

## Reading 2021

A collection by title and date of my reading for the year. A few details in each entry, but more than anything, this is a simple chronological record. You will find previous years' lists and my "Watching" list for Films and TV in my [DayBook directory](#).

"A novel worth reading is an education of the heart," Susan Sontag said. "It enlarges your sense of human possibility, of what human nature is, of what happens in the world. It's a creator of inwardness." Novels teach us "how to be alone," Jonathan Franzen has written; they stoke, says Sven Birkerts, "the more reflective component of self." That we possess inwardness at all is thanks to literature, Harold Bloom claimed, attributing the very conception of the inner life to Shakespeare. (From [Parul Sehgal's review of Fake Accounts](#), debut novel from Lauren Oyler.)

Salman Rushdie: "It is an interesting question to ask oneself: Which are the books that you truly love? Try it. The answer will tell you a lot about who you presently are." — [The Stories We Love Make Us Who We Are](#), NYT 052421



"Even in the busiest of places, if you have a good book, you can retreat into solitude," ... Anika Burgess writes. "And when you live in a city like New York, a book can be even more than a story at your fingertips. It can also be a respite, an escape, a sanctuary, a diversion and a travel companion." / The Times Book Review published photos of people sneaking some reading time around New York. You can see a couple of the photos in today's newsletter [and find the whole wonderful collection here](#).

"There's something about being able to read an entire book in one sitting that's emotionally very satisfying."

[Ann Patchett on Why We Need Life-Changing Books Right Now](#), NYT 033020

1. Stranger in the Woods (The): The Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit, by Michael Finkel. Paperback. Started 010121. Completed 010220.
2. The Tuscan Child, Rhys Bowen. Kindle. Started 010421. Light fare, I imagine ... Completed 010621. Perhaps the worst reading choice I've made in years. (Trying to remember a book as bad ...)
3. Bel Canto, Ann Patchett. Audible. Completed 010421. (Started 122620.) "How much luck is one entitled to in a night?" (8) "Why was it only now that he did not know things would end badly. Hope was a murderer." "They had to forget that they had not come up with a way to leave."
4. Go Tell It on the Mountain, James Baldwin. Paperback. Started 010921. Completed 011121.
5. The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris, David McCullough. Audible. Started 010921. Completed 012621. Learned about John Singer Sargent. Also George P.A. Healey. McCullough also seems to have a great respect for the "medicals."

6. *Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck. LoA edition. Started and completed 011221.
7. *Lincoln in the Bardo*, George Saunders. Kindle. Started 011321. Completed 011421. [Kindle notes and highlights](#).
8. *A Swim in the Pond in the Rain: In Which Four Russians Give a Master Class on Writing, Reading, and Life*, George Saunders. Kindle. Started, slowly, with "In the Cart" on 011521. Next is Turgenev. Another Chekhov, then Tolstoy, then Gogol. Completed 012221. Title refers to action in a Tolstoy story. [Kindle notes and highlights](#). Highlights: | The whole experience of reading fiction might be understood as a series of "establishings" ("the dog is sleeping"), stabilizations ("he is really sleeping deeply, so deeply that the cat just managed to walk across his back"), and alterations ("Uh-oh, he woke up"). (21%) | What makes you you, as a writer, is what you do to any old text, by way of this iterative method. This method overturns the tyranny of the first draft. Who cares if the first draft is good? It doesn't need to be good, it just needs to be, so you can revise it. You don't need an idea to start a story. You just need a sentence. (28%)
9. *The American*, Henry James. LoFA volume. Started 012321. Completed 012721.
10. *Here Is New York*, E.B. White (1949). Audible. Started 012921. Completed 013021.
11. *Ethan Frome*, Edith Wharton. Paperback. 1911. Started and completed 013021.
12. *The Europeans*, Henry James. LoFA. Started 013121; completed 020221.
13. *Beethoven: A Life in Nine Pieces*, Laura Tunbridge. Kindle. Started 020221. Completed 020621. [Kindle notes and highlights](#).
14. *Unquiet: My Life With Beethoven*, Jonathan Biss. Audible. Started 020221. Completed 020421.
15. *Mrs Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf. Kindle. Started 020721. Completed 021021. [Kindle notes and highlights](#). "Now it was time to move, and, as a woman gathers her things together, her cloak, her gloves, her opera-glasses, and gets up to go out of the theatre into the street, she rose from the sofa and went to Peter. And it was awfully strange, he thought, how she still had the power, as she came tinkling, rustling, still had the power as she came across the room, to make the moon ..." (23%) "Shredding and slicing, dividing and subdividing, the clocks of Harley Street nibbled at the June day, counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantages of a sense of proportion, until the mound of time was so far diminished that a commercial clock, suspended above a shop in Oxford Street, announced, genially and fraternally ... (52%) "And the Bradshaws talked of it at her party!" (94%) And the closing ... ""Richard has improved. You are right," said Sally. "I shall go and talk to him. I shall say goodnight. What does the brain matter," said Lady Rosseter, getting up, "compared with the heart?" "I will come," said Peter, but he sat on for a moment. What is this terror? what is this ecstasy? he thought to himself. What is it that fills me with extraordinary excitement? It is Clarissa, he said. For there she was."
16. *Farmer: A Novel*, Jim Harrison. Audible. Started 020721. Completed 022021. For me, the doctor steals the show.
17. *Black Diamond: A Novel of the French Countryside* (Bruno Chief of Police Book 3), Martin Walker. Kindle. Started 021021. Completed 021221. [Kindle notes and highlights](#). "Hercule was thoughtful, learned and well read, something of an inspiration to Bruno, who was learning that he need not be limited by the inadequacies of his own schooling but that he could read for himself, learn by himself, think for himself." (29%) "He sliced off some of the dense fat with the meat, chopped it into lardons, tossed them into his big casserole dish and lit the gas. He pulled down six shallots from the string that hung from the beam and began to peel them. The toast was ready, and he and Gigi ate slice and slice alike before he began cutting the venison into rough cubes. He stirred the lardons and judged whether there was sufficient fat. Not quite, so he added more from the ham and put the shallots into a separate pan to

- fry them with duck fat. He put more duck fat into the casserole and threw in the venison to brown." (45%)
18. *Portrait of a Lady*, Henry James. Library of America. Started 021321. The exchange on 275 is typical of James's dialogue and prose: | "And yet you have made her your bosom-friend?" "I have not made her my bosom-friend; but I like her, in spite of her faults." "Ah, well," said Ralph. "I am afraid I shall dislike her, in spite of her merits." Completed 021821. Magic.
  19. *The Guns of August*, Barbara Tuchman. Library of America edition. Started 021921. Completed 022421.
  20. *Dirt: Adventures in Lyon as a Chef in Training, Father, and Sleuth Looking for the Secret of French Cooking*, Bill Buford. Audible. Started 022421.
  21. *The Crowded Grave: A Mystery of the French Countryside* (Bruno Chief Of Police Book 4), Martin Walker. Kindle. Started 022621. Completed 022821. [Kindle notes and highlights](#). | "Almost wherever we look in the human past, we find the two great narratives of our origins, of a gigantic flood, and of a fratricidal killing or a civil war," Horst went on. "Amid all the mystery that still shrouds the birth of humanity, those two myths stand out in the folk memory of people after people, tribe after tribe, culture after culture. But now, we have a scientific revolution. We have forensic genetics and the ability to read DNA from bones." (19%) | He smiled at her, thinking how little she knew of life in the country. It was springtime. There was his vegetable garden to be planted, ducks and geese to be fed and horses to care for. But no Gigi. And then the tourist season would start again. There'd be no leave for Bruno until the autumn. A hunting season with no dog, an empty house without Gigi. (99%)
  22. *Never Let Me Go*, Kazuo Ishiguro. Paperback. Started 030221. Completed 030421.
  23. *City Boy: The Adventures of Herbie Bookbinder*, Herman Wouk. Hardcover. Started 030521. Completed 030921. Set in 1928. Herbie, Cliff, Lennie Kreiger, Lucy Glass, Mr. Gauss, Powers, Felicia (Fleece). "Herbie was one of those people who will not act unless the whole moral order of the universe is on their side — according to their own view, at least." (66) "Elmer Bean was regarded by Herbie as an oracle on camp matters." (198) "[Herbie] tried to reassure himself that once he returned the money he would be cleared, but meantime felt himself a sinner." (234) What's the difference between Herbie "stealing" from The Place and Mr. Gauss taking the Mardigras money? Mr. Gauss: "In his weary pursuit of small monetary gains he found no time for reading, yet as an educator he was obliged to have some knowledge of current literature. The reviews [in NYT] gave him acquaintance with titles and authors that served to work the necessary grace into his conversation." (270)
  24. *Wise Blood*, Flannery O'Connor. Library of America edition. Started 031221. Completed 031321. Followed up with the stories "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" and "Everything That Rises Must Converge" on 031221 and 031321, respectively. "Parker's Back" on 031421.
  25. *Writing Was Everything*, Alfred Kazin. Hardcover. Started 031321. Completed 032321. The great American critic bogs me down in German, French, Jewish, philosophistic C20 literature.
  26. *The Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper. Started 031521. Completed 032221.
  27. *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life*. Hardcover. Started 032321. Completed 032721.
  28. *Confessions of a White Racist*, Larry L. King. Started 032821. Completed 032931.
  29. *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, John le Carre. From *The Quest for Karla*, 3-book volume. Started 032921. Completed 040221.
  30. *The Honourable Schoolboy*. Started 040421. Completed 041221. See le Carre notebook.
  31. *Smiley's People*. Started 041221. Completed 041521. Hardcover.
  32. *The Transit of Venus*, Shirley Hazzard. Introduction by Laura Groff. Paperback. See notebook.
  33. *Dispatches*, Michael Herr. Hardcover, Everyman's Library. Started

042121. Completed 042621. Added to war project notebook.

34. The Mosquito Coast, Paul Theroux. Paperback. Started 050221. Completed 050521.
35. The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien. Paperback. Started 050621. Completed 050721.
36. Beginner's Mind, Yo-Yo Ma. Audible. Completed 050721.
37. The Premonition: A Pandemic Story, Michael Lewis. Kindle. Started 050821. Dr. Charity Dean. Carter Mecher. (It's pronounced MEH-sheer.) Richard Hatchett. Bob Glass. Lisa Koonin at CDC. [Kindle notes and highlights](#).
38. The Coldest Winter, David Halberstam. Hardcover. Started 051021. Completed 052021. Notes and highlights in Halberstam notebook. Another in series for Project | Modern Wars (see notebook).
39. The Collected Stories, Grace Paley. Paperback. First story: "Goodbye and Good Luck." 052121.
40. Klara and the Sun, Kazuo Ishiguro. Hardcover. Started 052121. Completed 052221.
41. The Free World: Art and Thought in the Cold War, Louis Menand. Started as part of Project on 052421. Completed 060921.
42. Kubrick, Michael Herr. Hardcover. Started and completed 061021. Brief notes in Michael Herr section of War Project notebook.
43. You Are Ready for Take-Off, A Short Trip, Susan Orlean. Kindle. Started and completed on 061021.
44. The Ghost Writer, Philip Roth. Hardcover. Started 061121. Completed 061221. Part of my Zuckerman project.
45. Zuckerman Unbound, Philip Roth. Hardcover. Started 061321. Completed 061421.
46. The Anatomy Lesson, Philip Roth. Hardcover. Started 071521. Completed 061721.
47. The Prague Orgy, Philip Roth. Hardcover. Started and completed 061821.
48. Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy 1945-1975, Max Hastings. Hardcover. Started 061921. Completed 062921.
49. The Light in the Piazza, Elizabeth Spencer (see below). Novella, the second entry in LoA collection. Started and completed 062921. Marvelous story. Looking forward to The Voice at the Back Door(#55), more book length. 062921. I was totally unfamiliar with her, yet she's been described as a similar voice in C20 southern fiction to Faulkner, Welty.
50. Philip Roth: The Biography, Blake Bailey. Hardcover. Started 070121. Completed 071521. NYT [review](#) by Cynthia Ozick.
51. Tell Me a Riddle, Requa I, and Other Works, Tillie Olsen. Paperback. Started 071521. Moving on without finishing "Tell Me A Riddle," the novella, on 071621.
52. The Secret Place, Tana French. Hardcover. Started 071621. Completed 072121. [Also read **The Witch Elm**, Tana French. Kindle. Started 102820. Completed 110220. [Kindle Notes & Highlights](#).]
53. American Pastoral, Philip Roth. Library of America. Started 072221. Completed 072821.
54. Final Draft: The Collected Work of David Carr. Kindle. Started 072921. Completed 080221. [Kindle Notes & Highlights](#). "Chemical dependency does not change—have one and you might die—and recovery does not change—have none and you might live." "... remember Al Pacino as Lowell Bergman whipping out a clunky cellphone as if it were an AK-47?"
55. The Voice at the Back Door, Elizabeth Spencer. Library of America volume. Started 080421. Completed 081021. At times a southern gothic, other times a kind of whodunit, still other times a scathing story of rampant racism and betrayal.
56. If Beale Street Could Talk, James Baldwin. Library of America volume. Started 081121. Completed 081521.
57. Under the Wave at Waimea, Paul Theroux. Hardcover. Started 081721. Completed 082221.
58. The Road to Little Dribbling: Adventures of an American in Britain, Bill Bryson. Started 082421. Completed 083021. Paperback.

59. Unsheltered, Barbara Kingsolver. Paperback. Started 083121. Completed 090421.
60. Ordinary Grace, William Kent Krueger. Paperback. Started 090521. Completed 090821. It seems to be similar to "To Kill A Mockingbird" ... only more episodic, less moving, more preachy. Mother's character goes through a dramatic transformation; one hero after another falls; tragedy visits on so many. Moving on ...
61. I Married A Communist, Philip Roth. Library of America edition. Started 090821. Completed 091421.
62. The Human Stain, Roth. Concluding Zuckerman series. Started 091421. Completed 092321.
63. **The Collected Stories**, Grace Paley. Paperback. Picked up again on 092821.
64. **Homeland and Other Stories**, Barbara Kingsolver. Paperback. Started reading on 093021.
65. The Lincoln Highway, Amor Towles. Hardcover. Started 100621. Completed 101221.
66. Crossroads, Jonathan Franzen. Hardcover. Started 101421. Completed 102321.
67. Harlem Shuffle, Colson Whitehead. Hardcover. Started 102521. Completed 102821.
68. Bewilderment, Richard Powers. Hardcover. Started 103021. Completed 110121.
69. Self-Consciousness, John Updike. Hardcover. Started 110321. Completed 110921.
70. Rules of Civility, Amor Towles. Reread and completed 111421. Original reading in Sep 2017.
71. Pastoral Song, James Rebanks. Hardcover. Started 111521. Completed 111721. Notes in November 2021 Daily.
72. Silverview, John Le Carre. Hardcover. Started 111721. Completed 111821.
73. Taft, Ann Patchett. Paperback. Started 111921. Completed 112221.
74. **Albion's Seed**: Four British Folkways in America. "David Hackett Fischer's classic history of British migration to colonial America, which was published in 1989 and explained these phenomena with a clarity that seems even more stunning today. The divide between maskers and anti-maskers, vaxxers and anti-vaxxers is as old as Plymouth Rock. It is deeper than politics; it is cultural." [Joe Klein essay in NYTBR](#). Paperback. Started 111921.
75. **The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution**, Bernard Bailyn. Paperback. Started 111921.
76. The Nickel Boys, Colson Whitehead. Hardcover. Started 112521. Completed 112621. See author notebook.
77. Gates of Fire: An Epic novel of The Battle of Thermopylae. Paperback. Started 112921. Completed 120621. (Notes and highlights in December 2021 Daily Notes & Tasks.)
78. **Liberty Is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution**, Woody Holton. [Jamelle Bouie stands-in for Ezra Klein](#).
79. The Speckled Beauty: A Dog and His People, Rick Bragg. Hardcover. Started 120721. Completed 120821. (Notes in December 2021 Daily Notes & Tasks.)
80. These Precious Days: Essays. Ann Patchett. Hardcover. Started 121321. Completed 121521. Notes in Ann Patchett Notebook.
81. Oh William! Elizabeth Strout. Hardcover. Started 121621. Completed 121721. Notes in Elizabeth Strout Notebook.
82. The Shepherd's Life: Modern Dispatches from the Ancient Landscape. James Rebanks. Hardcover. Started 121921. Completed 122121. See Daily Notes for Dec 2021.
83. A Childhood: The Biography of a Place. Harry Crews. Paperback. Started 122221. Completed 122521.
84. Gilead (2004). Marilynne Robinson. Hardcover. Started 122621. Completed 122921. Notes in Robinson Notebook.
85. Home (2008). Marilynne Robinson. Hardcover. Started 123121.

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