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TW Takes a Publishing Break from June to September

Catch Your Breath with These Deep Reading Suggestions



Editor's Note: Last December, I wrote about the value of deep reading for our annual "Writing and Faith" issue. At the time, I was finishing up a sabbatical in Australia—it was summer there—but now, back in the US and rolling into another summer, I have more faith in deep reading than ever.

This July and August, take time to hear yourself think—and to read deeply. At Talking Writing, you can:

- Revel in all fifteen poets in our current ["Wild Equations" math poetry issue](#) [3].
- Read ["The Anna Fragments."](#) [4] winner of TW's Hybrid Poetry Contest.
- Peruse selections from small presses in the [TW Reading Series](#) [5].

- Be inspired by a featured artist and her daughter in "[A Mother's Magic Shield](#)." [6]
- Get sparked by interviews with [Sanderia Faye](#) [7], [Gene Luen Yang](#) [8], and [Jane Hicks](#). [9]
- Click on the [Past Issues page](#) [10] to find other wonderful TW work you may have missed.

Below, we've reprinted my Editor's Note about deep reading, which originally appeared in a TW e-newsletter. Happy summer reading—and writing!

— Martha Nichols

My Faith in Deep Reading

It's embarrassing that I had to travel halfway around the world to realize how much I love reading.

While on a six-month break in Australia, I've worn out my library card at the local branch of the Geelong Regional Library system. I've bought loads of books, too many to take with me when I leave in two weeks. I've treasured the many hours spent reading long novels or personally driven nonfiction books by Australians and other writers. It's the kind of reading I normally don't have time to do—which is why I'm so worried now.

My "ah ha" moment may seem obvious, but a quote from Stephanie Johnson's entertaining 2015 novel *The Writers' Festival* (Vintage) recently struck home. It evokes the online distractions that swarm its protagonist, the director of a mostly fictional writers' festival in Auckland, New Zealand. After "mainlining" the news all day on her computer, she picks up a review copy of a book from the pile on her desk and finds it "generally calming, no matter the subject":

It's as if the deep concentration the writer needed to write the book somehow passes from the pages through her hands and into her body.

Taking time for deep reading is fundamental to the way I approach the world. Yet, I'll be battling for that time as soon as I get back to Boston.

A contradiction? Perhaps. Here's an editor of a digital magazine, calling for deep concentration and far fewer wasted hours online. But these days, I see no contradiction in focusing on writing and reading that makes a difference.

There's plenty of free digital content, but the sheer quantity available is part of the problem. It's hard to find the quality that turns reading into a lifelong learning experience. In a world full of virtual voices screaming past each other, good literary writing and journalism teach tolerance. They're what draw you into somebody else's world, into lives that may have little to do with your own but are still connected through universal threads.

At it's best, great writing is a revelation, a spark for personal and social change. Of course, the medium the words come in doesn't really matter; nor does the length of a written work. TW's "Writing and Faith" issue (Holiday 2015) includes a set of flash nonfiction pieces that are revelations in short form.

Still, the constant churn on most online sites reinforces flitting around without delving into anything. The digital space is plastered with eyeball-grabbing headline feeds, manufactured melodrama, and 400-words-or-less opinion pieces meant to piss readers off (and attract ad clicks).

After six months away from online chatter, I can see how much my own reading habits were eroded by it. Even a year ago, I found most novels not worth the effort, a fact I hate acknowledging here. I had to escape in order to rediscover, with relief and joy, reading that requires sustained attention.

I won't call this a spiritual awakening. For me, "awakenings" of any kind carry a New Age whiff, and I've never been drawn to easy answers. But I've come away from my Aussie adventures more committed than ever to championing creative work that encourages readers to think and feel and question deeply.

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So, take the time to read a long book, one you've been meaning to get to, that you need to stick with. Set it aside for awhile, if you must—as I did for weeks with *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara, because I found it so emotionally painful—but then return to that writer, that novel, that nonfiction history or biography. Have faith in deep reading, whether you're doing it on a Kindle, website, or tattered paperback.

It's a rare gift.



Reprinted from an "Editor Talk" note by Martha Nichols in Talking E-News, December 16, 2015. Photos taken on Bruny Island, Tasmania (December 2015) © Martha Nichols; used by permission.

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