

BEST LISTS OF "CONTEMPORARY" FICTION

In 1983 the distinguished British novelist and provocateur, Anthony Burgess, decided to issue a list of the 99 Best Novels in English since WW II. Presumably the hundredth slot was available for his readers to add one of his own. While this is all merely parlor games on a slightly higher level than "Trivial Pursuit" or "Jeopardy", such goings-on do provide some provocative reading lists for English Majors and/or people who love to read fiction. So here are Burgess' choices followed by the choices of the CSUS professors teaching contemporary fiction on a regular basis since they were hired.

ANTHONY BURGESS

1939: *Party Going* by Henry Green. *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* by Aldous Huxley. *Finnegan's Wake* by James Joyce. *At Swim-Two-Birds* by Flann O'Brien.

1940: *The Power & The Glory* by Graham Greene. *For Whom The Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway. *STRANGERS & BROTHERS*(a series of novels to 1970) by C. P. Snow.

1941: *The Aerodrome* by Rex Warner.

1944: *The Horse's Mouth* by Joyce Cary. *The Razor's Edge* by W. Somerset Maugham

1945: *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh

1946: *Titus Groan* by Mervyn Peake

1947: *The Victim* by Saul Bellow. *Under the Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry

1948: *The Heart of the Matter* by Graham Greene. *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer. *No Highway* by Nevil Shute

1949: *The Heat of the Day* by Elizabeth Bowen. *Ape and Essence* by Aldous Huxley, 1984 by George Orwell. *The Body* by William Sansom

1950: *Scenes From Provincial Life* by William Cooper. *The Disenchanted* by Budd Schulberg.

1951: *A DANCE TO THE MUSIC OF TIME*(a series of novels to 1975) by Anthony Powell. *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger. *A CHRONICLE OF ANCIENT SUNLIGHT*(a series of novels until 1969) by Henry Williamson. *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial* by Herman Wouk.

1952: *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison. *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. *Wise Blood* by Flannery O'Connor. *SWORD OF HONOR*(a series to 1961) by Evelyn Waugh.

1953: *The Long Goodbye* by Raymond Chandler. *The Groves of Academe* by Mary McCarthy.

1954: *Lucky Jim* by Kingsley Amis.

1957: *Room at the Top* by John Braine. *The Alexandria Quartet*(a series to 1960) by Lawrence Durrell. *The London Novels* by Colin MacInnes. *The Assistant* by Bernard Malamud.

1958: *The Bell* by Iris Murdoch. *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe. *The Once & Future King* by T. H. White.

- 1959: *The Mansion* by William Faulkner. *Goldfinger* by Ian Fleming
- 1960 *Facial Justice* by L. P. Hartley. *THE BALKAN TRILOGY* (a series to 1965) by Olivia Manning.
- 1961: *The Mighty & Their Fall* by Ivy Compton-Burnett. *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller. *The Fox in the Attic* by Richard Hughes. *Riders in the Chariot* by Patrick White. *The Old Men at the Zoo* by Angus Wilson.
- 1962: *Another Country* by James Baldwin. *An Error of Judgment* by Pamela Hansford Johnson. *Island* by Aldous Huxley. *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov
- 1963: *The Girls of Slender Means* by Muriel Spark
- 1964: *The Spire* by William Golding. *Heartland* by Wilson Harris. *A Single Man* by Christopher Isherwood. *The Defense* by Vladimir Nabokov. *Late Call* by Angus Wilson
- 1965: *The Lockwood Concern* by John O'Hara. *Cocksure* by Mordechai Richler. *The Mandelbaum Gate* by Muriel Spark. *The Magus* by John Fowles
- 1966: *A Man of the People* by Chinua Achebe. *The Anti-Death League* by Kingsley Amis. *Giles Goat-Boy* by John Barth. *The Late Bourgeois World* by Nadine Gordimer. *The Last Gentleman* by Walker Percy.
- 1967: *The Vendor of Sweets* by R. K. Narayan
- 1968: *The Image Men* by J. B. Priestley. *Pavane* by Keith Roberts
- 1969: *The French Lt.'s Woman* by John Fowles. *Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth.
- 1970: *Bomber* by Len Deighton
- 1973: *Sweet Dreams* by Michael Frayn. *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon
- 1975: *Humboldt's Gift* by Saul Bellow. *The History Man* by Malcolm Bradbury
- 1976: *The Doctor's Wife* by Brian Moore. *Falstaff* by Robert Nye
- 1977: *How to Save Your Own Life* by Erica Jong. *Farewell Companions* by James Plunkett. *Staying On* by Paul Scott.
- 1978: *The Coup* by John Updike
- 1979: *The Unlimited Dream Company* by J.G. Ballard. *Dubin's Lives* by Bernard Malamud. *A Bend in the River* by V. S. Naipaul.
- 1980: *Life in the West* by Brian Aldiss. *Riddley Walker* by Russell Hoban. *How Far Can You Go?* by David Lodge. *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole
- 1981: *Lanark* by Alasdair Gray. *Darconville's Cat* by Alexander Theroux. *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux. *Creation* by Gore Vidal.
- 1982: *The Rebel Angels* by Robertson Davies.
- 1983: *Ancient Evenings* by Norman Mailer

THE MADDEN LIST

The following is a highly selective, wholly subjective, and admittedly eccentric list. With only a couple exceptions (*you find 'em*), I've limited myself to American and Irish Fiction since 1960. These, then, are books I consider important, good, or simply entertaining. So, here, is the Madden addendum to the Burgess and Gregory lists; I've tried to avoid duplication, but some was inevitable.

1988: *Libra*, Don DeLillo. *The Houseguests* by Thomas Berger. *The Silence in the Garden* by William Trevor
 1989: *And Again?* by Sean O'Faolain
 1990: *The New York Trilogy*, Paul Auster
 1991: *The Women of Whitechapel and Jack The Ripper*, by Paul West. *Amongst Women*, by John McGahern
 1992: *Black Water* by Joyce Carol Oates. *Meeting Evil* by Thomas Berger
 1993: *Pictures at an Exhibition* by D. M. Thomas. *The Heather Blazing* by Colm Tobin. *A Table of Green Fields* by Guy Davenport. *Disobedience* by Michael Drinkwater. *Kill Hole* by Jamake Highwater
 1994: *Going Native* by Stephen Wright. *The Zoo Where You're Fed to God* by Michael Ventura. *How Late It Was, How Late* by James Kelman
 1995: *The First Man* by Albert Camus. *Athena* by John Banville

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY: American Fiction: 1972-1995 by Robert Olmstead

Looking over this list, which I've been keeping for the past fifteen years, I see, in addition to my own eclectic tastes, some shared qualities. First, all of them rely heavily on "story"; all of them have a strong narrative impulse. I am not interested in today's reflexive fiction which endlessly calls into question the authority of its own textuality so that the book implodes. Second, these novels are "teachable": they are capable of reaching a wide audience of intelligent readers. Of the novels listed, I have taught forty of them, several of them more than once. Third, the list reflects my belief that when the history of "postmodern" fiction is written fifty years from now, critics will identify the emergence of a distinct female voice as one of the hallmarks of the period, seeing that women writers used the conventions of fiction in ways that differed from their male counterparts.

My favorite writers? Robert Stone, Richard Ford, Russell Banks, Jane Smiley, Anne Tyler, Mary Gaitskill. My favorite novel? One that I snuck in, since it was published in 1968: Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes*. Only Charles Gregory and I really understand this novel, along with Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*.

Sue Miller: *The Good Mother*, *Family Pictures*, *The Distinguished Guest*

Jane Smiley: *Ordinary Love and Good Will*, *A Thousand Acres*, *The Age of Grief*, *Moo*

Bobbie Ann Mason: *Shiloh and Other Stories*, *Love Life*, *Spence and Lila*, *In Country*

Robert Stone: *Hall of Mirrors*, *A Flag for Sunrise*, *Dog Soldiers*, *Children of Light*, *Outerbridge Reach*

Richard Ford: *The Sportswriter*, *A Piece of My Heart*, *Wildlife*, *Independence Day*

Ann Beattie: *Love Always*, *Falling in Place*, *Remembering Will*

Ann Tyler: *Morgan's Crossing*, *Breathing Lessons*, *Celestial Navigation*, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, *The Accidental Tourist*, *Saint Maybe*, *Ladder of Years*

1960: *Welcome to Hard Times* by E.L. Doctorow. *The Magic Christian* by Terry Southern.

1961: *The Lime Twig* by John Hawkes. *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy.

1962: *Pale Fire* by Vladimir Nabokov

1963: *Second Skin* by John Hawkes. *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut

1964: *A Confederate General at Big Sur* by Richard Brautigan. *Little Big Man* by Thomas Berger.

1965: *Everything That Rises Must Converge* by Flannery O'Connor, *Tenement of Clay*, by Paul West

1966: *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon

1967: *Trout Fishing in America* by Richard Brautigan.

1968: *Lost in the Funhouse* by John Barth. *The Universal Baseball Association: J. Henry Waugh, Prop.* by Robert Coover. *Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer.

1969: *Slaughterhouse Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. *Ada* by Vladimir Nabokov. *Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth. *Pricksongs and Descants* by Robert Coover.

1970: *City Life* by Donald Barthelme. *Play It As It Lays* by Joan Didion. *Blue Movies* by Terry Southern. *Where Is My Wandering Boy Tonight?* by David Wagoner.

1971: *Love in the Ruins* by Walker Percy. *Underground Man* by Ross Macdonald

1972: *Edwin Mullhouse* by Edward Millhauser. *The Kid* by John Seelye. *Night* by Edna O'Brien

1973: *Ninety-two in the Shade* by Thomas McGuane. *Searches and Seizures* by Stanley Elkin.

1974: *Dog Soldiers* by Robert Stone

1975: *Cockpit* by Jerzy Kosinski. *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow.

1976: *Travesty* by John Hawkes.

1977: *The Professor of Desire* by Philip Roth. *Who Is Teddy Villanova?* by Thomas Berger. *True Confessions* by John Gregory Dunne

1978: *The Stories of John Cheever*. *Ladies Man* by Reynolds Price.

1979: *The Ghost Writer* by Philip Roth. *The Passion Artist* by John Hawkes.

1980: *Neighbors* by Thomas Berger. *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg*, Paul West. *No Country for Young Men*, Julia O'Faolain

1981: *Nobody's Angel* by Thomas McGuane. *Collected Stories*, Frank O'Connor

1982: *The Collected Stories of Sean O'Faolain*

1983: *The Feud* by Thomas Berger. *The Fools of Fortune* by William Trevor

1984: *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson

1985: *North Gladiola* by James Wilcox; *White Noise*, Don DeLillo

1986: *Rat Man of Paris* by Paul West. *The Funeral Makers*, by Cathie Pelletier. *The Counterlife* by Phillip Roth.

1987: *World's End*, by T. Coreghessan Boyle

Thomas McGuane: *Ninety Two in the Shade, Nobody's Angel, Something to be Desired, Nothing But Blue Skies*
 Frederick Exley: *A Fan's Notes*
 Lisa Alther: *Kinflicks, Original Sins*
 Toni Morrison: *Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved*
 Alice Walker: *The Color Purple*
 Gloria Naylor: *The Women of Brewster Place*
 Shirley Hazzard: *The Transit of Venus*
 Gale Godwin: *The Odd Woman, A Mother and Two Daughters*
 John Kennedy Toole: *A Confederacy of Dunces*
 Stanley Elkin: *A Bad Man*
 Marilyn French: *The Woman's Room, The Bleeding Heart*
 Francis de Plessix Gray: *Lovers & Tyrants*
 William Wharton: *Birdy, Dad, Scumbler, A Midnight Clear*
 John Irving: *Setting Free The Bears, The Water-Method Man, The World According to Garp, The Hotel New Hampshire*
 Alice McDermott: *A Bigamist's Daughter, That Night, At Weddings and Wakes*
 Marilynne Robinson: *Housekeeping*
 Carolyn Chute: *The Beans of Egypt, Maine, Letorneau's Used Auto Parts*
 Alison Lurie: *The War Between The Tates, Nowhere City, Love and Friendship, The Truth About Lorin Jones*
 Ellen Gilchrist: *The Anna Papers, Victory Over Japan, Drunk With Love, Light Can Be Both A Wave and A Particle, I Cannot Get You Close Enough*
 Raymond Carver: *Where I'm Calling From*
 Russell Banks: *Affliction, Continental Drift, Trailer Park, The Sweet Hereafter*
 Josephine Humphries: *Dream of Sleep, Rich In Love*
 Joyce Carol Oates: *You Must Remember This, Because It Is Bitter and Because It Is My Heart*
 Alice Adams: *Superior Women*
 Tim O'Brien: *Going After Cacciato, The Things They Carried, Lake of the Woods*
 Stephen Wright: *Meditations in Green*
 Joan Didion: *River, Run; Play It As it Lays*
 Joan Chase: *During The Reign of the Queen of Persia, Bonneville Blue*
 Michael Dorris: *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water, Working Men*
 Louise Erdrich: *Love Medicien, The Beet Queen, Tracks*
 Paule Sharp: *The Woman Who Was Not All There, Lost In Jersey City*
 Mona Simpson: *Anywhere But Here, The Lost Father*
 Walker Percy: *The Moviegoer, The Last Gentleman, Love Among The Ruins*
 Barry Hannah: *Airships*
 W.P. Kinsella: *Shoeless Joe, The Iowa Baseball Conspiracy*

Harriet Doerr: *The Stones of Ibarra*, *Consider This*, *Senora*
 Bob Shacookis: *Easy in the Islands*
 Barbara Kinsolver: *The Beantree*, *Animal Dreams*, *Homeland*
 Richard Yates: *Young Hearts Crying*
 Sheila Ballantyne: *Norma Jean*, *The Termite Queen*
 Paul Theroux: *The Mosquito Coast*, *Chicago Loop*
 Maureen Howard: *Before My Time*, *Natural History*
 Reynolds Price: *Love and Work*, *Kate Vaden*
 Frank Conroy: *Midair*, *Stop-Time*
 John Cheever: *Falconer*
 John Updike: *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit Is Rich*, *Rabbit at Rest*
 Jayne Anne Phillips: *Machine Dreams*, *Shelter*
 Susan Kennedy: *In Another Country*, *Sailing*
 Marge Piercy: *Small Changes*
 Bette Pesetsky: *Dig*
 Don DeLillo: *White Noise*, *Libra*, *Mac II*
 Abby Frucht: *Licorice*, *Are You Mine?*
 Pam Houston: *Cowboys Are My Weakness*
 Lynne Schwartz: *Leaving Brooklyn*
 Tom Robbins: *Another Roadside Attraction*, *Even Cowgirls Get The Blues*
 Douglas Unger: *Leaving the Land*
 James Harrison: *Legends of the Fall*
 Rosellen Brown: *Tender Mercies*, *Before and After*
 Cormac McCarthy: *All the Pretty Horses*, *The Crossing*
 Katherine Dunn: *Geek Love*
 Amy Tan: *The Joy Luck Club*
 Charles Johnson: *Middle Passages*
 Susan Minot: *Lust*
 Mary Gaitskill: *Bad Behavior*, *Two Girls Fat and Thin*
 Margaret Atwood: *Surfacing*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, *Wilderness Tips*
 T. Coraghessan Boyle: *East is East*
 Scott Spenser: *Endless Love*
 Tobias Wolff: *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs*
 Alice Hoffman: *Turtle Moon*, *Fortune's Daughters*
 Tom Drury: *The End of Vandalism*
 Joyce Williams: *Escape*
 Rick Bass: *Platte Rivers*
 Maria Thomas: *Come to Africa and Save Your Marriage*
 Ernest J. Gaines: *A Lesson Before Dying*
 Dennis McFarland: *The Music Room*

Seth Morgan: *Homeboy*
Larry Watson: *Montana: 1948*
John Casey: *Spartina*

SOME OF THE BEST FICTION OF THE LAST 25 YEARS Anthony Burgess forgot to mention (plus the group he couldn't have read since 1983) by Charles Gregory

My list follows the general inclinations of Burgess. I want to honor and draw attention to all fiction written in English and even to provoke by naming some works written in the pop genre that snobs would not lace in a "literature" list. So be prepared to see a few mystery and SF writers as well as writers from all over the world — part of that mythical global highway, not of information, but of art.

1959: *The Sirens of Titan* by Kurt Vonnegut. *Goodbye, Columbus* by Philip Roth.

1960: *Rabbit, Run* (The Rabbit Quartet, finished in) by John Updike. *A New Life* by Bernard Malamud. *The Householder* by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala.

1961: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark. *A Severed Head* by Iris Murdoch.

1962: *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey.

1963: *Cat's Cradle* by Kurt Vonnegut. *Our Mother's House* by Julian Gloag.

1964: *Little Big Man* by Thomas Berger. *Last Exit To Brooklyn* by Hubert Selby.

1965: *Nowhere City* by Alison Lurie. *The Magus* by Jown Fowles.

1966: *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon. *Beautiful Losers* by Leonard Cohen. *the Origin of the Brunists* by Robert Coover. *The Raj Quartet* (series completed in 1971) by Paul Scott.

1967: *The Mind Parasites* by Colin Wilson.

1968: *A Fan's Notes* by Frederick Exley. *Universal Baseball Association* by Robert Coover. *Unspeakable Practices, Unnatural Acts* by Donald Barthelme.

1969: *Fat City* by Leonard Gardner. *Flashman* (beginning of series) by George MacDonald Fraser. *Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula LeGuin.

1970: *A Fairly Honorable Retreat* by Iris Murdoch. *Fifth Business* by Robertson Davies.

1971: *Farragan's Retreat* by Tom McHale. *The Dick Gibson Show* by Stanley Elkin.

Friends of Eddie Coyle by George Higgins. *Riotous Assembly* by Tom Sharpe.

1972: *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith* by Thomas Kenneally

1973: *Burr* by Gore Vidal. *The Honorable Consul* by Graham Greene

1974: *The Milagro Beanfield War* by John Nichols. *The War Between the Tates* by Alison

Lurie. *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Leguin. *Winter in the Blood* by James Welch.

Enormous Changes at the Last Minute by Grace Paley.

1975: *Ragtime* by E.L. Doctorow. *Indecent Exposure* by Tom Sharpe. *Wife* by Bharati Mukherjee. *The History Man* by Malcolm Bradbury.

1976: *The Bric-a-Brac Man* by Russell Greenan. *Wilt* by Tom Sharpe. *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean. *Coming Through Slaughter* by Michael Ondaatje.

1977: *Territorial Rights* by Muriel Spark. *Death of an Old Goat* by Robert Barnard.

1978: *Final Payments* by Mary Gordon. *World According to Garp* by John Irving.

Billy Phelan's Greatest Game by William Kennedy. *Bogmail* by Patrick McGinley.

- The Last Good Kiss* by James Crumley. *The Human Factor* by Graham Greene. *Tirra Lirra by the River* by Jessica Anderson.
- 1979: *The Ghost Writer* by Philip Roth. *The Pornographer* by John McGahern. *Legends of the Fall* by Jim Harrison. *Your Lover Just Called* by John Updike.
- 1980: *Souls & Bodies* by David Lodge. *Rites of Passage* by William Golding. *Setting the World on Fire* by Angus Wilson. *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie.
- 1981: *Death of a Perfect Mother* by Robert Barnard. *A Good Man in Africa* by William Boyd. *Gorky Park* by Martin Cruz Smith. *Bliss* by Peter Carey.
- 1982: *The Mosquito Coast* by Paul Theroux. *Prizzi's Honor* by Richard Condon. *Cadillac Jack* by Larry McMurtry. *Sour Sweet* by Timothy Mo. *Shoeless Joe* by W.P. Kinsella.
- 1983: *The Desert Rose* by Larry McMurtry. *Dead Heads* by Reginald Hill. *Famous All Over Town* by Danny Santiago. *Waterland* by Graham Swift.
- 1984: *Small World* by David Lodge.
- 1985: *The Old Forest* by Peter Taylor. *Continental Drift* by Russell Banks. *In Country* by Bobbie Ann Mason. *Zuckerman Bound (a trilogy & epilogue)* by Philip Roth. *Machine Dreams* by Jayne Anne Phillips. *Accidental Tourist* by Anne Tyler. *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes. *The Old Forest* by Peter Taylor.
- 1986: *Tourist Season* by Carl Hiaasen. *Roger's Version* by John Updike. *An Artist of the Floating World* by Kazuo Ishiguro.
- 1987: *The Playmaker* by Thomas Keneally. *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* by Ivan Doig. *In The Skin of a Lion* by Michael Ondaatje.
- 1988: *Oscar and Lucinda* by Peter Carey. *Baumgartner's Bombay* by Anita Desai. *Nice Work* by David Lodge.
- 1989: *Jasmine* by Bharati Mukherjee. *Where I'm Calling From* by Raymond Carver. *Remains of the Day* by Kazuo Ishiguro. *Solomon Gursky Was Here* by Mordecai Richler.
- 1990: *The Wimbledon Poisoner* by Nigel Williams.
- 1991: *Native Tongue* by Carl Hiaasen. *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley.
- 1992: *Show Business* by Shashi Tharoor.
- 1993: *The Holder of the World* by Bharati Mukherjee.
- 1994: *The Waterworks* by E. L. Doctorow.
- 1995: *Moo* by Jane Smiley.