Dear Ms. Barnebey

In my sister’s words: “I am not a reader but I am a reader”. I won’t read or will read little for a month and then I will read an entire book in a day. I have not yet ascertained the reason for this, and even in defiance to my efforts to tame and regularize my reading schedule, this variability remains a part of who I am. I spent approximately sixty-five percent of the summer slowly making my way through the half physics half ego stroking book *The Black Hole War* by Leonard Susskind but upon finishing that, read the latter half of *i, Robot* by Isaac Asimov in the span of a couple days. I had read the first half of *i, Robot* slowly at the beginning of summer and recognized it as a book I would enjoy but just couldn’t manage to enter the trance -like state of reading for hours on end.

In as such as a large section of my summer was spent without the burning drive to seclude one’s self in a corner under a blanket and travel to the far-off lands contained in thousands of small marks on a stack of paper, I did not read as much as I would like to claim I have. Only a few full books can proclaim their exclusive place upon my attached list.

Despite the limited number of full books, there were many of other types of texts that don’t quite have the legitimacy and length to make the list that I still read or skimmed. Namely, these fall into two categories: news articles and technical papers or other works. I have been on the search for a good RSS feed for news and, although it is far from satisfactory, I have moved primarily to the default news app that comes with iPhones. The convenience factor is just too great to ignore. Often when I have a few free minutes (and an internet connection), I will pop open the app and scroll through the headlines briefly skimming or reading interesting articles. Not the full rigorous reading with fact checking and cross-comparison that news and current events should be treated to, but it’s something and I hope to improve upon it moving forward.

The more technical pieces align with my interest in all things computer science and space along with some of the more interesting dimensions of the wide world of maths. While I can’t understand everything (or even most) of the content contained within academic papers and essays, I quite easily fall down the rabbit’s hole of the never-ending citations and references that come with such works. Read the abstract, skim the hard sections, get confused at diagrams, google a couple of aleph nulls of terms, click on a citation with an interesting name, repeat, and it’s one-thirty in the morning and you’re reading about a tea making bot walking over a baby in a paper on AI safety and nothing that was set to be achieved that evening was given a thought. While I can’t claim to have a more than cursory grasp on most anything that I come across in my journey down to wonderland, I find the exposure to how complex some simple ideas can become quite enlightening. There’s a moment when you are reading a short paper that seems like it was written in a different language, and you realize that it in fact was written in a different language that’s quite startling and leads to some rather interesting thoughts in the wee hours of the morning.

Onto some of the proper books that I read, I am drawn to science fiction or anything related to science. *The Black Hole War* that I mentioned earlier is about the debate that occurred in physics about whether black holes destroy information. Without going into the physics and thermal-dynamics that I don’t know if I understand, if black holes did destroy information, a lot of what we think we know would have to be rethought and the core principles of most of physics would be wrong. Turns out black holes don’t destroy information due to black hole complementary, or at least that’s the currently accepted conjecture. Physicists can be a fickle group. This book was especially hard to get through because of the author’s rather prodigious ego, there was only so much personal glorification that I could take at one time. On the fiction side of science, *i, Robot* is, as I am sure you know, a fascinating look at a projection of what the future could look like from the past. It really gives insight into how something that is so core to modern society, in this case digital computers, was not the obvious path for the past into the future. What we now project and predict will be one of the great advances of the future may be entirely eclipsed by something else that no one ever dreamed of.

To be a bit late to the party, I finally got around to reading *1984* which I sincerely doubt needs an introduction. Like the latter part of *i, Robot*¸ the first 50 pages or so were read over the course of 6 weeks and the remaining within the span of 72 hours. Who even is consistency anyways? All the while reading it, *1984* constantly reminded me of one of my all-time favorite books, *Brave New World*. They seem to be based on similar premises except portrayed in very contrasting manners. Both had a character that was slightly outside the social standard that then meet another character who was very much outside the social standard resulting in an excision from that society for those characters. Of course, *1984* is placed in a dystopia and *Brave New World* on the very surface appears to be a utopia, but they carry a lot of the same message about society.

Another couple of books that had very similar premises, although this time about mathematical thinking, are *How Not to Be Wrong* by Jordan Ellenberg and *Innumeracy* by John Allen Paulos. While I started them both before the summer and skipped parts that were redundant and overlapping, together they held a lot of examples where the majority of the populations’ natural response is wrong and the maths behind it. Unfortunately, neither had a profound thesis or the high probability to cause a paradigm shift among its readers. I wouldn’t recommend them to anyone who is not already interested in mathematical thinking and logic examples.

Moving forward in my reading, I have a few goals. The first of which is to go back to reading a physical newspaper every morning as I eat breakfast as I stopped this practice during the summer. Secondly, I hope to somehow find a way to normalize my reading to increase my total throughput, although I may need divine intervention to achieve this one. Thirdly, I hope to broaden the scope of my readings to include works that will contribute to my own persuasive writing skill. I imagine these may include speeches, memoirs, opinion pieces, and many other types of writing. Persuasive writing, be it a speech to peers, a publicly posted opinion piece, or a message to a future boss, is the form of writing that I am most interested in no small part due to my last year’s English class with Mr. Zeddies. Never before then had I actually enjoyed an English class instead of merely getting through it, and I believe and hope I will continue to enjoy English.

Looking forward to a wonderful two years,

Ty Marking

Reading List:

* *The Black Hole War*
* *1984*
* *i, Robot*
* *Innumeracy*
* *How Not to Be Wrong*
* Many news articles from many sources (including LA Times, The New York Times, The Economist, etc.) via an RSS feed