

HEATHER REYES

an
EVERYWHERE

a little book about reading



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An Everywhere: A Little Book About Reading Heather Reyes

During several months of cancer treatment, writer and editor Heather Reyes decides to turn a necessary evil into an opportunity: the luxury of reading whatever takes her fancy.

An Everywhere: a little book about reading is a quietly passionate and witty defence of the joys and consolations of reading in both the difficult and day-to-day aspects of our lives.

It will appeal to anyone who has enjoyed Susan Hill's Howards End is on the Landing: A Year of reading from home and Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin's A Novel Cure: An A-Z of Literary Remedies.

'A brilliant travel guide to the city of books ... it is such a truthful book, honest about panic and anguish, and fascinating about what happens when the panic ebbs and the reader continues' Helen Dunmore

'An extended love letter to the joys of reading and a celebration of the book as a physical object. An illuminating and often moving guide to an individual's relationship with the written word' The Guardian

'Breathtaking scope ... intellectual sharpness, emotional honesty and a readable lightness of touch' The Lady

'This engaging and heartfelt meditation on the joys and consolations of reading in our daily lives' The Bookseller

'This is a gem of a book ... not just a guide to great literature but a reminder that reading is the highest form of religion' Cheryl Moskowitz

An Everywhere: A Little Book About Reading Details

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Robin says

I've always wondered how my reading would be impacted by a serious illness and, after reading Heather Reyes' wonderfully enlightening "memoir", I know the plan I would follow - hers. Not really knowing how much time she may have, her reading plan is one of her own making, giving her the freedom to buy on a moment's notice (thank you Amazon) to leisurely browsing through a beloved bookstore. Giving herself permission to discard a "must read" book because it does not satisfy the word lust she's craving permits all of us "book addicts" the same freedom. To close a book without tremendous guilt for not finishing that "must read", is a liberating freedom. This is a book I would recommend to all book lovers.

nina says

There's a part in this I love where Reyes writes about being criticised by her mother for not borrowing books from the library. She doesn't tell her mother that it's because she wants her books NOW OMG, and how borrowing takes away the pleasure of owning, and seeing a book on the shelf and remembering the pleasure of reading, but makes the excuse that the germs may not be great for her immune system. That's the tone for most of the book; it's not a book about having cancer and reading books. It's about having had time to reflect on the love of books. There's definitely an element of bibliotherapy here, but surely most books about books essentially tell us that book-make-me-feel-happy-nice-good.

I went into this book so defensive and prepared to dislike it (because prior to this I had read Phyllis Rose's *A Year of Reading Proust*, also mentioned by Reyes), but I love it, not at *all* because I know the books the author references, whether they're ones I've read, or are sitting on the shelf waiting to be read. She also mentions an episode of existential angst, where she picked up *Richard Fortey's Life: an authorised biography* to gain a little perspective. That title felt familiar to me at the time of reading this book. I turned to look at a pile of books on my desk, and it was right on top of that freaking pile. Talk about books sharing their destinies with the reader.

Anyway, gonna buy this book, gonna deface it with my love, gonna cherish it for a long time.

Tripfiction says

"If you can't go out into the world, bring the world to you" (it's all about books!)

The author was diagnosed with cancer and she decided to turn the months of chemotherapy that lay ahead into a positive journey of words. A way to travel for a self-confessed bibliophile. She kicks off with a trip by Eurostar to Paris with husband Malcolm....

We always take an over-optimistic number of books on holiday. They're unpacked, lined up on whatever

convenient surface the hotel room affords, marking our temporary territory...then neglected while we read new books bought locally

In the city of light, they pop into L'Arbre du voyageur (rue Mouffetard) and La Hune (in Saint Germain). And then it's on to the beautiful Collioure, the place that has been admired over many years by artists for its crystal clear light. And then it was back home to start treatment

Her exploration of the written word is not an escape from the terrible side-effects she was having to endure but a leap into life when her own physical existence was reduced to the walls of her home and she contemplates the many benefits copiously recorded throughout history of reading, the art of bibliotherapy.

Through books she had lived in 19th Century Russia, as an emigré in Paris, a repressed woman in Tehran – she had experienced the lives in these places through the eyes of an author. How she ‘visited’ Istanbul with her travelling companion – Alexander Kinglake’s Eothen, set in Constantinople as the city was then, a place of barbarity and beauty and feeling that she had truly been there have read the works of Orhan Pamuk.

This short book is like a treatise on the pleasure and value of reading, about how it enables you to travel and to put yourself in the shoes of others, which of course is fundamental to the skill of empathy. She ponders the need to own her own books – perhaps in the words of Alberto Manguel it was ‘a sort of voluptuous greed’ (he wrote *The History of Reading*). She takes us back in time to when she was a young girl and her enjoyment of books was fostered by those around her. She tries to identify the delight of meeting one’s favourite authors and ponders the burgeoning of literary festivals. The history of libraries, generally positive but less so in Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*.

Awaiting snow (the defamiliarising effect of snow can make us notice life more acutely...) and re-reading the snow descriptions of Jean Cocteau’s “*Enfants Terribles*” (the author has a skill at reading French books in the original) or that overwhelming snow in Russian books.

Being at heart such a European – and this published in 2014 – she could not have foreseen how on point her discussions with her father would be in 2018, with Brexit dominating everyday lives and all the news.

This is an encyclopaedic and fascinating exploration of books and reading, at a time when this author’s life was hanging in the balance.

Damaskcat says

I'm always on the look out for books about books because I'm interested in other people's thoughts and feelings about reading. Such books are usually fertile hunting ground for the titles of books you might not otherwise stumble across. I'm also a believer in bibliotherapy and have read my way through many crises in my life.

In this book the author discusses the books she read during a period of enforced idleness while she was undergoing chemotherapy. Her choice of books might not be your choice - or my choice - but this book still makes fascinating reading if you love books. The author read many book in their original French and also read many books of non-fiction. I tend to turn to well loved works of fiction in times of trouble so that I can lose myself in an alternative world but it is a case of whatever works for you.

Part memoir, part insight into an illness this is an interesting book about books and their effects on their readers and I would recommend it to anyone who likes books about reading or autobiographies. There is a list of the books discussed in the text at the end of the book and you might just find your next favourite among those listed.

Malcolm says

I really enjoyed this book. It lets you into the mind - and heart - of a reader and in this case a reader facing a serious illness. It's personal and full of insight and joy but is far from being self-obsessed in the same way that it's a wonderful guide to the world of books without being preachy or academic. It really is, as its title says, a book about 'An Everywhere' - how a book can become a whole world to you especially when you face a difficult life experience. And brilliant on Sally Marmion, Radio 4's Book at Bedtime adaptor, if you've ever wondered who this mysterious person is!

Arun Divakar says

The adage 'Live every day as if it were your last' does not carry much weight for a lot of people. It is just another pointer on how to live your life better for a lot of us. But as I was reading this book (it is not one of the best in this genre but still a good one), there emerged the story of a creative individual weighed down by the diagnosis of a mortal disease. Heather Reyes, a writer and teacher was in the final leg of her planning a trip to France with her partner when she was diagnosed with Cancer. This book chronicles four months in her life after she accepts the inevitability of the diagnosis and plans to live her life to the fullest with the aid of the best tool ever : books.

From the title of the book itself it becomes clear as to how much the author is in love with reading. She traces the time from her childhood to her current position in society as an author and a teacher and how all along the way, books have paved the path for her to move forward. In the course of the memoir, literature emerges as a factor essential to her survival than a hobby or an obsession. As the memoir progresses, she speaks little of her battle with cancer and more of her passion for literature which is strong enough to flow across the gap between the book and its reader. Take a look at this :

Yes, everyone should have lots and lots of books ! Just as World Music has hugely enriched the soundscape of contemporary music of all kinds, so we can all build richer selves by opening our minds to as many 'differences' as possible.

This is a point she offers in support of the fact that people should read more of books with opposing points of view. This to let them later distill out the truth behind these points and to arrive at logical conclusions of stated facts.

The one point I did note was that she did not focus too much on the genre of fiction outside the classical canon. You will find references to Nabokov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Woolf, Zola and countless other authors of the canon but not even a single author of the genre of popular fiction makes an appearance. Towards the end of the book, there was a stray reference to Stephen King but he appeared almost apologetic as someone who had wandered into the wrong room.

It is a pleasant little book. Full of sunshine, a never ending passion for the book and hope that never dies. When towards the end of the book, Reyes announces that she has a remission then you do feel like cheering. You sometimes come across your teachers from the past with whom you sit down and converse and they take you back in time and fill you with a strong dose of nostalgia. Heather Reyes knows that magic too. Try it out.

Ever wondered why this book is named so ? Here is the answer :

...Reading as an escape from those limiting conditions. But not as escape from life; as escape into life – a wider, richer, more complex and rewarding life. Drawing life into one little room, into one little head. As much life as possible. Making one little room 'an everywhere'.

Bex says

An interesting look at one woman's reading life as she reflects on time to read during treatment for cancer. One thing struck me about her life whilst she gets pleasure from reading it feels like she is very dismissive of anything that wouldn't sound good to 'posh' folk. Reading for pleasure of the story or escape doesn't feature in her life and she mentions at one point that that is how her childhood was. I am however envious of her ability to read in other languages. I'd love to read some of the books I own in their original language as at times a stilted (bad) translation Has ruined a story for me.

Heather Reyes says

I had a hard time during my first period of chemotherapy and couldn't do much more than sit on the sofa and read. I've always loved books but for years too much of my reading had been connected with teaching, research and editing. Suddenly I could read whatever took my fancy - and I started making notes about what I'd read.

As a kind of therapy, I also started to write down, in a very honest way, my reactions to the cancer diagnosis and my feelings during treatment. One tries to put on a brave face for family and friends so as not to add to their anguish of knowing you are so ill, but it can be a relief to give expression to what one is really 'going through' psychologically.

Writing about reading made me reflect on why it had come to be so important to me. In analysing the reasons I found they grew out of - or were attached to - various personal experiences, and I found myself hanging the things I wanted to say onto incidents from my life as a kind of proof of the validity of the 'abstract' ideas.

Pretty soon I found that my notes were turning into the outline for a book. Curious about what I was scribbling while sitting on the sofa, my husband finally read it and pointed out that it might be useful to others to read: after all, an awful lot of people face the diagnosis of cancer and have to cope with the exigencies of treatment. He passed it on to a few friends and family members and their responses were genuinely enthusiastic.

After the treatment, with the original emotions 'recollected in tranquility' but not diluted, I worked on a

couple more drafts of the book. And that's the story behind *An Everywhere: a little book about reading*.

Smitha Murthy says

I so love reading books about reading. Much the same way, I think, I might love books about running. Heather Reyes has penned a beautiful ode to her love of reading. I was swept along, remembering old well-loved classics. As with her, I no longer read to escape. I read because I love living and knowing more about the world around me - to broaden the narrow sinews of my mind.

There is no logical structure to the book. And that didn't bother me at all. You just pick up here and there, jostling for space with the writer. As Reyes points out at one stage, every book you have read is a private conversation with the author. I came back feeling I have spoken to a wonderful human being for 2 hours after reading this.

Dylan says

This is a charming micro journey into the inner world of reading, books, literature and culture. Anyone who has lived a life informed by the pages we hold in our hands will identify with the ideas and emotions here. Rather lovely, and this lady has some class - she avoided making this a memoir about her obviously traumatic and distressing cancer treatment. I'm glad she made a recovery, and hope she continues her journey into the eternal wonderland of words.
