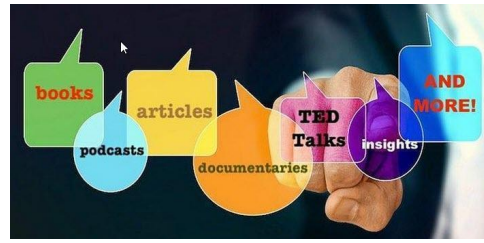


Synopsis 360°

September 7, 2021

Session Preview



Where Content and Community Connect

“The Horror and the Necessity of Distraction” – a conversation about Tony Hoagland’s 1992 poem, “In the Land of Lotus Eaters”.

I discovered “In the Land of Lotus Eaters” in *Atlantic* magazine shortly after *Sweet Ruin*, the collection of Tony Hoagland’s poems in which it appears, was published. I bought the book as soon as I could find it. I was taken with “In the Land of Lotus Eaters” immediately. I’m not beyond thinking about it yet. I don’t intend to be beyond thinking about it ever. It’s too rich. It’s too insightful. It’s too true in what it conveys.

Now, 29 years after the publication of the poem, there’s endless talk about *the moment*. “You have to live in the moment.” “You have to be in the moment.” What does that even mean? Do all moments deserve being in or living in equally? Are all moments equally bearable? Are all moments necessarily bearable? Are some things so legitimately horrible that being in the moments in which they occur is something like masochism? Should there be lines between what we should and shouldn’t bear, between what we can and cannot be reasonably expected to bear? If so, where should they be?

Join us at **NOON EST on September 7** for the next installment of Synopsis 360°. We’ll talk about our interpretations of Hoagland’s poem. We’ll explore the ways in which some of us might interpret the poem differently from the way others interpret it. We’ll share thoughts on the various ways in which we distract ourselves and why. We’ll talk about what we overlook or miss out on by being absentmindedly distracted— and what we avoid by being deliberately distracted. And we’ll try to figure out what to do about it ... if anything.

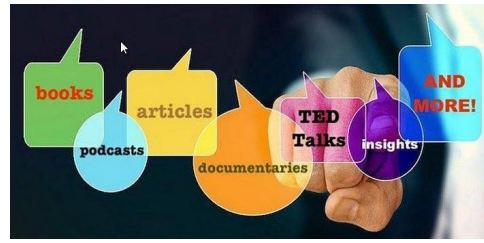
Prepare:

You’ll find the poem [here](#). Please try to read it and give it a little thought before the session.

Extend:

- You can find *Sweet Ruin* [here](#).
- You can find more of Tony Hoagland’s poetry and other writings [here](#).
- You can read more about Tony Hoagland [here](#), including the fact that he passed away in 2018, a fact of which I was unaware until doing some research for this session.
- You can watch Tony Hoagland read some his poetry [here](#) and [here](#).

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Consider:

1. Generally speaking, what did you think of the poem?
2. How did you interpret it?
3. Hoagland wrote, “I remember dying for a drink about the time my grandmother was ready to say her final words into someone's ear.” Was he wrong for being distracted that way?
4. Hoagland wrote, “I guess I'm just the kind of person who needs to be continually reminded about love and brevity, about diligence and loyalty to pain.” Do we have to be loyal to pain?
5. Hoagland wrote, “Maybe my attention is just permanently damaged, never coming back from too much television, too much silly talk.” Is he being too hard on himself? Is having to be reminded about love and brevity, about diligence and loyalty to pain necessarily a matter of damaged attention? Could it something else? Self-preservation? Ignorance?
6. In September of 2021, given all that’s going on in the world, how much distraction do we need? How much distraction should we tolerate? How much distraction should we deliberately engage in?