



## No Regrets: Three Discussions

*Dayna Tortorici (Editor) , Elif Batuman (Contributor) , Namara Smith (Contributor) , Astra Taylor (Contributor) , Emily Witt (Contributor) , Carla Blumenkranz (Contributor) , Kristin Dombek (Contributor) , Emily Gould (Contributor) , more... Elizabeth Gumpert (Contributor) , Amanda Katz (Contributor) , Sara Marcus (Contributor) , Dawn Lundy Martin (Contributor) , Sarah Resnick (Contributor) , n+1 ...less*

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No Regrets is a set of three transcribed roundtable discussions with 12 participants and moderator Dayna Tortorici about what the women recall from their lives and reading lists in their early twenties.

## No Regrets: Three Discussions Details

Date : Published December 2013 by n+1

ISBN :

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Format : Paperback 127 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Feminism, Writing, Essays

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# From Reader Review No Regrets: Three Discussions for online ebook

## Margaret says

The companion and follow up to n+1; What We Should Have Known: Two Discussions, it features many of the same elements from the previous set of interviews but all the interviewees (intentionally) are women. Just as fascinating as the previous volume.

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## Lauren says

"it's not a recommendation, but there is something about this, the position of consuming vs. the position of figuring out how to fill the world around you with art and action, which you can only do with people." (P 36)

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## Eva Silverman says

i love to revisit this book every year around the same time as a way of taking stock of how my relationship to reading has evolved, and every year i find new things to relate to or be inspired by. often when i don't feel capable of actually sitting down and reading i just scroll through goodreads and read about books, which gets me back in the mindset of wanting to read but is also kind of mindless. reading this feels kind of like doing that but not mindless-- instead of reading canned, five sentence summaries of books i might want to read, i get to read a bunch of smart, interesting women discuss their reading habits at length! reading about people i admire's personal relationships w/ reading makes me feel better about not having read ~everything~ and not being, as one contributor says, "a vast, general brain" bc it reminds me that reading is intensely personal and more about edification and inspiration than having read every sentence of every book in some canon or other.

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## Nicole says

I don't think I would've read this if it wasn't for my Emily Books subscription, but I enjoyed it. It made me nostalgic for my early years of university, when Butler and Haraway and other feminist theorists were new and overwhelming for me, and I had all these ideas about what books I should read in order to be taken seriously. I think I was more willing to suffer through books that were dense or obtuse or not easily accessible back then, but I also wasted my time on some bullshit just because it was highly regarded by people I thought I should respect. I love the idea of a "Secret Canon," that definitely exists.

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## Wendy Liu says

Better than the first in the series, imo. Really delightful to read.

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## Jessie says

I just read this in one sitting. Group Two's conversation spoke to me the most. Brought up questions of reading as an ascetic experience, in order to become an educated person/"an intellectual" vs. reading in order to understand one's own self and one's experience; reading for self-expansion and self-growth in relation to the personal, vs. the educational. Also, reading more masculinist works (by, e.g. Roth, Updike, etc.) in order to understand the other (to identify with the negative female vs. \*should\* not identify with: the choice defines the goal of one's reading).

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## Andrew Martin says

It feels wrong to be the first review on this, so let me simply say that I have this thing dog-eared within an inch of its life. "Secret Canon", "Wrong Science" and "Advice" especially.

oh, and:

DAYNA TORTORICI: What would Jack London do? Christ. You'd be dead.

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## Sarah says

I really enjoyed reading this. I started to read "What We Should Have Known," and found it almost impossible to care about a roundtable of dudes gushing about Henry Miller. So I switched to this and was much relieved. Lots of helpful ways of thinking about reading and the purpose of reading in here, especially for me as a teacher. Dawn Lundy Martin, in the first discussion, talked about her memories of reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and being the only black person in the classroom--but not having the necessary language or tools to analyze what exactly was making her uncomfortable and then voice that discomfort. And I thought, YES. That is a very important reason to read: to give yourself the tools to understand the world around you and put them to voice. Also helpful was the discussion of the "secret canon," and how every social circle (or presumably university) has its own subset of canonical texts that act as a shibboleth for entry.

The last discussion was the least satisfying, given how the best advice they all got was to turn down jobs and not do things they didn't love. That advice--though it may have been good for the women discussing it--would be disastrous for most people. That advice clearly comes from a place of privilege: an Ivy League education, parents who have the means to be a backup support system, the sure knowledge that you DO have the human capital to be hireable because you are already white and middle or upper class.

Also, how have I not read Judith Butler yet?

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## Mya says

A really friendly and readable discussion of books (and other things) that made a difference, or would have made a difference for these women in their college years. As someone who is at the target age for this book, and just getting into (and loving) theory, reading this felt like hearing from the big sister I don't have, the dedicated and intellectual college advisor I haven't met.

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## Jessemy says

I read this for Elif Batuman's comments.

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## Juli Anna says

Women writers and intellectuals talking about the books they read in their youth that informed who they are. Great conversation, but it will make you feel like you wasted your twenties reading trash. Most of these women were reading Joyce and Judith Butler in high school.

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## Emily Carlin says

- Read this laying on a towel on the lawn of the Cambridge Public Library while the sun set, mid-Juneish.
  - I love reading transcripts of conversations so this was pure pleasure in that sense.
  - Lots of people were changed by *I Love Dick* - I wonder if I will look back on reading it this summer as a game changer.
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## Sean Carman says

*No Regrets: Three Discussions* is the N + 1 follow-up to *What We Should Have Known*, a tiny book the New York publisher brought out in 2007. *What We Should Have Known* presented transcripts of two panel discussions of N + 1 writers and editors. The idea, according to Keith Gessen's one-page introduction, was to answer the "canon-based" approach to college study by identifying contemporary classics and by, in Gessen's words, "articulating a better reason to read the best books ever written than that they authorize and underwrite a system of brutal economic competition and inequality.

But a funny thing happened on the way to compiling a contemporary, Marxist-friendly literary canon. Perhaps guided by the subtext of its title, *What We Should Have Known* turned into a roundtable discussion of reading regrets. Which made the book complicated and entertaining. If there is such a thing as "the reading life" (there isn't, not really), it would have to be a life of regrets as much as one of enrichment and entertainment. There are too many books! There isn't enough time! You can't possibly read everything, much less read it in the proper chronology. Reading *What We Should Have Known* is like eavesdropping on a group of super-smart readers confessing to what they wish they had done differently. Actually, it isn't like that, it is that. It's a fun, easy-but-still-smart read.

It's seven years later (already!) and N + 1 is under the leadership of a new generation of editors. One of them, Dayna Totorici, has resurrected Gessen's project but with a twist. *No Regrets: Three Discussions* presents three panels instead of two, the cast this time is all female, and the conversations driven by a feminist sensibility. Totorici's super-sharp introduction explains that, for women, the injunction "should" in the title of the first volume embodies the double-possibility of female subjection *and* emancipation. The book, she explains, presents conversations about women becoming themselves. They are, she suggests, the kinds of conversations women tend not to have when there are boys around.

First and foremost, *No Regrets* offers the reader the experience of reading about reading. It's a small-scale version of what I imagine reading Rebecca Mead's book on *Middlemarch* would be like, but with less time spent on more literary subjects. Joan Didion comes and goes, as do Rebecca Solnit, Henry James, Judith Butler and Roland Barthes. *What We Should Have Known* was like this, too. Personally, I think it's a good thing these books are small. The paradox (and the problem) in reading about reading is that while you are reading, you aren't actually reading anything.

The loose focus of these discussions?—how did these women writers and readers become themselves?—is, as Totorici says, not so much more or less interesting than the focus on the previous book?—my misspent literary youth?—as it is refreshingly different. Still, I missed the complexity and delightful irony of reading a discussion that at once celebrated and mourned the privilege of having the time to read practically everything. In the first book, the authors' sense of entitlement (imagine being as well-read as these people, and at such a young age!) was nicely balanced by the remorse they shared in having not taken full advantage of (if not full-on wasting) their gifts of curiosity and ample leisure time. Here, the discussion orbits around calls to action (girls should stop texting and playing the tambourine at garage band hang-outs and pick up a guitar), refusals to admit regret (as suggested by the title), and tributes to influential feminists and critics (Didion, Butler, and Chris Krauss, author of *I Love Dick*, which sounds amazing).

But I don't mean to sound negative. If you enjoyed *What We Should Have Known*, or if it sounds like fun to briefly drop in on a well-edited conversation among super-smart book people, you should definitely read this book. My favorite panel is the last one, and my favorite critic is, as always, Elif Batuman, who offers a brilliant digression on the relationship between fashion advice and the danger of the writer's instrumental manipulation of a subject's conception of her own identity; a wonderful summary of why *I Love Dick* is a masterpiece; and the charming advice her small Turkish aunt always gave her on the phone (which I can't repeat without spoiling the book's hilarious and perfect ending).

Dayna Totorici is right. You wouldn't hear these conversations among a group of men, and you might not even hear them in a group that included just one man. *No Regrets* is a quick and fun read, an engaging public conversation, a pocket feminist anthem. You should throw a few bucks to the next generation of N + 1 and get yourself a copy. You'll be glad you did.

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## Shlby says

Themes: wishing for people to guide them, conversely wishing that they read things they didn't have to

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## Kay says

I wish n+1 had included more activists and social scientists. I'd love to see a similar book that interviews those who strive for social change. Though generally engrossing, a lot of n+1's works come off as insular, industry publications for those in the visual and literary arts.

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