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**2017**

The Big Read list for this year has been suggested by the women on the NWR Bookworms Facebook group. We have tried to stay faithful to the annual theme, which for 2017 is 'Women in Film'. You will find, therefore, that there are some well loved classics on the list as well as some biographies and books whose reputations were enhanced by wonderful actresses who acted in the film version so please do feel free to watch and discuss the relevant films as well as the books!

### **Persuasion – Jane Austen**

2017 marks 200 years since Jane Austen's death and since she is one of the most filmed and adapted female authors we have included two of her books, published exactly 200 years ago, on the list to honor her anniversary.

Persuasion was the last book to be completed by Austen and was published, posthumously, two hundred years ago in 1817 six months after Austen's death.

Amazon says: Eight years ago, Anne Elliot fell in love with poor but ambitious naval officer Captain Frederick Wentworth, a choice which Anne's family was dissatisfied with. Lady Russell, friend and mentor to Anne, persuaded the younger woman to break off the match; now, on the verge of spinsterhood, Anne re-encounters Frederick Wentworth as he courts her spirited young neighbour, Louisa Musgrove.

Wikipedia says: The story concerns Anne Elliot, a young Englishwoman of 27 years, whose family is moving to lower their expenses and get out of debt, at the same time as the wars come to an end, putting sailors on shore. They rent their home to an Admiral and his wife. The wife's brother, Navy Captain Frederick Wentworth, had been engaged to Anne in 1806, and now they meet again, both single and unattached, after no contact in more than seven years. This sets the scene for many humorous encounters as well as a second, well-considered chance at love and marriage for Anne Elliot in her second "bloom".

### **Northanger Abbey – Jane Austen**

Northanger Abbey was actually the first of Austen's books to be completed but was also published posthumously, in December 1817 (although 1818 is given on the title page).

Amazon says: Catherine Morland is one of ten children of a country clergyman. She is immersed in the world of attentive men and elaborate balls. But when one her suitors takes her to his family estate, Northanger Abbey, she becomes lost in the gothic mystery which surrounds it. Northanger Abbey is fundamentally a parody of Gothic fiction. Austen turns the conventions of 18th century novels on their head, by making her heroine a plain and undistinguished girl from a middle-class family, allowing the heroine to fall in love with

the hero before he has a serious thought of her, and exposing the heroine's romantic fears and curiosities as groundless.

GoodReads says: Northanger Abbey is often referred to as Jane Austen's Gothic parody. Decrepit castles, locked rooms, mysterious chests, cryptic notes, and tyrannical fathers give the story an uncanny air, but one with a decidedly satirical twist.

The story's heroine is Catherine Morland, an innocent seventeen-year-old woman from a country parsonage. While spending a few weeks in Bath with a family friend, Catherine meets and falls in love with Henry Tilney, who invites her to visit his family estate, Northanger Abbey. Once there, Catherine, a great reader of Gothic thrillers, lets the shadowy atmosphere of the old mansion fill her mind with terrible suspicions. What is the mystery surrounding the death of Henry's mother? Is the family concealing a terrible secret within the elegant rooms of the Abbey? Can she trust Henry, or is he part of an evil conspiracy? Catherine finds dreadful portents in the most prosaic events, until Henry persuades her to see the peril in confusing life with art.

### **Sofia Coppola: A Cinema of Girlhood - Fiona Handyside**

Sofia Coppola is one of a small number of women to make it to the top working behind the camera in the film industry of Hollywood. This book looks at Sofia as well as the themes of 'girlhood' which she examines in her work.

Book Description: She has received numerous accolades including an Academy Award and two Golden Globes, and in 2004 became the first ever American woman to be nominated for a Best Director Oscar. From *The Virgin Suicides* to *The Bling Ring*, her work carves out new spaces for the expression of female subjectivity that embraces rather than rejects femininity. Fiona Handyside here considers the careful counter-balance of vulnerability with the possibilities and pleasures of being female in Coppola's films - albeit for the white and the privileged - through their recurrent themes of girlhood, fame, power, sex and celebrity. Chapters reveal a post-feminist aesthetic that offers sustained, intimate engagements with female characters. These characters inhabit luminous worlds of girlish adornments, light and sparkle and yet find homes in unexpected places from hotels to swimming pools, palaces to strip clubs: resisting stereotypes and the ordinary. In this original study, Handyside brings critical attention to a rare female auteur and in so doing contributes to important analyses of post-feminism, authorship in film, and the growing field of girlhood studies.

### **Enchantment: The life of Audrey Hepburn – Donald Spoto**

Audrey Hepburn is one of the best known and loved female actors of the twentieth century, who also went on to work for UNICEF and whose childhood and early life was a sad product of Europe in the 1930's.

Amazon says: Born in Brussels in 1929, Audrey Hepburn was the daughter of a British father and a Dutch Baroness. But when she was five, her father deserted the family. With the outbreak of war in 1939, her mother thought they would be safer in Holland than Holland Park, but although they survived the German Occupation, the experience left its physical and emotional scars.

Back in England again, Audrey studied ballet with Marie Rambert. After a few West End musicals and minor film parts, she was spotted by the author, Colette, to star in a stage version of her novel, *Gigi*. And then Audrey's career took off. Her debut screen role was the Princess in the enchanting *Roman Holiday*. It won her an Oscar.

She went on to bring her unique grace and high spirits to a number of highly acclaimed films - from *Funny Face* and *The Nun's Story* to *My Fair Lady*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's* and *Robin and Marian*.

For a while it looked as though her personal life would follow the Hollywood dream. But her marriage to Mel Ferrer was not to last. She married and divorced a second time, and there were other passionate but short-lived affairs, some revealed for the first time in this book, but her relationships were never entirely successful.

With all the insight, background knowledge and innate sympathy for his subject, qualities that have made his biographies of Hitchcock, Dietrich, Monroe and Bergman such international successes, Donald Spoto truly captures the spirit of an elusive, beautiful, talented and vulnerable woman.

### **The African Queen – C.S. Forester**

A classic story about love and war which became a much loved movie starring Katherine Hepburn.

Goodreads says: A classic story of adventure and romance - the novel that inspired the legendary movie starring Katherine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart

A fast-moving tale and a very good yarn...Mr Forester again and again proves himself a master of suspense - *New York Times Book Review*

As World War I reaches the heart of the African jungle, Charlie Allnut and Rose Sayer, a dishevelled trader and an English spinster missionary, find themselves thrown together by circumstance. Fighting time, heat, malaria, and bullets, they make their escape on the rickety steamboat *The African Queen*...and hatch their own outrageous military plan. Originally published in 1935, *The African Queen* is a tale replete with vintage Forester drama - unrelenting suspense, reckless heroism, impromptu military manoeuvres, near-death experiences - and a good old-fashioned love story to boot.

### **The French Lieutenant's Woman – John Fowles**

A work of literature that received much attention for its treatment of the independent Sarah Woodruff who somewhat defied societal expectations.

Amazon says: Charles Smithson, a respectable engaged man, meets Sarah Woodruff as she stands on the Cobb at Lyme Regis, staring out to sea. Charles falls in love, but Sarah is a disgraced woman, and their romance will defy all the stifling conventions of the Victorian age. Widely acclaimed since publication, this is the best-love of John Fowles' novels.

Goodreads says: The scene is the village of Lyme Regis on Dorset's Lyme Bay..."the largest bite from the underside of England's out-stretched southwestern leg." The major characters in the love-intrigue triangle are Charles Smithson, 32, a gentleman of independent means & vaguely scientific bent; his fiancée, Ernestina Freeman, a pretty heiress daughter of a wealthy & pompous dry goods merchant; & Sarah Woodruff, mysterious & fascinating...deserted after a brief affair with a French naval officer a short time before the story begins. Obsessed with an irresistible fascination for the enigmatic Sarah, Charles is hurtled by a moment of consummated lust to the brink of the existential

void. Duty dictates that his engagement to Tina must be broken as he goes forth once again to seek the woman who has captured his Victorian soul & gentleman's heart.

### **The Light Between Oceans – M. L. Stedman**

The film of this book was released last year to mixed reviews but there is no doubt that the story is one worth reading.

Amazon says: THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER - 2.3 million copies sold  
The international bestselling book of the major Hollywood film starring Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander

A Richard and Judy bookclub favourite  
Goodreads historical category winner

'Extraordinary and heartrending' MARKUS ZUSAK, author of The Book Thief

A boat washes up on the shore of a remote lighthouse keeper's island. It holds a dead man - and a crying baby. The only two islanders, Tom and his wife Izzy, are about to make a devastating decision.  
They break the rules and follow their hearts. What happens next will break yours.

'Unforgettable' Guardian

'A moving tale ...prepare to weep' New York Times

### **Still Alice – Lisa Genova**

The women on the bookworms Facebook group loved this book and the film and highly recommended that it be included on this list.

Goodreads Says: Alice Howland is proud of the life she worked so hard to build. At fifty years old, she's a cognitive psychology professor at Harvard and a world-renowned expert in linguistics with a successful husband and three grown children. When she becomes increasingly disoriented and forgetful, a tragic diagnosis changes her life--and her relationship with her family and the world--forever.

At once beautiful and terrifying, Still Alice is a moving and vivid depiction of life with early-onset Alzheimer's disease that is as compelling as A Beautiful Mind and as unforgettable as Judith Guest's Ordinary People.

### **The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood**

A text in which the main female character only has one function – to breed. Dissection would bring death but the regime cannot extinguish a female fight for individual thought nor desire.

Wikipedia says: The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is a work of speculative fiction by Canadian author Margaret Atwood. Set in a near-future New England, in a totalitarian theocracy which has overthrown the United States government, the dystopian novel explores themes of women in subjugation and the various means by which they gain agency. The novel's title echoes the component parts of Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, which comprises a series of connected stories ("The Merchant's Tale", "The Parson's Tale", etc.).

The Handmaid's Tale won the 1985 Governor General's Award and the first Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1987; it was also nominated for the 1986 Nebula Award, the 1986 Booker Prize, and the 1987 Prometheus Award. It has been adapted for the cinema, radio, opera, and stage. The Handmaid's Tale has never been out of print since its first publication in 1985.

### **The Color Purple – Alice Walker**

A tale which has been the subject of debate and censorship because of its depictions of abuse and violence it is still hugely popular and considered a modern classic.

'One of the most haunting books you could ever wish to read ... it is stunning - moving, exciting, and wonderful' Lenny Henry

Goodreads says: The Color Purple is a 1982 epistolary novel by American author Alice Walker which won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction. It was later adapted into a film and musical of the same name.

Taking place mostly in rural Georgia, the story focuses on the life of women of color in the southern United States in the 1930s, addressing numerous issues including their exceedingly low position in American social culture.

Amazon says: Set in the deep American South between the wars, THE COLOR PURPLE is the classic tale of Celie, a young black girl born into poverty and segregation. Raped repeatedly by the man she calls 'father', she has two children taken away from her, is separated from her beloved sister Nettie and is trapped into an ugly marriage. But then she meets the glamorous Shug Avery, singer and magic-maker - a woman who has taken charge of her own destiny. Gradually Celie discovers the power and joy of her own spirit, freeing her from her past and reuniting her with those she loves.

### **Virginia Woolf – Orlando**

The NWR bookworms group felt that, not only should we include Virginia Woolf in our list, but that Tilda Swinton was exceptional in the film version of this work. 'The longest and most charming love letter in literature' (Goodreads).

Amazon says: As his tale begins, Orlando is a passionate young nobleman whose days are spent in rowdy revelry, filled with the colourful delights of Queen Elizabeth's court. By the close, he will have transformed into a modern, 36-year-old woman and three centuries will have passed. Orlando will not only witness the making of history from its edge, but will find that his unique position as a woman who knows what it is to be a man will give him insight into matters of the heart.

### **Room – Emma Donoghue**

A book about maternal love, resilience and strength.

Wikipedia says: Room is a 2010 novel by Irish-Canadian author Emma Donoghue. The story is told from the perspective of a five-year-old boy, Jack, who is being held captive in a small room along with his mother. Donoghue conceived the story after hearing about five-year-old Felix in the Fritzl case.

The novel was longlisted for the 2011 Orange Prize and won the 2011 Commonwealth Writers' Prize regional prize (Caribbean and Canada); was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2010 and was shortlisted for the 2010 Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the 2010 Governor General's Awards.

The film adaptation, also titled *Room*, was released in November 2015, starring Brie Larson and Jacob Tremblay and was nominated for four Academy Awards, with Larson winning the Academy Award for Best Actress.

Goodreads says: To five-year-old Jack, *Room* is the entire world. It is where he was born and grew up; it's where he lives with his Ma as they learn and read and eat and sleep and play. At night, his Ma shuts him safely in the wardrobe, where he is meant to be asleep when Old Nick visits.

*Room* is home to Jack, but to Ma, it is the prison where Old Nick has held her captive for seven years. Through determination, ingenuity, and fierce motherly love, Ma has created a life for Jack. But she knows it's not enough...not for her or for him. She devises a bold escape plan, one that relies on her young son's bravery and a lot of luck. What she does not realize is just how unprepared she is for the plan to actually work.

Told entirely in the language of the energetic, pragmatic five-year-old Jack, *Room* is a celebration of resilience and the limitless bond between parent and child, a brilliantly executed novel about what it means to journey from one world to another.

### **An Angel at my Table – Janet Frame**

Janet Frame is a favorite author of some of the women in the bookworms group who is felt to be underrated. This autobiography and film is felt to be a good introduction to her work.

Amazon says: One of the great autobiographies of the twentieth century ... A journey from luminous childhood, through the dark experiences of supposed madness, to the renewal of her life through writing fiction. It is a heroic story, and told with such engaging tone, humorous perspective and imaginative power' Michael Holroyd, Sunday Times

After being misdiagnosed with schizophrenia as a young woman, Janet Frame spent several years in psychiatric institutions. She escaped undergoing a lobotomy when it was discovered that she had just won a national literary prize. She then went on to become New Zealand's most acclaimed writer. As she says more than once in this autobiography: 'My writing saved me.'

### **Fried Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café – Fannie Flagg**

A book which tells the story of women's lives and explores themes of family, aging, lesbianism, race and boredom.

*The day Idgie Threadgoode and Ruth Jamison opened the Whistle Stop Cafe, the town took a turn for the better. It was the Depression and that cafe was a home from home for many of us. You could get eggs, grits, bacon, ham, coffee and a smile for 25 cents. Ruth was just the sweetest girl you ever met. And Idgie? She was a character, all right. You never saw anyone so headstrong. But how anybody could have thought she murdered that man is beyond me.*

Goodreads says: It's first the story of two women in the 1980s, of gray-headed Mrs. Threadgoode telling her life story to Evelyn, who is in the sad slump of middle age. The

tale she tells is also of two women -- of the irrepressibly dare devilish tomboy Idgie and her friend Ruth, who back in the thirties ran a little place in Whistle Stop, Alabama, a Southern kind of Cafe Wobegon offering good barbecue and good coffee and all kinds of love and laughter, even an occasional murder. (less)

### **Dr Zhivago – Boris Pasternak**

An epic Russian tale about love, war and society.

Goodreads says: This epic tale about the effects of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath on a bourgeois family was not published in the Soviet Union until 1987. One of the results of its publication in the West was Pasternak's complete rejection by Soviet authorities; when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1958 he was compelled to decline it. The book quickly became an international best-seller.

Dr. Yury Zhivago, Pasternak's alter ego, is a poet, philosopher, and physician whose life is disrupted by the war and by his love for Lara, the wife of a revolutionary. His artistic nature makes him vulnerable to the brutality and harshness of the Bolsheviks. The poems he writes constitute some of the most beautiful writing in the novel.