



How Literature Saved My Life

David Shields

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In this wonderfully intelligent, stunningly honest, and painfully funny book, acclaimed writer David Shields uses himself as a representative for all readers and writers who seek to find salvation in literature.

Blending confessional criticism and anthropological autobiography, Shields explores the power of literature (from Blaise Pascal's *Pensées* to Maggie Nelson's *Bluets*, Renata Adler's *Speedboat* to Proust's *A Remembrance of Things Past*) to make life survivable, maybe even endurable. Shields evokes his deeply divided personality (his "ridiculous" ambivalence), his character flaws, his woes, his serious despairs. Books are his life raft, but when they come to feel unlikable and archaic, he revels in a new kind of art that is based heavily on quotation and consciousness and self-consciousness--perfect, since so much of what ails him is acute self-consciousness. And he shares with us a final irony: he wants "literature to assuage human loneliness, but nothing can assuage human loneliness. Literature doesn't lie about this--which is what makes it essential."

A captivating, thought-provoking, utterly original way of thinking about the essential acts of reading and writing.

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