of a substantial and renowned tradition of female writing proved to be a serious obstacle to

¹⁸ "The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia," *Common Reader II* (London: Hogarth, [1932] 1953), 46.

¹⁹ "The Niece of an Earl," [1928] *Common Reader II*, 219.

²⁰ *A Room of One's Own* [1929] and *Three Guineas*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: Hogarth, 1984), 70f.

the development of literature – particularly for poetry and plays – by British female authors. Her observations on the problems of female authors can serve to highlight her general point and demonstrate that traditions are an important catalyst for the production of innovative works. On the other hand, literary traditions and particularly genre conventions could be an impediment to change and prevent authors from giving expression to their own beliefs, convictions and imaginations. Widely accepted narrative conventions render it difficult to respond to changes in cultural beliefs and to create works of literature that are more than just a repetition of well-known formulae.

To look at the positive impact of traditions first, being aware of them could be useful for writers and readers since both, according to Woolf, stand to gain by enlarging their own experiences by means of literature. After all, "masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common,"²¹ which gives authors confidence and makes it possible to create something new. For Woolf, literary creativity depends on a kind of calmness, unawareness and concentration, on a lack of self-doubt and anger that is fostered by the consciousness of being part of a long and fruitful tradition of writing.²² This mental state allows authors to experiment with conventions and provides a basis for new and innovative works of literature, which are nonetheless part of a larger historical background. The lineage of books could therefore be compared to those of families: "Books descend from books as families descend from families. Some descend from Jane Austen; others from Dickens."²³ Since writing is a method of communication, adherence to established traditions also facilitates the process of reaching readers, who know what to expect when they open a book belonging to a particular lineage or genre. This advantage of gaining readers' attention and goodwill, and making them willing co-creators of the book, was held to be extremely important by Woolf: "The writer must get into touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-operate."²⁴ To be able to write within literary traditions is an important precondition for generating literary change. Writers need the

²¹ *A Room of One's Own*, 61.

²² "[A] novelist's chief desire is to be as unconscious as possible. He has to induce in himself a state of perpetual lethargy [...] so that nothing may disturb or disquiet [...] the imagination"; "Professions for Women" [21.1.1931], *The Death of the Moth* (London: Hogarth, 1942), 152. See also *ibid.* 150-153; and "The Leaning Tower," 120. For the necessity of incandescence and unimpeded concentration, see also *A Room of One's Own*, 53, 68.

²³ "The Leaning Tower," 106. See also: "For books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (*A Room of One's Own*, 75).

²⁴ "Mr. Bennett," 104.

confidence to draw on traditions in order to create something new, and readers need something to recognise in order to co-operate.

Just as necessary as the reliance on established conventions, however, is the need to adjust and change them. According to Woolf, there are good reasons for using old conventions for new aims or for creating new conventions for the expression of innovative beliefs. The pleasure of reading and the state of enchantment that is evoked by reading works of fiction rely on some kind of variety. To be drawn into "the enchanted world of imagination,"²⁵ which can engross readers and raise their emotions, requires more than just the repetition of old formulae. The use of old conventions and constellations is unlikely to evoke the same emotions again and again; a state of rapture or enchantment is difficult to achieve when one sticks to old patterns: "If the old methods are obsolete, it is the business of the writer to discover new ones. The public can feel again what it has once felt - there can be no doubt about that; only from time to time the point of attack must be changed."²⁶

On the other hand, traditions and genre conventions can pose significant obstacles to literary change. Readers expect writers to use familiar genre conventions; they are puzzled and confused if faced with books which radically depart from such established ways of writing. In addition, the standards we raise as readers and

the judgments we pass steal into the air and become part of the atmosphere which writers breathe as they work. An influence is created which tells upon them [...]. And that influence, if it were well instructed, vigorous and individual and sincere, might be of great value now.²⁷

For modernist writers, readers' preferences for old narrative conventions which persuaded them that the content of a book was lifelike or authentic proved to be a problem. Beliefs about human nature had changed, if not in 1910 then thereabouts, and writers who wanted their novels to respond to new ideas about the way the human mind worked, had to turn away from old conventions and develop new methods of writing. Woolf emphasised that the established conventions did not fit the beliefs of modernist authors:

²⁵ "The Novels of E.M. Forster," [1927] *Death of the Moth*, 111. See also the references to "rapture" and "excitement" in *A Room of One's Own*, 67. See also Woolf's "On Re-reading Novels," [1922] *The Moment*, 127, and: "It is the peculiarity of Chaucer, however, that though we feel at once this quickening, this enchantment, we cannot prove it by quotation" ("The Pastons and Chaucer," *Common Reader I*, 18f.).

²⁶ "Henry James's Ghost Stories" [1921], *Granite*, 67. To be confronted with the same, old-fashioned kind of fiction would ultimately bore readers: "[I]f fiction had remained what it was to Jane Austen and Trollope, fiction would by this time be dead." ("The Novels of George Meredith" [1928], revised for *Common Reader II*, 234)

²⁷ "How Should One Read a Book," [1926] *Common Reader II*, 269.

"For us those conventions are ruin, those tools are death."²⁸ Instead, Post-Impressionist paintings and ideas advanced by Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud influenced modernist authors' conception of the human mind and literary forms. The new ideas could not easily be expressed by means of Victorian realist conventions.²⁹ Extraordinary, intense and inexplicable thoughts and feelings, obscure or missing motives, and opaque or conflicting intentions and emotions seemed to ask for different modes of writing. The bewildering ideas about the complex workings of the human mind jarred with realist forms of characterisation and plot lines:

There was Mrs. Brown protesting that she was different, quite different, from what people made out, and luring the novelist to her rescue [...]; there were [novelists like Bennett and Wells] handing out tools appropriate to house building and house breaking; and there was the British public asseverating that they must see the hot-water bottle first.³⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a combination of established traditions, genre conventions and the expectations of readers therefore seemed to hinder and impede literary change.

The rejection of realist modes of writing and the clarion call for new and innovative conventions in Woolf's two essays "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and "Modern Fiction" are often referred to in introductions to modernist writing or in interpretations of Woolf's novels in order to show that she wanted to establish a new genre sometimes referred to as the 'stream-of-consciousness novel' and a new mode of writing trying to "imitate" the "continuous formless flow" of human thoughts and feelings.³¹ The importance of changing cultural beliefs as catalysts of literary change certainly forms one essential aspect of Woolf's thoughts about the development of literature. Views on human nature had changed, and "[t]he mind receives a myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or 'engraved

²⁸ "Mr. Bennett," 104.

²⁹ Therefore, "the convention cease[d] to be a means of communication between writer and reader, and becomes instead an obstacle and an impediment." ("Mr. Bennett," 108)

³⁰ "Mr. Bennett," 107. Woolf therefore asked readers to become aware of their own thoughts and feelings and to insist that literary works take into account their daily experiences (cf. *ibid.* 110f.).

³¹ Duban, "The Mark on the Wall," 99. Duban considers the essay 'Modern Fiction' "Woolf's theoretical credo" (*ibid.* 100). See also Gary Day, "Changes in Critical Responses and Approaches," *The Modernism Handbook*, eds. Philip Tew and Andrew Murray (London: Continuum, 2009, 135-157), 142, who also refers to William James's concept of the 'stream of consciousness.' See also Jürgen Klein, "Virginia Woolfs Idee des neuen Romans," *Neue Rundschau* 96.1 (1985): 143-152. In contrast, Linden Peach recognises that Woolf had two different conceptualisations of the 'real,' and that she wanted to go beyond the depiction of the stream of consciousness. For a more detailed discussion of Woolf's conception of the 'real' see my *Ästhetik Virginia Woolfs* 107-135; for her idea of a 'new novel,' 164-174.

with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms."³² Beliefs such as these should be acknowledged in modern fiction, which in turn necessitates the development of new literary conventions.

However, these two often-quoted and anthologised essays date from the period between 1919 and 1925, and they illuminate only one facet of Woolf's ideas about literary change. While they can serve as a starting point for an understanding of an important aspect of Woolf's aesthetics and of the novels she wrote in the 1920s, they do not provide much in the way of enlightenment to Woolf's later works. We should bear in mind, moreover, that even in 1919 Woolf praised Dorothy Richardson's psychological realism, but at the same time criticised her way of depicting human consciousness, asserting that "the old method seems sometimes the more profound and economical of the two."³³

In addition, Woolf's ideas about the development of fiction went beyond the concentration on the 'stream of consciousness' and the resulting changes in narrative techniques. As early as 1927, when she had just finished *To the Lighthouse*, she speculated

that in ten or fifteen years' time prose will be used for purposes for which prose has never been used before. That cannibal, the novel, which has devoured so many forms of art will by then have devoured even more. We shall be forced to invent new names for the different books which masquerade under this one heading.³⁴

Instead of propagating the depiction of "an incessant shower of innumerable atoms," she stated that "the psychological novelist has been too prone to limit psychology to the psychology of personal intercourse."³⁵

What becomes visible in these propositions is a desire for formal innovation and the expression of new ideas – ideas that go beyond the description of a 'stream of consciousness.' Authors need to modify literary conventions in order to avoid repetition and to adjust them to their own visions. Looking back on her decision to break with the old realist conventions, Woolf admitted in a letter from January 1929 that the criticism of the tools used by authors such as Arnold Bennett or H.G. Wells was not the only reason, perhaps not even the most significant one for her desire to generate change:

³² "Modern Fiction," 150. Goldman, "Virginia Woolf and Modernist Aesthetics," 40, 43, 47 emphasises Woolf's alleged stress on feminine subjectivity and fragmentation. See also Nicola Watson, "Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*," *Aestheticism and Modernism*, eds. Richard D. Brown and Suman Gupta (London: Routledge, 2005, 277-323), 303 on Woolf's emphasis on "'myriadness' and incoherence – to the point of incipient nausea – of subjective experience."

³³ "The Tunnel" [1919], *Contemporary Writers*, 122.

³⁴ "The Narrow Bridge of Art," [1927] *Granite*, 18.

³⁵ "Narrow Bridge," 19. In the 1930s, she thought about and experimented with the integration of essay-writing into the 'cannibalistic' form of the novel.

Anna Karenina is branded on me, though I've not read it for 15 years. *That* is the origin of all our discontent. After that of course we had to break away. It wasn't Wells, or Galsworthy or any of our mediocre wishy washy realists: it was Tolstoy. How could we go on with sex and realism after that? How could they go on with poetic plays after Shakespeare? It is one brain, after all, literature; and it wants change and relief.³⁶

This quote could be interpreted in terms of Harold Bloom's 'anxiety of influence';³⁷ in the last sentence, however, Woolf gives it a turn which suggests that the impetus towards variety and change is inherent in literature. The dynamics of literature are at the centre of her aesthetics - both with regard to and independent of cultural change.

In addition, it bears emphasising that Woolf's conception of literary change transcends national boundaries. Both her aesthetics and her fictional works are influenced by European writers, particularly by French and Russian authors such as Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov and Ivan Turgenev. In her rejection of realist modes of characterisation in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Woolf significantly also considers cultural differences. Her interest in the specificity of cultures transcends her concern with temporal differences between periods; it also encompasses spatial differences between national cultures. In her brief illustration of national modes of approaching the depiction of character, the English mode does not appear to be the most attractive, since an English writer "would make the old lady into a 'character'; he would bring out her oddities." A French author would see beyond the individual character "to give a more general view of human nature; to make a more abstract, proportioned, and harmonious whole." A Russian author, in turn, "would reveal the soul."³⁸ The ideal of going beyond details, appearances and conduct in order to express 'human nature' and 'reveal the soul' is at the core of Woolf's aesthetics. In demanding changes of English narrative conventions, she also aimed at integrating patterns developed by French and Russian writers. Literature, for her, was "one brain, after all," not limited to the British tradition.

³⁶ 8.1.1929, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. IV, eds. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann (London: Hogarth, 1978), 4. See also: "No critic ever gives full weight to the desire of the mind for change," *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. IV, ed. Anne O. Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 26.1.1933, 145.

³⁷ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973).

³⁸ "Mr. Bennett," 97 (all three quotes).

3 Authors' Visions and Perspectives

"I think I shall find some theory about fiction [...]. The one I have in view is about *perspective*."³⁹

The third major driving force of literary change is, according to Woolf, caused by individual differences between authors. Though she fully acknowledged the importance of cultural beliefs and generic change, she also insisted that the individual sensitivity and creative power of authors had to be taken into account. She illustrated this by referring to Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Love Peacock, who lived and wrote at the same time and more or less on the same spot – but their perspectives on human nature and the major aims of literature could scarcely have been more different.⁴⁰ An author's perspective, for Woolf, encompasses more than just an individual angle from which he or she creates the fictional worlds in particular novels. An author's perspective is closely connected to his or her vision, to some profound and deeply subjective and individualistic view of human life that he or she tries to express by means of narrative conventions. This perspective determines the relations between the elements of a fictional world. According to Woolf, in a good novel everything is connected to the single vision which the author expresses:

[I]f there is one gift more essential to a novelist than another it is the power of combination – the single vision. The success of the masterpieces seems to lie [...] in the immense persuasiveness of a mind which has completely mastered its perspective.⁴¹

Authors' perspectives are, of course, influenced by the cultural beliefs and by the genre conventions prevalent at a time. However, the way in which authors respond to these cultural beliefs and conventions varies. Their attitudes towards such common knowledge can range from acceptance to rebellion, and leave room for modifications in both the choice of subject matter and the use of narrative conventions.

Since unifying visions are subjective and deeply felt on the parts of authors, and since conventions are by definition conventional, there is, according to Woolf, a clash between the interests of the author and the narra-

³⁹ *Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 7.12.1925, vol. III (1982), 50.

⁴⁰ See "Robinson Crusoe" [1926], slightly revised for *Common Reader II*, 53: "writers may live at the same time and yet see nothing the same size."

⁴¹ "The Novels of E.M. Forster" [1927], *Death of the Moth*, 104-112, 106f. See also: "For a novel [...] is a statement about a thousand different objects – human, natural, divine; it is an attempt to relate them to each other. In every novel of merit these different elements are held in place by the force of the writer's vision." ("Women and Fiction" [1929], *Granite and Rainbow*, 81).

tive tools that are needed in order to give shape to individual visions.⁴² Established conventions are unlikely to fit an individual author's perspective. This discrepancy between narrative techniques and authors' visions fosters literary change, because great writers will have to re-create the narrative tools and fictional forms in order to fit their own purpose: "the sign of a masterly writer is his power to break the mould callously."⁴³

This breaking of moulds and shattering of forms confuses readers, who expect novels to adhere to genre conventions, and who need to be shown something they can recognise in order to become 'co-creators' of literary works in whose imagination characters and situations come to life.⁴⁴ Authors therefore have to inspire the imagination of readers and to "lay an egg" in their minds, an egg the future of which is determined by readers, and cannot be controlled by writers.⁴⁵ However, for Woolf it is the mark of great writers that they can make readers believe in fictional worlds which are governed by highly subjective rules: "while we are under their spell these great geniuses make us see the world any shape they choose. We remodel our psychological geography when we read Dickens; we forget that we have ever felt the delights of solitude."⁴⁶ Woolf believed that great authors always convey an unusual perspective; they shatter the relations that are usually deemed to exist between the various parts of the world which they depict and impose their own perspective on readers, making them see familiar things in a new light. In this respect, Woolf's ideas on the nature of art resemble those of Viktor Shklovsky and other formalists, who stress that literature can enable

⁴² "[Dorothy Richardson's method] represents a genuine conviction of the discrepancy between what she has to say and the form provided by tradition for her to say it in. She is one of the rare novelists who believe that the novel is so much alive that it actually grows" ("The Tunnel," 120).

⁴³ *Diary*, 14.5.1933, vol. IV (1983), 157.

⁴⁴ See "The Patron and the Crocus," *The Common Reader I*, 206; for Woolf's insistence that the common reader has the desire and capacity to "create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole," see "The Common Reader," *The Common Reader I*, 1.

⁴⁵ "Fishing," *Moment*, 176. The metaphor of an "egg," which has to be fertilized or hatched in order to turn into a living being, lays even greater emphasis on the freedom and power of readers than the metaphor of the "crocus." The "crocus" has to be cared for by its patron, the reader, whose actions can influence whether the plant will wither, bloom or be malformed.

⁴⁶ "David Copperfield," [1925] *Moment*, 67. See also: "In masterpieces - books, that is, where the vision is clear and order has been achieved - he inflicts his own perspective upon us so severely that as often as not we suffer agonies - [...] our own order is upset" ("Robinson Crusoe," *Common Reader II*, 53f.), and: "the whole is held in its place, and its variety and divagations ordered by the power which is among the most impressive of all - the shaping power, the architect's power. It is the peculiarity of Chaucer, however, that though we feel at once this quickening, this enchantment, we cannot prove it by quotation" ("The Pastons and Chaucer," *Common Reader I*, 18f.).

readers to break out of routines of perception, to see and appreciate reality in a new way.⁴⁷

Each fictional world is, according to Woolf's normative aesthetics, governed by laws and principles consistent with the author's single vision. Though readers enter different fictional worlds each time they begin reading a good novel, these worlds are ordered and coherent:

we are living in a different world. [...] Yet different as these worlds are, each is consistent with itself. The maker of each is careful to observe the laws of his own perspective, and however great a strain they may put upon us they will never confuse us, as lesser writers so frequently do, by introducing two different kinds of reality into the same book.⁴⁸

This insistence on coherence runs contrary to postmodernist conceptualisations of aesthetics. It does, however, acknowledge a great divergence between literary works. Moreover, Woolf's aesthetics allows her to identify major catalysts of literary change and at the same time account for individual differences between the works of authors living in the same period. For Woolf, novels are harmonious wholes, each presenting a different fictional world: "a world where each part depends upon the other, the serene, impersonal, and indestructible world of art."⁴⁹ In contrast to later conceptions of literature, Woolf insisted throughout the 1920s and 1930s that "[t]umult is vile; confusion is hateful; everything in a work of art should be mastered and ordered."⁵⁰ Such an ordering requires a large amount of energy on the part of authors, especially if the vision that is expressed is a highly individualistic one, necessitating the modification or even breaking of old forms. If the writer's belief is intense enough, however, it can result in the creation of a perfect world of art which stimulates readers to become co-creators.⁵¹

⁴⁷ See Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," [1917] *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1965), 12-13.

⁴⁸ "How Should One Read a Book?" 260. See also: "But [the stories] have this characteristic of greatness - they exist by themselves. [...] We can see in what respects his vision was different from other people's," "A Glance at Turgenev," [1921] *Books and Portraits* (London: Hogarth, 1977), 107.

⁴⁹ "Congreve's Comedies," [1937] *Moment*, 30-38, 38. See also "a world where all is ordered, rational, and serene" ("Oliver Goldsmith" [1934], *Captain's Death Bed*, 18).

⁵⁰ "Narrow Bridge," 22. "When the last sentence is finished nothing vague or superfluous is left to blur the outline; the substance is all neatly packed into the form, rounded off, disposed of, completed," Woolf writes in "The Three Black Pennys" [1918], *Contemporary Writers*, ed. Jean Guiguet (London: Hogarth, [1965] 1978), 105-107, 105.

⁵¹ "The great novelist feels, sees, believes with such intensity of conviction that he hurls his belief outside himself and it flies off and lives an independent life of its own," "George Moore" [1925], *Death of the Moth* (London: Hogarth, 1947, 100-104), 101. See also "Women and Fiction," *Granite*, 81. This energy impedes the facile use of stereotypical

4 Woolf's Practice of Literary History in the Light of Recent Conceptualisations of Literary Historiography

Seen in the light of theories of literary history, both Woolf's theory of literary change and her practice of writing literary history seem to be as consistent as they are interesting today. Woolf acknowledged the impact of two basic modes of explaining literary change, i.e. a contextualist and an immanent one,⁵² arguing that literary works are related to the common beliefs of the time and to the existing literary tradition. In her essays, she often points to the influences of sociological and cultural change, mainly to prevailing beliefs about human nature and human relations. Interestingly, she only rarely refers to great political events in order to explain literary change. She once even drew attention to the fact that there is no mention of the Napoleonic wars in many writers of the period. Instead of politics, she emphasised the influence of beliefs and relations between human beings. The amelioration of class differences and social hierarchies, for instance, would change both human relations and images of men; it would also transform English novels. Her explanation of literary change is in itself encompassing, integrating, for instance, formalist ideas about the necessity of aesthetic changes in order to evoke similar emotions in readers that were raised by established conventions at earlier times. She also refers to other factors like authors' desire to vary prevailing techniques, or even the wish to produce something as perfect as had been achieved by authors like Tolstoy, but not being able to excel in his use of realist conventions. In addition, Woolf reserved a prominent role to the individuality of authors and the power of their vision, which could take different stances towards common beliefs and literary works.

The principles that govern Woolf's practice of literary history correspond to some key beliefs of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, such as the rejection of master narratives, the widening of the scope beyond nationalist literatures, and the inclusion of female authors. Most of her essays shed light on literary history, but many resist an easy classification as historical, biographical, or literary. Numerous essays deal with mainly obscure historical persons and forgotten as well as famous authors; many discuss books ranging from letters and diaries published from the Middle Ages onwards to a variety of literary works since the time of Elizabeth I; a large number were first published as reviews of new works or collections of works; others address cornerstones of her own aesthetics, such as the significance of authors' perspectives or the conceptualisation of fiction as a means of com-

patterns and thus fosters literary change. It leads to a harmonious integration of form and content, which in its turn makes it easier for readers to become entranced.

⁵² See David Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992), 121-174.

munication. With the exception of some impressionistic essays on fleeting feelings and experiences (and even including some of those), all of these works illuminate Woolf's conception of literature and literary change.

In accordance with her many-faceted theory of literary change, Woolf shied away from writing master narratives. Instead, she wrote numerous essays, each of them exploring particular works, genres or periods in a subjective, yet thoughtful and rigorous manner. Even her long essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) does not consist of one narrative only. Instead, several chapters probe into different facets of the topic, using counterfactual speculation, facts and fiction in order to pursue her argument.⁵³ If there is a kind of master narrative – or rather stance – at all in this essay, it is that of the fictional persona of Woolf searching for knowledge about women's lives and literary works. In the two volumes of her essays which she edited herself, she did not use any narrow principle of selection, let alone a single narrative structure. As the title indicates, anything that is important to 'the common reader' can be included. In her preface to *The Common Reader I*, she quotes Samuel Johnson on "the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, [without] the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning."⁵⁴ Woolf adds that the common reader "differs from the critic and the scholar" in that he or she does not have their education and learning.⁵⁵ It does not come as a surprise, therefore, that Woolf consciously rejects authoritative and professional categories of writing literary history. According to her, "[t]he common reader is [...] suspicious of fixed labels and settled hierarchies."⁵⁶

Woolf's attempt to go beyond fixed labels and do justice to individual works, however, does emphatically not imply that she was suspicious of

⁵³ This essay grew out of a lecture with a set topic; Woolf did not start working on it with the intention of producing a small book. For Woolf's method of using "counterfactual thinking," see Saloman, *Woolf's Essayism*, 10.

⁵⁴ "The Common Reader," 1. For Woolf's conceptualisation of the non-academic 'common reader' and her rejection of "authoritarianism," see also Koutsantoni, *Woolf's Common Reader*, 75-100; however, Koutsantoni relates this aversion to authoritarianism to a belief in authority and to collectivism as well as Woolf's conception of perspective (ibid. 93, 97f., 79). On Woolf's ideas about the common reader, see also Saloman, *Woolf's Essayism*, 58-63.

⁵⁵ "The Common Reader," 1. See also: "Everywhere else we may be bound by laws and conventions – there [in libraries, when reading] we have none." ("How Should One Read a Book?" 258) For Woolf's distrust of academic categories such as a 'period,' see also Elena Gualtieri, *Virginia Woolf's Essays – Sketching the Past* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 46f.

⁵⁶ "Phases of Fiction," *Granite*, 94. On Woolf's rejection of a didactic and authoritarian voice in her essays see also Saloman, *Woolf's Essayism*, 55, and Koutsantoni (fn. 54). Koutsantoni also recognises that "Virginia Woolf's objective is to construct a system in which the common reader is a common critic" (ibid. 63).

interpreting, evaluating and judging literary works. Instead, she draws on several modes of explaining literary change and establishes her own categories, which allow her to evaluate a work according to the coherence of its elements, its perspective, the match between vision and style, the evocation of a reality that is deeper than the surface, and the modification of narrative techniques.⁵⁷ She does not make these categories explicit, however, and uses narratives, metaphors and anecdotes illustrating her aesthetic principles as well as her criteria of judging literary prose. Rather than assuming the stance of a teacher, she encourages readers to arrive at their own conclusions, and provides examples of the ways in which this could be done in many of her own essays. She employs a pluralist approach, trying to be sensitive towards as many facets of literary works as possible. Her choice of the kinds of reasons that can explain literary change is just as diverse and wide as her choice of types of essay.

The variety of literary and cultural contexts that Woolf addresses might be regarded as a failure to identify one particular type of context in order to explain literary change. However, seen in light of recent insights that the selection of a relevant context is, in any literary history, always arbitrary and depends on the preferences of the historian, Woolf's mode of proceeding seems to be justified from today's perspective. After all, each work of history only describes a small part of a given context, and "most literary histories are eclectic with respect to the kinds of contexts and the modes of relationship they deploy as explanations."⁵⁸ Woolf implicitly acknowledged this by flaunting her arbitrariness and by choosing different contexts, depending on the books, authors or themes she wanted to interpret and develop. She even went further and, as a rule, refrained from identifying significant similarities between works and grouping books together. Though she mentions some relations between books in passing and claims that books descend from books, she published only one longer essay on the development of fiction. Significantly, she introduces her essay "Phases of Fiction" as an "attempt to record the impressions made upon the mind by reading a certain number of novels in succession" - which, she hastens to add, is neither a chronological succession nor one that includes every great author.⁵⁹ In addition, she does not resort to accepted categories such as genres or periods. Instead, she creates loose groups, such as those encompassing 'truth-tellers' or 'character-

⁵⁷ See above; see also my *Die Ästhetik Virginia Woolfs*, Anne E. Fernald, "Pleasure and Belief in 'Phases of Fiction,'" *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*, ed. Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 193-211), 197, stresses that in her essay "Phases of Fiction," "Woolf relies upon an organizing principle of contrast rather than development."

⁵⁸ Perkins, *Is Literary History Possible*, 133. For the problems of contextualisation, see Perkins, 126-128.

⁵⁹ "Phases of Fiction," 93.

mongers and comedians' and 'psychologists' as well as 'poets.' Even within these groups she stresses the particularities of authors, stating, for instance, that Guy de Maupassant brings a reality "before us [which] is always one of the body, of the senses."⁶⁰ Her brief account of literary history again includes 'lesser' as well as 'major' authors, as well as French and Russian writers. Woolf's practice of literary history was both manifold and open to different nationalities.

5 Woolf's Conceptualisation of Literary Change in the Light of Recent Trends in Narrative Theory and Psychological Research

Many of Woolf's ideas on literature are still worthy of consideration today. In the following, I will concentrate on three aspects of Woolf's conceptualisation of literary change, and briefly relate them to research in narrative theory and psychology: first, the bi-active model of the reading process; second, her focus on literature as a means of worldmaking; and, third, her ideas concerning author's visions and the persuasive power of fiction.

Woolf's view of literature as a means of communication, which is at the basis of her conceptualisation of literary change, entails a focus on the reader and is based on an understanding of the reading process which fits the bi-active reading model. This model, which is accepted in many linguistic and cognitive studies,⁶¹ presupposes an interplay between textual cues and the readers' attribution of meaning, which shapes their understanding of the text. Bottom-up processes are stimulated by textual characteristics, while top-down processes involve the application of cognitive and generic schemata as well as the readers' knowledge and earlier emotional experiences. Readers therefore have to know the pertinent schemata and be able to draw inferences in order to be able to make sense of the text. This bi-active model of reading implies that, in order to understand fictional works of earlier

⁶⁰ Ibid., 99. The discussion of the first group, the "truth-tellers," begins at page 94.

⁶¹ Norman N. Holland, *Literature and the Brain* (Gainesville, FL: PsyArt Foundation, 2009), 175. For an overview of different models of the reading process, cf. 173-177. Reading is conceptualised as a response to texts which is initiated by the perception and interpretation of textual cues. For linguistics, see Margit Schreier, "Belief Change Through Fiction: How Fictional Narratives Affect Real Readers," *Grenzen der Literatur: Zum Begriff und Phänomen des Literarischen*, eds. Simone Winko, Fotis Jannidis, and Gerhard Lauer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 317: "It is one of the most robust results in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology that the meaning that a reader assigns to a text is a function both of textual and of reader characteristics." Other studies on Woolf relate her belief in the importance of readers to varieties of reader-response criticism, including that of Wolfgang Iser. See, for instance, Koutsantoni, *Woolf's Common Reader*, 58-59, 64-65, 69 et passim.

periods or works which are governed by unusual perspectives, it is necessary to be in command of the knowledge that makes it possible to draw inferences. Only when readers are able and willing to use meaningful top-down processes and apply cognitive schemata, can they emotionally engage with a text. This necessity to know enough about periods and authors in order to appreciate literary works can explain why Woolf wrote so many essays illuminating cultural beliefs or key principles of the author's perspective and tried to "pick up something humble and colloquial that will make these strange Elizabethans more familiar to us."⁶² Again and again she attempted to inform readers about the cultural context and the preferences and beliefs of particular authors, thus providing readers with the knowledge necessary for understanding the texts.

Woolf's belief in the importance of the reading process and the application of cognitive and generic schemata can also serve to illuminate why she laid such stress upon genre conventions. Knowledge of these conventions makes it easier for readers to become 'co-creators' and build their own model of the fictional world. In her essays on modernist fiction, Woolf explained the reasons for modernist changes of established conventions, thus trying to make it possible for readers to appreciate novels which did not fit their expectations concerning realist fiction. From the point of view of recent cognitive theories, Woolf's assumption that literary genres and their formal characteristics are closely related to expectations of readers seems to capture key ideas about the functions of genres. According to contemporary scholars, knowledge about genre characteristics is shared by authors and readers and crystallised in scripts and frames, which are forms of storing past experiences.⁶³ Most importantly, it shapes our expectations concerning texts which we have not yet read: "For the reader, genres constitute sets of expectations which steer the reading process. [...] As sets of norms of which both readers and writers are aware, genres fulfil an important role in the process of literary communication."⁶⁴ In many of her essays, Woolf attempted to familiarise readers with the reasons for genre conventions which did not fit their expectations.

Secondly, Woolf's conviction that novels present fictional worlds which are governed by laws of their own corresponds to the conceptualisation of literature as a means of worldmaking. The philosopher Nelson Goodman

⁶² Woolf, "The Strange Elizabethans," *Common Reader II*, 15.

⁶³ David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2002), 85, emphasises that "representations [of past experience] can assume either a static (frame-like) or a dynamic (script-like) form." Scripts are stereotyped sequences of events, and therefore "help explain the difference between a mere sequence of actions or occurrences and a narratively organized sequence" (*ibid.*).

⁶⁴ Elisabeth Wesseling, *Writing History as a Prophet: Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel* (Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1991), 18.

emphasised that worlds are never created *ex nihilo*; instead, the process of worldmaking always starts with the knowledge of one (or many) world(s), which are then rebuilt by cognitive processes such as deformation, deletion and substitution, and ordering.⁶⁵ Woolf was aware of the impact of older fictional worlds, and of diachronic relations between them, stressing the importance of traditions for the creation of new fictional worlds. In addition, she asked readers to accept deformation and substitution of generic conventions, and to be open to fictional worlds which do not bear many resemblances to either the real world or to that created in traditional fictional works.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Woolf's insistence on the single vision and her claim that a literary work should form a harmonious whole, with nothing left to disturb the order imposed upon it by the strength of the author's vision, seem startlingly perceptive when compared to recent psychological research into the persuasive power of narratives. Her belief "in the immense persuasiveness of a mind which has completely mastered its perspective"⁶⁶ fits empirical research which established that stories with a high degree of perceived realism are particularly persuasive.⁶⁷ This 'perceived realism' does not primarily refer to works which resemble the real world; instead, the term also corresponds to Woolf's principle of internal consistency, of works which do not mix several kinds of reality or feature significant internal contradictions.⁶⁸ 'Perceived realism' evokes a high degree of 'transportation' or immersion in the fictional world – or, in Woolf's terms, enchantment or rapture. Although this conceptualisation excludes postmodernist novels, metafiction, or particular kinds of utopian fiction, Woolf's aesthetics is not only consistent in itself, but also able to explain a peculiar, if elusive, power of persuasion that particular fictional stories have. Reading fiction is an end in itself, as Woolf stressed, but it also has a significant impact on readers' minds. The recognition of this persuasive power of literary works may be at the heart of Woolf's attempts to induce readers to remain open-

⁶⁵ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1978), particularly 3-15. See also the articles in Vera and Ansgar Nünning and Birgit Neumann, eds., *Cultural Ways of Worldmaking: Media and Narratives* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

⁶⁶ "The Novels of E.M. Forster" [1927], *Death of the Moth*, 104-112, 107.

⁶⁷ There is a broad range of research on this question. See especially Melanie C. Green, "Transportation into Narrative Worlds: The Role of Prior Knowledge and Perceived Realism," *Discourse Processes* 38.2 (2004).

⁶⁸ See, for instance, Rick Busselle and Helena Bilandzic, "Fictionality and Perceived Realism in Experiencing Stories: A Model of Narrative Comprehension and Engagement," *Communication Theory* 18.2 (2008): 255-280, the studies on aesthetic illusion by Werner Wolf, for instance "Aesthetic Illusion," *Immersion and Distance: Aesthetic Illusion in Literature and Other Media*, eds. Werner Wolf, Walter Bernhart and Andreas Mahler (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 1-66, and my *Reading Fictions, Changing Minds: The Cognitive Value of Fiction* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2014), chapter five.

mindful, to welcome literary change, and to insist that authors do not fob them off with lesser works, but produce the best writing that they possibly can. If reading fiction changes readers' minds, one should choose the books one reads carefully, and subject them to sensitive, if rigorous, criticism.

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