The Joy and Enthusiasm of Reading

I believe in the absolute and unlimited liberty of reading. I believe in wandering through the huge stacks of books and picking out the first thing that strikes me. I believe in choosing books based on the dust jacket. I believe in reading books because others dislike them or find them dangerous, or too thick to spend their free time on, or too difficult to understand. I believe in choosing the hardest book imaginable. I believe in reading what others have to say about this difficult book, and then making up my own mind, agreeing or disagreeing with what I have read and understood.

Part of this has to do with Mr. Buxton, who taught me Shakespeare in the 10th grade. We were reading Macbeth. Mr. Buxton, who probably had better things to do, nonetheless agreed to meet one night to go over the text line by line. The first thing he did was point out the repetition of motifs. For example, the reversals of things ("fair is foul and foul is fair"). Then there was the association of masculinity with violence in the play.

What Mr. Buxton did not tell me was what the play meant. He left the conclusions to me. The situation was much the same with my history teacher in 11th grade, Mr. Flanders, who encouraged me to have my own relationship with historical events and my own attitude to them. He often quoted famous historians in the process. I especially liked the one who said, "Those who forget their history have no future."

High school was followed by college, where I read Umberto Eco's Role of the Reader, in which it is said that the reader completes the text, that the text is never finished until it meets this careful and engaged reader. The open texts, Eco calls them. In college, I read some of the great Europeans and Latin Americans. All the works I read were open texts. It was an exciting experience. Besides, I got familiar with wonderful works of literary criticism.

There are those critics, of course, who insist that there are right ways and wrong ways to read every book.

No doubt they arrived at these beliefs through their own adventures in the stacks. Perhaps their adventures were not so exciting or romantic. And these are important questions for philosophers of every character. But yet I know only what joy and enthusiasm about reading have taught me, in bookstores new and used. They have taught me not to be afraid of something new, unusual or non-traditional, not to deny it but embrace it and try to understand even if you cannot agree with it. Not to stay within the boundaries but always seek for something new and enjoy every second of this creative process and be happy every time you get some result, no matter how positive or negative.

I believe there is not now and never will be an authority who can tell me how to interpret, how to read, how to find the pearl of literary meaning in all cases. There exist thousands of versions, interpretations, colours and shadows. You could spend a lifetime thinking about a sentence, and making it your own. In just this way, I believe in the freedom to see literature, history, truth, unfolding ahead of me like a book whose spine has just now been cracked.

The narrator thinks that his love of reading...

1. ...is an inborn quality.
2. ...developed early at school.
3. ...was initially fostered by Mr. Buxton.
4. ...is all due to the efforts of his Shakespeare teacher.