

Popular Threads on Solosez

Holiday Reading List

I am almost at the end of my latest book and need some recommendations for the new year. This list has always come through with some great suggestions, so throw them out there!

Merry Christmas, Happy Hannukah and Happy New Year to all!

Andrea Goldman

Simple Rules for a Complex World, Richard Epstein.

Arthur B. Macomber, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

State of Denial -- Robert Woodward. Like all Woodward's books, incredibly researched. But it is also remarkably well-written and readable. You don't need to be a Beltway Insider or keep a notebook of which general is the assistant to what assistant secretary to follow the progression of events.

1 Dead in Attic -- Chris Rose. A collection of his award-winning columns from the New Orleans Times Picayune in the months following Katrina. Remarkable stories and personal accounts that bring home the emotions and trials of those living in Post-Katrina New Orleans.

A Gracious Plenty -- Sheri Reynolds. I read this novel several years ago, and it still stays with me. It is a story about a non-longer young girl who was deformed when a pot of boiling water was spilled on her as a youth. She has inherited the position of caretaker at the cemetery, and spends much of her time speaking with the spirits of the dead -- who are quite lively. Not a "scary" book, it is about mending relationships, and a wonderful read.

Snow Falling on Cedars -- David Guterson. Winner of many book awards several years ago, it remains one of my favorite novels. Wonderful writing. When a German-American is found dead on his boat in the San Juan Islands of Washington State a Japanese-American is charged with murder. Set post-WWII, it is a powerful look at prejudice and the impact it has on every-day lives.

The Last Madam -- Christine Wiltz. Wonderful biography of the last recognized madam in New Orleans. Tells a remarkable story of New Orleans, her life, and the characters who flowed through it (including Jim Garrison, Phil Harris and even John Wayne (who visited with his movie crew, but never went upstairs with the girls)

Lincoln -- David Herbert Donald. Wonderful biography.

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-- Steve Terrell

Personally, I could not believe I was spending time with fiction, but Gilead, by Marilynne Robinson, won the Pulitzer and I found it quite penetrating.

Arthur B. Macomber, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

The academic philosopher who teaches philosophy at Rutgers, Colin McGinn (Phil. of Mind, consciousness, intentionality, imagination, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical logic), has said that more great philosophy has been created by great authors of fiction" than has ever been produced by academic philosophers. The list is long, but I would include Graham Greene, Conrad, Dostoyevski, Tolstoy and a long list of others. The belief that fiction is for entertainment, not for serious study, is a great misconception.

Dick O'Connor

My position is one determined by my experience, which leads me to conjecture that to fairly cover the philosophic mindscape, fiction and academia would need to be compared with the philosophies inextricably bound to the acts of non-fictional characters and the events they create. A misread of the common man is that a philosophic bent or consideration is not an attribute of him or her, but I hew to the view that every voluntary act, if not every act, is an act demonstrating one's philosophy. This is true whether acts heroic or mundane are compared, because such philosophies are evident in the quick time of the moment without the academic or fictional tools of steeped consideration and parsed editing. With that in mind, my proposed hierarchy regarding a study of Great Philosophies (and my reply to Professor McGinn), would be 1) those found in the acts of real people in real events because they are philosophies people have lived out and committed to with real flesh and blood, 2) any battle between academicians and fictionists.

Of course, this allows Professor McGinn to remain correct, but I still remain primarily committed to non-fiction. While I agree with you that fiction is not only for entertainment, I find a truer study of philosophy comes from reading non-fiction.

Arthur B. Macomber, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

All that being said, Dick, and well-said it was, I find I most agree with your thought that the reader of non-fiction must guess at the philosophy of a book's actors. It is always difficult to chance an opinion on what type of personal background and perception of surrounding events led a person to act or react to historical circumstances as they have. Plus, the writer of non-fiction has a limited understanding of a historical actor's perception of reality which may be incorrect, in addition to the filter of the writer's own experience that is necessarily interposed between the actor and the reader. I guess the bottom line for me is that even with the

factual circumstances that can be detailed in non-fiction, a person's philosophy may be hard to determine, but at least I can hang my hat on the known facts. Whereas with fiction it is difficult to know what is meant to be true and to what extent, so I get lost keeping the various options in balance such that a discernable philosophy can have meaning for me back out here in the real world.

Arthur B. Macomber, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

In a message dated 12/26/2006 5:41:11 PM Mountain Standard Time, art@macomberlaw.com writes:

All that being said, Dick, and well-said it was, I find I most agree with your thought that the reader of non-fiction must guess at the philosophy of a book's actors.

My response:

I'm sorry if I gave the impression that one must "guess at the philosophy of a book's actor"--I didn't intend that at all. If anything, I think the writer (a Great Writer, that is) makes the philosophy of his actors crystal clear. Look at Conrad, in "Heart of Darkness" or "The Secret Sharer," two novellas that I have (for some reason) always thought of together. That is not to say that each reader may grasp a different philosophical idea (or a variation) out of any particular book.

It is always difficult to chance an opinion on what type of personal background and perception of surrounding events led a person to act or react to historical circumstances as they have. Plus, the writer of non-fiction has a limited understanding of a historical actor's perception of reality which may be incorrect, in addition to the filter of the writer's own experience that is necessarily interposed between the actor and the reader.

Response:

Now there I REALLY disagree. The writer (the GW, I mean) by his very creation, from his imagination and his life experiences, is automatically correct. You may disagree with what he is saying, but within the scope of his literary creation he must necessarily be correct. And, yes, his vision is "interposed between the actor and the writer"--that's what the philosophical novelist does--that's his purpose.

I guess the bottom line for me is that even with the factual circumstances that can be detailed in non-fiction, a person's philosophy may be hard to determine, but at least I can hang my hat on the known facts. Whereas with fiction it is difficult to know what is meant to be true and to what extent, so I get lost keeping the various options in balance such that a discernable philosophy can have meaning for me back out here in the real world.

Response:

It may have to do with your upbringing, your education, genetic heritage and any one of a number factors, mixed up in any number of ways. If the psychological makeup of every human being, consisting of millions of little cells organized in millions of different ways, is different from every other human being, I guess we can expect that we each process incoming information in different ways. So in fiction, if each reader processes the writer's words in a way that is perceptive, then we can expect that every reader will perceive the writer's intent in a slightly different way. However, although there may be disagreements by those who read Graham Greene , for example, there is a general agreement as to the nature of his focus and what he is trying (successfully in the case of Greene) to communicate. But the idea that what the writer (the GW) uses, as a factual basis upon which he hangs his philosophical concepts is somehow divorced of reality, is (if you will excuse me) just wrong. It is (once again, with a GW) a distillation of reality in a way that can be grasped by the reader and, about which, the related philosophical focus can be seen by the reader to present an answer (the protagonists--good OR bad) to the philosophical problem.

Now, let's say you have a problem of religious belief--something which is continually present in either your consciousness or just below the surface, ready to inundate you with doubt and a desire for understanding--some way to resolve the conflict. Reading one of the three books by Greene that I referred to initially will give you a view, however horrific you may consider it to be, of one way to work through the problem--the protagonist's, not necessarily the reader's. A new and different world has opened up for him or her.

Dick O'Connor

Reading list?!? Geez... you folks are making me yearn for the days when I had the time to read anything other than books with titles like "Evidence", "Criminal Law and Procedure", "Corporations" and "Professional Responsibility".

I graduate next June, however, and the day is fast approaching when I can sneak in some recreational reading. Yoo Hoo!

Brian Johnston Soon to be JD

There is a new Rumpole book out. Called RUMPOLE AND THE REIGN OF TERROR By John Mortimer Viking. 184 pp. \$23.95

David Zachary Kaufman

"The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World" by Matthew Stewart.

"The Fall of the Roman Empire" by Peter Heather

Dick O'Connor

Go for laughs and style. The Life and Times of Tristan Shandy, Joyce's Ulysses. Maybe Bryson, The Lost Continent or Notes From an Island.

John Page

I am familiar with all of Joyce's work..I read "Dubliners" in early High School and was hooked. IMO, "Ulysses" is absolutely his best work. Now I have to admit something--I have never been able to get through more than the first few pages of "Finnegans Wake."

"Tristan Shandy" is, of course, a classic. I've never read anything by Bryson and know nothing about him.

Dick O'Connor

Owls Aren't Wise and Bats Aren't Blind by Warren Shedd, a naturalist who debunks some wildlife myths. Well-written and entertaining. Ellen Buckley

Freakonomics by Steven D. Levitt is a fascinating read. A Univ. of Chicago economics professor applies economic analytics to everyday conundrums...

When Genius Failed by Roger Lowenstein - about the blowup of a prominent hedge fund that necessitated a government bailout - another fascinating read

Gene Lee

My wife, a youth services librarian and one of the greatest literary critics I know, brought home *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides (author of *The Virgin Suicides*) and I stole it from her. It's a good read.

Merry Christmas/Happy Festivus/Happy Hanukkah/Happy New Year/Happy Boxing Day/Have a great Kwanzaa,

Glenn Goonis, Dearborn Heights, Michigan

I was enchanted by *Middlesex,* but I had a hard time convincing others that it was a good read. Heck, I couldn't even get my best friends to consider reading it.

Last month, among my reading were:

In Patagonia, Bruce Chatwin I Feel Bad About My Neck, Nora Ephron Lucia Lucia: A Novel, Adriana Trigiani The Queen of the Big Time, Adriana Trigiani The Partly Cloudy Patriot, Sarah Vowell Thunderstruck, Erik "Devil in the White City" Larsen The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid: A Memoir, Bill Bryson

Having finished my stock of new acquisitions, I was forced to pluck out something from the shelves. I started upon re-reading old Paul Theroux. Tiring of that, or perhaps the better phrase is "exhausted," I began to fondly look at the collected works of Bill Bryson. Then, deciding that my reading needed direction, I picked up "Dancing with Cuba" by Alma Guillermoprieto, and decided that maybe I'd just start reading more about Cuba in the coming year.

jennifer rose

Blink - about how we process information.

Marc Stern

I saw Lincoln mentioned a few times, so I'll offer this title, which was a great read! *****Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln by Doris Kearns Goodwin If it's fiction you're after and you've read Michael Connelly's The Lincoln Lawyer, try all of Connelly's LAPD-Det. Harry Bosch novels. I, mistakenly read them all, out of order, and it was fun to sort of learn how things developed they way they did. I finally got my wife turned on to his books, which she now reads, only in large print while running on the treadmill.

Patrick C. Haynes, Jr.,

April 1865 by Stephen Winik was a great read for me although now teaching history (until this fall) I mostly read history. I don't think we will ever have a clear picture of Lincoln and I suspect we would mostly not like the man were he here today. The parallel to Bush is an unpleasant but telling portrait of the use of extra-law to preserve a perceived greater good, runs counter to my appreciation of the Constitution and the place it is to hold in this nation. Even though it appears to need thorough review and very carefully brought into the modern idiom in which great concepts, "cruel and unusual", "witness against (one's self)", "free speech", "free press", "freedom of religion" and "equal" do not appear to enjoy a general acceptance and certainly not a consensus by the people nor do they speak in a modern language well-understood throughout the society.

David McCullough's 1776 was finished recently and painted a picture of George Washington that for me, for the first time gave him flesh and feet of clay (teeth of wood NOT) humanizing this rigid figure adorning nearly everything remotely American. It was interesting history and more a biographical insight into Washington.

Winston Groom's 1942 (I now teach biology, physiology and anatomy all of which I learned mostly tactily) I am trying to read something other than numerical historical/fiction.

Another really fascinating clarification of my understanding of the history of Plymouth and the British Colonies which sprang up there is Philbrick's Mayflower.

Last "The Great Escape, Nine Jews who fled Hitler and Changed the World" a new release by Kati Marton is another form of truth to power and evil we cannot imagine in the context of the horrors these men lived through.

Now back to "Reproduction" and "Cell Membranes" along with "As Caesar Bent His Elbow" in pursuit of a 46 year aged memory. One can assess how the Springfield Schools are doing retaining teachers. The challenges mount.

Dick Howland

Dick - thanks for your insights. A great reading list. For an expansion of your biological reading, I highly recommend Parasite Rex by Carl Zimmer. (Gives great tidbits to keep student interest, but the primary value is a much deeper understanding of the complexity of the biological web.)

Rebecca Wiess

am currently reading Spook. It is a scientist's analysis of whether there is an afterlife. It is entertaining thus far.

Robert W. "Robby" Hughes, Jr., Stone Mountain, Georgia

I just finished reading An Anonymous Lawyer by Jeremy Blachman. I know its been discussed on this list. Great read; chuckle at the black humor. Its a fast read - I read it on the plane home from Huntsville, AL.

Also, got in my stocking (yes, my Mom still does stockings) Has My Lawyer Called Yet by Lawrence Fox. A collection of war stories by a solo practitioner. Entertaining.

I'm always up for the latest Anne Perry mystery (set in Victorian England, esp. the William Monk ones)

Recently started reading some old mystery writers: Ngaio Marsh and Josephine Tey.

And, though they have been mentioned on this list, you can't go wrong with the Alexander McCall Smith series which begins with the No. Ladies Detective Agency.

Sharon Campbell who is seven books behind my yearly goal - can I read 7 books by midnight Dec. 31?

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