

## This is Why We Read. This is Why We Write

**David W. Jardine**

Discussion bears fruit. The participants part from one another as changed beings. The individual perspectives with which they entered upon the discussion have been transformed, and so they have been transformed themselves. This, then, is a kind of progress—not the progress proper to research but rather a progress that always must be renewed in the effort of our living.

H.G. Gadamer (2007, p. 244) from *Hermeneutics as a Practical Philosophy*.

In response to reading Jodi Latremouille’s “My Treasured Relation,” Christine McIver, CEO and founder of Kid’s Cancer Care Foundation of Alberta who lost her son, Derek, to cancer, sent the following email to Dr. Nancy Moules, this journal’s editor:

*The piece by Jodi Latremouille. I read a lot of this stuff, so much it’s in danger of becoming a blur. This is exceptional. I am going to share it with our staff if that is okay. She writes exactly how I think. In paragraphs full of description and illustration – and then words that hit the moment. I was surprised at the moment of Shelby’s death, I was overcome again with the very same pain and sadness as when Derek died. This writing...it is SO good. Illustrates the journey perfectly. It needs to be seen.*

There is, here, something deeply recognizable to those of us who work with the living and the dying and the dead, something that nebulously defines being part of a profession. It is something we need to admit because its admission is a vehicle to its remedy—“ a progress that always must be renewed in the effort of our living.” There is a certain ennui here, something like having experienced too much, having seemingly heard it all before, something like the exhaustion of efforts to name this pain, this suffering, and how language itself seems to start to wear thin and then wear on you over time, wear you out. This is the secret lot of nurses and teachers, of parents and doctors--perhaps a secret lot of being human itself. The effort of our living can lose its power

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to renew. We can become halt and the glow of language that once bound us together in commiseration can burn out, and us with it. We lose our avail.

I'm reminded of this passage from David G. Smith:

“Education is suffering from narration-sickness,” says Paulo Freire. It speaks out of a story, which was once full of enthusiasm, but now shows itself incapable of a surprise ending. The nausea of narration-sickness comes from having heard enough, of hearing many variations on a theme but no new theme. (Smith, 1999, pp. 135-136)

Why do we write emails in response to reading Jodi Latremouille's work? Why am I compelled to write about earth cousins and now this little editorial? This compulsion is part of why attention is given in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1989, p. 60) to “[Immanuel] Kant's doctrine of the heightening of the feeling of life (*Lebensgefühl*).” Despite Gadamer's detailed caveats about this notion, it is one of the deep sources of hermeneutic work, percolating up through Husserl's ideas of lived experience and the life world. Part of the orbit of hermeneutic research is to revive in writers and readers the possibilities of our commiseration. Hans-Georg Gadamer (1986, p. 59) called it the opening up of “free spaces” and learning, in consequence, how we might then shape our lives in light of such possibilities, forging, if you will, “new solidarities” (p. 59).

This, then, is the other clue I got from Christine's email about why we read, why we write, why this journal--the hit, the moment. This is the *aesthesis* of aesthetics, as James Hillman (2006, p. 36) noted, “which means at root a breathing in or taking in of the world, the gasp, “aha,” the “uh” of the breath in wonder, shock, amazement, and aesthetic response.” Hermeneutics lingers about the in-breath where something hits us and wakes us up out of our melancholia over the wearying sameness of things. It is where our living can become spacious and open and full of *possibility* again, and we no longer feel locked into the often-panicky confines and immediacies of our circumstances.

This, too, is why some writing can be properly called *beautiful*, that is, precipitating of such aesthetic arrival even when it speaks of sad departure.

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