

Ethnicity of author changes readers' perspective

By Sunili Govinnage, Washington Post

In 2014, I decided that for the entire year, I would not read books written by white authors. My goal was to address the reading practices I developed growing up in Australia, where white authors have dominated the literary world. My high school reading list was filled with the “classics” – Shakespeare, Austen, the Brontes, Euripides – and well-known modern writers such as Margaret Atwood and T.S. Eliot. After school, my pleasures came from bestseller lists, which also were filled with Anglo names: John Grisham, Peter Carey, Hilary Mantel. Then I read “Questions of Travel” by Sri Lanka-born Michelle de Kretser. It moved me so deeply that I decided to evaluate the literature I was reading. I quit my standard diet to expose myself to new perspectives.

But it was much harder than I expected to discover books by nonwhite authors. The resources most readers use to find good literature left me with all the usual suspects. White authors reign in book reviews, bestseller lists, literary awards and Amazon.com recommendations.

In a survey of *New York Times* articles published in 2011, author and cultural commentator Roxane Gay discovered that nearly 90 percent of the reviewed books were authored by white writers. Among Amazon editors' top 20 picks of 2014, just three authors were minorities.

Read the whole story