

NOT DROWNING, READING

ANDREW RELPH

ABOUT THE BOOK

Not Drowning, Reading is Andrew Relph's conversation with the reader about how the act of reading and how his own relationship with books have been his salvation. Growing up with a reading disability, he nonetheless knew that within books lay great consolation. The act of learning to read, as difficult as it was, was a life-affirming, even life-saving, necessity. Using his relationships with different authors or characters encountered across time – such as Martin Amis, Virginia Woolf and Saul Bellow's Herzog – *Not Drowning, Reading* creates a space for the reader to reflect upon the meaning of books in their own lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Relph is a psychologist and psychotherapist. By vocation and by disposition, he often assumes the role of conversationalist, interactions which are highly attentive, highly attuned and carefully guided; their intended outcome is that the other participant in the conversation might come to reflect on themselves and on their life patterns with greater clarity and self-understanding. It is also possible for books to enable this kind of conversation, and to create this kind of effect of self-clarification in the reader. Through the act of reading, the reader participates in a potential relationship with a book, its author, or its characters, and as a result of this relationship something within the reader has the opportunity to shift or expand or change.

STUDY NOTES

- At one time, the author says, he went around asking people what three books were most important to them in their life so far. Is it possible to make a list of one's most important books? What makes them important? What would be your top three, and why? Has your list changed over time? Is it possible to see how these books have meaning for you on your path on the circular process of development?
- What is the effect of reading the same book across time? How is it that we see different things in a book at different times? Is it because there is a difference in ourselves?
- Have you ever come across the right book at the right time? Is this as serendipitous as it sounds, or do we ourselves need to be open, searching, in the way that we open and enter into a book?
- Have you ever felt indebted to an author or a character?
- Generally, is your strongest relationship with the author or the character, or to the story itself? Or does this depend on the book itself?
- Is there a difference for you in reading fiction, non-fiction, or poetry? Is it possible for you to experience relationship within any or all of these genres?
- Who is the character or author you know best? Which book knows you best? Can a book be a mirror to the soul? Are there other more useful metaphors for the meaning books have in your life?
- *Not Drowning, Reading* is in many ways a book about readers, and the act of reading. It also contemplates the act of writing. Why are some of us compelled not only to read, but to write down or to tell stories? What is there to gain from the act of formally shaping thoughts into words that are placed on a page? Is it possible to transform oneself or to reach new understanding through the process of writing?

