

Appreciating American Classics
MY JOURNEY

Classic Books

Alcott, Louisa May. Little Women. New Jersey: Watermill 1983.

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.

Buck, Pearl S. Portrait of a Marriage. New York: Cardinal. 1961.

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.

Truman Capote. In Cold Blood. New York: Random House. 1994

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.

Crane, Stephen. The Red Badge of Courage. New York: Pocket Books 1954

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.

Cather, Willa. My Antonia. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1954

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.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. The Writings Of. New York: Random House. 1950

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.

Faulkner, William. As I Lay Dying. New York: Random House. 1964

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.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. The Last Tycoon. New York: Scribner's. Undated

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.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott. Tender is the Night. New York: Scribner's. Undated

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.

Hansberry, Lorraine. A Raisin in the Sun. New York: Signet. 1966

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, Bret. The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Stories. New York: Lancer. 1968

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.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The Scarlet Letter. New York: Barnes and Noble. 2003

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.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. Twice Told Tales. Clinton, MA: Airmont. 1965

The only book I know of where a review of it might be more famous than 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.

Hemingway, Ernest. The Old Man and the Sea. New York: Scribner. Undated

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.

Hemingway, Ernest. A Farewell to Arms. New York: Scribner: Undated.

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

Henry, O. The Complete Works of O. Henry Vol II and I. New York: Doubleday. 1953

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.

Henry, O. The Four Million (5 book set). New York: Doubleday 1906-1911

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.

Irving, John. The Cider House Rules. New York: Bantam. 1986 1st Edition PB

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.

James, Henry. The Portrait of a Lady. Boston: Houghton. 1956

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.

James, Henry. The Turn of the Screw. New York: Heritage 1949

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.

Lee, Harper. To Kill a Mockingbird. New York: Warner Books. Undated

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.

Lewis, Sinclair. Babbitt. New York: Harcourt. 1950

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.

Lewis, Sinclair. Kingsblood Royal. New York: Random House. 1947 1st Edition

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.

London, Jack. The Sea Wolf. New York: Grosset and Dunlap. 1913

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

London Jack, White Fang. New York: Scholastic. Undated

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

Mailer, Norman. Harlot's Ghost. New York: Random House. 1991 1st Edition

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 than half the words. This beautiful old hardcover was given to me by my grandmother.

Miller, Arthur. The Crucible. New York: Bantam. 1971

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

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.

Poe, Edgar Allen. Great Tales and Poems. New York: Washington. 1960

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.

Puzo, Mario. The Godfather. New York: Putnam. 1969

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.

Rawlings, Marjorie Kinnan. The Yearling. New York: Scribner. Undated

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.

Segal, Erich. Love Story. New York; Harper and Row. 1970 1st book club edition

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.

Steinbeck, John. Cannery Row. New York: Viking. 1945 1st Edition

I felt this novel had a little more humor than 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.

On the publication page: “THIS EDITION IS PRODUCED IN FULL COMPLIANCE WITH ALL WAR PRODUCTION BOARD CONSERVATION ORDERS.”

Steinbeck, John. *The Red Pony*. New York: Bantam. 1983

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.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. New York: Penguin 1986

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.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden and Civil Disobedience*. New York: Signet. 1980

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

Twain, Mark. *The Prince and The Pauper*. New York: Scholastic. 1961.

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.

Vidal, Gore. *Myra Breckinridge*. New York: Bantam. 1969

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.

Wallace, Lew. *Ben Hur; A Tale of the Christ*. New York: Harper. 1908

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 than 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.

White, E.B. *The Second Tree from the Corner*. New York: Harper and Row. 1965

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.

Wilder, Thornton. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. New York: Washington. 1964

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)