

As long as I can remember, my life has pulsed from the sensation of the written word. As a child, I was enthralled by the characters of Corduroy, The Cat in the Hat, and Amelia Bedelia; rather than the spooks and treats of Halloween. I favored a trip to Barnes & Noble over an excursion to the local park, and I always spent my allowance on a wondrous collection of paper that held the possibilities of alternate lives between its covers.

That passion for the discovery of friends and opportunities in books naturally extended into a quest to carve and craft tales myself. In fifth grade I spent my recess time with a notebook and pen in hand; the following years I discovered I didn't want to write- I needed to write.

Whenever an emotion engulfed me, I would express my thoughts through words. Writing became my own personal yoga instructor: I stretched my mind every time I took up a pen and delved into the hallways of my thoughts through the rawness and honesty paper and pen offered. Writing not only became my favorite way to communicate with others, but also to renew and rediscover the evolution of self.

Once I realized that writing had chosen a life for me, I longed to experience the lifestyles of others involved in the craft; I wanted to confirm that what I felt was the way one should feel when succumbing to words. I craved to meet someone who could experience the certain intimacy between writer and reader as I felt I could.

I found my companion waiting for me in a place that seemed fitting- a book. Diane Setterfield's debut novel, *The Thirteenth Tale*, put into words my love affair with books. In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Setterfield beckons readers into the story of a young writer who is summoned by an author. The author, the brooding Vida Winter, is in need of someone to tell her biography, which also serves as the final tale in a series of novels she has written over her lifetime; Winter's

own thirteenth tale longs to be told. In an act of desperation, the authoress stumbles upon Margaret Lea, a somewhat disparaged young writer who makes her living working amongst antiquated books in her father's bookshop. Lea becomes the biographer of Winter's final tale. Together, the two women embark on a journey to document Winter's life story, *The Thirteenth Tale*, skewing the lines between published author and hopeful writer.

When I met Margaret Lea, she appeared to me not as a figment of fiction, but as a kind of alter ego of my own personality. The more I came to discover the many facets and nuances of her bibliophilic life, the more I believed I was discovering an extension of my own beliefs. When I envisioned Margaret's character, I felt as if I were foreseeing my own future.

I have always been an amateur book collector. Margaret works amongst the antiquated books I own, the only exception being that my copies reside with me and not in Lea's Antiquarian Books. In *The Thirteenth Tale*, Margaret examines herself and realizes that her work in the family bookstore has led her to take up writing. Margaret and I have both been subject to the impervious nature of life-altering literature.

Margaret explains her romance with books in such a way:

People disappear when they die. Their voice, their laughter, the warmth of their breath. Their flesh. Eventually their bones. All living memory of them ceases. This is both dreadful and natural. Yet for some there is an exception to this annihilation. For in the books they write they continue to exist. We can rediscover them. Their humor, their tone of voice, their moods. Through the written word they can anger you or make you happy. They can comfort you. They can perplex you. All this, even though they are dead. Like flies in amber, like corpses frozen

in ice, that which according to the laws of nature should pass away is, by the miracle of ink on paper, preserved. It is a kind of magic” (Setterfield 17).

After I read Margaret’s introspective description of why she is a reader, I had to pause. I had to reread the passage. I gasped. I thought. Margaret had explained myself to me; what she described was precisely the reason I am a reader. I inhaled as I took in this self-revelation.

Margaret later ponders the other-worldly existence of the authors she reads, asking, “Do they sense it, these dead writers, when their books are read? Does a pinprick of light appear in their darkness? Is their soul stirred by the feather touch of another mind reading theirs?” (Setterfield 17) Again, I was overcome with the feeling that my own musings on reading and writing were finally being pinpointed and expressed in words; this is what I had hoped when reading any novel, whether I knew the author to be alive or deceased. I wanted the author to know that I was reading their work, that I understood their words and their general disposition, that they were influencing me. And this is what I hoped for anything I would ever write; that my thoughts could persevere through the lethargic mold of time and be preserved.

With the discovery of Setterfield’s *The Thirteenth Tale*, I discovered much more than a fictional narrative. I stumbled upon something of myself when Margaret Lea greeted me, and when we parted ways at the close of the novel, I was left with my own personal watershed: I had discovered myself as a reader-writer. My soul has been stirred into life.