



Best books...chosen by Therese Anne Fowler

In her new novel, *Z*, Therese Anne Fowler assumes the voice of Zelda Fitzgerald to recount the story of the young Southern belle who, by wedding F. Scott Fitzgerald, launched one of the most famous literary marriages of the 20th century.

Save Me the Waltz by Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald (out of print). A modernist, semi-autobiographical novel about a tormented baller dancer and her tormented artist husband. Published by Scribner's but heavily edited—first by F. Scott Fitzgerald, in order to “control the message”—it has moments of brilliance and begs for further care and development.

Loving Frank by Nancy Horan (Ballantine, \$15). To be a woman of passion and ambition in the early 20th century was to invite scandal, scorn, and personal anguish. Horan's 2007 novel gives us the real characters Martha Borthwick and her lover, Frank Lloyd Wright, as Borthwick struggles to balance her conflicting desires to be writer, mother, lover, and individual.

The Painted Girls by Cathy Marie Buchanan (Riverhead, \$28). This recent novel imagines the belle-epoque lives of two sisters, including the girl who inspired Degas's sculpture *Little Dancer Aged 14*. Here is the unglamorous side of Paris and art and aspiration and desire, and the lives of young women whose opportunities to even

survive, let alone thrive, are few.

The Age of Innocence by Edith Wharton (Dover, \$3.50). Wharton's novel of desire and emotional tragedy prefigured the kinds of fraught stories F. Scott Fitzgerald would go on to tell in his novels. When society not only dictates but controls our behaviors, what is really to be gained from following the rules?

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (Scribner, \$15). A Shakespearean novel most people know of but often don't actually know. Not a celebration of excess, nor a demonstration, entirely, of excess's “road to ruin,” *Gatsby* is a dark tale of how obsessive and unalterable hope can ruin even the most well-intentioned.

Rules of Civility by Amor Towles (Penguin, \$16). This debut novel from 2011 unfolds within the milieu of the Fitzgeralds' later lives—1930s New York—and shows how society came to reflect the vision put forth in *Gatsby*. In Towles's bright, daring narrator, Katey Kontent, we get a version of Zelda that Zelda herself was never quite able to embody.

Author of the week

Ida Pollock

For Ida Pollock, love is ageless, said **Toni Jones** in the *Daily Mail* (U.K.). At 105, the energetic Briton can confidently claim to be the world's oldest working romance novelist, and though she now dictates her



stories rather than typing them, she has no plans to stop. *The Runaway*, her 124th novel, is due out later

this year. “I think I was born to write,” she says. “My mother would put a typewriter on the dining room table and say, ‘There you go.’” Pollock was 14 when she wrote her first novel, a thriller titled *The Hills of Raven's Haunt*. She preferred writing mysteries as a teenager but says she switched to romance paperbacks “because my mother would always ask me to write ‘something pretty.’”

Pollock, who now writes as Marguerite Bell, admits to following a formula in much of her work, said **Simon de Bruxelles** in *The Times* (U.K.). “You need a grand, dramatic setting,” she says. “And a chance meeting—on a train, a cruise, or perhaps the hero and heroine find themselves shipwrecked on a desert island.” The men, she says, “are normally rich, but never vulgar with their money. Young men lack the maturity to take control, so an older man is essential to provide the reassurance the heroine needs.” Pollock says “there's always turbulence” before the man sweeps in to save the day, but she'd object to her stories being called bodice-rippers. “My books are full of hope and romance rather than sex,” she says. “They are a form of escapism: You can escape the parts of the world that you don't like.”

Also of interest...in creative quests

Forty-one False Starts

by Janet Malcolm (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, \$27)



Journalists who profile artists often forget that making things is hard work, said Pamela Erens in *TheMillions.com*. Not *New Yorker* contributor Janet Malcolm. In this collection of profiles of various

painters, photographers, and authors, process always matters more than personality. It's a “very refreshing” approach, even after Malcolm discovers that J.D. Salinger, Diane Arbus, and several other legends all apparently believed that they never created work as great as they'd hoped to.

The Ordinary Acrobat

by Duncan Wall (Knopf, \$27)



Duncan Wall was a circus skeptic before he became an aficionado, said Elizabeth McCracken in *The Washington Post*. In this “lovely” new book, the young lecturer at the National Circus School of Montreal

covers an “astonishing” amount of circus history while recounting how a kid bored by circus acts eventually chose to learn acrobatics, juggling, and clowning. Those first-person chapters lack drama, but Wall is terrific at explaining why each act is an art, a way to get audiences dreaming.

Daily Rituals

by Mason Currey (Knopf, \$25)



Gertrude Stein stared at cows. Igor Stravinsky did headstands. In this “lean, engaging volume,” former blogger Mason Currey surveys the work habits of history's great creative minds and shows us there's no

right way to get one's juices flowing, said John Wilwol in *NPR.org*. There's “something reassuring” about watching so many heroes battling the challenges of the daily grind. But while none discovered a way that anyone could produce good work, “all greats have *their way*.”

A Grand Complication

by Stacy Perman (Atria, \$26)



Relentless one-upmanship sometimes has its benefits, said Robert H. Frank in *The New York Times*. In the 1920s, automobile magnate James Ward Packard and Wall Street scion Henry Graves Jr. drove the art of

watchmaking to new heights by commissioning what were then the two most elaborate personal timepieces ever made. In Stacy Perman's “artfully told” account, the contest's wastefulness remains ever in sight, but so too does the salve such battles provide for the psyches of the super-rich.