

Who Needs Books?

LYNN COADY

Reading in the Digital Age

Who
Needs
Books?

Reading in the Digital Age

Who Needs Books?

LYNN COADY



The University of Alberta Press

CLC Kreisel Lecture Series

Published by

The University of Alberta Press

Ring House 2

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E1

www.uap.ualberta.ca

and

Canadian Literature Centre /

Centre de littérature canadienne

3–5 Humanities Centre

University of Alberta

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6G 2E5

www.abclc.ca

Copyright © 2016 Lynn Coady

Introduction © 2016 Paul Kennedy

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION

Coady, Lynn, 1970–, author

Who needs books? : reading in the
digital age / Lynn Coady.

(CLC Kreisel lecture series)

Co-published by Canadian Literature Centre /

Centre de littérature canadienne

Includes bibliographical references.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77212-124-7 (paperback).—

ISBN 978-1-77212-120-9 (EPUB).—

ISBN 978-1-77212-142-1 (kindle).—

ISBN 978-1-77212-143-8 (PDF)

1. Books and reading—Technological
innovations—Social aspects. 2. Electronic
books—Social aspects. I. Title. II. Series:
Henry Kreisel lecture series

Z1003.C72 2016 070.573 C2015-908776-7

C2015-908777-5

First edition, first printing, 2016.

First electronic edition, 2016.

Copyediting and proofreading by

Peter Midgley.

Book design by Alan Brownoff.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be produced, stored in a retrieval system,
or transmitted in any form or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording, or otherwise) without prior
written consent. Contact the University of
Alberta Press for further details.

The University of Alberta Press supports
copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encour-
ages diverse voices, promotes free speech,
and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for
buying an authorized edition of this book and
for complying with the copyright laws by not
reproducing, scanning, or distributing any
part of it in any form without permission.
You are supporting writers and allowing
University of Alberta Press to continue to
publish books for every reader.

The Canadian Literature Centre
acknowledges the support of the Alberta
Foundation for the Arts for the CLC Kreisel
Lecture delivered by Lynn Coady in April
2015 at the University of Alberta.

The University of Alberta Press gratefully
acknowledges the support received for its
publishing program from the Government
of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts,
and the Government of Alberta through the
Alberta Media Fund.



Government
of Canada

Gouvernement
du Canada

Alberta
Government



Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

FOREWORD

The CLC Kreisel Lecture Series

In this event we come together, listen with more than our ears, remove blinders and become part of the celebration, expand our thinking and feeling of inclusion, and build relationships.

—CHRISTINE SOKAYMOH FREDERICK¹

THE FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVE of the CLC Kreisel Lecture Series could not have been better summarized. This series realizes most fully the Canadian Literature Centre's mission: to bring together authors, readers, students, researchers and teachers in an open, inclusive and critical forum. Kreisel lecturers already include Joseph Boyden, Wayne Johnston, Dany Laferrière, Eden Robinson, Annabel Lyon, Lawrence Hill, Esi Edugyan, Tomson Highway, and here the formidable Lynn Coady. Take the fine points about social oppression, cultural identities and sense of place by Boyden, or Johnston's reflection on the tumultuous encounter of history and fiction. Consider with Laferrière both the pains of exile and the joys of migrancy, or the personal and communal ethics of Aboriginal storytelling that Robinson presents. Antiquity and the present come together through Lyon's lecture about the creative process of historical fiction. Hill invokes the need for an informed conversation about book censorship. Highway makes a compelling argument for the liberating joy of knowing *other and others' languages*, including the language of music. In these pages, Lynn Coady's 2015 lecture urges us to assay

cultural alarmism about the future of the book in the digital age, and to reflect on what exactly we are afraid of losing, or better yet, of seeing change. Through her nonetheless very grown up and clever *Sesame Street* analogy, Coady reminds us that our latest monstrous bogeyman, supposedly lowbrow internet culture, is in reality us. She reminds us of our own agency to resist projections of fearful cultural apocalypses that the West has constructed for itself since Gutenberg's printing press ushered in modernity. Coady reminds us of our love, both intellectual and sensual, of books.

The CLC Kreisel Lecture Series confronts questions that concern us all in the specificity of our contemporary experience, whatever our differences. In the spirit of free and honest dialogue, they do so with thoughtfulness and depth as well as humour and elegance, all of which characterize, in one way or another, the nine incredibly talented writers featured so far.

These public lectures set out to honour Professor Henry Kreisel's legacy in an annual public forum. Author, University Professor and Officer of the Order of Canada, Henry Kreisel was born in Vienna into a Jewish family in 1922. He left his homeland for England in 1938 and was interned, in Canada, for eighteen months during the Second World War. After studying at the University of Toronto, he began teaching in 1947 at the University of Alberta, and served as Chair of English from 1961 until 1970. He served as Vice-President (Academic) from 1970 to 1975, and was named University Professor in 1975, the highest scholarly award bestowed on its faculty members by the University of Alberta. Professor Kreisel was an inspiring and beloved teacher who taught generations of students to love literature and was one of the first people to bring the experience of

the immigrant to modern Canadian literature. He died in Edmonton in 1991. His works include two novels, *The Rich Man* (1948) and *The Betrayal* (1964), and a collection of short stories, *The Almost Meeting* (1981). His internment diary, alongside critical essays on his writing, appears in *Another Country: Writings By and About Henry Kreisel* (1985).

The generosity of Professor Kreisel's teaching at the University of Alberta profoundly inspires the CLC in its public outreach, research pursuits, and continued commitment to the ever-growing richness and diversity of Canada's writings. The Centre embraces Henry Kreisel's no less than pioneering focus on the knowledge of one's own literatures. The CLC seeks and fosters a better understanding of a complicated and difficult world, which literature can reimagine and perhaps even transform.

The Canadian Literature Centre was established in 2006, thanks to the leadership gift of the noted Edmontonian bibliophile, Dr. Eric Schloss.

MARIE CARRIÈRE

Director, Canadian Literature Centre

Edmonton, December 2015

NOTE

1. Christine Sokaymoh Frederick, introduction to *A Tale of Monstrous Extravagance: Imagining Multilingualism*, by Tomson Highway (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press and Canadian Literature Centre, 2015), xiii.