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Nathifa Greene, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

Abstract

In this latest *Next Page* column, Assistant Professor of Philosophy Nathifa Greene '03 shares her longtime love of Toni Morrison, Zadie Smith, and George Eliot, as well as a newfound appreciation for speculative fiction.

Keywords

Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, reading, books, interview

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Nathifa Greene, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

In this latest *Next Page* column, Assistant Professor of Philosophy Nathifa Greene '03 shares her longtime love of Toni Morrison, Zadie Smith, and George Eliot, as well as a newfound appreciation for speculative fiction.

What are you reading now (or have read recently) that you would recommend to a friend and/or colleague?



Nathifa Greene '03, Assistant Professor of Philosophy

[*The Source of Self-Regard*](#) by Toni Morrison. I love essays. And I love that Morrison was unapologetic about the difficulty of her writing and for making black women's lives, stories, questions, the specific focus of the worlds she created in her fiction. She does not defend that decision, just takes it for granted. In recent writing about her work as an editor and mentor, I learned how she mentored writers and a whole literary movement, really. Right now images of her with Angela Davis and other writers over the years are my screen saver photos.

An all-time favorite essay collection that I would recommend to a friend is [*Changing My Mind*](#) by Zadie Smith – plus any and everything she writes for *The New Yorker* and other magazines. I guess this friend would have to like essays. *Changing My Mind* is my reading equivalent of that favorite album I'll listen to over and over again. I am a superfan. It is possible that I have read everything she has ever written. I'm not sure, but that might be the case.

In terms of fiction, I recently recommended [*Pachinko*](#) by Min Jin Lee to anyone who would listen. I devoured it on a long flight a couple years ago, and then read her other books too. Lee is a phenomenal writer!

An online newsletter that always provides good social commentary, comedy, and reading recommendations is by [Baratunde Thurston](#), a writer, activist, and comedian formerly at *The Onion* and *The Daily Show*.

Describe your reading habits. Do you prefer print or ebooks? Do you mostly buy or borrow? How do you keep track of what you have already read, are reading currently, or want to read in the future?

Most of my reading is for work. Honestly, I mostly read long-form journalism when I get a chance to read for leisure. Online essays about contemporary issues do capture a lot of my time and attention on my smartphone.

I don't often read ebooks, but one good memory stands out: I read [My Life in Middlemarch](#) by Rebecca Mead on an e-reader all at once, sitting at the beach one Memorial Day weekend a few summers ago. That device was all I had with me on that trip. I love George Eliot, and have read [Middlemarch](#) several times. That was the summer Lin Manuel Miranda became a household name, and I enjoyed Ron Chernow's [biography of Alexander Hamilton](#) that same weekend as well.

I read haphazardly, more than one thing at a time. I pretend that my intuition is guiding me in a very specific direction. When I come across a book I want to read I add it to a list on my Notes app, sometimes with an image. I often don't get very far into longer books before falling asleep. When I only have a few moments, I sometimes read poems just one at a time, and I have a few collections on a side table: [Ardency](#) by Kevin Young, [Honeyfish](#) by Lauren Alleyne, and [Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver](#). (Writers, don't @ me for reading poetry in tiny morsels; this is not a statement on poetry, just something I do.)

I mostly borrow books, and I love public libraries! Public libraries are always on my "must see and sit for a while" list when I travel.

As a graduate of Gettysburg College, are there any works/authors you encountered as a student here that you are now using in the classroom?

I used my father's copy of [Black Skin, White Masks](#) by Frantz Fanon that he got when he was a university student, which was and is really special to me, and I first read that text in college. Also, I first read [Nicomachean Ethics](#) by Aristotle as an undergrad, one of my all-time favorites. I still have copies of texts by some European political philosophers that I first read as a student here – John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx, for example. I do still assign these authors. And I first read French feminist works by Simone de Beauvoir and Luce Irigaray here. Some of these books still have the Gettysburg College bookstore sticker on them!

Your research in philosophy encompasses feminist theory, critical philosophy of race, and ethics. Any titles you would you recommend for a novice reader who is interested in learning more?

My answer would depend on the topic, but journalists, essayists, and speeches can provide good philosophical introductions and critical thinking.

What do you read for fun? Anything we would be surprised to find on your bookshelf?

Do memes count as reading? Because Black Twitter is everything! So much fun! I am always awed and impressed by people who come up with those.

But honestly, I do not know what would be *unsurprising* to find on my bookshelf. Maybe it would be surprising for those who don't know me very well to know that I speak and read Portuguese, and that I have books in languages other than English on my bookshelf.

If I think about it really hard, perhaps my love for George Eliot might be a surprise. I own all her books, and I wish I could explain why I enjoy her writing so much. It's difficult to explain, like a flavor in a tried and true meal I always enjoy whenever I eat it. Eliot is an author I would invite anyone to fight me on, especially in comparison to Henry James, who is nice but very much her inferior. I have reread *Middlemarch* several times now and still can get lost in it.

How have your reading preferences changed over time?

I recently began to enjoy speculative fiction, thanks in large part to Afrofuturist writers I read to develop the senior seminar in philosophy (on utopias and dystopias) that I taught last year: Octavia Butler, Marlon James, Nnedi Okorafor. I selected Butler and a short story by Ursula K. LeGuin for the seminar, and kept reading after that.

What are you planning to read next?

Now that Morrison has joined the ancestors I am returning to her novels too, and gathered them all to read for the next while. Algorithms have recommended (and I am super excited to read) [*The Island of Sea Women*](#) by Lisa See.