



Título: *Luna roja* (fragmento) | Joel Alcázar

## Diatribes Against Reading

Evelia María Botana Montenegro  
*Universidad Veracruzana*  
Traducción: Alicia Trivi Miniño

Nowadays we hear a lot about “Mexican people who don’t even read a book in a year” or “Mexico is not a readers country”, opposing this image of this cultural poverty, or at least the information shortage to the varied and abundant reading performed by the citizens of other countries in the world. However, we should take a look at what do readers read and how much are we missing, watching the number of poor books in most of the shelves in book stores. The information that we have access to through reading has also been manipulated by the powerful in turn, those who are constantly changing the crystal to see reality making it better or worse according to their need or whim, we are never too sure if we are really informed because statistics and bibliographical sources have a big probability of being fake and misleading. To cut a long story short, and by a healthy process of discarding, I’ve reached a conclusion that it’s better to focus this paper in something more precise and I’m not going to make up nonsense.

So, because there are so many panegyrist of reading and its benefits and non-execrator of it, with the need that exists of people who discourage reading from a theoretical level, with the knowledge to do it, with a frame of reference “as God intended”, I’ve imposed on myself the noble task of writing a diatribe against reading, and therefore I’m facing the hard task of excusing those who don’t read. Yes, the way you are reading, I’m going to exonerate, absolve, in a single word: “Go and don’t read anymore, my son” What do you think about it? What a magnanimity on my behalf!



Luckily, dealing with the practical aspect of reading is another matter. This argument is going to be much easier than politics, because here I'm not trying to persuade nobody, I don't have to win followers, or transform garbage into gold. Thanks God, I don't have to prove anything. So, the following paper will only be a description but that doesn't diminish it, because it is about reality, something so avoided, the poor thing.

In practice, as we were saying, the figures of those who don't read nothing at all, even if they could, is in a constant evolution. It's something unstoppable, a meteoric process. Does it have anything to do with the general need of working more and having so many obligations? In words of the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet, "the immense humanity goes to work at eight/gets married at 20 and dies at 40". And that's the way things go in Mexico, as in Tukey, and any other place of the third world, and even more in societies according to the progressive numeration of the successive worlds, most of the population old enough to make any productive activity goes to work at that precise hour or even much earlier, stays there until is late and poorly eats and sleeps in the same place, or goes from one job to another and another, completing the long working journey during the weekends with extra Saturdays and Sundays. Until you drop, as we usually say.

Following the order of these ideas, imagine one of these irreducible readers that fantasizes with laying down in bed with a book in his hands as the most expected moment of his day, but when he gets home, after a double or triple working journey, moving from place to place in our huge geographies, there will many other possibilities waiting for them because it is time to do all the other obligations that are part of their lives, such as the family, the household chores, breath from time to time, etcetera. If this is the reality for all who had the reading habit and we don't know how in this world they've got it, let's imagine the outlook of zero books of the ton of people who did not listen to the call, because, to tell you the truth, I think that this reading thing is really a call, a vocation, as any other one, where few are called and even fewer are chosen.

Who is the brave one in this scene of useless and constant acceleration that is going to read anything? Now, you tell me, at what

---

**Diatribes Against Reading...** Evelia María Botana Montenegro

time, in what moment or place? Of course, there are those who read in the bus, in any way of getting to their working place, even in the office, when there's nothing to do, or while waiting in line to pay bills, to do any paper work, in the bank, or waiting for the doctor's appointment, at the dentist or at the hairdressing. Surely, they will read Esopo's or Monterroso's fables, Machado's aphorisms, Ramon Gomez de la Sierna's gregueries, or superficial little things in romantic magazines or "from the heart", quoting the Spaniards, or the news in a newspaper or the political or sport weekly of their preference or the "Book of Westerns", "Laughs and Tears", without leaving aside the wonders of macrame or sexual athletics.

Those are going to be brief texts, because a novel, for example, poetry, an essay, a scientific paper read like that, in time to time, demand twice the effort when you return after a lapse that more than a "mind gap", most of the times seems like a sea. I speak for myself, because in that order of fragmented reading I've never been able to read Savater. You know...

Definitely, this thing about reading against the tide is a Roman task, it implies a lot of will and stubbornness because of the countless factors against reading. I'll classify them in three categories:

- Distractive, as various music, sounds and noises, figures and advertisement images, pictures, movies and TV programs, romantic calls and other more rogue messages.
- Dissuasive, among them, we find arguments like "Life is so brief, and you're reading", "Do something productive", "First the obligation and then devotion", "That's just literature", "So much reading is going to damage your vision!", "Your brain is going to dry out", "Leave that book alone, you are already daydreaming", "Woman who knows Latin, neither has a husband nor she ends up well", "Are you planning study Literature? Come on, are you going to be a poet?", "Are you going to buy more books? You haven't even read all the books you have over there!", or "So and so is weird, he/she reads", or "Your grandfather was 90 and he never, I've say never, read anything but de oldest Galvan Calendar", or "Look at Somebody, he's filthy rich, doesn't read or write and he never needed it",



“What we need is to get to work, not novels”. The appeal is then, the little practicality or application of reading, an activity for lazy people, intellectuals, bohemians, bums and all kind of conflictive people, those who don’t want to progress in the competitive business of life. They are not interested in being captains of their teams, or chiefs of their partners, or being Miss Mexico, or appearing in the social pages or stuff like that. They like to swim against the current and draw attention, obviously they are not going to be the winners in TV contests. They have missed it, don’t they? Furthermore, carrying a book under the arm doesn’t add you a bit of attractiveness nor a social prestige, as in the case of a car of the year, brand clothes, imported jewelry, or a very expensive cell phone.

- To top it off, the banning factors derived from the individual, family, national and supranational economy, where books, magazines and others have become un luxury items, that is to say, not essential for the everyday life, except for the obligatory readings for the elementary, high school or university curricula.

Have you ever seen something like that? Reading for its own sake? Is there anybody in his sound mind who is willing to exercise the eye vision going through the lines, along the pages until the bunch of them from the right side are piled up on the left, making his arms tired because is holding the book, to cram the memory with the words and phrases we just have read? Well, they say, it takes all sorts.

Nevertheless, having read o making believe you actually did, can be useful when you have to attend a sculpture, ceramic, photo or painting exhibition, going to a symphonic concert, suffer a book presentation or a ballet performance, even worse a modern dance, because you never know the cost of living in a city that boasts its high cultural level.

Let’s remember that in certain environments with a specific kind of people it’s very nice to show that we also have little readings, or at least, to say yes or no with our head in the right moment or to do gestures when our illustrated interlocutors present their ideas, generally taken from some artistic, social reading and politi-

---

**Diatribes Against Reading...** Evelia María Botana Montenegro

cally convenient. If you have the aspiration of a higher or to improve your social status, you have to give the appearance of being the happy owner of a vast and updated library, because at all costs you have to avoid being called somebody from the nineteenth century, the sixties, and even from the eighties! Absolute horror! We're old for sure. So, it is mandatory to stick to the wise proverb that says that you don't have to be something, but you also have to look that way. Because the way you look is the way you are going to be treated. Or not?

If after this forceful diatribe there are still some stubborn people who still want to read, don't know why the hell, it is possible to take hand of many gadgets that will benefit the potential and pertinacious reader. We could choose from traditional resources like Reader's Digest that gives us everything chosen and abbreviated "peeled and in the mouth"; summaries and reviews taken from the Internet, written by some unknown person, under his own criteria and taste and who knows with what intentions and sophisticated presentations of books and CDs with little drawings and all those things. No doubt about it, nowadays science gets ahead and in no time books, magazines, libels, pamphlets, cookbooks, agreements and manuals will be abolished. Even the Guia Roji, something we thought would be immovable.

Fellow citizens, let's be happy illiterates! For those who have had the patience to listen to this call for disinformation and ignorance-idea that is not only mine but the idea of those who run the show, who have the upper hand, those who shake the tambourine and in short, those who cut, share and keep the best of all- once again, I want to exhort you not to read and if you feel the urge, read as little as possible, just to stay away from the problem. Anyway, reading what for?

Don't tell me that someone could be interested in knowing the thoughts of another person who wrote them. Don't forget that thinking is something contagious and a risky activity. An ancient book says: "the truth will make you free", but between us, let me tell you that for me, it didn't work at all. So, it's up to you, you have been warned if you persist in your baleful reading behavior. History is full of people with better or worse luck who imposed their idea as



the only good one and the vertical line as the prettiest, achieving the improbable task of enlisting banned bibliographies, burning piles of books, everything to prevent their contemporaries (and even the unborn, when they got to be piarists) from surrender to the outrageous vice of the unrestrictive reading, subverting the order and destroying the moral rules. Nevertheless, it seems that the bonfires where so many press papers were burned haven't had the effectiveness expected and books are as resistant as cockroaches, those disgusting bugs that will inherit the earth. How come such a foolishness? Imagine it, each one reading whatever he wishes, where will we end up? If anyone wants to find out in detail, no way, he will have to read books like Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, George Orwell's 1984 and Rebellion in the Farm, Aldous Huxley's A happy world, Humberto Ecco's The name of the Rose and some other of the kind. Sorry, just to be taken as study purposes. But, be careful and don't read them very often, maybe you'll end up liking them and I will have to say: I've told you so!

Xalapa, Ver., winter before the pandemic.