

Recommended Good Reads

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'Saturday' by Ian McEwan

The line between rationalism and mysticism is at the heart of all of McEwan's work and Saturday is no exception, although it is hidden under an overt political theme, the consequences of which play out in quintessential, McEwanesque, rupturing of daily existence. How much can we trust our world of reason and can we ever predict the points at which we are closest to chaos? Are we constantly standing on the brink whilst being comforted by rational illusion? Set against the backdrop of the Iraq War Protests in London, McEwan, with his usual masterly command of the language, takes a 24 hour period and transforms it into a mind map of freethinking Henry Perone, a neurosurgeon, and thoroughly reasonable fellow, whose world is disrupted by a violator whose presence causes Henry to radically question the ideals he holds dearest. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Brixton Beach' by Roma Tearne

Roma Tearne fled the civil war in Sri Lanka at the age of 10 in the 1970s and now lives in England. This novel with autobiographical elements is the story of a little girl of a mixed Tamil/Singhalese marriage growing up in the midst of increasing inter-racial tensions and violence. In spite of the portrayal of the tragic events befalling the girl's family, this book contains heart-warming elements, especially in its description of the girl's relationship with her beloved grandfather. [Graham, Access & Inclusion]

'You Don't Love Me Yet' by Jonathan Lethem

Being in a band. Sleeping with your band mates. A chance encounter with a mysterious stranger. Lethem treats us to a youthful fifteen minutes of fame, where hipsters, nerds and downright weirdo's come together to create the sound of their times and dance alternately with the concepts of superficiality and authenticity. A quick, modern read with sharp dialogue and smooth prose. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Buddha of Suburbia' by Hanif Kureishi

Following the life and troubles of young Karim, Kureishi explores identity and belonging, prejudice and racism not always necessarily explicit. Fittingly, London is the backdrop, taking us on a journey of self discovery through the landscape and the diversity of people Karim encounters. [Aysha, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Stranger' by Albert Camus

Probably the best known of all of Camus' novels and essays, *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*) in the guise of the hero, Mersault, is the quintessential embodiment of Camus' theory of the Absurd. Mersault acts less like a typical human and more like the Absurd universe itself; cold, unresponsive and indifferent to the ways of mankind. Yet still becomes a victim of the Absurd, due to the tragic incompatibility between, the rest of society and the world they inhabit. Society must find reason through judgement, and so they condemn Mersault for his inability to define the world in terms of rational morality. A classic by any criteria. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Believers' by Zoe Heller

Set in New York, post 9/11, as members of one outwardly successful family are forced to confront doubt about their long-held beliefs. This is an excellent book – absolutely readable, extremely funny, and also profound. As in 'Note on a scandal' Zoe Heller takes you into the minds of, and even makes you sympathise with, what are some quite obnoxious characters. Really enjoyable and satisfying. [Kate, Library Development]

'Young Adam' by Alexander Trocchi

Trocchi's drifter is one of a long line of literary drifters; amoralist facing moral dilemma. Unlike Camus' "Stranger" Trocchi's drifter commits a crime of which he goes unpunished and so we are deprived of the judgement of society but are treated to the self judgement of a man supposedly set adrift from the rules of humanity. A simple, direct prose and candid tone of voice belies a rich texture of ethical quandaries. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Trainspotting' by Irvine Welsh

Written in the first person, Welsh uses various narrative techniques in exploring the lives of heroin addicts in a whirlpool of violence, illness and self destruction. Inspiring the Danny Boyle directed film of the very name, *Trainspotting* has indeed become a cult classic, a must read and a must see. [Aysha, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Isle of Dogs' by Daniel Davies

A smart novel, whose controversial subject matter is really the least thrilling part of the work. As in Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, protagonist, Jeremy Shepard, is revealed to us through the device of "found manuscript." This manuscript is really a confessional document describing, in first person narration, how Jeremy came to give up the nineties London life of achievement, adrenalin and material gratification for a drab, dull existence, living with parents in suburban England, in a dead end job with no ambitions. Except, to worship at the altar of his asceticism, by having anonymous sex in car parks with onlookers. Hence the title of the book. Davies cleverly investigates Maslow's hierarchy of needs, through the laconic tongue of his confessor/narrator. It's all pretty slick and brings to mind the spirit of J.G. Ballard. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Madame Bovary' by Gustave Flaubert

Sparking controversy upon its initial release, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is no

doubt a literary masterpiece. Focusing on Emma Bovary's extravagant indulgences as a means of escaping the provincial life, Flaubert lets her take this further by having adulterous affairs. The near perfect narration and Realist approach have only served to further Flaubert's influence on the literary world. [Aysha, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Demon' by Hubert Selby JR

Selby JR lulls you into a false sense of security with his artless, unassuming style. You know something's coming but you feel safely distanced from it. Before you know it, you're sliding. The characters dark concerns become your concerns and before you know it you are off the rails and running the gauntlet of the psychological horror that is a genre all of it's own in Selby's hands. What you thought was artlessness is calculated manipulation and concrete style. One of the true mavericks of the late twentieth century. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Alchemist' by Paulo Coelho

"When you really want something to happen, the whole universe conspires so that your wish comes true". The Alchemist presents a simple fable, based on simple truths. A motivational, and exciting novel that bursts with optimism; it is the kind of novel that tells you that everything is possible as long as you really want it to happen. If you read through the eyes of the Shephard, you'll discover the wealth of wisdom as you turn each page. [Joytun, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Revolutionary Road' by Richard Yates

Richard Yates belongs in a category all of his own. Eugene O'Neil is the only other writer who comes close to his, particular brand of, darkness. The construction of the interior lives of these young hopefuls, living out the suburban nightmare of fifties America, is remarkable in its detail, realism and symbolic relation to the world of the novel. The emotional depth, ear for dialogue and dramatic construction is second to none. The philosophical insights regarding the American Dream in all it's terrible mediocrity informs the world of the book, the world at large and your own existence in devastating prose. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Broken Verses' by Kamila Shamsie

I found 'Broken Verses' by Kamila Shamsie addictively beautiful. The plot twists round the engaging themes of feminism, media, poetry and politics in modern day Pakistan, enveloping the reader in a world radiant with poetry, wit and lovely dry humour. [Anna, Idea Store Canary Wharf]

'Apathy and Other Small Victories' by Paul Neilan

Continuing the tradition of slacker fiction, Paul Neilan's irreverent and hilarious novel is unrelentless in its scathing attack on contemporary culture's obsession with Work and Relationships. One of the funniest books I've ever read with a style that crackles like a hot stand-up comic. [Jeff, Idea store Whitechapel]

'Brixton Rock' by Alex Wheatle

'Brixton Rock' is set in the early 80's around the time of the Brixton Riots, it's a story of a young mixed race teenager, who is fighting for survival on the urban streets of Brixton. The story deals with difficult issues such as incest, violence and race relationships. This was an interesting read, but not for the faint hearted, but I would recommend it to people to open their minds. [Roger, Idea Store Canary Wharf]

'Ask the Dust' by John Fante

Fante, who was the acknowledged god of Charles Bukowski, is one of the most overlooked American fiction writers of the twentieth century. The plight of his protagonist, wannabe writer Arturo Bandini, evokes an absurdity that is universally recognised. The story is at once tragic and hilarious. The style is artless and poetic. Fante's honesty and humour regarding the state of his own ego results in some of the most beautiful and courageous prose you will ever read. Spectacularly modern, even seventy years on. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Testimony' by Anita Shreve

An emotional story told through the eyes of all the individuals concerned: each one captivating the gripping emotions that sway through the chapters, of a sex scandal caught on camera. Brilliantly written to keep you wanting to get to the end which concludes with a sad but very convincing consequence of how many lives can be shattered by one single act. [Lisa, Idea Store Canary Wharf]

'The F! Up' by Arthur Nersesian**

A true urban odyssey. Nersesian effectively effuses this tale of a down at heel loser with his sense of the mythic, whilst maintaining warmth and a fine comic sensibility. Nersesian's characters are never stock. They are always infused with a myriad of motivations, confused and situationist, caught in the web of the world, making things worse for themselves by kicking to get free. Ultimately a novel about the absurdities of life's pitfalls and the consequences of desire. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Great Lover' by Jill Dawson

Based on fact, a fiction novel involving the loves and lives of and around Rupert Brooke. A 'love' story with strong moving chapters, capturing the early 1900s and way of life. I loved the way the author takes you through a story of love and fate through the eyes of Rupert and a maid where he lodges, named Nellie. Very moving and how the actual letters and phrases have been used compels me to read more on Rupert's troubled and complex life of a poet. The novel creates a mass of afterthought and I felt quite mesmerised for days, wondering, if life was not so governed by class differentiation then, would Nellie and Rupert's destiny of been together? [Lisa, Idea Store Canary Wharf]

'Unlubricated' by Arthur Nersesian

Sounds painful, and it can be when you're a young actress who's trying to set

up a shot for herself off Broadway. Nersesian paints such charming and likable hustlers. They aren't exactly criminals or saints, just opportunists who are looking for that lucky break. The poignancy of Nersesian's prose throws a sympathetic glaze over his protagonists who are trying desperately to do the right thing in a world where nice guys finish last. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Headlong' by Michael Frayn

An art historian stumbles across what he thinks is a lost Breugel in a tumble down country house. He decides to try and outwit the owner and keep the fortune the painting is worth. He is thrown into a whirlpool of double dealing and intrigue. A fascinating and wonderful mix of art history, crime novel and morals. [Rebecca, Idea Store Canary Wharf]

'The Fall' by Albert Camus

Camus didn't win the Nobel Prize for nothing. His second person narrative about a man who gradually discovers the absurdity of his own life, demonstrates the prowess of a writer at the height of his powers. Camus' deft skill enables an identification, and thus appreciation of the similarities of everyone's feelings towards their life, as well as an artful distance which then enables an intellectual recognition of the Absurd Philosophy which Camus conceived of in Paris after World War Two following a split with the Existentialists.

'My Best Friend's Girl' by Dorothy Koomson

A brilliant read. Love, betrayal, grief and fun right through to the very end. [Lorraine, Idea Store Canary Wharf]

'The Reader' by Bernhard Schlink

How do we cope with the knowledge of atrocities and what are the secrets in our own lives that allow us to live in collusion with such atrocities? These are just a couple of the themes that Schlink manages to grapple with in this incredibly lucid account of a young man's sexual awakening in Germany during the aftermath of the holocaust. The writing is so simple and direct that it is able to encompass so many ideas, love, betrayal, conscience and the torture of memory. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Mortal Engines' by Phillip Reeve

Although classed as 'children's fiction' I would recommend it to literally everyone over the age of 9. The story is original, Reeve has a wonderful writing style, the characters are great, and I was on the edge of my seat with horror, awe, and excitement towards the end. The whole series is fantastic, including the recent prequel. [Caroline, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Junky' by William Burroughs

Is there anybody more slick and hip than William S. Burroughs. One of the key movers and shakers of the Beat Generation, Burroughs has left a lasting impact on all art forms from film (David Cronenberg's Naked Lunch) to photography (Annie Leibovitz: A Photographer's Life 1990-2005). His prose is as iconic as his persona. His laconic tone presides over a world of lowlife. The style reads like a reportage from the "hip" to the "straight" world which also

has other homosexual connotations. Drenched in, alternately and sometimes instantaneously, self aggrandizing and self deprecating narration, Burroughs extemporaneous prose reveals the quintessential form of "Beat". Simply genius. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Good Omens' by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman

Two fantastic authors (I particularly love Pratchett's Discworld) that between them created a hilarious and intelligent novel about sworn enemies and friends Aziraphale (an Angel) and Crowley ("an angel who did not so much fall as saunter vaguely downward") trying to prevent Armageddon. Next Saturday. Parts of this book have become family lore, in particular the fact that if you leave a tape in your car for too long it will morph into Queen's Greatest Hits. [Caroline, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Commitments' by Roddy Doyle

The concept, the style, the prose, the dialogue. Everything about this novel is so simple and it works just wonderfully. Roddy Doyle's first novel, set in blighted Barrytown, Dublin in the eighties, is the evolution of a soul band from conception, in the mind of the manager, to the inevitable break up due to over inflated egos and entangled loins. So beautifully witty and observant and just laugh out loud funny. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'I Did a Bad Thing' by Linda Green

What can I say! I totally loved this book. A great debut novel by Linda Green. A story about being imprisoned by guilt, and the courage to face it and then forgive yourself. There's some hilarious bits which really made me laugh out loud (you'll see when you meet Jonathan!) Green skillfully takes the reader back in time in the chapters as opposed to having the character just reminiscing about it. So good, I had to read it twice!! [Joytun, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The End Of Mr Y' by Scarlett Thomas

The musty smell of an old book, a generous helping of time-travel and an exploration of the very nature of being make this one to be missed at your peril. [Mark, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The End of the Affair' by Graham Greene

The consuming power of jealousy and the conflicts between love of self, love of another and love of God are under the spotlight in Greene's masterful portrayal of an illicit wartime romance. Transportive prose that oozes with the malady of obsession laced with deep insight and wisdom in regard to everyone's emotional life. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Secret Scripture' by Sebastian Barry

This novel finds Roseanne McNulty secretly writing her life story from a hospital in Ireland, as she nears her 100th birthday. Heart-rending, tragic and passionate, this is a beautifully written book that won the Costa Book Award 2008. [Mark, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The Making of Mia' by ILana Fox

A brilliantly written, gorgeous, feel-good book of one woman's journey from rags to riches. This book is extremely touching, sad yet after reading it, it will definitely put a big smile on your face! [Mita, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Perfume' by Patrick Suskind

An incredible modernist fable set in period times. The protagonist of this novel became one of my literary heroes before I'd even finished the book. A scathing portrayal of man's search for beauty and truth amongst the vagaries and downright brutalities of life. The story of an uncompromising artist by an artist who doesn't compromise. [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Because She Can' by Bridie Clark

This chick flick is a must read summer book! It is very funny and you will not want to put it down! Claire is about to get married to Randall, the man of her dreams. Claire has reckoned without the boss from hell, Vivian Grant, who is considered the publishing world's ruthless tyrant. As Claire finds her career teetering, she begins to doubt whether she can survive Vivian's abuse, tantrums, and whether Randall is really her Prince Charming. [Mita, Idea Store Whitechapel]

A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry

Set in Mumbai, India, 'A Fine Balance' describes how four different characters from dissimilar backgrounds come together and develop a bond. It was set in mid 70s during the political emergency of Indira Government and describes how politics can cast lunatic effects on general people's life. [Rashed, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'Boredom' by Alberto Moravia

Boredom is of the Existential kind in this novel of sexual obsession. The boredom has parallels with Sartre's Nausea, that sensation of feeling one's existence acutely. The hapless protagonist of Moravia's tale, a wealthy artist, craves the feeling of boredom but is denied it due to his preoccupation with a young model. What Moravia is able to capture and transmute into fiction is the utter individuality of sensation, as though his dilemma had never, and would never be, experienced by anyone but himself, conjuring to mind Joseph Conrad's maxim: "We live as we dream...alone." [Jeff, Idea Store Whitechapel]

'The God of Small Things' by Arundhati Roy

This is a story of two twins, Rahel and Estha, whose childhood was traumatised by a series of unfortunate events that led them in separation. Set in Kerala, India, This book tells how childhood abuse can perpetually damage one's life and haunts throughout. [Rashed, Idea Store Whitechapel]

Sea of poppies by Amitav Ghosh

During the Opium Wars, a very mixed group of people head out to sea on a former slaving ship, The Ibis, each with their own set of dreams. The great mix of language, caste and nationality makes this book a real page turner. [Yvonne, Idea Store Whitechapel]

‘The Five People You meet in Heaven’ by Mitch Albom

I found this book inspirational and emotional. It is a simple tale about the story of Eddie a fairground attendant who dies and is met in heaven by five people who allow him to put his life in perspective. It is spiritual in the sense that it makes us wonder about the after life but at the same time thought provoking as it makes us realise that even trivial things can impact on a person’s life and shape their perceptions. It has a beautiful philosophy that we are all interconnected in some way and the things that Eddie did had a huge impact on others. This book is simply an inspirational and thought provoking read.....a really outstanding book! [Zoe, Idea Store Whitechapel]

Wind-up Bird Chronicle by Haruki Murakami

Toru Okada is a very ordinary man who has had a bit of bad luck. We follow his daily jaunts observing his encounters with various characters and situations, some of which are extremely mundane, while others are magical. [Yvonne, Idea Store Whitechapel]