



## Novel Guide

*Kent Halstead*

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The Novel Guide challenges readers, "Why not read the best?" then provides a running start with as rigorously selected a list of titles as ever compiled. Then for each title a carefully chosen quotation, typically 300 to 500 words, illustrates the nature of the story and the author's writing style. Supporting content includes each author's photograph and 300 examples of art associated with the novel genre including illustrations common to early titles, book covers, chapter headings, related film advertisements, literary award medals, bookmarks, fore-edge art, and cartoons. And the Guide includes a remarkable collection of related commentary dealing with all facets of reading and the fiction industry. All-in-all, the Guide, listing 575 titles and supporting content, should be the novel reader's best friend. The Novel Guide's commentary section covers 22 topics ranging from practical discussions on "Readers and Reading," "Collecting," and "Book Clubs," to such esoteric subjects as "Literary Feuds," "Deaths Too Early," and "Tributes, Epitaphs, and Inscriptions." Would-be authors will likely find the sections on "The Writing Craft," "The Publishing Industry," and "Rejections," at least informative if not necessarily encouraging. Students of the genre will be interested in "The State of the Art," "Writer's Lives," and "Reviews and Criticism." And such peripheral topics as "First and Last Lines," "Awards and Lists," and "Literary Extremes" are there simply for your enjoyment. The bibliography lists 127 titles under 19 headings, the major divisions being "Biographies, Memoirs, and Conversation," "Criticism/Reviews," "Guides and Listings," and "Plot Synopsis." The 575 reported titles were selected in as comprehensive and informed a manner as possible. The core listing of 257 "All-Time Best" titles were each so designated by at least two of 12 expert sources including Anthony Burgess, the British Broadcasting Company, the Norwegian Book Club, the College Board, Radcliffe Publishing, and Random House. A second set of 264 "Award-Winners" are titles that won or were finalists for two or more of seven major awards for fiction; prior to 1968, winners or finalists for one or more of the three major awards then available. Awards include the Pulitzer Prize (1918- ), National Book Award (1950- ), TIME magazine (1956- ), New York Times (1968- ), and the Man Booker Prize (1969- ). To this central collection the present author has added a 54 additional titles representing work believed significant yet overlooked, together with a few personal favorites. Each entry receives the same comprehensive treatment: title; publication date; brief plot synopsis; author's photo or artistic rendition, vital statistics, and occupation(s); and text quotation. Additional content selectively reported includes special events or circumstances of a given author's life and related visual evidence. Tabular data includes: ? Author, title, publication year, and page count. ? Citations received for "All-Time Best" titles, awards received for "Award Winners." ? Central theme identified by one of 12 subject descriptors, e.g., character, family, culture, history, crime/mysteries, military, and short stories. ? Literary quality and to a lesser degree readability appraised by the present author by a simple 1-2-3 rating scheme. Of the 575 title total, 139 titles (24%) received a #1 "outstanding" rating; 235 titles (41%) a "superior" rating; and 201 titles (35%) a "notable" rating. A final supplementary table lists 91 fiction "Bestsellers" reported by Publishers Weekly from 1917 through 2007. Judicious selection within this listing will invariably result in some "good, solid, commercial fiction" as John Grisham describes his writing.

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