



Where I'm Reading From: The Changing World of Books

Tim Parks

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Should you finish every book you start?

How has your family influenced the way you read?

What is literary style?

How is the Nobel Prize like the World Cup?

Why do you hate the book your friend likes?

Is writing really just like any other job?

What happens to your brain when you read a good book?

As a writer, translator, critic and professor of literature, Tim Parks, is well-placed to investigate any questions we have about books and reading. In this collection of lively and provocative pieces he talks about what readers want from books and how to look at the literature we encounter in a new light.

Where I'm Reading From: The Changing World of Books Details

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From Reader Review Where I'm Reading From: The Changing World of Books for online ebook

Rebecca says

Parks is an English novelist living in Italy. In these essays first published in the *New York Review of Books* between 2010 and 2014, he dwells on the increasing globalization of literature, cautioning that in flattening out country-specific references and language (“seeking out maximum communicability”), we are in danger of producing homogenized, Americanized works that lack the vibrancy of the cultures from which they emerged. He comes at this from many angles: as a writer, as a professor, and as a translator. Americanizing his book on Italian train travel, translating Giacomo Leopardi into vernacular English, and seeing one of his novels adapted into an Austrian television movie are some of his key later examples of the disorientation that occurs when you try to take something out of its original language and context and reproduce it in another without losing the subtleties.

I also liked his controversial suggestion that reading e-books is the purest form of reading, “the movement of the mind through a sequence of words from beginning to end … as close as one can get to thought itself” without the distractions of a print book’s appearance and heft in the hand. He makes frequent references to Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence and Jonathan Franzen. These pieces are dense but clearly argued and well structured. If you’re at all interested in the state of world literature, you should definitely pick this up.

Another favorite line: “this global mingling of cultures works against nuance and in favour of the loud, clamorous, highly stylized and idiosyncratic voice that can stand out in the cosmopolitan crowd.”

Cem says

Tim Parks'ın dili çok akıcı. Acaba bir sonraki bölümde ne gibi tavsiyelerde ya da önermelerde bulunacak, hangi yazarlardan örnekler verecek diye bekliyor, merak ediyorsunuz.

Bir kitabı sonuna kadar okumalı mı? Yıllarlık e-kitap okumalı mı? Yıllarlık basit, türk romanları neden edebi-ciddi okumalara geçti? Mümkün müdür, gibi sorulara çok net ve enteresan cevaplar veriyor; iyi tanımlı yazarlar hakkında da bilgilendiriyor.

Okudukları mı? Yıllarlık yeni bir bakış açısı mı? Getirebilecek, okuyacağı mı? Kitaplar seçeğen bizi daha seçici olmaya yönlendirecek, okumak mı? Yoksa canlı hayatı mı? Daha çok dahil olmak gerektiği ini bize sorgulatacak bir kitabı.

Ve; bana bu kitabı tavsiye eden Yakup arkadaşım sunar, ben de sizlere tavsiye ederim.

Esra M. says

Yazar, çevirmen ve iyi bir okur olan Tim Parks ilk önce okura çalırsa neden okuyoruzu detaylı bir şekilde düzündürerek güzel bir giriş yapıyor. Sonrasında ver elini edebiyata dair türlü türlü sorular. Her bölümde kah yazar/çevirmen, kah okur açısından yaklaşıarak yeni bir pencere açıyor önüne. Potaya takılan

sorulardan baz?lar? küreselle?en dünyada edebiyat?n ne kadar özgün kalabildi?i, çevirmenlerin üzerine dü?en yükü hakk?yla yerine getirip getiremedi?i ya da çeviri en iyi ?ekilde olsa bile anadilin oyunlar?n? ne kadar yans?tt???, edebiyat ödüllerinin ne kadar kapsaml? bir taramadan geçti?i, yarat?m sürecinde yazarlar?n k?skac?nda kald??? sorunlar?n çözümünün olup olamayaca??, edebiyat okumalar?nda okurlar?n kendi yollar?n? çizmeye ne kadar cesareti oldu?u. Bütün bu sorular ve daha fazlas? dört bölüme ayrılan kitapta sistematik bir biçimde tart??ld??? için okuma esnas?nda herhangi bir kar??kl?k ya?anm?yor. Parks'?n dedi?i gibi nas?l her okur bir edebiyat eserinde içindeki neyse onu görür ancak iyi bir edebiyat eseri yeni ufuklar açarsa bu kitapta benim aç?mdan daha önce hiç dü?ünmedi?im sorular üzerinde kafa yormam?sa?lad?.

Lobstergirl says

Parks's essays are sometimes provocative. "Do We Need Stories?" "Why Finish Books?" "Does Copyright Matter?" "E-books Are for Grown-ups" are a few of their titles.

In "Why Finish Books" Parks advances the radical notion that it's fine to stop reading a book. Not just a bad book, but any book. A good book. The novels of D.H. Lawrence, Elfriede Jelinek, Thomas Bernhard, Samuel Beckett, Christina Stead, and others, suggest that "beyond a certain point a book might end anywhere" and "the reader may choose for him or herself where to bow out (of Proust's *Recherche* for example, or Mann's *Magic Mountain*) without detracting anything from the experience." (This is where I should tell Parks that not only did I abandon his book *Adultery and Other Diversions* a few chapters in, but I owned it, and gave it away, because I couldn't imagine any future point at which I would want to pick it up again. Certainly he would be pleased.) "There is a tyranny about our thrall to endings," Parks suggests. Endings are perhaps least important in a novel where plot is not the highest priority, but even where plot and the story arc are important, readers should not feel compelled to see the story through to its bitter end. I guess if Parks were at a football game, he would get up and leave with the teams tied at the end of the third quarter, fully sated by the quality of play up to that point.

One of his most interesting topics is "The Dull New Global Novel." Increasingly the market for new novels is global rather than local or national. A novel by a well-known writer will usually be issued in foreign editions simultaneously with the original edition. The importance of a decent translation, or an easy translation, becomes paramount, and it changes the way some novelists write – "Kazuo Ishiguro has spoken of the importance of avoiding word play and allusion to make things easy for the translator." Parks teaches translation and has a lot of inside-baseball thoughts on it.

A side effect of an international market for books was that a certain style could become an indelible feature. Magical realism became such a trademark of South American literature that it became very difficult for South American writers to get published if they didn't employ it. But how could the writers then portray "the more prosaic truths about the continent?"

"Few works of art can have universal appeal," he argues. For him some of the best literature is local, it plucks in the reader the "affinities" Goethe wrote about, it relates to the reader's concerns, it requires that the reader understand a particular milieu. This aspect of literature fights against the trend toward globalism, since localities and cultural specifics don't translate as well, in both the literal and metaphorical senses. Writers in this mold include Barbara Pym, Henry Green, Natalia Ginzburg – and there are even aspects of this localism/non-universalism in Thomas Hardy, Jane Austen, Shakespeare.

“The politically engaged social novel many European writers (Moravia, Calvino, Sartre, Camus, Böll) were celebrated for writing up to about the 1970s continues in the Anglo-Saxon world, but is fast disappearing in many European countries for the simple reason that people are reading and now perhaps writing rather less about their own societies...”

As soon as he quotes Jonathan Franzen in the essay “Do We Need Stories?” (“There is an enormous need for long, elaborate, complex stories”) you know which side Parks is going to come down on. Nearly everyone loathes Franzen and Parks is no exception. Franzen-haters will enjoy the essay “Ugly Americans Abroad” in which Franzen is knocked around for writing novels overstuffed with Americana, much of which is hard to translate into other languages, an issue he is able to blissfully ignore because globalism always puts America first. The virtuous European counterpart to Franzen’s Ugly American Writer is the Swiss author Peter Stamm, whose lean non-specific prose makes his Swissness disappear.

If you admire much of the typical, conventional, perhaps award-winning literary fiction out there, you probably won’t have much in common with Parks. “Literary fiction has become a genre like any other, with a certain trajectory, a predictable pay-off, and a fairly limited and well-charted body of liberal Western wisdom to purvey,” he writes. Examples of rare books contravening this trend are Gerbrand Bakker’s *The Twin*, Peter Stamm’s *On a Day Like This*, and Christina Stead’s *Letty Fox: Her Luck*.

Parks teaches creative writing in addition to translation and tries to debunk the popular idea that creative writing programs exist to teach writers to write. What they offer instead is a trajectory for the hopefules to get published. If the prose emerging from such programs seems flattened and suffering from predictable sameness, it’s because of the desire of the writers to make their writing more marketable. But viewing creative writing as a career is problematic – “careers are things you go on with till retirement. The fact that creativity may not be co-extensive with one’s whole working life is not admitted.”

Damla says

Okur, yazar, yay?nc?, editör, çevirmen gözünden olmak üzere be? farkl? taraf?n sorunlar?n?, sorgulamalar?n?, ele?tirilerini ve bunun yan?nda son olarak küreselle?menin edebiyat dünyas?ndaki rolünün birkaç örne?ini görebilece?iniz keyifli ve kolay okunan ele?tiri kitab? "Ben Burdan Okuyorum". K?sa k?sa böülümlerden olu?mu? olan eser sayesinde pek çok konu hakk?nda bilgi edinmek mümkün -ara?t?r?lma kayd?yla-. Elbette bu demek de?ildir ki her dü?üncesine kat?labilirim. Ancak bu tarz eserleri okurken önemli olan daha önce akl?m?za gelmeyen ya da gelip de yaz?ya dökemedi?imiz konularda ayn? veya farkl? dü?ünceler etraf?nda kafa yormak. Bu nedenle pek çok yazara ve yazmak isteyene kap? açacak konular mevcut.

Hadrian says

Essays on a smattering of topics, such as e-books (he approves), the Nobel Prize in Literature (they’re often silly), and the meaning of words lost in translation. This latter subject is the most interesting of the entire book, and Parks’ experience translating Zibaldone makes for compelling reading in his comparison of styles and integration of literary references.

The most striking example of the book is his description of an Italian translation of 1984. Instead of “It was a bright cold day in April and the clocks were striking thirteen”, the translator misses the point completely and says the clocks strike one in the afternoon.

Baran ????? says

Okuma ve kitaplar üzerine son zamanlarda yay?nlanm?? ve severek okudu?um en güzel kitaplardan biri, nedense Llosa'n?n Letters to a Young Novelist kitab?ndan ald???m tad? an?msatt? bana...

Sinem says

Tim Parks'?n edebiyat dünyas?na bak?? aç?s? benim okuma prati?imle çok örtü?tü?ü için kitab?n yar?s?n? çok severek okudum. kalan yar?s? okudu?umun tekrar?ndan ba?ka bir ?ey de?ildi, bu sebeple 3 y?ld?z verdim. kitap okurken dü?ündü?üm ya da kitaplar hakk?nda tart???rken oldu?um tarafta duruyormu? Tim Parks da. edebiyat nedir, gerekli midir, yazar olmak, bilinirlik gibi herkesin üzerinde dü?ündü?ü konular? ç?itli örnekler vererek ve kendi tecrübelerini katarak anlatm??. sarkastik bir tavr? var onu da çok sevdim. Roza Hakmen han?mefendi nefis çevirmi? yine, onu da söylemeden geçmeyeyim. en k?sa zamanda Roza Hakmen'in çevirisini yaptı? Kader'i de okumak istiyorum.

Howard Cincotta says

I am a sucker for reading books about reading, and Tim Parks's essay collection – dyspeptic and insightful – is no exception. But a question kept occurring to me: is it possible to simply have read too many books?

I don't mean those days when you say, “screw the world,” and stay inside with a book instead of errands, exercise, sunshine, and all those other more worthwhile enterprises. I mean, over a lifetime, reading too many literary novels and essays, from Homer and Shakespeare to Proust, James, Calvino, Harakumi and Borges?

I wonder if that might be the case with Tim Parks, British-born author and professor who has lived in Italy for many decades. At times, he simply seems burned out, exhausted by the prospect of responding psychologically and intellectually to yet another novel or nonfiction tome full of vaulting ambitions and complex and/or ambiguous themes. Here, he uncorks one long sentence on the subject:

More and more, I wonder if it is possible for a novel not to give me the immediate impression of being manipulated toward the goals that are predictable and unquestioned: the dilemma, the dramatic crisis, the pathos, the wise sadness, and in general a suffering made bearable, or even noble through aesthetic form, fine prose, and the conviction that one has lived through something important.

His apparent exhaustion with reading, whether accurate or merely a writer's persona, makes for a pleasurable reading experience for the rest of us, however. Parks's tactic here is to take a contrarian stance in his often successful effort to puncture many of the comforting myths propounded by the literary establishment (which he cheerfully admits to being a member of).

Do we actually *need* stories? Not really, Parks responds. What does the Nobel Prize actually signify? Not much, since it largely rests on the energy and reading abilities of Swedish bureaucrats with a limited linguistic range. Is globalization of literature a good thing? Not when it results in shearing away the rich detail and nuance of lives in cultures very different from our own. Can e-books be a “purer” form of reading than print books? In many instances, with their exclusive focus on the words, yes.

Parks, who is both a translator and a teacher of translation, is particularly sensitive to the losses suffered when he attempts to communicate the complicated word play and references from one language to another. Joyce, for example, or any number of his favorite Italian authors. Parks, who writes in English and Italian, decries the smothering impact of English, especially American English, which dominate literary fiction in Europe, even if the novels are actually read in local translation.

(Although I have to ask: what is it about Jonathan Franzen that sets off so many critics, Parks among them? Okay, Franzen is a white male competing for the (largely bogus) title of Great American Novelist. I get it. But so are many others, including Alice Munro – even if she is Canadian, female, and doesn’t write novels. Deal with it.)

Parks is strongest with his astringent puncturing of the bloviations about great literature and great authors. Dickens played the ultimate father figure in English literature yet dismissed his wife, kept a mistress, and psychologically oppressed his children. Joyce probably left Ireland as much to be with his young uneducated girlfriend, Nora, as “to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.” Samuel Beckett enjoyed Parisian life with his long-time partner while composing nihilistic prose about the impossibility of living at all. And these are three writers that Parks greatly admires.

What Parks seems to want is not to dismiss literature so much as reject its pieties. Literature can be an escape or an exploration; it may provide comfort and insight. But first, we need to acknowledge that literature’s rewards are often hard-won, small, specific, and the result of craft as much as art. Some of it may translate into other languages; other books and authors may remain inaccessible and unknowable to a larger (often English-speaking) audience. Accept and move on.

Lisa says

[3+] Reading Park's essays about language and translation was a thought-provoking treat. I also loved his essay on the Nobel Prize. But I grew weary of Park's obsession with the same club of white, male English/American writers (+Rushdie).

Yakup says

Okumak; Kendi içinde kutsallık ile yorumlanır ya? Amdaki bir başka mücadele ve özgürlük mekanı? Kapı? Dır? R? Okurlar taraf?ndan kutsal oldu?n kadar okunmayanlar taraf?ndan s?rt çevrildi?i halde yine de önemsenen bir etkinlik. Hatta Tanrı?lar ve elçileri kitaplar?n?n okunamama kaygısı?n?n? t?yacaklar ki, ilk yazdır?klar? ‘Oku’ olmu?tur.

Bu Okuma etkinliği?inin her okurda ayrı? amaçlar ve derinlikler yaratır?n? tahmin edersiniz. Bilinci bo? bir arazi de oyunlar oynatır?p onu dönü?türüp özgürlük?tirme çabası?d?r aynı? zamanda. Walter Winkelman ‘okuma Sanat?’ üzerine yazıs?n?n giri?inde Goethe, Eckermann ile Konu?malar’?nda doğrultu okumayı?

ö?renmek için seksen y?l harcad??n?, yine de kendini bu ülküye tam ula?m?? saymad??n? söyler. Goethe bu sözle besbelli okullarda ö?renilen okumay? de?il, fakat bu melekeyi i?lete i?lete onu gerçek okuma sanat? hâline getirmeyi kastediyor ve ilerlemi? ya??nda bile bu sanata istedi?i kadar sahip olamad??ndan dert yan?yor. Okuma eylemi, Goethe'nin bile tam anlam?yla yapamad??n? itiraf etti?i kadar zor mu? Elbette Goethe'nin derinde istedi?i ile bizlerin yüzeyde istedikleri bir olmaz. Onun istedi?i en yukarı?y? görme çabas?d?r bu sanatta. Bizler her okumam?zda kendimizce bu etkinlik için sorular sorar?z. Amac?n?n ne oldu?u, daha iyi nas?l yapabilece?ini ortaya koyacak ritüelleri ke?fetmeye yönelik sorgulamalar yapar ve bunlar? destekleyecek yan okumalar? da mutlaka merak ile ara?t?r?r, yeni ?eyler ke?fetmek isteriz. Yani daha iyi okuyabilmek için yine bir ?eyler okumak.

Kendi görü?lerimi k?saca yazd?ktan sonra bu ay (Kas?m-2016) Metis Yay?nlar? Ele?tiri dizisinde Roza Hakmen taraf?ndan ba?ar?l? bir çeviri ile sunulan Ben Buradan Okuyorum-Kitaplar?n De?i?en Dünyas? kitab?n? tesadüfen bir tavsiye ile hemen al?p okuma gere?i duydum. Çünkü dünyada her ?ey de?i?irken kitaplar?n de?i?en dünyas?n? bilmek biz okurlar?n ayr? bir merak?d?r.

Öncelik ile direkt söylemek isterim ki kitap birçok soruma cevap verdi?i gibi, hiç dü?ünmedi?im konulara da de?indi?i için tam da istedi?im gibi bir tatmin yaratt?.

Kurmaca eserlere ne gibi bir ihtiyaçtan okuma gere?i duyar?z? Bu tarz okumalar bizi özgürle?tirir mi bilinç düzeyinde? Okudu?umuz eserler kendi inançlar?m?z? sorgulamak için mi yoksa desteklemek için midir? Bir kitab? ?srar ile bitirmek zorunda m?y?z? Bitirmek bir ba?ar? m?d?r yoksa zaman kayb? m?d?r? E- kitaplar biz yet?kinler için gerekli midir? Telif hakk? önemli midir? Okurlar neden fikir ayr?l????na dü?er? Sadece okurlar ile ilgili de?il çevirmenler ve yazarlar için de birçok paradoksal cümleler kurarak sorular sordurtup cevaplamaya çal??an bir çal??ma. Edebi metin ile tür eserler aras?ndaki fark? iyi koyup okusun da ne okursa okusun mant??n?n do?ru olmad??n? ortaya koymaktad?r.

Böylelikle ilk bölüm okurlara ikinci bölüm çeviri dünyas?na üçüncü bölüm yazarlar?n ve son bölüm ise küresel dünyadaki kitab?n durumunu ortaya koydu?unu söyleyebiliriz. Her bölümde bir ?eyleri ö?renmek mümkün?r çünkü her ne kadar okur olsak da çeviri ve yazarlar?n dünyas? bize uzak de?ildir.

‘Kimse ölümsüzlük taklidinden vazgeçemez’ der Emil Cioran. ‘Ölüm mutlak son olarak kabul edildi?inden beri herkes yaz?yor!’

Not: Daha büyük edebi eserlere sayg?mdan dolay? bu kitaba dört y?ld?z veriyorum. Siz be? y?ld?z olarak görün. ?yi okumalar.

Sinem A. says

Dili çok sade ve samimi. Kitaplar ve kitaplarla ilgili bir sürü ?ey bar?nd?r?yor . Kitaplar? seven herkesin sevebilece?i bir kitap.

Yazar?n romanlar?n? okumak istedim bir an önce.

Paul says

I do like reading books about books and reading, and in this collection of essays and articles drawn from the New York Review of Books, Tim Parks, extolls the virtues of reading, asks why we hate the books our friends love and tries to fathom just how a Nobel prize winner is selected. Other questions that he considers include: why finish books, the dull new global novel, what the writers job actually is and can we learn to speak American.

All of these things are interesting questions about a variety of subjects on reading, writing and awards, and Parks is not afraid to be provocative in answering them. He advocates rethinking the purpose of a book, what it is for, why we read it and the perils of the homogenisation of languages and the slide towards one world culture. He puts his strong opinions in a short, to the point essay style making it easy to dip into and to find a particular point he was making. I have only read *An Italian Education* by him so far and sadly wasn't aware that he was a novelist as well as a translator, critic and professor of literature. He is quite well placed to make these observations and he draws on his skills to write these articles. Sadly thought there were flaws; whilst some were amusing and easy to read, others were very academic, esoteric and dry to read, which is a shame as some of the articles were superb. 3.5 stars overall.

Amalia Gavea says

I started writing this review, a day after I started reading Tim Parks book, because there were so many thoughts in my head, so many questions I didn't even know I had.

Why do some of us feel compelled to get through a book we hardly like, while others (like yours truly) give up once they realise that it is a waste of time? Why do we feel members of a greater community once we read a novel which is accompanied by world-wide success? And even feel guilty if we don't like it at all? How does our upbringing, or our family values influence our appreciation of this genre or that? Why do we tend to value foreign literature more than our own country's? Tim Parks tries to answer all these questions and many more.

There were moments when I lifted my eyes from the page to think on the issues examined in his essays. His language is simple, informative but not didactic. I had the feeling that I was participating in a discussion with a very eloquent and very friendly teacher, a colleague. Not to mention his excellent essay about the Nobels which convinced me as to the absurdity of having such a competition, in the first place.

There was, however, something that bothered me. Repetition. There is information that is mentioned so many times that it becomes tedious. E.g. the fact he lives in Italy or that one book fair in France. Also, I found that the number of authors he focuses on is rather limited. We are forced to think of DeLillo, Roth, Faulkner, Borges, Hardy and Lawrence too many times, as if they are the epitome of Literature alone and nobody else. Well, no, they are not. This problem becomes much more obvious towards the end of the book.

Perhaps, this repetition is the trap that lays there for all teachers. We- and I'm speaking from personal experience, pleading guilty to the crime- tend to repeat things over and over again to help our students understand. Otherwise, you don't teach, you don't inform. You impose, you give a lecture that accomplishes nothing. So, I must conclude by saying that I wish I had a professor like Tim Parks in university.

O?uzhan says

çok çok güzel. tim parks yay?nc?l?k anlay??na, okurluga yazarl??a, kuresellesme olay?na, yerel kültürün yok olu?una, kültür tasiyiciliginde ve buna benzer konulara de?iniyor. k?sac?s? kitaplara ve kitaplar?n etraf?nda dönen dünyaya dair bir çok ?eyden söz ediyor. okudu?unuz ya da okuyaca??n?z kitaplara farkl? gözle bakmanizi sa?layabilecek denemeler. okudu?unuz kitab?n mutfa??nda dönen hosa gitmeyecek ?eyleri ucundan k?y?s?ndan ö?renmek de ho? deneyim.

