

## **Short Perfect Novels** (with annotations from GoodReads and Amazon)

- *Too Loud a Solitude*, Bohumil Hrabal (1992, 112 pp)

...a tender and funny story of Haňša - a man who has lived in a Czech police state - for 35 years, working as compactor of wastepaper and books. In the process of compacting, he has acquired an education so unwitting he can't quite tell which of his thoughts are his own and which come from his books. He has rescued many from jaws of hydraulic press and now his house is filled to the rooftops. Destroyer of the written word, he is also its perpetrator... This is an eccentric romp celebrating the indestructibility- against censorship, political oppression etc - of the written word.

- *Train Dreams*, Denis Johnson (2011, 116pp)

...the story of Robert Grainier, a day laborer in the American West at the start of the twentieth century---an ordinary man in extraordinary times. Buffeted by the loss of his family, Grainer struggles to make sense of this strange new world. As his story unfolds, we witness both his shocking personal defeats and the radical changes that transform America in his lifetime. Suffused with the history and landscapes of the American West, this novella captures the disappearance of a distinctly American way of life.

- *Sula*, Toni Morrison (1973, 192 pp)

Nel Wright has chosen to stay in the place where she was born, to marry, raise a family, and become a pillar of the black community. Sula Peace has rejected the life Nel has embraced, escaping to college, and submerging herself in city life. When she returns to her roots, it is as a rebel and a wanton seductress. Eventually, each woman must face the consequences of their choices.

- *The Shadow-Line*, Joseph Conrad (1916, 132 pp)

A young sea captain's first command brings with it a succession of crises: his sea is becalmed, the crew laid low by fever, and his deranged first mate is convinced that the ship is haunted by the malignant spirit of a previous captain... A subtle and penetrating analysis of the nature of manhood, *The Shadow-Line* investigates varieties of masculinity and desire in a subtext that counters the tale's seemingly conventional surface.

- *The All of It*, Jeannette Haien (1986, 145 pp)

... a deceptively simple story that has the power and resonance of myth. The story begins on a rainy morning as Father Declan de Loughry stands fishing in an Irish salmon stream, pondering the recent deathbed confession of one of his parishioners. Kevin Dennehy and his wife, Enda, have been sweetly living a lie for some 50 years, a lie the full extent of which Father Declan learns only when Enda finally confides "the all of it." Her tale of suffering mesmerizes the priest, who recognizes that it is also a tale of sin and scandal, a transgression he cannot ignore.

- *Winter in the Blood*, James Welch (2008, 160 pp)

The narrator of this beautiful, often disquieting novel is a young Native American man living on the Fort Belknap Reservation in Montana. Sensitive and self-destructive, he searches for something that will bind him to the lands of his ancestors but is haunted by personal tragedy, the dissolution of his once proud heritage, and Montana's vast emptiness.

- *Swimmer in the Secret Sea*, William Kotzwinkle (1975, 91 pp)

A perfect novella in every way—there is not a single superfluous word—it is the brief narrative of a couple who drive to the hospital in the winter snow at night in Maine to experience the wonder of having their first child that they have waited a long time for.

- *The Blue Flower*, Penelope Fitzgerald (1998, 320 pp)

...the story of Friedrich von Hardenberg (Fritz), a young man of the late 18th century who is destined to become one of Germany's great romantic poets...an exhilarating evocation of the romantic era in all its political turmoil, intellectual voracity, and moral ambiguity.

- *First Love*, Ivan Turgenev (1860, 128 pp)

(A) vivid, sensitive tale of adolescent love which follows a 16-year-old boy who falls in love with a beautiful, older woman—the same woman his father is in love with. The boy experiences a whirlwind of changing emotions, from exaltation and jealousy to despair and devotion.

- *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys (1966, 176 pp.)

A prequel to *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte. Born into an oppressive, colonialist society, Creole heiress Antoinette Cosway meets a young Englishman who is drawn to her innocent sensuality and beauty, but soon after their marriage, rumors of madness in her family poison his mind against her. He forces Antoinette to conform to his rigid Victorian ideals.

- *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf (1925, 220pp)

...a classic of modernist literature, first published in 1925. Set in London on a single day in June 1923, Mrs. Dalloway follows Clarissa Dalloway, a high-society woman, as she prepares to host a party. Throughout the day, Clarissa reflects on the decisions and events of her past, as well as the consequences of her choices and the choices of those around her. Woolf's novel examines the nature of identity, the passage of time, and the role of memory.

- *Waiting for the Barbarians*, J.M. Coetzee (1980, 192 pp)

... a startling allegory of the war between oppressor and oppressed. For decades the Magistrate has been a loyal servant of the Empire, running the affairs of a tiny frontier settlement and ignoring the impending war with the barbarians. When interrogation experts arrive, however, he witnesses the Empire's cruel and unjust treatment of prisoners of war. Jolted into sympathy for their victims, he commits a quixotic act of rebellion that brands him an enemy of the state. The Magistrate is not simply a man living through a crisis of conscience in an obscure place in remote times; his situation is that of all men living in unbearable complicity with regimes that ignore justice and decency.

- *Fire on the Mountain*, Anita Desai (1977, 162pp)

Gone are the days when Nanda Kaul watched over her family and played the part of Vice-Chancellor's wife. Leaving her children behind in the real world, the busier world, she has chosen to spend her last years alone in the mountains in Kasauli, in a secluded bungalow called Carignano. Until one summer her great-granddaughter Raka is dispatched to Kasauli and everything changes.