

## In Praise of Retreat: Finding Sanctuary in the Modern World

**Kirsteen MacLeod**

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Kirsteen MacLeod's *In Praise of Retreat* is a body, mind, and spirit book that invites refuge away from the noise.

In today's hyperconnected climate, wherein the idea of stepping away is unthinkable, this book calls stepping back an act of rebellion. This sense of brashness and determination ushers in the book's exploration of the theory and practice of retreat, showcasing the deep, nourishing potential of time away.

The book examines the historical precedent for retreat, covering hermits, monasteries, and pilgrimages and drawing inspiration from the words of Romantic poets Henry David Thoreau and William Butler Yeats. Then it proceeds to modern incarnations of stepping away, including yoga and meditation retreats and camping in national parks. Along the way, MacLeod shares her own experiments with retreat. Both elements of the book—research and personal narrative—showcase the quest for wisdom, quiet, and rest. The balance of the two is intellectual, visceral, and inviting.

Narrated with a touch of warmth that is balanced with the detachment that comes from self-awareness and solitude, the book's pace is smooth, and its diction is beautiful. Engaging intellectual curiosity pervades the book's historical elements; its storytelling has a strong sense of place, with reverence for nature and meditation that finds deep resonance within inner lives. All of this is accomplished without glossing over challenging externals (bugs, boredom, and uncomfortable sleeping arrangements among them).

This balanced work eschews polarized thinking about retreat and engagement, and about mental and physical health. While it focuses on antidotes, the book also examines the perils of modern life, including distressing statistics about how noise affects health. The result is a considered choice to step away, rather than just running away.

*In Praise of Retreat* issues a deep, thoughtful, and experienced invitation to one's mind, body, and spirit.

MELISSA WUSKE (March / April 2021)

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