Twitter Thread by Jennifer A. Frey



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Whenever people call me an elitist, I am flummoxed. I am from a working class background, I am a product of public education my entire life, and I spend my free time creating a podcast that aims to make great books accessible to all for FREE.

I am called an elitist because I believe there's a difference between literary art and plain fiction. I believe some books are more worthy of your attention than others. Lots of books are like junk food: pleasurable but not nourishing.

My podcast is dedicated to the idea that great books are for everyone and everyone deserves a chance to learn to enjoy them. This is not an elitist enterprise. It does, however, suppose that some books are truly worthy of your attention and that I have some capacity to judge.

My podcast doesn't pretend to be exhaustive. I have limited resources and time and perspective. But the conceit of the podcast is that in listening to it you will deepen your literary and philosophical education. These aren't just books I happen to like and hope you do too.

My podcast highlights books I think you will benefit from reading. Many of them are challenging; one might have to struggle with them before one can enjoy them at all. The podcast aims to help get you to the enjoyment/appreciation stage, to show that the struggle pays off.

I think it's a disservice to tell people they should just read what they enjoy. Some of the best, most impactful books I've ever read are books I didn't immediately enjoy at all. I am so grateful for those willing to challenge me, guide me, and help me appreciate literary art.

My education was full of teachers who from early on gave me good books, books I'd never heard of but they thought I should read. I would have been lost without them.

Humanists do no one any favors by saying "just read what you love." People need to be shown what is worthy of their love, especially now. And at any rate, if people should just read what they love, why do we need literature classes? Book clubs are much, much cheaper.

When highly educated people say read what you love, they are not being sufficiently attentive to how cut off from literary culture most people are now. Walk into a regular bookstore and see what's highlighted. When the educated refuse to guide, the market fills the void.

What is a normal bookstore, the kind most people have access to, promoting? Books by celebrities and pundits, not literature. Growing up, my parents read what normal bookstores/libraries highlighted: chicken soup for the soul, Tom Clancy, etc.

Most people grow up in houses without anything like a personal library and with parents who don't read much. I did. What does it mean to someone like that to just "read what they love"?

To me, the real elitism comes from the read what you love crowd. I think that mantra only really makes sense when spoken from a place of luck or privilege--it is said by well educated folks who were blessed with resources many people lack.

Anyway, don't just read what you love, read great books. If you are looking for suggestions, check out @eudaimoniapod ■ or just ask me. I will literally talk to anyone about books I think are worth the effort.