



'Jorge Luis Borges made me see all literature anew'

Richard Flanagan

The book I am currently reading

James Rebanks's marvellous and moving *English Pastoral*, along with Ayad Akhtar's *Homeland Elegies*, perhaps the best American novel I've read in several years. Akhtar, a Muslim Philip Roth, anatomises how the US, for some time the world's most successful third world country, came to be so unsuccessful.

The book that had the greatest influence on me

More a writer than a book: Jorge Luis Borges. He made me see all literature anew as a sort of guided dreaming - a joyful, comic, astonishing revelation. What changed was not so much my writing as my reading - and that, in turn, transformed my writing.

The book I think is most underrated

Bohumil Hrabal's *Too Loud a Solitude*. Written in the wake of the Prague spring, the saga of Hanta, a book compressor in an unnamed totalitarian country, is an exquisite tragicomedy, a meditation on the necessary futility of wisdom and futile necessity of love, that achieves more in its 98 pages than most writers do in a lifetime.

The book I'm most ashamed not to have read

I'm ashamed of how many I have read and didn't throw across the room at page 2 because I still too often feel it shameful to not finish a book, even a bad one. Somewhere in *Don Quixote* Cervantes says there is no such thing as a book that's all bad in a book that

is, in one sense, an immense joke about someone who believes too much in bad books.

The book that changed my mind

Isn't it more the case that in every book we love we recognise our own rejected thoughts? Thoughts that felt too shameful, too obvious, too stupid, too painful, too strange to admit to ourselves, far less others?

The last book that made me laugh

Jay Parini's *Borges and Me*, a road novel, partly true, in which the youthful, earnest would-be poet Parini has foisted upon him the aged, blind writer of whose works Parini is unaware and made to drive him around Scotland in 1969.

The book I give as a gift

Of late there have been two. Jenny Erpenbeck's *The End of Days* is a beautiful and innovative take on a woman's life and her multiple deaths over the course of the 20th century. A great writer. Stan Grant's *Talking to My Country* is part-memoir, part-meditation on growing up Indigenous in Australia. It is as compelling on race, identity and history as anything by Ta-Nehisi Coates - but more original.

The book I'd most like to be remembered for

Writers start with dreams of greatness and end grateful for news of payment. Pondering any future beyond that for even a moment is the path to insanity.

My earliest reading memory

My mother reading me *The Wind in the Willows* at bedtime in a tiny mining town in the remote Tasmanian rainforest, her voice soft against the rain thundering down on the low tin roof.

The Living Sea of Waking Dreams by Richard Flanagan is published by Chatto & Windus.