



# Why I Read: The Serious Pleasure of Books

*Wendy Lesser*

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## Why I Read: The Serious Pleasure of Books Wendy Lesser

"Wendy Lesser's extraordinary alertness, intelligence, and curiosity have made her one of America's most significant cultural critics," writes Stephen Greenblatt. In *Why I Read*, Lesser draws on a lifetime of pleasure reading and decades of editing one of the most distinguished literary magazines in the country, *The Threepenny Review*, to describe her love of literature. As Lesser writes in her prologue, "Reading can result in boredom or transcendence, rage or enthusiasm, depression or hilarity, empathy or contempt, depending on who you are and what the book is and how your life is shaping up at the moment you encounter it."

Here the reader will discover a definition of literature that is as broad as it is broad-minded. In addition to novels and stories, Lesser explores plays, poems, and essays along with mysteries, science fiction, and memoirs. As she examines these works from such perspectives as "Character and Plot," "Novelty," "Grandeur and Intimacy," and "Authority," *Why I Read* sparks an overwhelming desire to put aside quotidian tasks in favor of reading. Lesser's passion for this pursuit resonates on every page, whether she is discussing the book as a physical object or a particular work's influence. "Reading literature is a way of reaching back to something bigger and older and different," she writes. "It can give you the feeling that you belong to the past as well as the present, and it can help you realize that your present will someday be someone else's past. This may be disheartening, but it can also be strangely consoling at times."

A book in the spirit of E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* and Elizabeth Hardwick's *A View of My Own*, *Why I Read* is iconoclastic, conversational, and full of insight. It will delight those who are already avid readers as well as neophytes in search of sheer literary fun.

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