



Am I Alone Here?: Notes on Living to Read and Reading to Live

Peter Orner

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Peter Orner reads and writes wherever he finds himself—in a hospital cafeteria, a canoe in northern Minnesota, the Las Vegas Cafe in Albania, or on a bus in Haiti. Stories have always been his lifeblood, as they are the only way he has been able to make sense of a chaotic life. His father's death, his divorce, an unexpected pregnancy—all are seen, one way or another, through the lens of literature. The result is what Orner calls "a book of unlearned criticism that stumbles into memoir."

Among the writers Orner addresses in these essays are Isaac Babel and Zora Neale Hurston, both of whom told their truths and were silenced; Franz Kafka, who professed loneliness but actually had a far busier social life than Orner; Robert Walser, who spent the last twenty-three years of his life in a Swiss insane asylum, "working" at being crazy; and Juan Rulfo, who practiced silence. Also lauded are Virginia Woolf, Eudora Welty, Yasunari Kawabata, Saul Bellow, Mavis Gallant, John Edgar Wideman, Vaclav Havel, Gina Berriault, William Trevor, and the poet Herbert Morris, about whom almost nothing is known.

Hovering over *Am I Alone Here?* is Peter Orner's eccentric late father, who he kept at a distance and now mourns. The book is also an elegy for the end of a marriage, as well as a celebration of the possibility of renewal. At once personal and panoramic, *Am I Alone Here?* conveys the absolutely necessary place of stories in Orner's life, which will inspire readers to return to the essential stories of their own lives.

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