

## **In the age of YouTube, it may be time to sit back and enjoy a book**

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A not so subtle series of changes has crept into my evenings recently. These changes, both exciting and occasionally unsettling, have pushed me to reflect about how I use my limited “leisure time.”

My hunch is that I am not alone in this development, and that readers within the broad range of my age group may identify with me.

I used quote marks around the words at the end of that first paragraph up there for a reason. Nowadays it seems tough indeed to draw a line between time for leisure and time for work. No matter what we may do for a while after the sun goes down, many of us toss in another half hour or more of work-related e-mail before drawing the curtains on the day.

I am in some ways suspicious of high technology. I see it as a potential culprit.

YouTube, which enables us to zoom back into history and in a sense relive our collective past, seems a bit like an invader to me. I admit it is I who choose to click the icons, I who open the door and step inside its rooms. But, oh! Once inside the grip of YouTube, how difficult it is to step away! Facebook, with its opportunities for chats and photo exchanges with loved ones any time of day, is similar.

Two treasured alumnae dragged me, kicking and screaming, into the world of Facebook in the summer of 2009. Fooling around there soon began to chew up my late evenings. A year later, I wandered rather much by accident (like the proverbial babe in the woods) into the incredibly vast library of YouTube. Things immediately got worse.

Once upon a time, you see, when the world was simpler, I was truly happy and content to read my leisure time away at the end of the day.

Having squeezed in as much class preparation and as many academic chores as possible from 8 o'clock in the morning till 9 or so at night, and having stolen time earlier for physical exercise, I used to plop down in a chair and read my heart out. I enjoyed anything that was well written. Fielding, DeFoe, Poe, Updike, McBain, Hiassen, Parker, Leonard and company all satisfied my soul. This comforting routine changed unexpectedly, and the change, I fear, was not for the better.

It all snuck up on me when I wasn't looking. There was no specific moment when I made a conscious decision to put my books aside and turn on my computer. In the beginning, it seemed so harmless, so attractive, so truly beguiling.

Over the past recent months, I confess YouTube has been pretty fascinating.

The music of the 60s and 70s - - Peter Paul and Mary, Simon and Gar, the old Dylan. Depending on your age, you know what I mean. Linda Ronstadt and “Blue Bayou,” right? The same held for American baseball and highlights of the national pastime . . . Mantle and Maris, Yogi Berra, Collavito and Bunning (before he went to Washington.) Did someone say “politics”? The folly of the Vietnam War, YouTube coverage of Nelson Rockefeller, Goldwater, the Kennedys, Nixon, McGovern. Lately I've been switching between the current Dylan, the aging Frank Sinatra, and concerts with fresh versions of “The Sounds of Silence” and “Diamonds on the Soles of her Shoes.”

I realized just this week, however, that I am no longer as happy as I once was as a late night reader.

A lesson I am learning is that, if I am not careful, I may well let the pleasures of high technology take over my life at the end of the day. I don't want that to happen. I've had my little fling, and it was great, but it's time now to go back home to my books.

It may be different for others, but looking at my computer screen encourages me not to think and analyze, but to become more passive. I've become lulled, you see, seduced, really, into a habit of quietly watching, browsing, and absorbing. I've become a sponge.

Forgive me, YouTube, my new friend, for taking a leave for now. I've been missing late night entertainment more nourishing than yours. I aim to go back to it, back to my unrepentant and eclectic ways, back to my “Blue Bayou,” back to “Old Friends,” back to living “My Way.” (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

### **Talking Point**

1) This column focuses on a comparison between reading for a hour or so at the end of the day and surfing the Internet, using YouTube and Facebook and so on. Are you comfortable with your use of time at night before you go to bed? Do you ever have the feeling that YouTube or your computer controls you?

2) When you enter your Internet world at night or on weekends, do you think and analyze what you are hearing and seeing, or just passively "watch" and "hear" it? Are you a sponge to soak up what the media and computer screen give you?

3) Is reading important in your life? Why or why not?