

Incarnation: the Forgotten Second Step of Reading a Book

I read a lot of books when I was younger. I read books in restaurants, in the car, at school events, even while deer hunting. Books and I were inseparable.

But for all the adventures and risks and decisions and significant actions I read about (fictional and non-fictional), there was little reality to them (at least in my life). The things in books that excited me were things that remained far off and high above me.

Things have changed.

After going out on my own as a young man, I've stumbled on, chased down, or survived a range of adventures in human consciousness and action. Those things in books have actually come into my real, non-library life.

I've learned something from all of this: you haven't really finished reading a book until you lived it. We finish the "read and comprehend the lines" part and think we're done. But this forgotten second step of embodying (you could say "incarnating") books makes all the difference.

We don't all have to survive a desert island just because we read *Robinson Crusoe*. We don't all have to play matchmaker just because we read *Pride and Prejudice*. We don't have to destroy a magic ring if we read *Lord of the Rings*.

Yet we must experience isolation. We must experience love. And we must experience adventure and calling and danger and power. If we want to appreciate the breadth and depth of the world's writing, we have to (should we say "get to"?) experience the widest range of human potential and emotion and thought possible. And we must experience these things in ways that hearken back to the books that shaped us.

Only then can we really close the books - and pass them on to others.

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