

On Being Asked Why I Love Language and Literature

By Erick Collings

To set the record straight, I don't love language or literature.

I don't love the stumblings and bumbling inadequacies of communication, the roles and rules of grammar, the inarticulate inconsistency of language. Language is tricky, as are its constituents: letters, words, sounds, meanings, moods, sentences, and infinitely more.

Nor do I love the dense range of nuances and complexities of literature. The time-consuming work of planning, interpreting, developing, and laboring involved in its creation and reception is anything but loveable in my eyes.

Rather, what I love is the articulated human experience, especially its catches, crooks, and caveats: for it reminds me in my self-centeredness that I am not the first to be human. Moreover, simply by being exposed to this documentation of experience, my own perspective (and therefore creative output) is influenced, informed, and transformed.

In a text, I take a piece of someone else's life: it is from understanding this alone that my love of language and literature blossoms.

I love the lessons, souls, ideas, struggles, celebrations, ambiguities, and harebrained stories buried within literature. I love the people who are behind the craft of language, and I love that they compel others to stand on the shoulders of giants and join the conversation. I love the vignettes and tomes, the system and science, the art and craft.

I love the miracle of fiction: while Moses brought forth water from rock, authors bring forth truth from not-truth. Whether water or truth, the result is captivating. Language too is mesmerizing because it defines objects by what they are not: a pen is called a pen because it is not a sword, gun, or slingshot.

I love the relationship between language, literature, and those who wield them. Language is the metal from which the wordsmith forges literature; it is tempered by trial, and it is beaten and beaten and beaten until the wordsmith can hammer no more. By this process is the forged text real, authentic, and true.

In summation, I don't love language or literature.

I love the people and the process involved in the curation and creation of language and literature.