



JRB ART
AT THE ELMS
Pasco Arts District

GIRL READING

By Joy Reed Belt



New Yorker Magazine Cover from June 2019

When I was a young girl I was lucky enough to have my own room. It was a classically "girly" room done up in my favorite colors. Installed on one wall was a reproduction of "Young Girl Reading," by Jean Honore Fragonard, a painting he completed in less than an hour. Every night my parents would make sure I was in bed, wish me a good night and remind me to turn off my lights. When I got in bed I would listen for their bedroom door to close, retrieve the books and flashlight I had hidden under my mattress, pull the covers over my head and read for as long as I could stay awake. Of course I often got caught and had to find more and more obscure hiding places for my books.

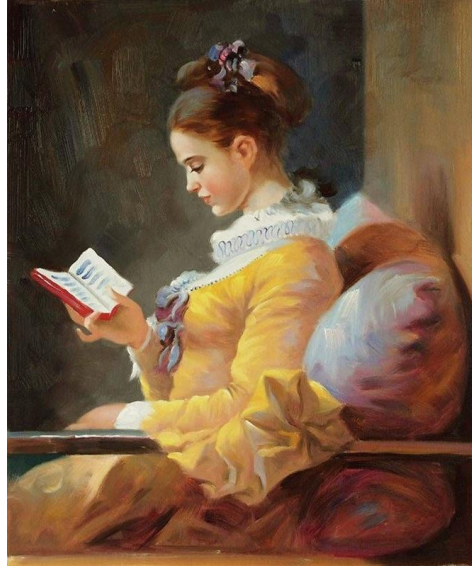
Back then the local Carnegie Library was a treasure trove. Of course, I was only allowed to check out age appropriate books, but while at the library I spent as much time as I could exploring and "becoming familiar" with books that did not necessarily fit that category. "Gone with the Wind" was an early revelation.

One summer, the older son of friends of my parents gifted me with a set of 27 Hardy Boy Mystery Books. I was thrilled and immediately appropriated some church tithing envelopes and glued one in each book. After slipping a card in the envelope, I created my very own lending library, which became somewhat popular in the neighborhood.

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Pierre-Auguste Renoir, "Girl Reading," 1890, Oil, 1' 4" x 1' 4", (The Museum of Fine Art in Houston, TX)



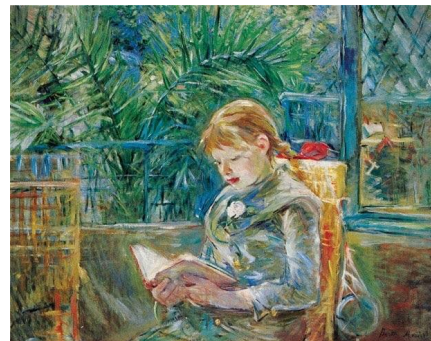
Jean-Honore Fragonard, "Young Girl Reading," 1770, Oil on Canvas, 2' 8" x 2' 2" (National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.)

Of course, that summer I also learned it was not a good idea to steal church envelopes. Operating my very own personal library was an activity I enjoyed for a few years. People would give me all sorts of books, creating an interesting range of books for me to both read and lend.

Growing up, our family summer vacations often consisted of making car trips to visit relatives. My mother's brother and his wife lived on the family farm in a different state. He was the Superintendent of a Consolidated School System and she was a third grade teacher. They were members of three or four book clubs and their house was full of overflowing bookcases. They had books to which I didn't otherwise have access. While visiting them I would read from morning to night, carefully swapping dust jackets to conceal what I was really reading.



Henri Matisse, "Girl Reading, Vase of Flowers," 1922, Oil on Canvas, 15 1/8" x 18 1/4", (Baltimore Museum of Art)



Berthe Morisot, "Reading (La Lecture)," 1888, Oil on Canvas, (Private Collection Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, Florida)

I still love to read and don't think there is a room in my house that doesn't have a book case or a couple of stacks of books. Often I will have books I am concurrently reading in several different rooms. Periodically, I will buy a book, start reading it and then put it aside until months' later. At exactly the right moment in my life, it seems, the book screams at me to be read.

Yesterday, I ran across this New Yorker magazine cover that I saved because I found it amusing. The cartoon prompted me to check out the titles that are on my night table waiting to be read. Here are the books I found: "Angle of Repose" by Wallace Stegner; "Healing Back Pain," Dr. John Sarno; "How Emotions Are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain," Lisa Feldman Barrett; "Plain Song," Kent Haruf; "Five Seasons," A.B. Yehoshua; "When We Were Orphans," Kazuo Ishiguro and "Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad. I also have a Kindle loaded with often read books that I find comforting and reassuring for those nights when I really need to unwind and relax.

There has never been a better time to read or to view art than now. This summer we find ourselves struggling on all fronts. Art and books are sustaining, informative, and only get better with time. More importantly, we benefit from experiencing the wisdom and knowledge that is brought to us from a different perspective. Tired? Stressed? Uncertain? Grab a book! If you already have a pile of unread books by your bed, don't be intimidated. Just pick one up and start reading. Glean what you can from each page. It will benefit you in ways you can't imagine.

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