



THE HAZEL TREE

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On Books, E-Books and Language

There's nothing quite like opening a new book: there's that smell of new ink on new paper on new glue; there's that excitement of licking the tip of your finger to turn the first page and dive into the world you've chosen.

Between those two covers there is the possibility to visit 1920s New York City with Gatsby, sail across the ocean with 'Pi' and his tiger, or look at the future of London with Winston Smith. So, you sit with that book in your hand and are utterly absorbed into the story in a way that television and films can only attempt to mimic; you read the book back to back and then it takes pride of place on a shelf or bookcase.

On the other hand, there's e-readers like the Kindle. Many people question the need for them, after all, is it not an unnecessary expense? 'Yes, books may be cheaper but realistically it'll be so long before you get your money back it's just not worth it!' they say. Moreover, books are left in libraries in neat rows by author, title or genre; books are items that people feel drawn to care for and maintain and organise.

I recently went on holiday for two weeks, low baggage allowance and little leftover space for books of my own. However, I read eight books in fourteen days whilst there, which were all from my Kindle. There's no way that I would have been able to fit those all into my suitcase without my Kindle! I have the entire *A Song of Ice and Fire* series; all of the major religions' holy books; and, most of the out of copyright 'classics' such as the majority of Dickens' novels. Yet, they collectively take up no more than size of short novellas, like *The Great Gatsby*, because they are all on my Kindle. I have a library's worth of books which I can throw into a bag and take away. What's more, I have access to hundreds upon thousands of books at a moment's notice. Whilst I was away, I received a recommendation to read *Wonder* by RJ Palacio. Two minutes after receiving the recommendation, I was reading the book, many thousands of miles from home with no waiting time.

The crux of all of this is that my Kindle gives me access to an unlimited amount of books, anywhere I can connect to the Internet, all at a moment's notice. I don't have the smell or feel of a new book but I would argue that the trade-off is more than worth it!

However, in many ways this argument is just

redundant. I fundamentally do not care if people reject or accept reading on Kindles. It's a personal choice, up to the reader. What is much more important is that people read at all.

People who don't read pass off books as being 'boring' and 'long-winded'. These people are wrong. These people have been reading the wrong books.

There was a book I saw in the airport on the way to the aforementioned holiday the other day called *The Chocolate Lover's Club*, a book all about a group of women who (shockingly) loved chocolate and would meet up once a week to eat chocolate and as far as I can work out, whinge about their lives and their men. I can tell, I would hate it, I would think that it was long-winded (400+ pages long?!), I would think that it was boring. But, it was the wrong book for me, maybe this book would be right up someone else's street but not mine! I

know this because I have read enough

books to be able to know what genres I like. There will be

hundreds of books which everyone can enjoy but they

are only discovered by reading. The people who

don't read because they 'don't like reading' have just

been reading the wrong books. Reading is important

because not only is it a past-time which is enjoyable, but

because every book is about our civilisation. Language is the

fundamental building block for civilisation. Without being able to

communicate, our lives would consist

of hunting for food and water, sleeping and

ahem ensuring the survival of future generations of human beings. And that would be it. We have to

have language to communicate, to innovate, to create and to invent. In ways not possible for

cinema and television, books teach us language: how to use it, when to use it. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by

George Orwell examines this by looking at 'NewSpeak' which is a way of talking with little

room for expression and interpretation. For example, emotional words like "fantastic",

"ecstatic", "amazing", "terrible", "horrific", and "disgraceful" are replaced by a sliding scale of

"good". Experiences are "doubleplusgood", "plusgood", "good", "ungood", "plusungood",

"doubleplusungood" and that's it. They are created in the book to prevent connotations and to stop

people fully expressing themselves. We need to learn the subtle differences in meanings of words

like "ecstatic" and "fantastic" so that we can use words to correctly communicate what we mean.

If you like Kindles or prefer a physical book, I do not mind. Just go recommend a good book to someone who doesn't read whatsoever! Our very civilisation might just depend on it. (*Jacob Sowter*)

