

Atwood, Margaret - *Alias Grace*

A wonderful read up to the end—when Atwood seemed to let the reader down a bit. Great way with the language. Took real circumstances of a murder and turned it into an engaging novel.

Benna, R. Theodore - *Escaping the Coming Retirement Crisis*

Good except for references to praying to god as if the author's logical formulas for calculating your retirement could also require a little voodoo.

Benstock, Shari - *No Gifts From Chance: A Biography of Edith Wharton*

Extremely engaging and informative literary biography of Edith Wharton. Very comprehensive and impartial. Benstock remains clear of her subject and allows the facts to speak for themselves: an affair with Morton Fullerton; Wharton's philanthropic work in France during WWI; twenty-four dependents whom she supported in the last years of her life; forty-eight books, mostly fiction except for some in architecture, memoir. A pioneer. [See The Mount, Edith Wharton's home in Lenox, Massachusetts, under Links.]

Buckley, Chris - *Thank You for Smoking*

"Satire" of smoking issue, but predictable. "Fluff." Cardboard characters. Commercial (they made a film of it).

Caldwell, Joseph - *The Uncle from Rome*

Wonderfully realized novel of opera, Naples, AIDS, the gulf created by loss of lover. Funny. Sad. Beautifully executed. Never heavy handed or manipulative.

Davis, Chris - *Joseph and the Old Man*

Made me angry. Though well-written, it is too obviously Hemingwayesque. Not quite a parody but would make a good entry in the Harry's Bar and Grill competition. Even the title is derivative. Otherwise, the scene at the hotel, the writing itself, and the narrative are finely rendered. ©1986. Perhaps early in the gay male rush to publish fiction. It would not necessarily be publishable today. It might better have been titled *Joseph and the Old Man and the Sea*.

De Moor, Margriet - *First Grey, Then White, Then Blue*

Dutch novel B gave me. Always have trouble reading translations. There is always something that gets lost in the . . . . Nonetheless, I enjoyed it. Somewhat complex. Must re-read.

Ellis, Bret Easton - *The Informers*

Talented writer (*American Psycho*) daring to go where most serious writers won't in order to portray the abject superficiality of our civilization.

Ellison, Ralph - *Invisible Man*

Ellison is a verbal virtuoso.

Faulkner, William - *The Sound and the Fury*

His style and structure are disconcerting to the reader who is unaware. He really needs to be studied to see what he's doing (more than I wish to do right now). The first three sections are written in first person from the viewpoint of three different characters. The fourth section is written in the third person.

Ferro, Robert - *The Family of Max Desir*

Ferro, Robert - *The Blue Star*

A better novel perhaps than *Max Desir*—certainly different in its “fancifulness.” My kind of book: happy ending with a touch of ennui. [Ferro died in 1988.]

Fitzgerald, F. Scott - *The Short Stories of FSF* (Bruccoli ed.)

[Annotations made in text.]

Gann, Ernest K. - *Fate is the Hunter*

Wonderful memoir of an airline pilot. Also author of *The High and the Mighty* (both films, as well). Wonderful descriptions with virtuosity of language (great vocabulary). An excerpt could be used to demonstrate how someone can write quite clearly about things most people know nothing about (flying an airplane). “Fortune” and “fate” are contrasted repeatedly throughout as a fine motif.

Gifford, Barry - *Night People*

Nice structure. Four interrelated novellas as in *Winesberg, Ohio* (Sherwood Anderson). Interesting characters and events.

Glickman, Gary - *Years From Now*

An author who manages to cover three generations in 263 pages through flashback and sort of a montage, giving the reader just enough information to glue the entire thing together. Nice. Exciting writing: “Each time, though, for an instant, I hold that small body in both my hands, and trust that in the nature of things, the faster he goes, the sooner he'll be back in my arms” (263). The last sentence of the novel, a gay man pushing his toddler son on swing. Wonderful depth of poetry in such a

simple scene.

Haley, Alex - *Roots*

A tour de force of its own kind. Astounding information, history we were never taught. The written account of one family's oral history. It reads as if it were a novel, but instead is written as an account of a family's oral history; the story is repeated many times, retold from one generation to an ever-expanding generation (in the tribe one man of each generation is appointed the person to memorize the tribal history so it can be re-told). By the end the reader knows Kunta Kinte's story almost as if it were his/her own family. [Later I read that Haley "plagiarized" portions of the book. I wonder what became of that issue. *Roots* is still a powerful work.]

Herren, Lamar - *The Lies Boys Tell* (1990 AWP novel competition winner)

Well-written. Maudlin subject but handled well. Something missing? (An emotional distance that keeps reader out.)

Holleran, Andrew - *The Beauty of Men*

Bleak but beautiful rendering of a forty-seven year-old man who has buried most of his friends from AIDS deaths and also takes care of his mother (for twelve years) until she dies. Answer to the question why gay men are promiscuous is so great. "Because," he said—thinking, Because sex is wonderful, and who wouldn't want to do it as much as possible? Because sex is ecstasy, and there's no ecstasy left in this civilization anymore. Because we thought penicillin could cure everything. Because people are looking for Love. Because in this society we can't find support for stable partnerships. Because we're ashamed, and seek out sex with a stranger we don't have to say hello to in the street the next day, much less mention at our funerals. Because, because, because, he thought, and then he turned to her and said. "Why do you smoke?" (196).

Page 73: Gatsby allusion is a bit heavy-handed and unnecessary.

Irving, John - *The 158 Pound Marriage*

I've now read six of Irving's books. Very consistent. I thought this early novel would be "immature" in some way, but it was fine: sparse prose, great images, four distinct characters about whom the reader cares a great deal.

Irving, John - *A Prayer for Owen Meany*

I bought this in the early 90s, but I had never got past the first one hundred pages before putting it down. I think it may be his best. Really fine characters. Wonderfully crafted. When Owen does the final "jump," it is a religious experience for the reader (and I'm not religious). I cried. The entire novel falls clattering into neat exactly fitting puzzle pieces. No contrivances, no manipulation

of the reader.

Irving, John - *A Son of the Circus*

As usual I had trouble with the beginning. So Dickensian, in that Irving must give the reader a great deal of information at the beginning to build a foundation for the rest of the novel. Lost me this time.

Irving, John - *Trying to Save Piggy Sneed*

Memoir. Short stories. Homage. I like pretty much anything Irving writes. He writes with such authority that I want to believe everything he says.

Ishiguro, Kazuo - *Remains of the Day*

Enjoyable.

Karr, Mary - *The Liars Club*

The first two-thirds are great, but the last third seems hurried, lacks loving detail used at first. "This was back when [1950s] when women's underwear was like armor: the bra cups were like rocket cones . . ." (28)

"It ain't the heat, it's the stupidity" (42)

McCarthy, Cormac - *All the Pretty Horses*

Very spare prose. Hardly any interior punctuation: no commas, no quotation marks, no apostrophes on contractions—sparse like the land. Excellent novel, especially comes alive as John Grady Cole crosses the border into Mexico.

Mann, Thomas - *Death in Venice*

Had to read again after seeing the film. Such a wonderfully subtle rendering of one's obsession. (cf. *The Beauty of Men*, Andrew Holleran)

Maupin, Armistead - *Tales of the City, More Tales of the City, Further Tales of the City, Babycakes*

All four books are nice, light reading—comparable to soap operas, tongue-in-cheek. Nevertheless, the characters are such that one cares about them enough to read one novel and three sequels.

*Men on Men 5* - David Bergman, editor

Good stories, especially "Fearless" by Jameson Currier

Mogan, Jewell - *Beyond Telling*

Several great stories among a list of very good ones, particularly “Desaparachos.” This one would be great for teaching how to use two points of view in same story. Part of the narrative is told from the POV of the train engineer, and part from the “wetback’s” POV. Also “A Certain Lot or Parcel of Land” and “X and O”.

“See to Appreciate” was not quite as strong. Story is about two lovers who have AIDS. It never seems to get inside the characters. Seems that the author’s pity might intrude a bit on the story.

Monette, Paul - *Afterlife*

Story of three AIDS “widows” who are also doomed (HIV +). Good, yet somehow left me empty (the author’s purpose?).

Ondaatje, Michael - *Running in the Family*

Memoir of Ondaatje’s life and later return to Sri Lanka. Hauntingly beautiful and funny. Lala’s sliding breast story is hilariously poignant.

Porter, Katherine Anne - *Ship of Fools*

I’m not sure I grasp the “importance” of the novel. Is it truly an allegory? It seems unwieldy with regard to its large cast of characters and uneven in quality. [I later read that she wrote the novel over many years, a fact that might account for either of these problems.] Her short stories are pristine, however.

Salvatore, Diane - *Love, Zena Beth*

Good Lesbian fiction (Lambda nominee 1992?)

Shields, David - *Handbook for Drowning*

Great set of short stories, all with the same characters. Instead of being told chronologically, however, the stories jump around in time with different points of view employed.

Simon, Ken - *Pizza Face*

Nice diversion from *Dunces*. Okay but not as good as touted by *PW*.

Simpson, Thomas William - *This Way Madness Lies*

A unique combination of historical fiction, romance, mystery. Commercial yet deeper than most in this category.

Spoto, Donald - *The Kindness of Strangers: The Life of Tennessee Williams*

Biography of TW. Harrowing. His life after 1960 was shit in spite of great wealth (perhaps because of). He drank and drugged himself to death like Hemingway, like Fitzgerald, like Capote, like Inge . . . .

Styron, William - *Sophie's Choice*

Styron, a verbal virtuoso. Words I have never seen before. When I re-read [and I will] I will have to look them up [I'm lazy], all the words I circled [at least 50]. A work in which the title resonates throughout with smaller choices until the final "choice" is revealed to the reader by Sophie. An admirable, admirable work. Tour de force.

Tan, Amy - *The 100 Secret Senses*

As always, a good read. Loved her structure (back and forth through time) and her courage to write about reincarnation as if she really believes it and without once using the word.

Tartt, Donna - *The Secret History*

Second reading, first in 1993. Worth the time. She is an excellent storyteller. Characters are so real, even in a world alien to someone my age and station in life.

Toole, John Kennedy - *A Confederacy of Dunces* (second reading)

Seems shallow, self-consciously clever this time around.

Vidal, Gore - *Palimpsest*

Great memoir. Gossipy but in a good way [what could I have meant?]. Literary in its approach and style [of course]. Honest about himself and others [J&J Kennedy, Capote, et. al.].

Wallace, David Foster - *The Girl With Curious Hair*

Interesting mixture of stories with a variety of distinct voices.

White, Edmund - *A Boy's Own Story*

Good. Nice, clean, exciting prose. A pre-AIDS story. Coming of age. Perhaps *the* coming-of-age story for gay men.