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# ME MY SHELF & I

Good Reading Magazine  
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## GOOD READING MAGAZINE

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Michael Kirby

#### What are you reading now and why?

Colm Tóibín's *Love in a Dark Time* (2001). This contains a series of essays on famous and infamous gay people. Generally I avoid such books. But lately I have read Tóibín's writing in the *London Review of Books*. He is perceptive without being confrontational or obsessive. Most un-Irish. The book was sent to me by an Indian friend now living in Amsterdam. Evocative and disturbing.

#### Who are your favourite authors?

I know it looks silly, but Shakespeare certainly is up there. When I was a boy, my father bought recordings of Gielgud and Olivier speaking Shakespeare. That is how he should be taught. Biographies are a passion, and histories by Barbara Tuchman and Alison Weir. Not much fiction. Until recently, too much fiction crossed by desk in court.

#### Which books have the most influence on your lifestyle or philosophy

Boy, I hate that word "lifestyle". It is what some churches use to describe homosexuality. Thomas Cramner's *Book of Common Prayer* taught me the beauty of good English and the need sometimes to compromise heartfelt differences. Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948) taught me that I was not so odd after all. Julius Stone's *Province and Function of Law* taught me that, in law, judges have choices and must be candid about selecting them. I read too much. Every book teaches something. Even erotica, and I would include John Cleland's *Fanny Hill – Memories of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748, reprinted 2005), which I defended in the courts forty years ago.

What books have had an influence on your work

Julius Stone's legal books especially. But also historical books. Victor Klemperer's *To the Bitter End* contains war diaries kept by an expert in the use of the German language living in Dresden. The book is hard to put down. The diaries, started in 1918 and extending to the 1960s, tells how the Nazi oppression did not happen overnight. It crept up on the Germans. I have referred to this in High Court decisions. We must always be vigilant against accidental oppression.

What are some books that made you laugh out loud?

Well, *Fanny Hill* for one. Also, Frank Harris' *My Life and Loves* (1925, reprint Corgi 1963). Sexual escapades, straight or gay, are inherently ludicrous but often end up in guilt and tears. We should all be more realistic and loosen up.

Is there a well-known book you never finished or did not enjoy?

Hundreds of them. Huge volumes containing a "short" treatise on income tax law, for starters. One very long (1100 pages) recent book by Ian Freckleton and Hugh Selby (Eds), *Appeal to the Future – Michael Kirby and his Legacy* (Thomson Reuters, 2009) contains 35 essays, produced on time for my judicial retirement. Strangely enough, it is very readable – even for me who hates to read past dissents for fear of suffering a broken heart. Strongly recommended.

When you were a child, what did you enjoy reading?

Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopaedia* – a cornucopia of Imperial adventures, English poetry, beautiful flags, classical painting and knowledge about our extraordinary world.

What is your all-time favourite book?

Too many to mention. But *Appealing to the Future* is definitely now in the running – at least when it shows I was right in my decisions most of the time.

Do you have a favourite film of a book and if so, why?

Yes. *East of Eden* with James Dean and Julie Harris (Elia Kazan, 1955). A brilliant adaptation of John Steinbeck's haunting novel.

Where are most of the books in your home?

In a special library created by my practical partner, Johan. He converted an unused balcony (with harbour views) into a closed-off library and even built the shelves. That is the kind of partner everyone should have. The library is off the main bedroom, conveniently situated for sleepless nights.

Is there one category that dominates?

Law, history and human rights. Not enough fiction. I am planning to repair that now I have left the courts.

How are the books on your shelves are organised?

There is a rough classification – but definitely not Dewey. A big travel section is there on Asia, from the time we journeyed overland in 1970 and 1974.

*When do you do most of your reading?*

All the time. Always reading. Sometimes it is good to just do nothing and think. Since losing my staff, I have learned to open and answer emails. I fear I am fast becoming an e-monster.

*Where is your favourite place to read?*

On the front terrazzo, under an ample tree, looking out on Sydney Harbour. Only such a person would close in a harbour balcony for a library. (This is very Sydney real estate talk)

*Do you have a favourite bookshop?*

The Darlinghurst bookshop off Taylor Square in Sydney. But Johan buys most of the books. He has been my *Readers' Digest* for 40 years. Never short of conversation. "What will we talk of" he asked after we had first met. The dialogue goes on. Books have provided us with constant stimulation and we love them.