

∞ READING ROUND ∞

The Writers Who Inspire Me

Lulu Allison

TALES FROM KING ARTHUR was the first book I can remember that had an emotional impact on me. I was broken-hearted that all Arthur's effort, all his unlikely golden goodness, was wasted. Why oh why did Lancelot and Guinevere have to spoil it? It was above my pay grade at the time to understand the complex drive of desire but something in me clung to that special sadness, the hope of it, the dashed hope and somehow, within, the gift of transcendence.

For a long time the authors that meant the most to me were the ones who revealed a world at once filled with the possibility of love and torn apart by its absence. Authors that made me cry. Authors who yearned for a different world. In my early teens, E. M. Forster was my favourite author. His gentle plea and relentless disappointment seemed somehow to prove that a better world *was* possible. The death of Kent in *King Lear* made me weep every single time I read it as a part of the A level curriculum.

Then as my understanding of the world grew, so my love for a broader spectrum of writing emerged. The tender brutality of Genet, a defiant mix of love and grime. I craved books that fed and stoked my feelings. Love, hope, misery, injustice, a sense that the status quo could be challenged. Authors who first provoked and then provided a home for my own emotions. Yes, feelings were everything. The bigger the better.

Sometimes I miss the wild, insistent intention of my younger self. But as I have got older, I have come to realise that emotions have a limited value.

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They are only one part of a complex system, a part of how we read and then evaluate our situation. And they are of course important. But calmer weather has left spaces for other things. I still cry, still get angry, still long for beauty when I read, and I still appreciate an author who can make it so. But I have come to most appreciate authors who do something quieter. I can't think of how to describe it any better than saying they leave a space. A space for the reader, to unfold, to get lost, to feel or not feel, to wonder, to be upheld, perhaps pulled around a little. Two recent favourites are *Self Portrait in Green* by Marie NDiaye, translated by Jordan Stump, and *Ducks, Newburyport* by Lucy Ellmann. The first is very short, the second very long, and both of these beautiful books have been written as though to open up an endless space where we can, with or without the easy hit of emotions, really share what it means to be human.