

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

For more information go to www.charlotterogan.com

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.