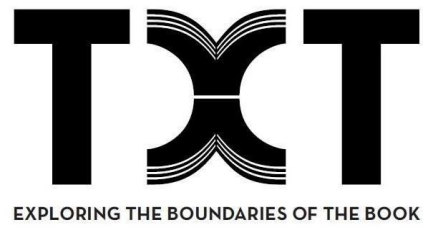


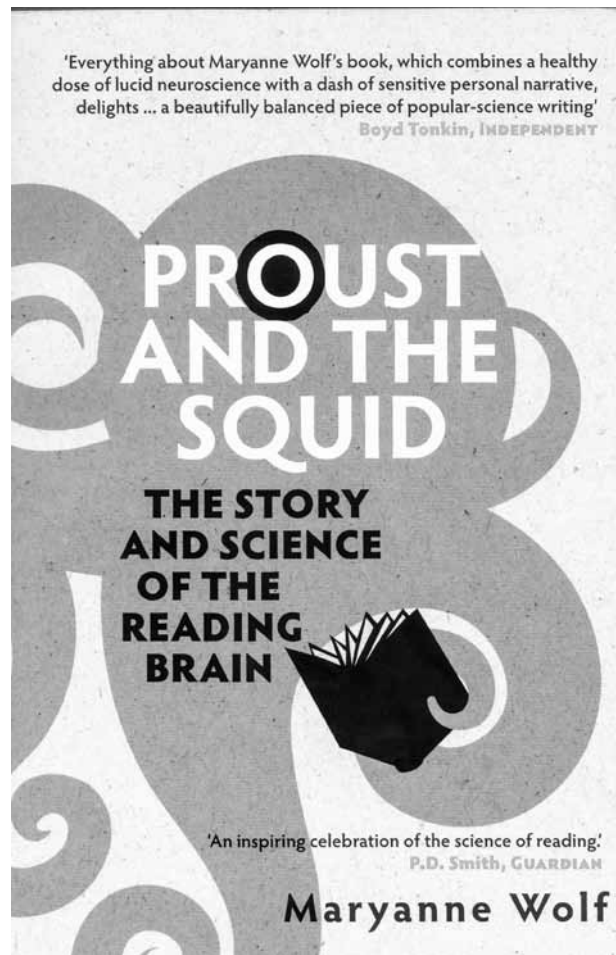
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Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain by Maryanne Wolf

MARJOLEIN DE VOS

The odd title of this non-fiction work hides an extensively researched book that is very understandable and well written. The reading human brain is something that has kept neuroscientists fascinated for many years. As technology advanced, theories about how people read and learn to read evolved. Imaging technology especially was an important step in this process; enabling researchers to get an inside look into the workings of our brains.

The scope of Proust and the Squid covers not only on the present, but also discusses the history and science of reading. The book is divided into three parts. First Wolf discusses in a clear way how human beings devised the first writing systems and how this relates to reading. These first chapters are an interesting and a quite complete overview of the development of writing systems and the various forms it assumed from cuneiform and the Incan 'quipus' to our own alphabet. The second part explains how children learn to read and problems that can occur in this process. Wolf refers to a number of, seemingly unrelated, aspects that can have a significant effect on learning a language. The third and last section is about reading problems, such as dyslexia. This does not just describe how this reading deficiency works; it gives

interesting insights into the causes and possible solutions. Proust and the Squid does not have one research question or thesis that is argued for, rather it explores what is known and how it has changed which makes it an engaging and well-written work. Maryanne Wolf shows that she researched the subject well and has years of experience in this field. Wolf's book is also a good starting point for understanding in what ways the digital world might be changing our brains. Although the work centres on the neuroscience of reading, it is still very accessible. The quotations, which contain references to literature and popular culture as well as case studies, place the subject it into a wider framework of culture and history. Moreover, the accompanying illustrations by Catherine Stoodley add further clarification.

Maryanne Wolf works as a professor at Tufts University in Boston. Proust and the Squid is her second non-fiction book, published in 2007 by HarperCollins. This review concerns the paperback edition published by Icon Books in 2008.

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