

Rereadings

Subtitle: Seventeen Writers Revisit Books They Love

Edited by Anne Fadiman, author of *Ex Libris*

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***American Scholar* Editor Shares Most Popular Feature from Her Literary Experience with the Journal**

Reviewed by Carolyn Howard-Johnson, award-winning author of *This Is the Place* and *Harkening: A Collection of Stories Remembered, Tracings*, a chapbook of poetry, and the *HowToDoItFrugally* Series of books for writers

Let's be right up front. Anne Fadiman's *Rereadings* (Farrar Straus Giroux) is neither for every reader nor for every writer. It is a beautiful little volume meant for those who didn't hate their English Lit classes or those who wonder if they would enjoy that class more if they revisited it now with more good (emphasis on the *good*) reading under their belts and thus more understanding.

Fadiman selected from the journal she edits, the *American Scholar*, seventeen essays from writers who had been asked to write about their relationships with books, books they had read before they were twenty-five and then reread it at any age after that. How had the author changed? How had the book changed them--both in the first reading the second or more? How did the book seem different? In the foreword Fadiman says their essays "revealed at least as much about the readers as about the books." Therefore she feels comfortable assuring readers that these essays aren't "conventional literary criticism" and that is comforting for those who just prefer a good story, forget the background stuff and the whys and wherefores.

Still, as a collection this book will work for best for readers (and writers) who love to read everything -- from the backs of milk cartons to novels to, yes, field guides, for it covers the scope of reading and makes us glad that we can.

Writers -- serious writers who want to improve their craft or are looking for inspiration -- will adore this book. It is a chapter-a-night kind of reading that will provide them with memories, encourage them to read some books (and some kinds of books) they may have missed. It is full of nostalgia and camaraderie and tales of friendships with books. But it also is a way to acquaint oneself with fellow authors. Each and every essay made me want to answer the writer, weigh in on what he or she had to say, share a memory.

In fact, readers of this review may want to read one such impulse I followed up on in my *Back to Literature* column. at MyShelf.com. You'll need to click on the "Archive" link on

the right of the page. You might even find other books you'll want to read. Be warned, though, I don't deal with flimsy but fun books. I like books with meat on their bones.

Carolyn Howard-Johnson's first novel, *This is the Place*, has won eight awards. Her book of creative nonfiction *Harkening*, won three. A UCLA Writers' Program instructor, she also is the author of the *HowToDoItFrugally* Series of books for writers. *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* are both winners of USA Book News Best Book award. Learn more at: <http://carolynhoward-johnson.com> and <http://HowToDoItFrugally.com>.