

Where Have All The Great Writers Gone?!

...and what does this mean for YOU



Hearken! And observe how healthily – how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

E.A. Poe

Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them. Henry David Thoreau

Living in American culture in the 2000's is a pressure-filled, daunting existence for most people. Many appear to thrive on the outside, while inwardly reeling with mounting anxiety about themselves, their loved ones, and their future.

This Feels Wrong

The push to maintain the outer appearances of wealth, happiness and vitality is in direct conflict with the inner pull of insidious personal insecurity. This results in the employment of reactionary measures: resolving (again) to “grow up,” taking on a new hobby, buying more stuff, going to church more often, or seeking guidance from the latest and greatest “guru.”

American mass media and the culture of consumerism have consistently and systematically since the 1950s undermined your ability to become fully conscious of your own identity.

Could the disparity between who you are and who you want to be stem from years of succumbing to the relentless pressures of society?

Stop Gap Measures are Available – But Do They Work?

Anxiety, fear, and disconnectedness are often treated with psychotherapy; in fact, so many men of the Baby Boomer generation are experiencing signs of “dis-ease” that an extensive line of products and services has emerged to address “Irritable Male Syndrome.”

Source: <http://www.theirritablemale.com/index.htm>
Retrieved January 12, 2010



The Nobel
Committee:

American writers are
“too sensitive to
trends in their own
mass culture.”

“The U.S. is too
isolated, too insular.
They don’t translate
enough and don’t
really participate in
the big dialogue of
literature. That
ignorance is
restraining.”

Source:

Lost in Translation: A
Swede’s Snub of U.S. Lit

[http://
www.nytimes.com/2008/10
/05/
weekinreview/05mcgrath.ht
ml](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/05/weekinreview/05mcgrath.html)

Retrieved January 7, 2010

Reading Quality Fiction is Key to Both Personal and Cultural Recovery

A way to recover from the malaise, break free of manipulation, and rise above this mass consumer mediocrity is to demand quality fiction – **quality novels that challenge you and refuse to disrespect who you are.** Your mind is desperately hungry for something real.

There is so much fiction available today—the genre-mongers have taken over. Quality fiction is not just another frivolously-worded, contrived novel. Quality fiction helps you discover who you are. It empowers you to face whatever limiting beliefs are holding you back in life. **Quality fiction shifts you into a different mindset, allowing you to receive what you are meant to receive, and give what you are meant to give in this life.** It releases the song within you. Think again of the works of the great writers who inspired you in the past. What they open for you is possibility.

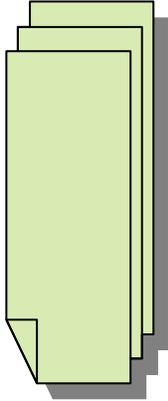


*The most beautiful thing we can
experience is the mysterious. It is the true
source of all art and science. Albert
Einstein*

Reading Quality Fiction Opens Your Eyes



Read a quality novel



Recognize parts of yourself and your life.

See the culture you grew up in more truly.

Receive a chance that you may not have had growing up.

Realize that fear really could be the first enemy.

Your Emotional Mind Assimilates things through Stories

The logic of the emotional mind is *associative*; it takes elements that symbolize a reality, to trigger a memory of it, to be the same as that reality. That is why similes, metaphors, and images speak directly to the emotional mind, as do the arts — such as novels, film, poetry, song, theater and opera.”

This logic of the heart—of the emotional mind—is well described by Dr. Sigmund Freud in his concept of *primary process thought*; “. . . The primary process is the key that unlocks the meanings of works like James Joyce’s Ulysses; . . .”

Source: Emotional Intelligence, Why it can matter more than IQ, Daniel Goleman, Copyright © 1995

“We are still learning to be James Joyce’s contemporaries, to understand our interpreter.” Richard Ellmann

*Through Newly Opened Eyes You Realize that Everything
in Your Life To This Point Has Been of Your Own Making*

Haven't We Stopped Blaming Our Parents?

Works of fiction that are safe and non-transformative do offer some entertainment value. Years of reading low-quality fiction, though, can affect your mind like eating junk food affects your body: making it flabby, inconsequential.

Like junk food and other purely consumer-driven phenomena of our culture, frivolous and mediocre fiction feeds the problem, and feeds upon it. It makes you flabby of heart as well as mind. It constitutes the gap, the angst that too many people in America choose to accept and endure.

Quality fiction counters all of this, awakening your spirit, so you can deal with the past, accept it, appreciate and learn from it; and then move forward in a positive, responsible way, toward your personal fulfillment.

... Such a deep taste of change and of having above all for the moment nobody and nothing to consider ... The Ambassadors, Henry James

In teaching history, there should be extensive discussion of personalities who benefitted mankind through independence of character and judgment.

Albert Einstein



Not only is there no novel of the '60's...



...there's been no quality fiction throughout the post-modern era. We have no American literature for our time. (Till now).

Since World War II—with a few minor exceptions—the 'celebrated,' the spawn of the conventional publishing industry, have ripped us off. Their works are self-indulgent, neurotic, devoid of any real writing ability. They've grown ensconced in a multi-tentacled complex for which pliability and name recognition take precedence over artistic growth. They're charlatans, mountebanks who couldn't write their way out of a paper bag.

They're literary Madoff's, their books toxic assets. They've led us to a precipice—where the story never gets told, where we lose our Memory; and where, thus, any Orwellian vision they'd care to impose might actually have a chance.

Selecting Quality Fiction That Tells Your Story:

What to Look For

Look for a novel that makes you a bit uncomfortable ; then keep reading. (Beware those who'd want to stroke you). Self discovery is a process; there's never a time when you finally "arrive." Mastering the process is not easy but through persistence you can transcend the past and step into your own greatness. (What Thoreau meant when he remarked: *Only great poets can read great poets*).

Selecting Quality Fiction That Tells Your Story: What to Look For



Look for different types of narrative and perspective within the same work. Shifting from first to third person, and between present, past and future allows for some very profound “a ha” moments to emerge, if you persevere.

Choose a story that deals with myths and themes along the lines of the “last frontier.” “ So much self discovery involves going places in your own psyche that you’ve never visited or been aware of. **Maybe the only “last frontier” is in your own mind.**

Beware, too, of prizes and other gewgaws. Inner circles tend to decorate their own. Remember Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and all those poor folks down there in their darkness living out their illusions through shadows on the wall? They gave prizes, conferred honors on those deemed most facile in interpreting the shenanigans of the shadows. And Plato quotes Homer: **“Better to be the poor servant of a poor master (and endure anything) than to be lord of all the dead who have perished.”**

What To Do Next!

Visit <http://www.lulu.com/johnshields> John Shields' novels chronicling America's Last Frontier, *Letters from Alaska, Books I, II, and III* are absolutely what we've been looking for.

The novels are available in three formats:

Immediate Download | Soft Cover | Hard Cover (pending)

John is making himself available exclusively to people who receive this paper to answer any questions about this paper, his novels, American Literature today, and to support the reading of quality fiction nationwide.

John Shields is originally from back east, but has lived in Alaska, Europe, Salt Lake City — sundry places from Connecticut to South Carolina — and, most recently, on an Indian reservation in northern Nevada. He holds an MA from the University of Iowa and is currently a member of the adjunct English faculty at UNLV. He's published his Alaska Trilogy and a collection of short stories, some of which have appeared in *The Sewanee Review*, *Seal*, and *Wordriver*.

Contact John at jshieldsfiction@gmail.com



Turn the Page for Insight Into *Letters From Alaska*





Insight Into Letters From Alaska

The self's retention

Leave, if that's your only recourse. Extricate yourself. The frontier! It's still there! **Dump your baggage, and we're not talking Samsonite. Come to terms with everything that's happened to you.** Not easy. Maybe well-nigh impossible! But necessary if you're ever going to have your own life. Your OWN LIFE. Wow. And you don't even have to go to Alaska.

Book I

Letters From Alaska is based thematically upon the wilderness and its capacity for renewal of the American spirit. The form of Book I, though not strictly epistolary, hinges upon the predominant first person; he, Ansley Perkins, strives to retain possession of self against the fracturing influences of the civilization he leaves. His struggle is resolved upon his arrival in Alaska. His quest for the hero ends with himself. The surface time frame of this novel is approximately three weeks, though, using the precept of the omnipresent past, I've attempted an overview of the fifties and early sixties in this country through a young man's eyes.

Excerpts

Warfield looked slim--in unbelievably fine, lithe physical condition...like everything about him--his brain, his body, memory, aspiration, were all one; like he'd never have to come right out and think when he played...

Warfield blew through that hole in what seemed like one step, cut to the outside, and at that moment, man, you knew what was happening...the safety hesitated--just the least little bit...all Warfield needed...gave him no more than a look...and the safety-man fell down...fell down on the grass without laying a hand on Warfield and Warfield was gone.

The light up here...it's like a separate entity...everything depends on it...a main character, with its own autonomy, yet involved with, dependent upon, inextricably, through color, the others: the land, the sky. It's all one thing...like one great drama or symphony;

...it wants to elevate you, drag you up with it, somehow, and make you part of it, but you're just too dull...



Insight Into Letters From Alaska

The self's expansion

Okay, so now you're free to move, to grow. Now it's most certainly your choice — you've shaken the bonds that hold you. You've beaten your fear and now you see the world with clarity. Choose!

Book II

Book II focuses upon the 60's Fairbanks community, a short but remarkably rich period of what might be called **post-statehood, pre-oil Alaska**. In this novel our protagonist, Ansley Perkins, achieves an expansion of self through his own personal myth, the Raven and the Wolf.

Excerpts

Alluringly it arose, shimmering like a mirage on a crest, its progress at once imperceptible and ineluctable: a train song. I took another deep toke on the corncob and another sip of whiskey, duly impressed by the resonance of the juke. The low, rolling rhythms of the guitars filled the room, subsuming like an irrepressible sphere the rote clicks and whirrs of the rangy dude's subsequent selections. Then--concomitant with high-pitched and remarkably synchronous voices--the boring, burning bit of a harmonica ensued. A midnight train. The dude turned and sauntered back to the bar.

...a polar parka...

With the hood up and tied you can't hear anything. What with the gargantuan ruff peripheral vision is all but eliminated. Luxuriant wolf: gray etched with stark black like the skin of a serpent. There's a brown inner ring of wolverine. Apparently, this fur sheds ice.

I stood for some minutes looking at myself in the fluorescent mirror. Senses must be made more acute: quick side glances--attune the ears, the nose. My face in the garish light began to fuse with the fur: blonde fringes of my hair with the wolverine, the steel rims of my spectacles with the iridescent gray. My cheekbones gained prominence, and I discerned an elongation of jaw, a glint of teeth. Relinquishment, knowledge--power and a disregard for death. I felt rumblings in the belly, fierce, exultant beatings of the heart--even salivation, a propensity in the throat for a hiss; and, as I gazed steadily, I perceived a fanning of my irises. I chuckled and left off.



Insight Into Letters From Alaska

The self's completion

Our poor hero, Mr. Ansley Perkins, achieves it in marriage. And then the stakes increase multifold—the burdens of history, down to the moment. The power's yours. **The only choice now becomes very simple: do what's there to do. Fathom the possibility!**

Book III

From Book I which assumes the theme of the self's retention, through Book II and the self's expansion, to this the consummate novel, Book III, and the self's completion, the trilogy, Letters from Alaska, examines the dynamics of the entire postmodern age at levels till now past the reach of any work in any literature. One might specifically recommend Part 2 of Book III for a new take on the so-called 'greatest generation.' It's the New Literalism.

Excerpts

And as for the young man she just married who strode even with her now--she loved him, she was certain of that; and moreover, found him consistently interesting, and often amusing.

The fact is, Suzanne was born without them. Like a lake her nature was to reflect, not impose. Had her parents known or cared about knowing they could have helped her with this and made a real contribution.

...Going down the trail as they talked a wolf passed them, heading up. Evidently preoccupied, he didn't even look at them--simply stepped out of the trail and around them without slipping or breaking stride...

Then zooming along the river in the open expanse of the great white flats of the Black Rapids a pack of eight of them seemed to simply materialize, flowing even with the machine and all around it, diving, smiling like dolphins.