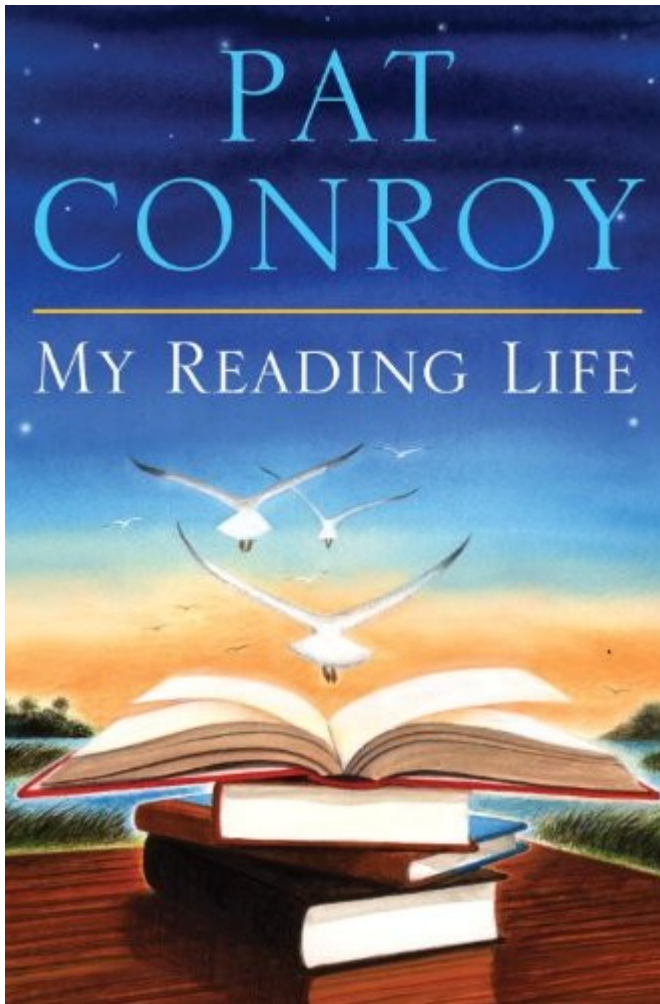


A review of My Reading Life

Books in the [November 30, 2010](#) issue

In Review



My Reading Life

By Pat Conroy
Nan A. Talese

Ever since he was a freshman in high school, Conroy has tried to read 200 pages a day. Inspired by his mother, an insatiable reader, he was also driven to inhabit another world in his reading because of his abusive father, a fighter pilot. "Reading

and prayer are both acts of worship to me," says Conroy. A great book "puts readers on their knees." He looks for writers—novelists and poets especially—who will change him utterly. Conroy thinks *War and Peace* "is the finest novel ever written," even though Tolstoy's theories of history are didactic. James Dickey's *Poems 1957-1967* is the finest book of poetry ever published in America, Conroy claims—better than the volumes of Whitman, Dickinson or Eliot. Conroy adds a chapter on "Why I write." He says he writes "to explain my own life to myself" and to tell stories. "The most powerful words in English are 'tell me a story.'"