

Non-necessary reading

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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This year, I have decided to make space for more non-urgent reading. This is reading that isn't about keeping up with work-related issues or the latest, best writers. It might mean that I will have to lay off a bit on my habit of reading the *New York Times Book Review* and imagining the necessity of reading everything that is in it.

Although he puts it differently, Chris Smith of the [Englewood Review of Books](#) is apparently on the same track. He started the new year by [recommending](#) that people turn to the classics in 2013. He defines "classic" in a way similar to my own line of thought: books that are simply "not of the moment."

The main reason I want to do this is to move out of the mode where all reading is utilitarian. Old books are places where I anticipate pleasures that have nothing to do with keeping up with or being a part of. I want to have one old book by my nightstand and read a little from it every night, as a rabbit hole down which I can disappear in order to have my imagination expanded.

My list is eclectic. It represents gaps in my education and places I have wanted to go but have never gone. Here it is:

Villette, by Charlotte Brontë. I love a psychological novel, and when I read Charlotte Brontë I get the kind of pleasurable transportation that reading has always provided for me. But I have never read *Villette*, about young Lucy Snow who travels to teach at an all-girls school and finds her certainties about herself challenged.

The Magic Mountain, by Thomas Mann. More than 20 years ago, I read Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and loved the interplay of narrative and philosophy. I always meant to move on to *The Magic Mountain*, but now two decades have passed. This is the kind of book that demands the slow reading that I intend to make time for in 2013.

Sor Juana, by Octavio Paz. This book will allow me a triple pleasure: reading about colonial Mexico, learning about one of its central poets, and reading prose by the more contemporary Mexican poet Paz (whose work I have always wanted to understand more deeply).

The Seven Storey Mountain, by Thomas Merton. What can I say? I have never read it. This year, I will.