Appreciating American Classics
MY JOURNEY

Classic Books

A classic Alcott tale in every sense. Alcott is enjoyable to read but never quite fully captivating, even when the Marches are going through a tragedy. The book itself is a library discard that I picked up for a quarter in middle school.

An excellent book exploring class separation. It’s unfortunate that more people don’t read Buck. The book itself is a neat sort of pocket book that with just its appearance seemed to draw me to it while browsing through the Book Burrow at the CADL.

Buck, Pearl S. The Good Earth. New York: Simon and Shuster. 1975
Buck’s most famous work and a Pulitzer Prize winner. A story I enjoyed but I think my favorite part is Buck’s foreword. “I am always glad when one of my books can be put into an inexpensive edition, because I like to think that any people who wish to read them can do so. Surely books ought to be within the reach of everybody.” My copy was a garage sale find that I loaned to my friend before he went to China for the summer.

Fiction or nonfiction? That is the question. In terms of a page-turner it might be second to none. Had to read it twice to enjoy the superb use of language as well. This copy was attained when I was fortunate enough to take an IAH where this was required reading.

A riveting tale of fear. Awesome quote from H.G Wells in the beginning: “Stephen Crane was, beyond dispute, the best writer of our generation.” A CADL find as well, in pretty good shape for a 55 year-old paperback.

A book I should reread because I might have not fully comprehended how it was set in the American West, but so much different then the one Louis L’amour depicted. The copy itself is neat to me because it was a book my mother bought for class when she went to MSU.

Dana, R.H. *Two Years Before the Mast*. New York: Rainbow. 1946

Classic tale of the sea. Sometimes a struggle considering it was first published 170 years ago. This is a nice hardcover given to me by my grandmother.


America’s original transcendentalist shares his thoughts. Very interesting in terms of trying to apply to the modern world. A nice hardcover I found at the ELPL.


I was recently turned on to Faulkner by a friend and have to say I find him compelling. This is a terrific story and he supposedly wrote it in six weeks. My copy is an ELPL find, and is in remarkable shape for a 45-year-old paperback.


Similar tale to Gatsby in terms of confused love life. I don’t know how fair it is to read and criticize unfinished works, so I’m going to avoid diving deeper. The first of two nice Fitzgerald hard covers that I picked up at a garage sale.


Everyone complains about being forced to read Fitzgerald in school but in my eyes he has a wonderful touch with the American language. This copy is the latter of the two Fitzgerald’s that I picked up at a garage sale.

A play I’ve read and seen. As a white kid growing up in Suburbia it made me a little more aware that some people struggled through life. Tremendously sad that Hansberry died so young. This copy features pictures from the movie. A yard sale find.


Harte was the one of the first to write about life in the west. Very good reading, especially the title story. Also intriguing is Twain’s dislike of Harte. This copy was acquired at Goodwill.


Full of symbolism, intrigue and an introduction fearsome to dissuade even the bravest of readers, the Scarlet Letter was the bane of my A.P. English class. I enjoyed the story even though the writing was, at times, a little wordy. My copy is the one I purchased for this class.


The only book I know of where a review of it might be more famous then the actual book. When Poe reviewed it in 1842 he attempted to define the genre of the short story. My favorite “tale” is The Sister Years. A little wordy, but still relevant 160 years after publishing. This copy was a DeWitt library book sale discovery.


After reading hundreds of authors, I have not seen anyone with a writing style that is as frustrating and rewarding as Hemingway’s. He always leaves me wanting to know more, yet enjoying that I don’t. Not my favorite of his, but still a superb book. One of a few Scribner’s from the mid 60’s that I acquired from a neighbor.

My favorite book of all time. What more can I say? Another Scribner I received from a neighbor.


I think O. Henry, felon or not, is an underrated author, the master of the unexpected twist in short stories. This is a thoroughly enjoyable collection, which I acquired at a used bookstore in Ann Arbor.


If I have a knack for finding a certain American author’s books it would have to be O. Henry. This five-book set is in pristine shape and has a nice lithograph inside the book. I should have had to pay a princely sum for such a fine collection, but an antique dealer was practically giving them away.


The youngest book in my collection, it is a classic in my mind. Sad at almost every turn, it still somehow conveys hope for the human condition. My copy is a first edition paperback that was in a “free pile” by the side of the road.

James, Henry. The Golden Bowl. New York: Grove. 1962

Quite the story. James’ last major work. I picked up this copy while vacationing in Florida.


Henry James has a sort of mastery of the novel. This is just another example of excellent work. Probably my favorite piece of his. My copy is a fifty-year-old paperback that was found at the CADL.

I just can’t seem to get enough of James. This copy is a wonderful 60-year-old hardcover complete with a few relatively creepy illustrations; this was acquired at an auction.


A great movie and an even better book, I can’t help feel disappointed that this was her only novel. Her relationship with Capote is also interesting to me. This copy was purchased at the 7th grade bookfair in DeWitt.


A funny/sad look at a man’s life. Also enjoy that it is dedicated to another of my favorite authors, Edith Wharton. I feel Lewis gets overlooked. My copy is a hardback acquired at the ELPL book sale.


A unique story about a white man who discovers he has black heritage. Caused quite a controversy in 1947. I discovered this copy w/dust jacket at the Book Burrow.


Less known then some of London’s other works, this is my favorite. I found this copy, which is in great shape, at an antique mall.


A nice contrast to *Call of the Wild*, it is a great “read in an afternoon” book. This copy was an ELPL find.

Mailer’s longest work is just another example of fine writing by a man who won the Pulitzer twice. A page-turner by a gifted author. This copy is another CADL find.

**Melville, Herman. Billy Budd and Other Tales. New York: Magnum. 1970**

While not having much use for the “other tales” Billy Budd remains one of my favorite short stories. A tragic story. My copy was acquired when I took an IAH class that let us read this.

**Melville, Herman. Moby Dick. New York: Book League. 1940**

Critics say that this is the greatest American novel of the 19th century, and Melville’s reward was to fade into obscurity and to only achieve recognition after his death. I enjoyed it after reading it when I was old enough to understand more then half the words. This beautiful old hardcover was given to me by my grandmother.


A great play illustrating how mob mentality sometimes takes over. I got to read this in high school.

**Norris, Frank. The Octopus. Cambridge: Houghton. 1958**

A book I probably never would have read or heard of if I didn’t own the comic first. Classic tale of David and Goliath set in the old west. This book was found at the book burrow and is in great condition for being a 50 year-old paperback.

**Norris Frank. The Pit. New York: Doubleday. 1903 1st Edition**

The second part of an intended trilogy, this is a book that I recently had the fortune of finding at a library book sale. It is the oldest book in my collection. Though part of the same intended trilogy as The Octopus, it remains very different tale.

**O’Connor, Flannery. 3 by. New York: Signet. 1961**
Andrew Friend 7

This edition contains three of her short stories; including the famous *A Good Man is Hard to Find*. I like her writing style. I wish she hadn’t died so young. This copy is stamped with USPS Auction on the inside, and was a CADL find.


An excellent collection of all of Poe’s major works. Spooky reading even today. My favorite is The Cask of Amontillado. I’ve had this as long as I can remember and appreciate it more every time I open it.


It’s amazing how many people don’t know the movie is based on this superb book. Maybe a little too much sex, drugs and violence for some conventional critics, but definitely a modern classic to me. An ELPL find.


The story of Jody and Flag may be the biggest tearjerker in the history of American literature. Wonderful does not even begin to describe this book. Another Scribner I acquired from a neighbor.


I thought I would include this because it might not be a conventional American classic, but to me it is easily a classic. I don’t know why I like sad stories so much but this is a real gem in that category. I picked up this copy from Goodwill on my way to work one particular Sunday and was fortunate enough to have enough time to read it.


I felt this novel had a little more humor then the rest of Steinbeck’s works and was almost let down by this. He still paints an excellent picture of California. This is a first edition that somebody was going to discard if I hadn’t shown up at their yard sale.
   Between this and Of Mice and Men Steinbeck constructs two books that can break your heart in an afternoon. Kind of along the same lines as The Yearling with the main characters both, oddly enough, being boys named Jody. A CADL find.

   A book with a message I believe is still relevant even today. The best-selling book of the 19th century after the bible. I think Stowe probably couldn’t imagine topping this so she just didn’t even try. This was a yard sale find.

   I enjoyed Civil Disobedience more then Walden. Any work that inspired Gandhi is surely worth noting. I picked up this copy in Baltimore while on vacation.

   I was always fascinated that Twain, the master of the American story, would write something set in 16th century England. And I think that’s what makes this book more enjoyable. It is another book that has been around my house as long as I can remember.

   A book that I cannot even draw a comparison to. A must read if only for its uniqueness and Vidal’s trickery with words. I purchased this with the intent of it being a quick easy read and was glad to be disappointed.

The best selling American novel until *Gone with the Wind*, *blessed* by the pope, written by a Union General, and the basis of one of the greatest movies of all-time. The story surrounding the book is possibly more compelling then the story in the book. It is a great story, nonetheless. Acquired at an antique mall, this book is still in pretty good shape for being 100 years old.

**Warren, Robert Penn.** *All The King’s Men.* New York: Bantam. 1966

One of my favorite books. A story of a little man whose life is ruined by power. Based on the life of Huey Long. I haven’t seen the movie and would never want to. An extremely powerful book. My copy was picked up at the old Capital City Comics in Lansing.

**Wharton, Edith.** *Ethan Frome.* New York: Scribner. Undated

I wish nobody had told me how bad *Ethan Frome* was. That way I would have read it earlier and told them how wrong they were. What a story. This copy was a CADL find.


A unique collection from a man I thought was a writer of children’s books. His piece on Walden is humorous to say the least. A book I picked up by chance at a yard sale.


Beautiful use of the English language is what could sum up Wilder’s book. Almost a novella, but it seems so much more. This book was given to me by a friend.

CADL= Capital Area District Library.
ELPL= East Lansing Public Library
Classics Illustrated

Cooper, James Fennimore. The Last of the Mohicans. #4 1961
Melville, Herman. Moby Dick. #5 1962
Stowe, Harriet Beecher. Uncle Tom’s Cabin. #15 1953
Twain, Mark. The Prince and the Pauper. #29 1954
Poe, Edgar Allen. Mysteries. #40 1952 (RARE)
Harte, Bret. Western Stories. #62 1957
London, Jack. Sea Wolf. #85 1951 (Original)
London, Jack, The Call of the Wild. #91 1952 (Original)
Crane, Stephen. The Red Badge of Courage. #98 1952 (Original)
Norris, Frank. The Octopus. #159 1960 (Original)