

23/09/1998

Five personalities give us their 10 all-time favourite novels

ALL titles are published this century. The lists are in no particular order.

* Marina Mahathir, activist

I took a look at the (Random House) list and was mortified to find that I had only read two books on it, *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie and *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron, both of which I would certainly have put on MY list. My book reading has been very much slowed down recently because I'm so busy all the time. Most of these I read in the past few years.

1. *Midnight's Children* - Salman Rushdie. I'm sure he's a perfectly horrible person, but a brilliant writer nevertheless.
2. *Sophie's Choice* - William Styron. I don't write novels, but people like Styron make me feel very inferior.
3. *A Suitable Boy* - Vikram Seth. Simply loved the whole ride.
4. *Written on the Body* - Jeanette Winterson. A very elegant writer, I'd put all her books in if I could.
5. *The God of Small Things* - Arundhati Roy. Her first book, and it's a star. Makes me jealous.
6. *Love in the Time of Cholera* - Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I like magic realism, especially when it's set in tropical climes.
7. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* - Gabriel Garcia Marquez. As above.
8. *Smilla's Sense of Snow* - Peter Hoeg. Also like the other one about the woman and the gorilla.
9. *Remains of the Day* - Kazuo Ishiguro. So elegant and after that he went funny. Couldn't read his last book at all.
10. Tie between all those Chinese books - Timothy Mo, Amy Tan.

* Jo Kukathas - actor, director, founder of Instant Cafe Theatre

My ("no poetry, no plays, no non-fiction, strictly this century!") list of 10 favourite books. Any list of favourite books is suspect, so I decided to let my choice be governed by Sir Walter Scott's advice that "Books, like friends should be fun and well-loved." (see CORRECTION above) These are books I visit regularly.

1. *The Once and Future King* - T.H. White
2. *A House for Mr Biswas* - V.S. Naipaul
3. *The Great Gatsby* - F.Scott Fitzgerald
4. *The Spire* - William Golding
5. *Midnight's Children* - Salman Rushdie
6. *The Solid Mandela* - Patrick White
7. *Absalom! Absalom!* - William Faulkner
8. *The Black Book* - Orpan Pamuk
9. *Lucia's Progress* - E.F. Benson
10. *Love in the Time of Cholera* - Gabriel Garcia Marquez

* Raja Zarith Sofiah Sultan Idris Shah, author

1. *The Joy Luck Club* - Amy Tan
2. *One True Thing* - Anna Quindlen
3. *The God of Small Things* - Arundhati Roy
4. *Presumed Innocent* - Scott Turow
5. *Lord of The Rings* - J.R.R. Tolkien
6. *A Time to Kill* - John Grisham
7. *The Robber Bride* - Margaret Atwood
8. *The Lives and Loves of a She-Devil* - Fay Weldon

9. The Sweet Shop Owner - Graham Swift
10. Simple Abundance - Sarah Ban Breathnach

It is difficult to say that there is any one book that I consider the best since there are so many authors who have written impressive and influential books.

However, one book that still holds me entranced is Lord of the Rings by J.R.R. Tolkien. I read the book when I was 18 and re-read it last year.

After a gap of 20 years, I was still attracted to its magic and most of all by its simplest and most profound message: that ultimately good triumphs over evil. It was written long before science-fiction became a category on bookshelves, and is probably one of the finest fantasy books ever written, complete with its own Middle Earth and peopled by humans, dwarves and elves.

Perhaps what also attracts me still to this book is the idea that power is irresistible and that it can corrupt. Whether it happens in a fictional land or not, it perhaps says a lot about our human strengths and weaknesses.

* Amir Muhammad, scriptwriter, columnist

Compared to its artistic heyday in the last two decades of the 19th century, the novel as an art form is now mainly a domain for weird transgressive sex, kinky motives and gratuitous provocation. I thoroughly approve of this trend. This is because I am currently writing a novel myself, and I never thought research could be this much fun.

1. Midnight's Children - Salman Rushdie
2. Lolita - Vladimir Nabokov
3. Money - Martin Amis
4. Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter - Marion Vargas Llosa
5. The Wings of the Dove - Henry James
6. The Secret History - Donna Tartt
7. The Malayan Trilogy - Anthony Burgess
8. American Psycho - Bret Easton Ellis
9. The Grifters - Jim Thompson
10. No Longer at Ease - Chinua Achebe

* Andrew Khor - copywriter and partly responsible for the tagline Malaysia Boleh!

1. Mutant Message from Down Under - Marlo Morgan
2. The Name of the Rose - Umberto Eco
3. Lord of the Rings - J.R.R. Tolkien
4. Restaurant at the End of the Universe - Douglas Adams
5. Yes Minister - Jonathan Lynn and Anthony Jay
6. To Kill a Mockingbird - Harper Lee
7. Wild Swans - Jung Chang
8. Book of 5 Rings - Eiji Yoshikawa
9. Hunt for Red October - Tom Clancy
10. Judge Dee - Robert Van Gulik
11. All Creatures Great and Small - James Herriot

Mutant Message is the latest book I've read. A friend loaned me her copy. Chucked it aside and I didn't look at it for about a month. Till one day.

Since I really didn't have anything better to read, I dusted it and decided to give it a go.

I finished it in two days.

The author claims her story is true, but people may accept it as fiction if they wish.

I was so enthralled that I had to get my own copy.

Imagine, if you arrived at a meeting-place miles from civilisation, someone burnt everything you had - money, credit cards, shoes, clothes -

gave you a rag to wear and then invited you for a 1,400km walkabout barefoot in the Australian outback. You must be off your rocker! But this American woman did it, and learnt many valuable lessons about herself, about man and about our connection with Mother Earth.

Check it out. If your mental stereotype of an Australian aborigine is that he is only a stone age savage, you're in for a terrific surprise. They possess an ancient wisdom which will blow your mind.

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