

TAKADA

A Monthly Newsletter of Ibadan Book Club – February Edition

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LIBRARY

A **library** is an organized collection of books, other printed materials, and in some cases special materials such as manuscripts, films and other sources of information. Its collections can be of print, audio, or visual materials, including maps, prints, documents, microform (e.g. microfilm/microfiche), CDs, cassettes, videotapes, DVDs, video games, e-books, audiobooks and many other types of electronic resource. The places where this material is stored include public libraries, subscription libraries, and private libraries, and material can also be in digital form, stored on computers or accessible over the Internet. Libraries range in size from a few shelves of books in a small organization's library to collections of several million items in the larger national and academic libraries.

The first libraries consisted of archives of the earliest form of writing - the clay tablets in cuneiform script discovered in Sumer, some dating back to 2600 BC. These written archives mark the end of prehistory and the start of history. The earliest discovered private archives were kept at Ugarit. There is also evidence of libraries at Nippur about 1900 BC and at Nineveh about 700 BC showing a library classification system. Private or personal libraries made up of written books (as opposed to the state or institutional records kept in archives) appeared in classical Greece in the 5th century BC. In the 6th century, at the very close of the Classical period, the great libraries of the Mediterranean world remained those of Constantinople and Alexandria. From the 15th century in central and northern Italy, libraries of humanists and their enlightened patrons provided a nucleus around which an "academy" of scholars congregated in each Italian city of consequence. Tianyi Chamber, founded in 1561 by Fan Qin during the Ming Dynasty, is the oldest existing library in China. In its heyday it boasted a collection of 70,000 volume of antique books. The first library classification system was set up during the Han Dynasty. In

North America, it is believed that personal collections of books were brought over to the continent by French settlers in the 16th century. The oldest non-personal library on the North American continent was founded at The Jesuit College in Quebec City in 1635. The first textbook on library science was published 1808 by Martin Schrettinger.

A library is organized for use and maintained by a public body, an institution, a corporation, or a private individual. Public and institutional collections and services may be intended for use by people who choose not to — or cannot afford to — purchase an extensive collection themselves, who need material no individual can reasonably be expected to have, or who require professional assistance with their research. In addition to providing materials, libraries also provide the services of librarians who are experts at finding and organizing information and at interpreting information needs. Libraries often provide quiet areas for studying, and they also often offer common areas to facilitate group study and collaboration. Libraries often provide public facilities for access to their electronic resources and the Internet. Modern libraries are increasingly being redefined as places to get unrestricted access to information in many formats and from many sources. They are extending services beyond the physical walls of a building, by providing material accessible by electronic means, and by providing the assistance of librarians in navigating and analyzing very large amounts of information with a variety of digital tools.

Early libraries (2600 BC – 800 BC)

The first libraries consisted of archives of the earliest form of writing - the clay tablets in cuneiform script discovered in temple rooms in Sumer, some dating back to 2600 BC. These archives, which mainly consisted of the records of commercial transactions or inventories, mark the end of prehistory and the start of history.

Things were much the same in the government and temple records on papyrus of Ancient Egypt.^[3] The earliest discovered private archives were kept at Ugarit; besides correspondence and inventories, texts of myths may have been standardized practice-texts for teaching new scribes. There is also evidence of libraries at Nippur about 1900 BC and those at Nineveh about 700 BC showing a library classification system.

Over 30,000 clay tablets from the Library of Ashurbanipal have been discovered at Nineveh,^[8] providing modern scholars with an amazing wealth of Mesopotamian literary, religious and administrative work. Among the findings were the Enuma Elish, also known as *the Epic of Creation*,^[9] which depicts a traditional Babylonian view of creation, the Epic of Gilgamesh, a large selection of "omen texts" including *Enuma Anu Enlil* which "contained omens dealing with the moon, its visibility, eclipses, and conjunction with planets and fixed stars, the sun, its corona, spots, and eclipses, the weather, namely lightning, thunder, and clouds, and the planets and their visibility, appearance, and stations",^[11] and astronomic/astrological texts, as well as standard lists used by scribes and scholars such as word lists, bilingual vocabularies, lists of signs and synonyms, and lists of medical diagnoses.

Han Chinese scholar Liu Xiang established the first library classification system during the Han Dynasty,^[12] and the first book notation system. At this time the library catalogue was written on scrolls of fine silk and stored in silk bags.

Classical period (800 BC – 500 AD)

The Library of Alexandria, in Egypt, was the largest and most significant great library of the ancient world.^[13] It flourished under the patronage of the Ptolemaic dynasty and functioned as a major center of scholarship from its construction in the 3rd century BC until the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BC. The library was conceived and opened either during the reign of Ptolemy I Soter (323–283 BC) or during the reign of his son Ptolemy II (283–246 BC).^[14] An early organization system was in effect at Alexandria.^[14]

Private or personal libraries made up of written books (as opposed to the state or institutional records kept in archives) appeared in classical Greece in the 5th century BC. The celebrated book collectors of Hellenistic Antiquity were listed in the late 2nd century in *Deipnosophistae*. All these libraries were Greek; the cultivated Hellenized diners in *Deipnosophistae* pass over the libraries of Rome in silence. By the time of Augustus there were public libraries near the forums of Rome: there were libraries in the Porticus Octaviae near the Theatre of Marcellus, in the temple of Apollo Palatinus, and in the Bibliotheca Ulpiana in the Forum of Trajan. The state archives were kept in a structure on the slope between the Roman Forum and the Capitoline Hill.

Private libraries appeared during the late republic: Seneca inveighed against libraries fitted out for show by illiterate owners who scarcely read their titles in the course of a lifetime, but displayed the scrolls in bookcases (*armaria*) of citrus wood inlaid with ivory that ran right to the ceiling: "by now, like bathrooms and hot water, a library is got up as standard equipment for a fine house (*domus*).^[15] Libraries were amenities suited to a villa, such as Cicero's at Tusculum, Maecenas's several villas, or Pliny the Younger's, all described in surviving letters. At the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, apparently the villa of Caesar's father-in-law, the Greek library has been partly preserved in volcanic ash; archaeologists speculate that a Latin library, kept separate from the Greek one, may await discovery at the site.

In the West, the first public libraries were established under the Roman Empire as each succeeding emperor strove to open one or many which outshone that of his predecessor. Unlike the Greek libraries, readers had direct access to the scrolls, which were kept on shelves built into the walls of a large room. Reading or copying was normally done in the room itself. The surviving records give only a few instances of lending features. As a rule, Roman public libraries were bilingual: they had a Latin room and a Greek room. Most of the large Roman baths were also cultural centres, built from the start with a library, a two room arrangement with one room for Greek and one for Latin texts.

Libraries were filled with parchment scrolls as at Library of Pergamum and on papyrus scrolls as at Alexandria: the export of prepared writing materials was a staple of commerce. There were a few institutional or royal libraries which were open to an educated public (such as the Serapeum collection of the Library of Alexandria, once the largest library in the ancient world),^[14] but on the whole collections were private. In those rare cases where it was possible for a scholar to consult library books there seems to have been no direct access to the stacks. In all recorded cases the books were kept in a relatively small room where the staff went to get them for the readers, who had to consult them in an adjoining hall or covered walkway.

Middle Ages (600 AD – 1400 AD)

In the 6th century, at the very close of the Classical period, the great libraries of the Mediterranean world remained those of Constantinople and Alexandria. Cassiodorus, minister to

Theodoric, established a monastery at Vivarium in the heel of Italy with a library where he attempted to bring Greek learning to Latin readers and preserve texts both sacred and secular for future generations. As its unofficial librarian, Cassiodorus not only collected as many manuscripts as he could, he also wrote treatises aimed at instructing his monks in the proper uses of reading and methods for copying texts accurately. In the end, however, the library at Vivarium was dispersed and lost within a century.

Through Origen and especially the scholarly presbyter Pamphilus of Caesarea, an avid collector of books of Scripture, the theological school of Caesarea won a reputation for having the most extensive ecclesiastical library of the time, containing more than 30,000 manuscripts: Gregory Nazianzus, Basil the Great, Jerome and others came and studied there.

By the 8th century first Iranians and then Arabs had imported the craft of papermaking from China, with a paper mill already at work in Baghdad in 794. By the 9th century public libraries started to appear in many Islamic cities. They were called "halls of Science" or *dar al-'ilm*. They were each endowed by Islamic sects with the purpose of representing their tenets as well as promoting the dissemination of secular knowledge. The 9th century Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil of Iraq, ordered the construction of a "zawiyat qurra" – an enclosure for readers which was "lavishly furnished and equipped". In Shiraz Adhud al-Daula (d. 983) set up a library, described by the medieval historian, al-Muqaddasi, as "a complex of buildings surrounded by gardens with lakes and waterways. The buildings were topped with domes, and comprised an upper and a lower story with a total, according to the chief official, of 360 rooms.... In each department, catalogues were placed on a shelf... the rooms were furnished with carpets".^[17] The libraries often employed translators and copyists in large numbers, in order to render into Arabic the bulk of the available Persian, Greek, Roman and Sanskrit non-fiction and the classics of literature. This flowering of Islamic learning ceased centuries later when learning began declining in the Islamic world, after many of these libraries were destroyed by Mongol invasions. Others were victim of wars and religious strife in the Islamic world. However, a few examples of these medieval libraries, such as the libraries of Chinguetti in West Africa, remain intact and relatively unchanged. Another ancient library from this period which is still operational and expanding is the Central Library of Astan Quds Razavi in the Iranian city of Mashhad, which has been operating for more than six centuries.

The contents of these Islamic libraries were copied by Christian monks in Muslim/Christian border areas, particularly Spain and Sicily. From there they eventually made their way into other parts of Christian Europe. These copies joined works that had been preserved directly by Christian monks from Greek and Roman originals, as well as copies Western Christian monks made of Byzantine works. The resulting conglomerate libraries are the basis of every modern library today.

Philosopher Laozi was keeper of books in the earliest library in China, which belonged to the Imperial Zhou dynasty.^[18] Also, evidence of catalogues found in some destroyed ancient libraries illustrates the presence of librarians.^[18]

Buddhist scriptures, educational materials, and histories were stored in libraries in pre-modern Southeast Asia. In Burma, a royal library called the Pitaka Taik was legendarily founded by King Anawrahta,^[19] in the 18th century, British envoy Michael Symes, upon visiting this library, wrote that "it is not improbable that his Birman majesty may possess a more numerous library than any potentate, from the banks of the Danube to the borders of China". In Thailand libraries called ho trai were built throughout the country, usually on stilts above a pond to prevent bugs from eating at the books.

In the Early Middle Ages, monastery libraries developed, such as the important one at the Abbey of Montecassino.^[20] Books were usually chained to the shelves, and these chained libraries reflected the fact that manuscripts, created via the labour-intensive process of hand copying, were valuable possessions.^[21] Despite this protectiveness, many libraries loaned books if provided with security deposits (usually money or a book of equal value). Lending was a means by which books could be copied and spread. In 1212 the council of Paris condemned those monasteries that still forbade loaning books, reminding them that lending is "one of the chief works of mercy."^[22] The early libraries located in monastic cloisters and associated with scriptoria were collections of lecterns with books chained to them. Shelves built above and between back-to-back lecterns were the beginning of bookpresses. The chain was attached at the fore-edge of a book rather than to its spine. Book presses came to be arranged in carrels (perpendicular to the walls and therefore to the windows) in order to maximize lighting, with low bookcases in front of the windows. This "stall system" (fixed bookcases perpendicular to exterior

walls pierced by closely spaced windows) was characteristic of English institutional libraries. In European libraries, bookcases were arranged parallel to and against the walls. This "wall system" was first introduced on a large scale in Spain's El Escorial.

Shift to digital libraries

In the 21st century there has been increasing use of the Internet to gather and retrieve data. The shift to digital libraries has greatly impacted the way people use physical libraries. Between 2002 and 2004, the average American academic library saw the overall number of transactions decline approximately 2.2%.^[51] Libraries are trying to keep up with the digital world and the new generation of students that are used to having information just one click away. For example, the University of California Library System saw a 54% decline in circulation between 1991 to 2001 of 8,377,000 books to 3,832,000.^[52]

These facts might be a consequence of the increased availability of e-resources. In 1999–2000, 105 ARL university libraries spent almost \$100 million on electronic resources, which is an increase of nearly \$23 million from the previous year.^[53] A 2003 report by the Open E-book Forum found that close to a million e-books had been sold in 2002, generating nearly \$8 million in revenue.^[54] Another example of the shift to digital libraries can be seen in Cushing Academy's decision to dispense with its library of printed books — more than 20,000 volumes in all — and switch over entirely to digital media resources.^[55]

One claim to why there is a decrease in the usage of libraries stems from the observation of the research habits of undergraduate students enrolled in colleges and universities. There have been claims that college undergraduates have become more used to retrieving information from the Internet than a traditional library. As each generation becomes more in tune with the Internet, their desire to retrieve information as quickly and easily as possible has increased. Finding information by simply searching the Internet could be much easier and faster than reading an entire book. In a survey conducted by NetLibrary, 93% of undergraduate students claimed that finding information online makes more sense to them than going to the library. Also, 75% of students surveyed claimed that they did not have enough time to go to the library and that they

liked the convenience of the Internet. While the retrieving information from the Internet may be efficient and time saving than visiting a traditional library, research has shown that undergraduates are most likely searching only .03% of the entire web.^[56] The information that they are finding might be easy to retrieve and more readily available, but may not be as in depth as information from other resources such as the books available at a physical library.

In the mid 2000s Swedish company Distec invented a library book vending machine known as the GoLibrary, that offers library books to people where there is no branch, limited hours, or high traffic locations such as El Cerrito del Norte BART station in California.

The Internet

A library may make use of the Internet in a number of ways. A library may make the contents of its catalogues searchable online. Some specialised search engines such as Google Scholar offer a way to facilitate searching for academic resources such as journal articles and research papers. The Online Computer Library Center allows library records to be searched online through its WorldCat database. Websites such as Library Thing and Amazon provide abstracts, reviews and recommendations of books. Libraries provide computers and Internet access to allow people to search for information online. Online information access is particularly attractive to younger library users.

Digitization of books, particularly those that are out-of-print, in projects such as Google Books provides resources for library and other online users. Due to their holdings of valuable material, some libraries are important partners for search engines such as Google in realising the potential of such projects and have received reciprocal benefits in cases where they have negotiated effectively.^[63] As the prominence of and reliance on the Internet has grown, library services have moved the emphasis from mainly providing print resources to providing more computers and more Internet access.^[64] Libraries face a number of challenges in adapting to new ways of information seeking that may stress convenience over quality,^[65] reducing the priority of information literacy skills.^[66] The potential decline in library usage, particularly reference services,^[67] puts the necessity for these services in doubt.

Library scholars have acknowledged that libraries need to address the ways that they market their services if they are to compete with the Internet and mitigate the risk of losing users.^[68] This includes promoting the information literacy skills training considered vital across the library profession. However, marketing of services has to be adequately supported financially in order to be successful. This can be problematic for library services that are publicly funded and find it difficult to justify diverting tight funds to apparently peripheral areas such as branding and marketing.

100 Must-Read Books: The Essential Man's Library

There are the books you read, and then there are the books that change your life. We can all look back on the books that have shaped our perspective on politics, religion, money, and love. Some will even become a source of inspiration for the rest of your life. From a seemingly infinite list of books of anecdotal or literal merit, we have narrowed down the top 100 books that have shaped the lives of individual men while also helping define broader cultural ideas of what it means to be a man.

Whether it be a book on adventure, war, or manners, there is so much to learn about life's great questions from these gems. Let us know in the comments which of these you loved, hated, and the books that meant a lot to you and should have made the list (you can even get really indignant about your favorite book). And without further ado, this is our list.

***The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Set on the East Coast in the roaring 20's, this American novel is a classic. From it we learn that often the wanting of something is better than actually having it. It is relevant to every man's life. Furthermore, one true friend is worth infinitely more than a multitude of acquaintances.

“He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles... It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor.”

***The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli**

Considered by most to be the authoritative text on statesmanship and power (how to obtain it as well as an illustration of its trappings), although certainly a shrewd one.

From this arises an argument: whether it is better to be loved than feared. I reply that one should like to be both one and the other; but since it is difficult to join them together, it is much safer to be feared than to be loved when one of the two must be lacking.

Essentially, Machiavelli advocates letting your people have their property and women, but making sure that they know what you are capable of doing if they step out of line.

***Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut**

Through the beloved Billy Pilgrim, we see the central themes of Vonnegut's humanism along with his satirical take on how disgusting it is when humans don't use their (limited) free will to prevent simple atrocities. A great example of how we use humor to deal with hardship, and the conflict between the way heroism is conveyed through stories for actions in situations that perhaps could have been avoided altogether.

“So then I understood. It was war that made her so angry. She didn't want her babies or anybody else's babies killed in wars. And she thought wars were partly encouraged by books and movies.”

***1984* by George Orwell**

If you are already worried about the information that your computer is collecting from you, re-read this one and you will feel much better! Or, perhaps, you will throw your computer in a river. This is the classic text for the will of the individual to maintain his privacy and free will, and how easy it is at the end of it all to just try to blend in and go with the flow to avoid making things even worse by speaking out.

“But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother.”

***The Republic* by Plato**

Since every man can use a fair portion of philosophy in his literary diet, the origin of legitimate western thought might be a good place to start. Plato's most well known work breaks down topics of which you should have a fundamental understanding such as government, justice, and political theory.

***Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky**

The final work of Dostoevsky (commonly accepted English spelling of the name) has a lot of meat to chew on...it strikes at the core of who we are and what drives us. Ultimately, for all of our strength and wisdom as individuals, we are often frustrated by our failures to do what we know we must do (or at least think we should do) and need the power of forgiveness in our lives. Many important thinkers consider this to be one of (if not *the* most) important masterpiece of literature, including Sigmund Freud and Franz Kafka (who did not think quite alike, to say the least).

“So long as man remains free he strives for nothing so incessantly and so painfully as to find some one to worship.”

***The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger**

Holden Caulfield, if nothing else, should serve as a point of reference for the angst and cynicism that you perhaps once had, or ideally never had. If you thought like him when you were 16 or 17 years old, you are forgiven. If you still identify with him, you need to find some more joy, somehow...fake it 'til you make it. Do something.

***The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith**

The fundamental work on free market policies: “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.” Want an education in economics? This book is a great start. (Pictured is the copy that belonged to John Adams).

***For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway**

Set in the Spanish Civil War, this novel explores who man becomes when faced with the prospect of his own death. It is worthwhile for all of us to consider what we would give our lives for, as this defines what and who we truly love. This is one of the great examples of how war has shaped men, past and present, and has in part defined the image of a true hero who is courageous even when it has brutal consequences.

“You learned the dry-mouthed, fear-purged purging ecstasy of battle and you fought that summer and that fall for all the poor in the world against all tyranny, for all the things you believed in and for the new world you had been educated into.”

***The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde**

Arguably the best work from the ever-quotable Wilde, this novel is a guide for how to live a life of pure decadence. Packed with impeccable wit, clever one-liners and an excessive amount of egotistical vanity. At the very least, this book will show you the glory and the pitfalls of being the best looking chap around.

***The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck**

One of the most controversial books of its time, the Joads are “Okies” who head west to the fertile valleys of California during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930s. Because of the social solutions that the book proposed, and its depiction of work camp conditions, some groups attacked the novel as communist propaganda. However, it was widely read as a result of the national attention, and is a classic example of a man doing what he had to do for his family and persevering through all plights and conditions.

“Fear the time when the strikes stop while the great owners live – for every little beaten strike is proof that the step is being taken...fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.”

***Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley**

With a revolutionary and controversial view of the future, Huxley's satiric take on the "utopia" of tomorrow has provoked reader's thoughts for decades. Depictions of genetically enhanced embryos predisposed to a specific social class cast warning signs for technological interference with human life.

***How To Win Friends And Influence People* by Dale Carnegie**

This is not a Dr. Phil self-help book. Citing intimate examples from the likes of Rockefeller, Charles Schwab and FDR, this comprehensive guide is all about how to get ahead in business, relationships and life. Read one chapter a day for the rest of your life. It will make you a far better man than you would ever be without it.

***Call of the Wild* by Jack London**

The tale of a domesticated dog forced to adapt to a life of work in Alaska during the Yukon gold rush. Most of us can recall rooting for Buck in the ferocious battle to be the leader of the pack. Make sure that you embrace the benefits of competition to push yourself to become better in your work, but do it without biting and/or killing co-workers.

"...men, groping in the Arctic darkness, had found a yellow metal... These men wanted dogs, and the dogs they wanted were heavy dogs, with strong muscles by which to toil, and furry coats to protect them from the frost."

***The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* by Edmund Morris**

The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt shows what made Theodore Roosevelt the great man he was. Reading this book will inspire you to get off the couch and start moving in your life. Harvard graduate, New York Assemblyman, rancher, historian, author of several books, New York City Police Commissioner, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Governor of New York, and commanding officer of the Rough Riders are all titles that TR had before he became president at 42.

***Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann David Wyss**

Every boy can stand to learn a bit of old fashioned resourcefulness from their pops. Finding yourself on a deserted island is surely the way to learn these skills in a hurry. Tree forts, treasure hunting, and constant adventure mark the Swiss Family's 10 year run. Lesson number one? Shipwrecks make for some good literature.

***Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac**

An idealistic vision from the man who fueled the Beat Generation, a life on the road without concern for wealth or even stability, rather an enjoyment of surroundings, whatever they may be. This is a great book for reminding us to get away from technology, at least for a day, to appreciate nature and some of the more simple pleasures of life. Don't feel inferior to the beatniks if you still like driving your car...don't ever let hipsters give you guilt trips.

"I felt like lying down by the side of the trail and remembering it all. The woods do that to you, they always look familiar, long lost, like the face of a long-dead relative, like an old dream..."

***The Iliad and Odyssey* of Homer**

(2 for 1 special) Though the authorship is disputed, the place of these two epics in the man canon is not. Roughly based around the events of the Trojan War, these poems are likely a great collection of common Greek folklore surrounding the events in those days of fierce political turmoil. It is rumored that there were 10 epics in all, and 8 were lost over time. This may be a blessing in disguise, because, if they were around, you would never get to the rest of this list.

***Catch-22* by Joseph Heller**

The logic here is simple: any book which has the influence to have coined terminology commonly used in our society for decades on end should be perused based solely on principle. Nothing is worse than a man being caught using language of which he is unfamiliar with its proper meaning or origin. Also, it is a great book.

***Walden* by Henry David Thoreau**

A bit of isolation never hurt any man. Thoreau spent two years, two months and two days writing this book in Walden, a cabin tucked deep in the woods near Concord, Massachusetts. This work of non-fiction describes the changing of the seasons over the course of a year and was intended to give the author an escape from society in order to achieve a more objective point of view. A real man would take this sabbatical himself, but the book should suffice for those of you who are employed.

***Lord of the Flies* by William Golding**

Primal instincts. With only the most basic of needs to consider, human nature takes a different approach. A fictional study of the struggle for power and the unspeakable things that man (or child) will do when taken outside the order of civilization.

***The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov**

There is nothing more manly than a bout with the Devil. An entertaining commentary on the atheistic social bureaucracy in Moscow in the 1930's wherein Lucifer himself pays the town a visit to make light of their skepticism regarding the spiritual realm.

“As a result he decided to abandon the main thoroughfares and make his way through the side streets and back alleys where people were less nosy, and there was less chance that a barefoot man would be pestered about long johns that stubbornly refused to look like trousers.”

***Bluebeard* by Kurt Vonnegut**

Written as the autobiography of Rabo Karabekian, of course with Vonnegut's own war experiences drawn upon as inspiration to the aging artist who narrates his own story. It is a hilarious take on abstract art, and takes jabs at both the inflated self-importance of the artist and the people who simply refuse to look beneath the surface.

“My soul knows my meat is doing bad things, and is embarrassed. But my meat just keeps right on doing bad, dumb things.”

***Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand**

Exploring the “virtue” of living for ourselves, this monster of a book (1,084 pages in my version) is certainly worth plowing through as it is simply a great story. The fundamental concept is that our world falls apart when individuals stop seeking their own satisfaction through personal achievement and feel a sense of entitlement to the accomplishments and work of others. This book challenges us on many levels...you may find it conflicting with your value of other people, her treatment of God, or any other beliefs you already hold. Yet, who can argue with “The most depraved type of human being ... (is) the man without a purpose.”

***The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka**