

Bookshelf

Here is a list of the most dog-eared books on my shelf. I have included books that astonished me, books that inspired me, and books that taught me how to write.

—Charlotte Rogan

Dubliners by James Joyce: Still gives me chills.

The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot: Most writing attempts too little—not this.

A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess: Great movie, great book.

First Love and Other Sorrows and *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode* by Harold Brodkey: Depth of moment; language with meaning and surface.

Dracula by Bram Stoker: One of the first books of my adult life to knock my socks off.

Slaughterhouse Five and *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut: Ditto.

Adam Bede by George Eliot: Deep characters with interesting psychologies.

The Russians: *Crime and Punishment*, *Anna Karenina*, *Fathers and Sons*.

The Brontës: *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*.

A Sport and a Pastime and *Solo Faces* by James Salter: Polished jewels—extraordinary pacing, beautiful writing.

Hunger by Knut Hamsun: Head-spinning transitions between despair and mania.

Knulp by Hermann Hesse: Simple, elegant, meaning of a life.

First Love and Other Shorts and *Texts for Nothing* by Samuel Beckett: Spare, no plot, makes you think—try it.

Amateurs by Donald Barthelme: Brilliant stories with bizarre logic and strange juxtapositions.

Death Comes for the Archbishop by Willa Cather: Rich language, astonishing imagination.

The Magic Mountain by Thomas Mann: For a long time my favorite book.

The Kiss of the Spider Woman by Manuel Puig: All dialogue and all astonishing.

Life is Elsewhere by Milan Kundera: The book completely lives up to the title.

The Sleepwalkers by Hermann Broch: Disintegration of values after WWII, but applies today.

The Death of Virgil by Hermann Broch: Open to any page and read for language.

The Killer Inside Me by Jim Thompson: Incredible 1950's era thriller about a sociopath; cult classic.

The Portrait of a Lady by Henry James: Read for dialogue.

Going After Cacciato and *In the Lake of the Woods* by Tim O'Brien: Haunting; for readers and writers.

Despair by Vladimir Nabokov: Claustrophobic exploration of point of view and how perceptions are all we have.

The Mountain Lion and *Collected Stories* by Jean Stafford: Zingy language and characters that pop off the page.

The Watcher and Other Stories by Italo Calvino: Wonderful sentences; drama in the every day.

Lost in the Funhouse by John Barth: Sheer originality.

The Virgin Suicides by Geoffrey Eugenides: Nobody understands anybody else.

The Power and the Glory by Graham Greene: Powerful story about missionary in Mexico; the best Greene.

The Trial by Franz Kafka: Arbitrariness of law; man's darkness in the face of life.

A Distant Episode by Paul Bowles: Violent, shocking, great.

Waiting for the Barbarians by J.M. Coetzee: Ditto.

The Victim by Saul Bellow: Fabulous characterization, claustrophobic paranoia.

The Butcher Boy by Patrick McCabe: Schizophrenic boy; amazing shifts of mood.

All the Pretty Horses and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy: Violent and beautiful search for connection to the land (*Horses*) and people (*Road*).

The Queen of the Tambourine by Jane Gardam: Affecting portrayal of English woman through letters from meddlesome neighbor; quirky, funny, bleak.

An Experiment in Love by Hilary Mantel: Complex structure, brilliant language.

Corregidora by Gayl Jones: Powerful, brutal story of the legacy of slavery.

Lives of a Cell by Lewis Thomas: Eye-opening essays on a macroscopic view of cell biology.

Rebellion by Joseph Roth: Disconnected quiriness that stems from repressive regimes.

Waiting by Ha Jin: Inherent goodness of characters juxtaposed to absurdity of man-made rules; psychological damage done by Cultural Revolution.

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe: Loss of the old ways in Nigeria; very affecting.

Stones for Ibarra by Harriet Doerr: Americans in Mexico; reminiscent of *The Power and the Glory*.

Interview with the Vampire by Anne Rice: Sensual, almost purple comment on nature of life and mortality.

The Mysteries of Pittsburgh by Michael Chabon: Spectacular writing, likeable characters.

White Noise by Don DeLillo: Language and dialogue and absurdity, but also humanity and warmth.

In the New World: Growing up with America from the Sixties to the Eighties by Lawrence Wright: Memoir about growing up in Dallas, rings bell after bell.

Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight by Alexandra Fuller: Wonderful and funny memoir of African childhood.

The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga: Seamy underside of India; terrific character development.

The Boy Who Couldn't Sleep and Never Had To by D.C. Pierson: Ingenious coming of age story about social outcast.

The Confessions of Edward Day by Valerie Martin: Read for characterization and suspense.

In a Free State by V.S. Naipaul: My first Naipaul—what took me so long?

The Rehearsal by Eleanor Catton: A strange and compelling novel of performers and voyeurs.

David Foster Wallace: Start with the essays, then try a novel—that's what I'm doing.

Housekeeping and *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson: Gorgeous language and affecting meditation on life.

Remainder by Tom McCarthy: Brain damage and no unnecessary explanations.

The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry and *Perfect* by Rachel Joyce: The ordinary is extraordinary in Joyce's hands.

The First Man by Albert Camus: The key to everything else Camus wrote.

Nausea by Jean Paul Sartre: Read for philosophy and language.

Zone One by Colson Whitehead: Astonishing powers of observation, no plot.

The Stockholm Octavo by Karen Engelmann: A brilliant construction as much as an intriguing read.

Smilla's Sense of Snow and *The Elephant Keeper's Children* by Peter Høeg: Two sides of this writer's amazing brain.

The Sense of an Ending by Julian Barnes: Very subtle mystery—stay with it.

T.C. Boyle: I have read *The Tortilla Curtain* and *East is East*, but I am guessing they are all pure manic genius.

Tenth of December by George Saunders: Laugh out loud; more imagination in one book than in a shelf of more usual fare.

The Appointment by Herta Müller: Late discovery for me; no wonder she won a Nobel Prize.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* by Mohsin Hamid: Fascinating structure and POV.

Fallen Land by Patrick Flanery: Literary thriller with drop dead gorgeous writing; nails the American nightmare.

Agaat by Marlene Van Niekerk: Long, complex; a giant of a writer.

The Good Doctor by Damon Galgut: Undercurrent of horror; reminiscent of Graham Greene.

The Blue Fox and *The Whispering Muse* by Sjón: Lyrical gems.

My Struggle by Karl Ove Knausgaard: Big themes approached through minute detail—stunning.

Dirt by David Vann: Vann creates an entire psychological world, then shocks the hell out of you.

Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk by Ben Fountain: Astonishing language and pace—and funny!

Stoner by John Williams: Stoner carries on—don't read if you are already depressed.

Woodcutters by Thomas Bernhard: One candidate for best novel of the 20th century.

The Patrick Melrose novels by Edward St. Aubyn: There are 5 of these, thank god, all laugh-out-loud funny and shockingly sad.

To Rise Again at a Decent Hour by Joshua Ferris: Dentist confronts identity theft, almost finds meaning—funny, thoughtful, startling sentences.

The Dog by Joseph O’Neill: Lawyer confronts absurdity and globalization; read for the sentences alone.

Fourth of July Creek by Smith Henderson: Gorgeous, interesting plot; think Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy.

Paris Nocturne by Patrick Modiano: About memory and longing, moments of warmth and safety.

Cloud Atlas by David Mitchell: Manic exuberance; Interesting structure.

The Loser by Thomas Bernhard: Classic Bernhard. The slow action of the present enfolds a rush of recollections; no paragraphs.

Martin Dressler by Steven Millhauser: Son of cigar seller builds ever more fanciful worlds.

How I Became A Nun by César Aira: It all starts with an ice cream cone.

A Little Lumpen Novelita by Roberto Bolaño: Shorter and more accessible than *The Savage Detectives*, which is Bolaño's opus.

Lincoln in the Bardo by George Saunders: the death of young Willie Lincoln inspires a moving and unbelievably creative story of living, loving, and letting go.

Night of Fire by Colin Thubron: The mysteriously interconnected lives of the tenants of an apartment building flash before their eyes. Thubron searches for meaning and damned if he doesn't find it.

The Great Santini by Pat Conroy: An abusive father you can love. Read for the dialogue as the family members tease, encourage, and bully each other.