

Week 8 Day 3: Theories of Fiction

ENGL201: Introduction to Modernism

The Novel

convention

The English Novel

“Before the twentieth century, the art of the English novel had been measured in terms of its ethical content. The social world created by the novelist was understood as a product of the author's "vision of life," and the depth of insight or quality of wisdom informing that vision was understood as the artistic contribution....The ‘strangely unfamiliar’ news announced in [Percy Lubbock’s] *The Craft of Fiction* [(1922)] is that novels have techniques of their own—and that good novels can be distinguished from bad novels on aesthetic rather than on biographical, historical, sociological, moral, or any other terms outside of autonomous art. With the formal basis revealed, the novel's future is assured, a ‘fresh life’ opened up.” (Hale, “The Art of English Fiction in the Twentieth Century,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century Novel*)



Victoria 1830-1901



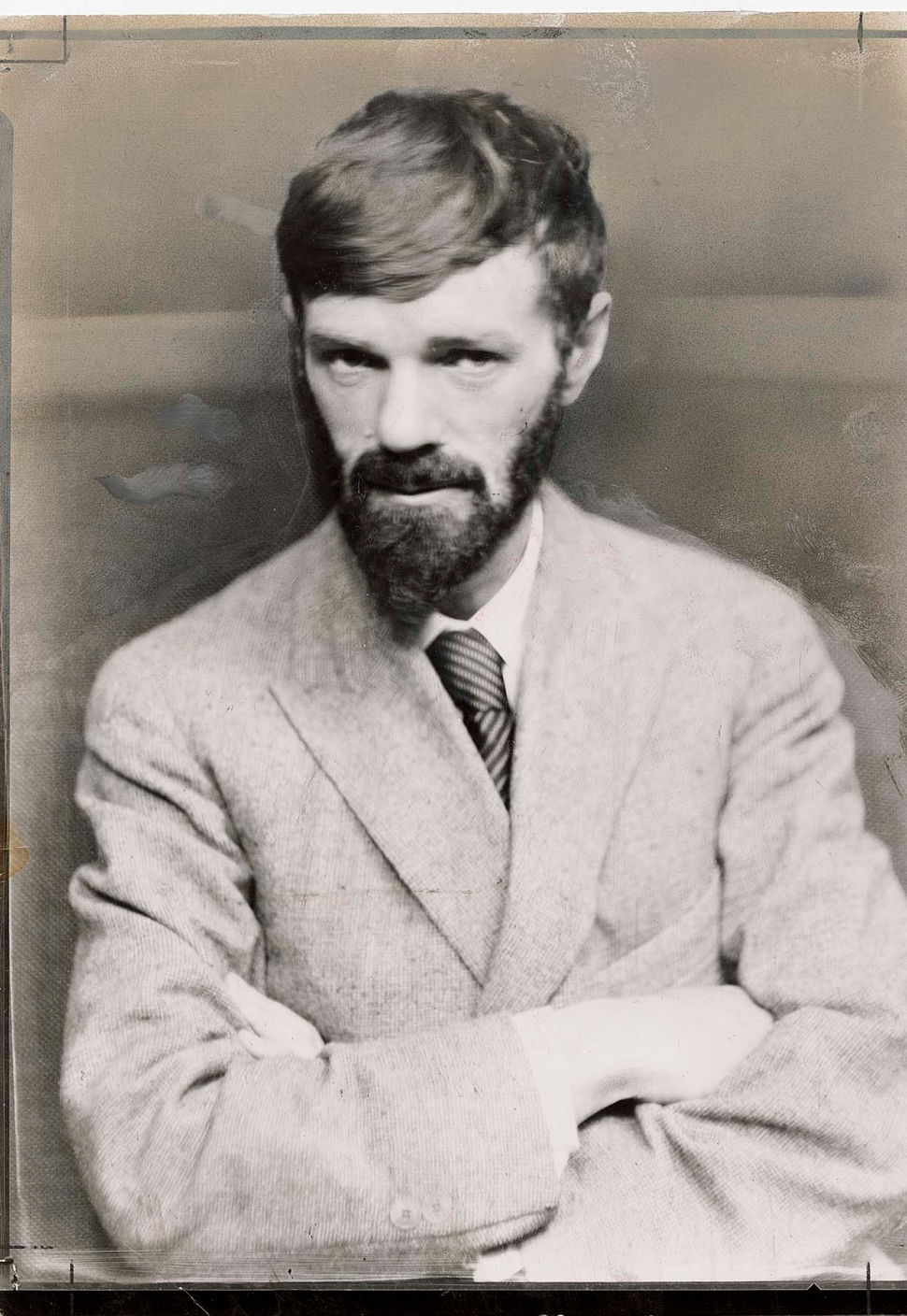
Edward VII 1901-1910



George V 1910-1936

The English Novel

- Central tension:
 - Formal experimentation (*how* something is represented)
 - Representation of life and subjective experience (*what* is represented)
- Novelists are also academics and critics
 - Ford Madox Ford (Hueffer)
 - Virginia Woolf
 - E.M. Forster
 - D.H. Lawrence



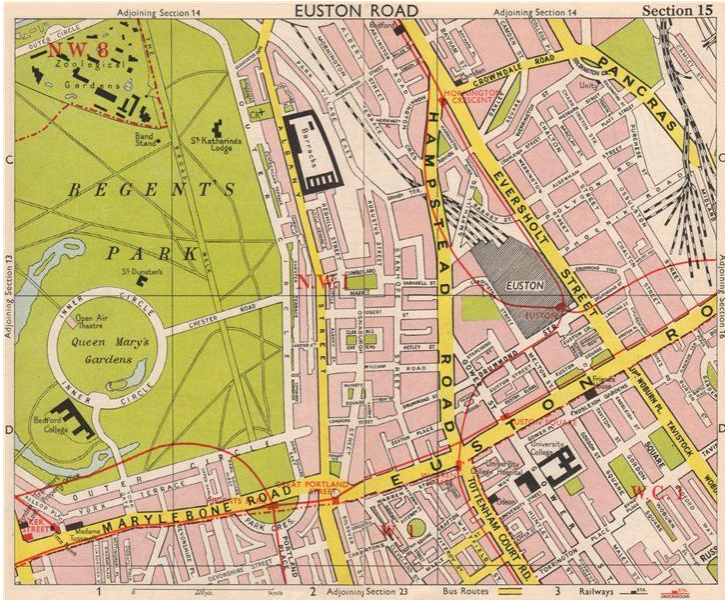
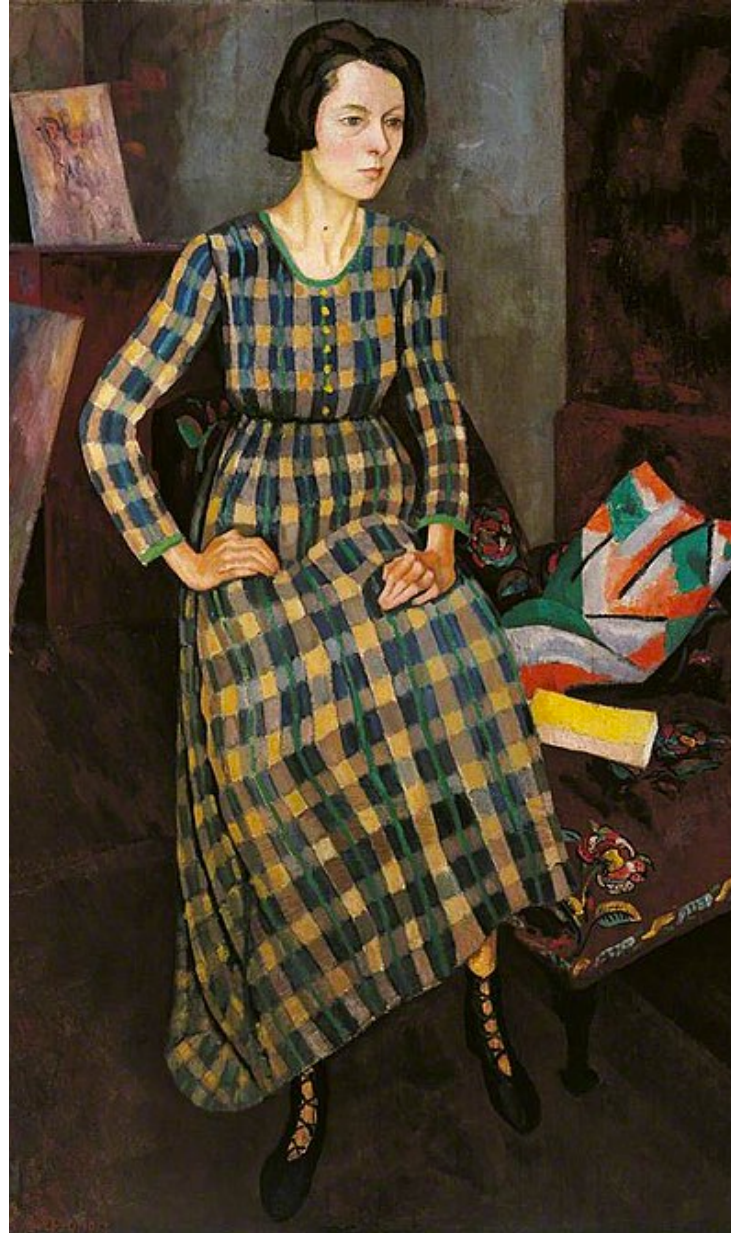
D.H. Lawrence (1885-1930)

- British novelist, poet, playwright, essayist, and literary critic
- Known for sexually explicit literature, frequently depicting homosexual acts and desires
- *The Rainbow* (1915)
- *Women In Love* (1920)
- *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928)



Virginia Woolf (1882-1944)

- British novelist, diarist, biographer, and essayist
- From a well-known literary and intellectual family
- Part of the Bloomsbury Group
- Known for “stream-of-consciousness” style and novels that develop psychological insight
- *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925)
- *To the Lighthouse* (1927)
- *The Waves* (1931)



Bloomsbury Group

- Loose cultural formation of prominent writers who all lived around Bloomsbury in London
- Overlapped with other formations: Omega Workshops, British Modernism, Hogarth Press
- Clive and Vanessa Bell, E.M. Forster, John Maynard Keynes, Lytton Strachey, Leonard and Virginia Woolf



Arnold Bennett (1867-1931)

“And that’s what you learn, when you’re a novelist.” (Lawrence 2508)

“The whole is greater than the part.” (2509)

“The novel is the book of life.” (2509)

A character in a novel has got to live, or it is nothing. (2511)



All this spirit stuff is just tremulations upon the ether. If you, as man alive, quiver from the tremulation of the ether into a new life, that is because you are man alive, and you take sustenance and stimulation into your alive man in a myriad ways. But to say that the message, or the spirit which is communicated to you, is more important than your living body, is nonsense. You might as well say that the potato at dinner was more important. (Lawrence 2509)





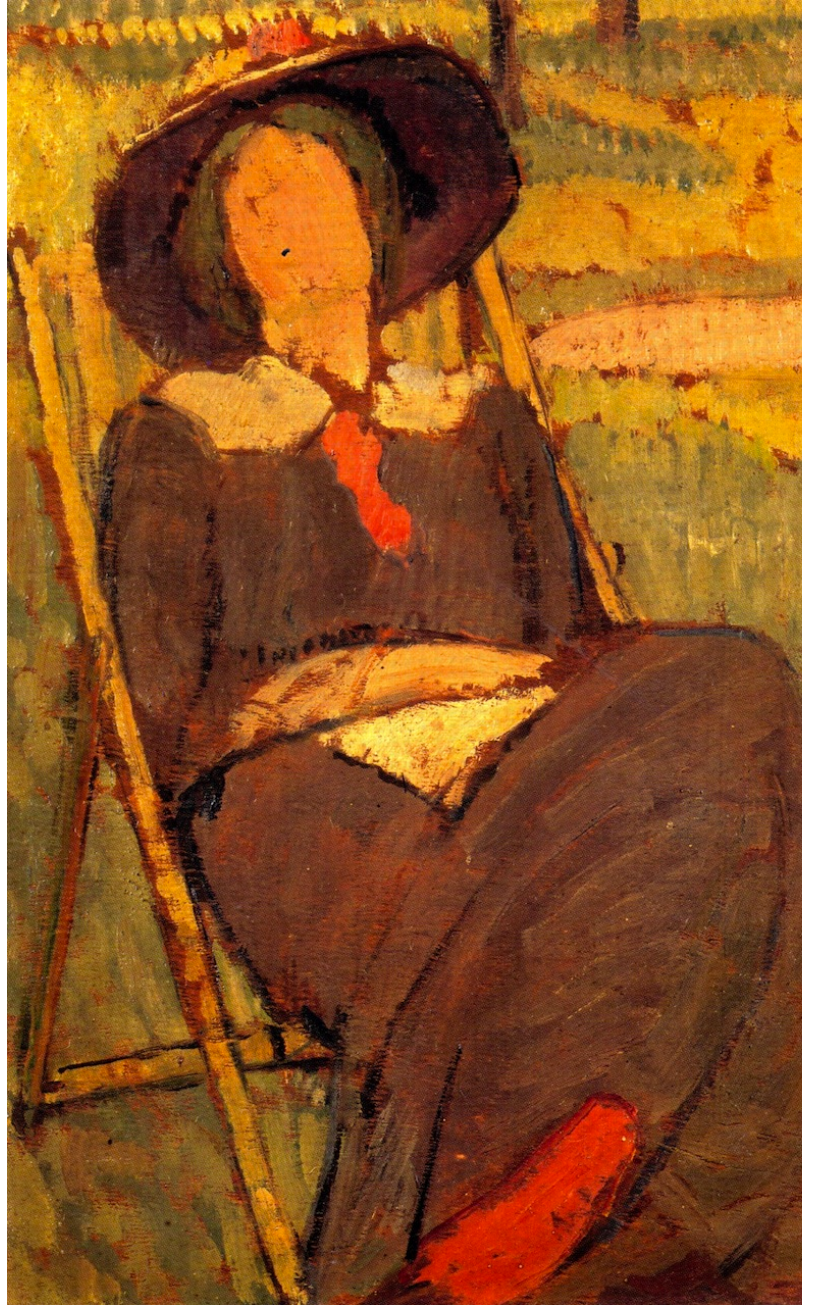
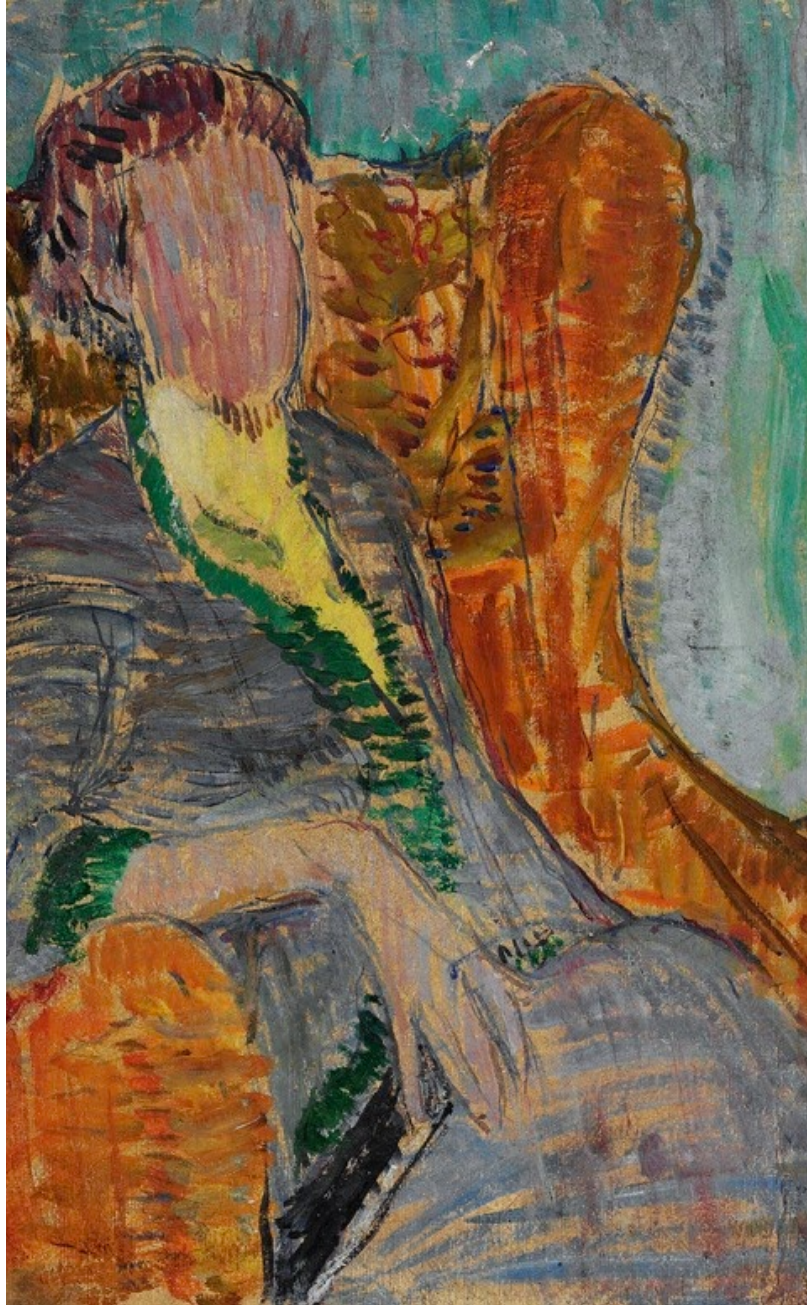
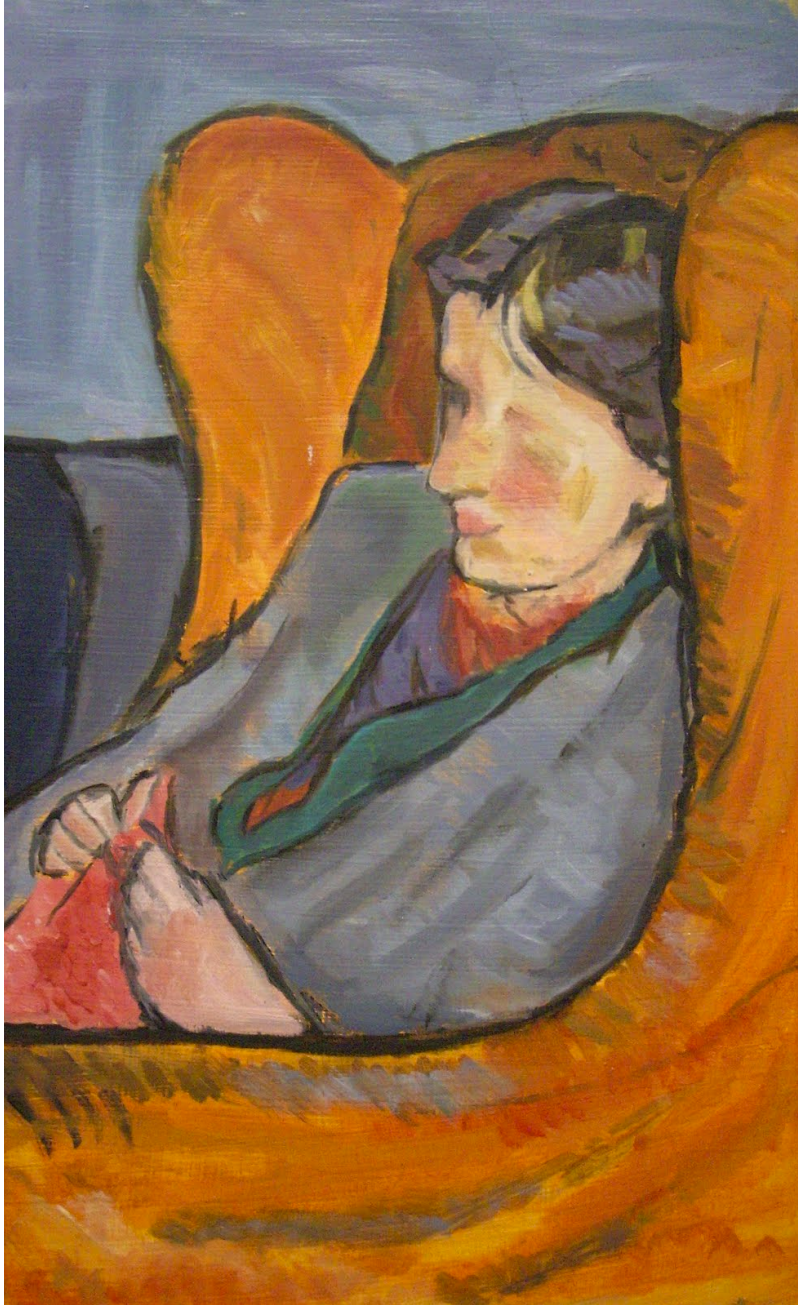
And only in the novel are *all* things given full play, or at least, they may be given full play, when we realize that life itself, and not inert safety, is the reason for living. For out of the full play of all things emerges the only thing that is anything, the wholeness of a man, the wholeness of a woman, man alive, and live woman. (Lawrence 2511)

My first assertion is one that I think you will grant—that everyone in this room is a judge of character. Indeed it would be impossible to live for a year without disaster unless one practised character-reading and had some skill in the art. Our marriages, our friendships depend on it; our business largely depends on it; every day questions arise which can only be solved by its help. And now I will hazard a second assertion, which is more disputable perhaps, to the effect that in or about December, 1910, human character changed.

(Woolf, “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”)

Vanessa Bell, 1912







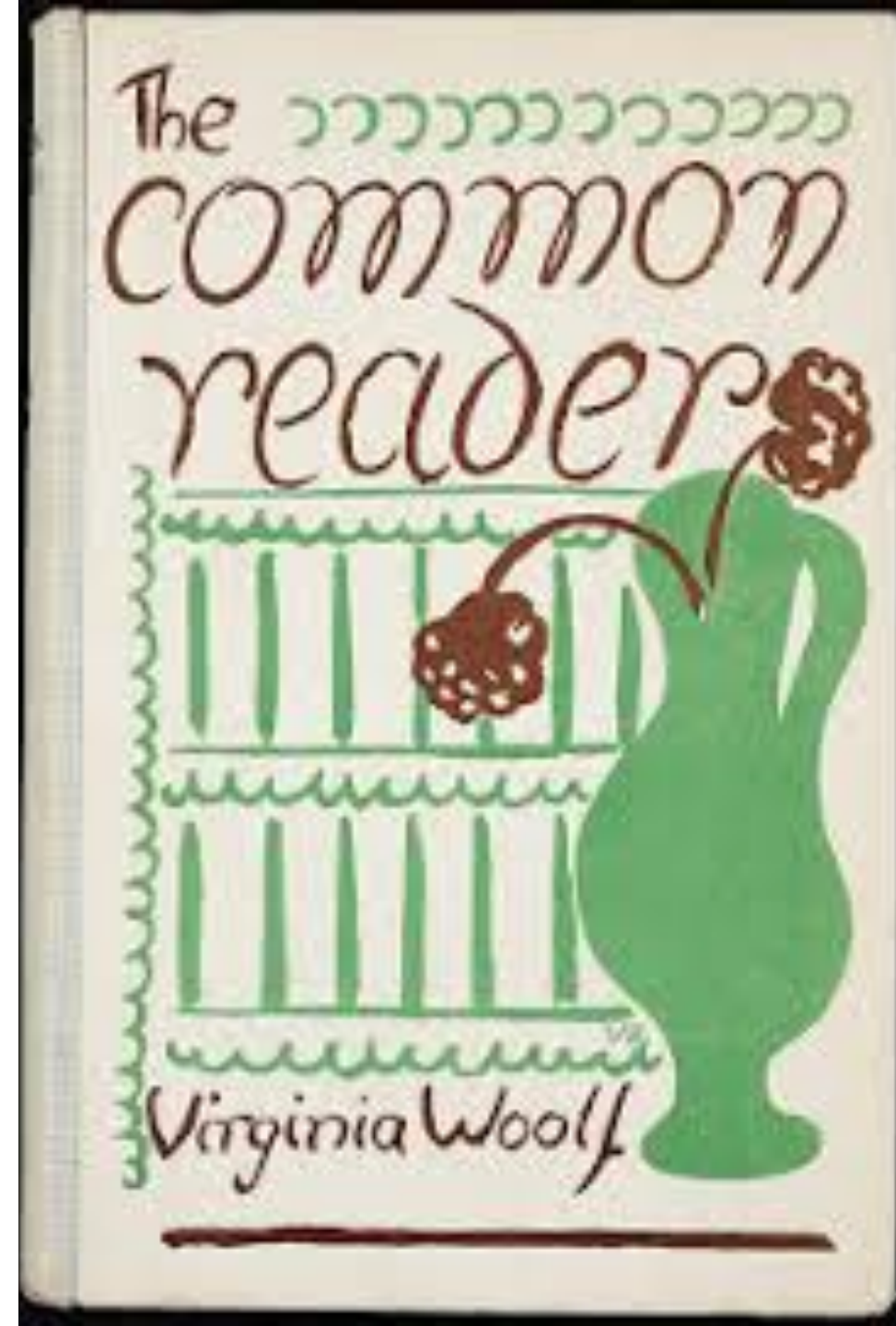


“With all his powers of observation, which are marvellous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which are great, Mr. Bennett has never once looked at Mrs. Brown in her corner. There she sits in the corner of the carriage —that carriage which is travelling, not from Richmond to Waterloo, but from one age of English literature to the next, for Mrs. Brown is eternal, Mrs. Brown is human nature, Mrs. Brown changes only on the surface, it is the novelists who get in and out—there she sits and not one of the Edwardian writers has so much as looked at her.”

(Woolf, “Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown”)

Look within and life, it seems, is very far from being 'like this'. Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old; the moment of importance came not here but there; so that, if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style, and perhaps not a single button sewn on as the Bond Street tailors would have it.

(Woolf, "Modern Fiction")





‘The proper stuff of fiction’ does not exist; everything is the proper stuff of fiction, every feeling, every thought; every quality of brain and spirit is drawn upon; no perception comes amiss. And if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured.

(Woolf, “Modern Fiction”)

Roger Fry, 1917