

Read a bit (fornever)

I write to you, to myself, to my soul's reflection in another. For now, and for never: forever.

I'm sure that you read all the time. Your eyes are glued to your tiny hand computer. A glowing pool where, gazing upon my reflection, you see the lines on your forehead reflecting back at you.

You wasted your loveliness on me. I'll be your best friend.

You see my pictures and read my messages and make meaning from the shapes of the letters and order of the words. And it's quiet. And it's ours. And it's something for us to say together in secret and forever.

Who "us"? US us?

Yes, us. Me and you.

That's the rub: the wound that Roland spoke of in looking. Stranger or soulmate that may never have been and may not ever be except in the text, and in this moment. (I'm already dead, so happy birthday to you!)

We know who we are through the stories we hear: the ones we tell ourselves and each other, the ones we gravitate to or our memories omit. We read what we see around us: where to go, how to look, what to buy, how to feel - the fleeting messages and dopamine bursts that flash and refresh but don't stay with us deeply and pierce us (we hope).

When we are small, we know who we are through the stories we are told with books at bedtime: big bad wolves, hoppers and ants, and flexible reeds that do not break but bend. We listen and learn and repeat and repeat as a grown-up lovingly, patiently, lets us, with chubby fingers, tear or turn the page. We hear the sounds that match the pictures until we know the stories by heart; the stories that tug on the heartstrings of grown-ups when, in time, they recall reading them to their no-longer-small children. If we are lucky.

It's linear, it's logical, learning the sounds that turn into stories when they correspond to pictures. Next, abstractly, we learn the sounds that turn into stories when they correspond to strange lines on a page. We learn why lines and curves shaped this way make this sound and those going that way make that one. We read aloud, and sound it out: this or that not tis or tat or his or hat. That *his* and *this* do not rhyme (sound that out). We need rules to govern this arbitrary and communally agreed upon nonsense! An adjective modifies a noun, but written differently, an adverb, it modifies an adjective, a verb, or another adverb - and don't get them confused! Your subject and your verb must agree (you fool!) unless you know the rules so well that you may break them. Toward school with heavy looks we go, laden with rules to perform for our classmates the task of reading aloud.

Some of us, at curtain, discover the solace of reading alone. With stage fright abandoned, fawn-like, we stumble through chapter books and fantasy and magic and poetry. Perhaps you retreated, hot cheeked, from reading and haven't looked back. I hope you found your solace somewhere.

Witnessless reading is wonderful.

The next step is research and reading dense material for fact finding, analysis, and dissection. The formaldehyde hangs in the air as I pin back the skin cut by a scalpel. I hide my solace where the smell won't find it.

Essays, book reports, research papers: reading gives us truth. We demonstrate our reasoning with citations and bibliographies that what we have read is real and true, so what we are sharing must also be true and real. We present words and letters like mathematical proofs.

Next, we are anointed and offered the secrets of how to decode our reading for music, for intention, scanning syllables for rhythm and emphasis where different combinations have names like dinosaurs, with names for words and groups of words that build meaning and muscle onto skeletal -oses like myth, eth, and log.

For some of us, this science feels good. There is a joy in knowing how to dissect the combinations, the blood, the guts, the chemistry of why it feels beautiful to hear *so long lives this, and this gives life to thee*. The pull of prose whose arachnid architecture satisfies like weaving a tail of yarn back into the seam.

From control to surrender, perhaps it's the magic, psilosophic means of seeing without sight, smelling past perfume, and clay, and dust, and history. Abandoning rules and science, Roman scribbles turn to color to the temporary synaesthete. In silence, the beat of the wording throbs. You surrender to story, one I control, and my fingertips brush the folds of your brain. I place words on your lips, where, held in your mouth, they taste like the watchband still warm from my wrist. Like your heart on my cheek when you slept in my bed and I loved you. I reach across an ocean, the plains, a century: a global village of two. It's never and it's now. To read is to wander while Penelope, faithful, the words stay the same.

Perhaps you can smell Pacific salt in the air from where you are reading. Be with me and breathe in California—!

Despite knowing better, we trust what we read. It's fact-checked, it's proved. If it's written, it's right. If it's published, it's verified, it's true and it stays, to be referred to through time, unlike speech, unlike memory which evaporates, ephemeral, and liable to disbelief. To forgetting.

(A traitor once told me recalling a memory, we only remember the last time we recalled it. The memory itself floats farther and farther away. If it's true, then our memories of dreams and novels and truth become the same collection of reproduced impressions to recall and recall and recall. They say you'll go blind that way. Perhaps that's the point.)

Sometimes when we read, we get the truest truth: the honesty we see only rarely in Patis moonlight with pupils unmet. The most intimate pleasure where your thoughts meet my thoughts. Missives

sent through sadness or secret. Wet, animal, alive. You confess your desires under serified shroud.
When Bibles came home - imagine the scandal! The secrets of God on your lips.

The confession is pleasing. A secret smile curls as you read, in awe, the despicable and poetic filth.
The violence. The darkest acts unfold and bleed ink on the page and in your image, and you keep
reading. Keep turning the page. *Le bébé est mort*, but how could she kill him? Why do you like her?
When you shiver knowing you will feel what she feels, do you like the feeling? Do you fear
familiarity with Adam's Cathy and Bianca's sister? The voyeuristic embodiment of your lowest self.
Of lying and spying, of cheating and stealing that you would never feel in life. (Or maybe I lie after
years of being so good as a balance. When does this silent sound turn to fiction?)

And you return to us in this condition—!

You recognize the worst of you in them: the most hidden, crumpled, pushed away shame that you
thought was only yours. A quiver that makes you alive and exposed. The ego! You are not special.
There is humility in seeing your feelings are not unique. Your ennui, homesickness, jubilation, your
heartache: it is not your own. It is shared with at least one other, an epistolary confessor who named
it in ink so precisely today or many hundreds of years before. The sweet relief that you are not alone.
The sightless riddle and wisdom in recognizing that together we are Nobody. The word on the page
is both proof of something and of nothing: an intimate conspiracy to anchor our projections,
perceptions, and pasts. Be it book, or screen, or warm phone in place of your hand in mine, *palm to
palm in holy palmers' kiss*, to read is to share our most intimate moments. Humility meets hubris. You
feel what I feel; I feel what you do. So, read a bit. It will be good for you x