



Journal

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more on

Books and Reading

The text to the National Endowment for the Arts report, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007), is available on the NEA's website (www.nea.gov/research/ToRead.pdf) Gregory Reynolds's *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age** (2000) is published by Wipf & Stock. Among the books Reynolds mentions as helpful in understanding the insights of media ecology are: Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word** (Eerdmans, 1985); Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man** (Gingko Press, 1964); Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior** (Oxford, 1985); and Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word** (Yale, 1967). Books about the particular pleasures and irreducible virtues of reading are numerous. One place to begin would be Alberto Manguel's enthusiastic and affectionate *A History of Reading** (Penguin, 1996). In *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age** (Random House, 1994), Sven Birkerts offers a series of essays that describe his experiences in the "ecology of reading." Many of his observations focus on the quality of inwardness enabled (uniquely?) by reading. In one essay, he reports on the difference in sensibilities he encountered when working in the early 1990s with a college class struggling to read a Henry James short story. It was disastrous, which caused Birkerts to talk with his students about their experience of reading: "And what emerged was this: that they were not, with a few exceptions, readers—never had been; that they had always occupied themselves with music, TV, and videos; that they had difficulty slowing down enough to concentrate on prose of any density; that they had problems with what they thought of as archaic diction, with allusions, with vocabulary that seemed 'pretentious'; that they were especially uncomfortable with indirect or interior passages, indeed with any deviations from straight plot; and that they were put off by ironic tone because it flaunted superiority and made them feel that they were missing something. The list is partial." One wonders if the insights available in Augustine's *Confessions* or Pascal's *Pensées* will reach a smaller and smaller fraction of educated people. Note also Birkerts's anthology *Tolstoy's Dictaphone* (Graywolf, 1996). Walker Percy's essay, "Another Message in the Bottle," in the anthology *Signposts in a Strange Land** (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1991), encourages teachers

Disc 1

1 Introduction

- 1 **J. Mark Bertrand**, on how the language of "worldviews" can mean something richer than it often does
- 2 **Michael P. Schutt**, on how the day-to-day practice of Christian lawyers can reflect a Christian view of the nature of law
- 3 **Michael Ward**, on how C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* were shaped by medieval cosmological beliefs about the seven planets

Disc 2

- 1 **Dana Gioia**, on the disturbing trends in the reading (non) habits of Americans
- 2 **Makoto Fujimura**, on reading, painting, and attending to the world
- 3 **Gregory Edward Reynolds**, on lessons about reading from the study of media ecology
- 4 **Catherine Prescott**, on why portrait painters often depict their subjects with books in their hands
- 5 **Eugene Peterson**, on the place of reading in the spiritual lives of Christians

*An asterisk means that the book is in print; if you wish to purchase it from our friends at Splintered Light Books, call 1.800.979.3310.

to exhort their students to become readers. Percy insists that in reading good fiction (not just "great literature"), "that which seems most individual about oneself, the quirky unspoken part of one's experience, even the unspeakable, is suddenly illumined as part of the universal human experience. The exciting paradox of literature is that it is in one's own unique individuality that one is most human." Reading is both individualizing and a deliverance from solipsism. More reflection on the experience of reading is available in a recent collection of essays from the Turkish Nobel Prize winning novelist Orhan Pamuk. *Other Colors: Essays and a Story** (Knopf, 2007) contains a section called "Books and Reading," in which Pamuk explains why he believes the pleasures of reading are unique, unavailable in film, TV, or other media. "Because words (and the works of literature they make) are like water or like ants. Nothing can penetrate into the cracks, holes, and invisible gaps of life as fast or as thoroughly as words can. It is in these cracks that the essence of things—the things that make us curious about life, about the world—can first be ascertained, and it is good literature that first reveals them."

Other Works Mentioned

J. Mark Bertrand's *(Re)thinking Worldview: Learning to Think, Live, and Speak in This World** (2007) is published by Crossway Books. Michael P. Schutt's *Redeeming Law: Christian Calling and the Legal Profession** (2007) is published by InterVarsity Press. Michael Ward's *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis** (2008) is published by Oxford University Press.



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