

Tuesday • October 7, 1997

— Reading between the lines —

Laziness plagues students who have forsaken popular literature

Careful, college student — you're reading right now. Well, probably skimming, and if we have anything in common, you are waiting for class to begin, praying that your prof doesn't call on you to discuss a book you were supposed to have completed two weeks ago.



CHRIS MARTIN
 columnist

For me, reading was actually fun at one point in life. I could barely control myself the first time those weird squiggles in my Little Lulu comic book made sense. I could read Bible stories on my own and not just guess what was going on in those bizarre Precious Moments pietas. I even made a habit of reading my mom's 1962 encyclopedias every night.

"By 1980, scientists predict that a majority of middle class Americans will commute to the moon for work each day," the "cyclopedia" would say. I can't wait.

The library was a boundless source of wonder at that age. I would shuffle over to the kid's section, which always had inspiring posters of C-3PO or Miss Piggy saying "Reading is Fun!"

Even television encouraged this newfound obsession. My all-time ultimate goal was to be one of those kids on the end of Reading Rainbow, warbling on and on about how great the new Madeleine L'Engle book was.

Then for some reason reading got less exciting.

One reason was my Aunt Linda. As an English teacher, she was required by federal law to give me books every Christmas and birthday.

"Hey! A present from Aunt Linda! What could it be?"

Shake, shake — thwunk.

The sound of a heavy hardcover book wrapped up with tissue inside a white

cardboard box was unmistakably horrendous, unlike the joyous sound of a million pirate Leggo pieces. Avast.

So like eating hominy, taking baths and not sitting in the car honking the horn all afternoon, reading became a forced activity, and ergo, an object of rebellion.

Zoom forward to college, where rebellion often becomes a moot point in the absence of direct parental supervision. Luckily, we have nice authoritarian instructors who delight in taking the force-feeding mantle to new heights.

"Class, read the first 800 pages of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* in your fifth-generation Xeroxed class packet for Monday. By the way, it's set in old English type and the s's look like f's and the u's are v's so you may want to transcribe the whole thing out before you read it. Have a good weekend."

So off we shuffle to the library, where there are no posters of C-3PO or Miss Piggy, to read. The library has graciously banned all traces of food or nourishment from the premises in an academic attempt to make you concentrate on reading about the many methods of statistical gathering instead of reading about the intricate odds and details of the Twist-a-Pepper contest.

The real brain power in college belongs to those who figure out how to learn all the information without the cumbersome burden of reading. Some people control their own slack destiny with Cliff's Notes. Frankly, I don't understand why people think Cliff's Notes are like manna from heaven, because you still have to read them.

One solution I tried was to get highlighted books, and only read what was highlighted. This master plan has its kinks, however, especially when your book has been highlighted so much, the pages look like clown vomit. There should also be a mandatory posting of the previous owner's grade on the inside cover. That would save a lot of heartache.

As much as I would love to read

about the battle of Midway, it's just impossible when the cast of "Eight is Enough" is locked in mortal combat against the cast of "Love Boat" on a re-run of the "Family Feud" on the Game Show Network. Man, America sure knew how to treat its stars back in the early '80s. We could all look forward to seeing Cathy Lee Crosby walk across broken glass in the Circus of the Stars, or see Leroy from "Fame" pull some Bloopers and Practical Jokes on Debi Allen. But I digress.

The biggest victim of bibliocide is the

innocent trade paperback. Forced reading is like Orwell's two minutes of hate, brazenly conditioning the victim to recoil at anything remotely resembling a textbook.

Say you have a certain personality quirk from deep inside your marrow that transcends any label made available by the English language, and to simplify conversations you sum up your realm of consciousness with one artificial word like, for instance, "smarmy." Suddenly a deep and swirling indigo ocean of emotion and purpose has been

distilled down into blasé puddle of brown hot dog juice.

Reading, like storytelling, may die in the face of new communication advances. By 2080, scientists predict that a majority of middle class Americans will absorb the great classics from a literacy pill. I can't wait.

Chris Martin is a senior journalism major.



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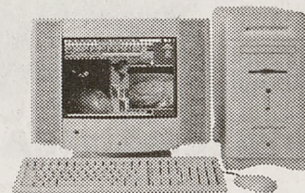
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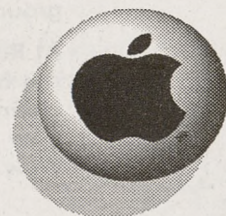
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