

Breaking Old Reading Habits

Ten Literary Works: Convincing You to Love Literary

By Carolyn Howard-Johnson

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The Frugal Book Promoter: How to Do What Your Publisher Won't and *The Frugal Editor: Put Your Best Book Forward to Avoid Humiliation and Ensure Success*

(This is a reprint from Carolyn's "Back to Literature" column at MyShelf.com. In it, Carolyn explores all things literary for readers and for writers. As part of this format, she includes in each column a tip and tidbit that she hopes will keep both readers and writers coming back each month to see what's new. Find it at www.myshelf.com.)

Because I so often hear, "I don't read literary novels," or even, "What's a literary novel?" I've compiled a list that I think might convince those who think they hate them to try reading them--at least every so often. Those of you who already love literary, will find at least one or two books that aren't already in your library.

None of these books are real classics--the kind you may have detested in high school. Most have been popular in relatively recent history and a couple are books that Oprah should have picked if she had been doing that when these books were released.

Why not give one or all a try? Sandwich them in somewhere between the romance, crime, and psycho-stuff that we tend to keep on our night stands.

Here goes:

To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. This is one of my favorites of all time.

A Painted House by John Grisham. A recent favorite that few called "literary" but got blasted by Grisham's fans anyway because, I think, they were all expecting the same old, same old.

The Chinchilla Farm by Judith Freeman. It's been around awhile but it one of the few good pieces of fiction set in Utah where I set my first novel.

Dear Corpus Christi by Eve Caram. This is a lovely little piece by my first writing teacher at UCLA. It deserves wider readership.

A Child of Alcatraz by Tara Ison. This writer is relatively unknown. She is a novelist and a screenwriter (no one ever gives screenwriters much credit so very few are famous regardless of the fact that their talent or the lack thereof can make or break a movie). She has taught writing at UCLA and is now teaching at Antioch University.

The Sixteen Pleasures by Robert Hellenga. Apart from an occasional lapse in drawing his female characters truly, this book, set in Florence during the Arno's infamous destruction, is a winner.

Angle of Repose by Wallace Stegner. You can't go wrong with this one or any other title written by this novelist and journalist.

The Wedding by Dorothy West. This was West's first and only novel because she didn't get around to storytelling until she was in her last decade. She breaks rules and makes it work. She also makes us understand a portion of black history and black intolerance that many of us didn't know existed.

Travels with Charlie by John Steinbeck is not fiction but it is literary. You might enjoy seeing nonfiction written with passion and style and artistry. *Charlie* was the last book Steinbeck wrote, the culmination of years of honing his craft.

Dandelion Wine by Ray Bradbury is a touching novel that will be loved by those who liked the first book on this list.

Dr. Zhivago by Boris Pasternak. This book is worth the struggle required to sort out the Russian names. Hundreds of thousands of readers did it a few decades ago when we weren't all so spoiled by authors who too often now cater to short attention spans and formulaic writing.

Okay. So that's 11. I'll make it a baker's dozen.

Anna Karina by Leo Tolstoy. This is a novel that holds up over the decades, especially for women (and men) who still suffer from gender prejudices.

This is the Place by Carolyn Howard-Johnson. It's a little romantic, a little memoirish, a little historical, a little women's. They're all good categories but I prefer a little literary. If I didn't include this book among my favorites, I wouldn't be giving you the truest list possible. Ahem! Maybe my next novel should examine the mirror image twins of false pride and false modesty as its premise.

(Carolyn Howard-Johnson novel, *This Is The Place*, is a winner of Sime-Gen's Critic's Choice Award. Valerie Susan Hayward, Consultant and former senior editor at Harlequin/Silhouette pronounced it "...fabulous." Learn more at <http://carolynhoward-johnson.com> .)