



How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines

Thomas C. Foster

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines

Thomas C. Foster

How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines Thomas C. Foster

While many books can be enjoyed for their basic stories, there are often deeper literary meanings interwoven in these texts. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* helps us to discover those hidden truths by looking at literature with the eyes—and the literary codes—of the ultimate professional reader: the college professor.

What does it mean when a literary hero travels along a dusty road? When he hands a drink to his companion? When he's drenched in a sudden rain shower? Ranging from major themes to literary models, narrative devices, and form, Thomas C. Foster provides us with a broad overview of literature—a world where a road leads to a quest, a shared meal may signify a communion, and rain, whether cleansing or destructive, is never just a shower—and shows us how to make our reading experience more enriching, satisfying, and fun.

How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines Details

Date : Published February 25th 2014 by Harper Perennial (first published February 18th 2003)

ISBN : 9780062301673

Author : Thomas C. Foster

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Academic, School, Writing, Books About Books, Language, Education

 [Download How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and E ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines Thomas C. Foster

From Reader Review How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines for online ebook

Thomas says

EVERYTHING IS A SYMBOL.

Okay, not really. But more things than not, at least when it comes to literature. I was hesitant to read *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* because I felt that I had not read enough classics to understand what Thomas Foster would be talking about - but then I realized that maybe it was a good idea to read the book before embarking on my literature quest, so I would have some background knowledge heading in. After all, knowledge is power.

And I was right. Though a myriad of the book titles went over my head and some of the examples were consequently confusing, for the most part I feel like I've learned a lot from reading this book. Granted, I'm a high school student, so I didn't know much to begin with, but I would highly recommend this book to anyone who loves English, literature, or is interested in reading a book about books. As a bibliophile and self-proclaimed future English major, I loved learning about irony, allusions, and everything else Foster shared using his casual yet sophisticated writing style.

Not a bad book to start out 2012 with. Now to move on to an actual novel...

*review cross-posted on my blog, the quiet voice.

Wiebke (1book1review) says

I finally finished this. It was waiting a long time for me to pick it up, and it was by no means related to the book not being good.

I got this as a refresher mainly, since I left uni 10 years ago and sometimes a little reminder is nice. And I got exactly what I wanted in an easy to read and follow way.

I think this book can function as an introduction to literary analysis as well as a fresh up. There are many examples given and everything is explained in everyday language, without complicated terms.

The only thing I should warn about is that it contains a lot of spoilers for literary works. I had read a fair amount of the books but not all of them. So if that is a problem for you, check out the appendix where there is a list of works he used.

Antigone says

If you read more than five books a year, you've already learned what Professor Foster has to teach. And if you're like me, about halfway through you'll start asking yourself: Who wants to read literature like a professor? Why would anyone want to read literature like a professor? Isn't that a bit akin to learning how to have sex like the local prostitute? ("The main thing you have to remember here, Kiki, is to distance yourself from the act.") Perhaps we should all go to watchmakers with our questions about Time. Coroners with our questions about Death?

If you plan on dating, living with or marrying an English Lit professor, this book would be a fine primer on what he does with his day. If you plan on being graded by an English Lit professor, this book would be a fine overview of her critical standard. Barring these two eventualities?

Read like yourself.

Margitte says

This book is pure joy to read. While learning a few new secrets of writing, it was exciting to explore all the book titles mentioned in the book.

The author uses a casual tone to introduce the magic of serious reading to the reader. Some of it is old news, others, instinct and common sense, such as recognizing patterns and story elements, but new information, for me at least, was also added. For instance, that many works attributed to Shakespeare might not have been his at all.

Although I would love to share my views on the content of the book, since that is the most exciting part of it, I would restrict myself to the book itself.

The chapter headings says it all:

1. Every trip is a Quest;
2. Nice to eat with you: Acts of Communion;
3. Nice to eat you: Acts of Vampires;
4. If it's square, it's a sonnet;
5. Now, where have I seen her before?
6. When in Doubt, it's from Shakespeare ...;
7. ... or the Bible;
8. Hansel and Gretel;
9. It's Greek to me;
10. More than just rain or snow.

... and more of the same.

And suddenly I am more excited than ever before, although I figured out some of these issues in the book already, like for instance, the borrowing from Greek mythology. In *Light Between The Oceans* by M.L. Stedman, the Greek god *Janus* formed the backbone of the story, and that characters such as Mr. Darcy in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, inspired many others in romance novels.

We find Dracula in more than one storyline, and Shakespeare in a multitude of other contemporary novels - long before the Hogarth project was launched in 2016. Of course my recent favorite in this regard is Ian McEwan's *Nutshell* in which 'Fetus Cairncross' as I dubbed him, became Hamlet *in utero*, and the author was not even part of the Hogarth Project.

The author highlights other books which royally borrowed from the greatest author of all times:

QUICK QUIZ: What do John Cleese, Cole Porter, *Moonlighting*, and *Death Valley Days* have in common? No, they're not part of some Communist plot. All were involved with some version of *The Taming of the Shrew*...

If you look at any literary period between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, you'll be amazed by the dominance of the Bard. He's everywhere, in every literary form you can think of. And he's never the same: every age and every writer reinvents its own Shakespeare. All this from a man who we're still not sure actually wrote the plays that bear his name.

Try this. In 1982 Paul Mazursky directed an interesting modern version of *The Tempest*. It had an Ariel figure (Susan Sarandon), a comic but monstrous Caliban (Raul Julia), and a Prospero (famed director John Cassavetes), an island, and magic of a sort. The film's title? *Tempest*. Woody Allen reworked *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as his film *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*.

West Side Story famously reworks *Romeo and Juliet* which resurfaces again in the 1990s, in a movie featuring contemporary teen culture and automatic pistols. And that's a century or so after Tchaikovsky's ballet based on the same play.

The BBC series *Masterpiece Theatre* has recast *Othello* as a contemporary story of black police commissioner John Othello, his lovely white wife Dessie, and his friend Ben Jago, deeply resentful at being passed over for promotion. The action will surprise no one familiar with the original.

Nor is the Shakespeare adaptation phenomenon restricted to the stage and screen. Jane Smiley rethinks *King Lear* in her novel *A Thousand Acres*.

I'm insanely thrilled with this book. For many of us it is impossible to attend literature lectures and have forgotten most of the ones we did honor with our presence, many years ago. So this is it. Read the book and become wiser. The information might not be unfamiliar to many of us, but it certainly deepens our experience of serious books.

Then there is the many references to Bible stories, and once again, Ian McEwan, uses the wisdom of Solomon in his book *The Children's Act* to solve a serious situation when the Jehova's Witnesses and The State have to compromise on a minor child's life.

So yes, I'm jumping up and down. Nothing is new, says the Bible, psychologists and sociologists. Remember the Pavlov experiments with dogs and mice? It is still used today to solve behavioural problems. No story is therefor new. It is just told differently as time goes on.

The book made me think again. About a letter my mom once wrote me to warn me against a unsavory character trying to enter my life. She said nothing was new, the rules would always remain the same, only time and setting changed. The story line would not change, only the characters in it will have different

names. She changed my life. I was nineteen years old and needed to know that when I did not recognize the difference between a he-hussy and a perfumed skunk.

I was wondering if a person who never read Shakespeare, told his story, if it can be regarded as a Shakespearean 'borrow' if some elements to it was similar? Would it be fair? And someone who don't know the Bible could have a similar experience as a Bible character? Human behaviour patterns, different personality types, cultures, social mores and values play the most important role in how characters in a story will act or react. So yes, all stories happened before, it could be in real life or literature, but nothing is really new. It's only seasoned authors who might borrow from other stories, but real people in real life repeat behaviour based on genetic indicators and circumstantial impulses. Then there's human instinct to predict outcome.

So, while the cognoscenti sleuth through a great novel, ordinary lay readers like yours truly do not have to do it. However, it might add a wonderful new dimension to the experience if we are experienced enough to know when it happens in the shaping and sustaining power of a story and the symbolism behind it.

The author is passionate about his subject. He has a serious issue with the programmatic nature of political novels, just a certain type though, and shares his views with the reader, no matter what.

I hate “*political*” writing—*novels, plays, poems*. They don’t travel well, don’t age well, and generally aren’t much good in their own time and place, however sincere they may be. I speak here of literature whose primary intent is to influence the body politic—for instance, those works of socialist realism (one of the great misnomers of all time) of the Soviet era in which the plucky hero figures out a way to increase production and thereby meet the goals of the five-year plan on the collective farm—what I once heard the great Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes characterize as the love affair between a boy, and girl, and a tractor. Overtly political writing can be one-dimensional, simplistic, reductionist, preachy, dull.

Don't we find those preachy dullness in too many novels nowadays? I like the idea of calling it programmatic. *Word-dumping* or *information dumping* were my favorite two concepts in addressing it. But I have something new to call it. :-))

There are too many authors, such as Edgar Allan Poe, Washington Irvine, D. H. Lawrence, Charles Dickens, Gabriel García Márquez, Virginia Wolfe, Toni Morrison, George Bernard Shaw, Seamus Heaney, Eavan Boland, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lord and so many more who masterfully incorporate politics into their prose. It is how it is done which matters. *State of Fear* by Michael Crichton comes to mind. My word, how this author rattled a few cages, right? And what about *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver; *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. Yes, we have our exciting moments in prose! Oh yes, and *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane* by Lisa See, which had me a bit miffed-so programmized, Eoowwww! :-)) And don't ever forget Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Now talk about ruffled feathers, folks. Some authors know how to do it. Others don't.

That reminds me to ask the question if chick lit is also so obviously programmatic? Not literature by any means, but still prose of some kind with often deeper undertones. Mmm... think about it, shall we?

The difference between a murder/death in a murder mystery and a literary book was good to learn, even though, once again, common sense, although we seldom take the time to think about the symbolism in it.

In getting hyped up about the content of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* I quickly made a list of all my favorite characters in books. After many hours, I stopped when I realized how impossible it is to recall

them all. I've read a few thousand books long before I joined GR, to begin with. And who will want to know anyway? I could just sit back in amazement though. How many authors introduced so much magic into my life by presenting amazing characters in their stories.

It took a long time to read this book. Probably three weeks. More or less a chapter each day, with a few rereads in between. Not because it was boring or tedious. No, it was just so inspiring. I was constantly lured into exploring old books and new titles.

Allow me to sneak in two of my favorite book endings:

Rhet Butler - in *Gone With The Wind* author Margaret Mitchell:

----- "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn"

Professor Higgins - in the play *My Fair Lady*(Pygmalion) author George Bernard Shaw:

-----"Where the devil is my slippers, Elyze?" (Of course you realize that this play was named after a Greek mythological figure, Pygmalion who fell in love with his statue Galatea. Read the inspiring love story here: <https://www.greekmyths-greekmythology...>

For young readers this is undoubtedly a wonderful introduction to literature, in so many ways. For all readers it is a rejoicing in excellent prose and the authors behind it. It strengthens the bond between the reader and the writer. Imagine having Thomas C. Foster as a house guest in your own library! Oh how short life would be at that very moment! Pity we will not be able to order another lifetime right that minute :-))

Well, before your eyes glaze over and your mind wander, let me stop.

Enjoy this chatty, informative, entertaining read. It's worth your while.

And then consider reading the book *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* by Mortimer J. Adler, Charles Van Doren

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

And then tell me who your favorite characters in novels were. I'm simply dying to know! :-))

Will Byrnes says

I have read more than a few books of this sort. This one stands above the crowd. While the material may not be particularly novel, it does pull together core truths about how literature can be understood, and communicates that information in a very accessible manner. It has made a world of difference in my approach to reviewing. I made my teenagers read this, back when they were actually teenagers.

Revised and re-released - May 16, 2017

Hannah Greendale says

Click here to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

How to Read Literature Like a Professor offers an extensive introduction to literary analysis for the purpose of finding deeper meaning in one's everyday reading.

One of the central precepts of the book is that there is a universal grammar of figurative imagery, that in fact images and symbols gain much of their power from repetition and reinterpretation.

Memory. Symbol. Pattern. These are the three items that, more than any other, separate the professorial reader from the rest of the crowd.

Chapters are divided into relatively similar page counts and, while each chapter explores a topic and provides helpful examples from literary works, the length of each chapter allows for digestion of information in small bites.

Citing folklore, religious dogmas, and Greek mythology, the author delicately introduces varied or contrasting belief systems for interpretation of literature in an unoffensive and unbiased manner.

Every reader's experience of every work is unique, largely because each person will experience various elements to differing degrees, and those differences will cause certain features of the text to become more or less pronounced.

While this book provides a thorough examination of theme, symbols, and contexts, the author freely admits that it is by no means a complete compilation; one could hardly fit all elements of literary assessment, all interpretations of symbols, or all references to venerable lore into just one book. The writing is consistently comprehensive and entertaining, occasionally infused with Foster's personal quips and moments of charming self-deprecation. His points, whether serious or silly, are stated with eloquence.

The author's examination of various classic works are liable to tantalize readers to pick up new reads, and a long list of recommended reads at the back of the book further encourage the accumulation of TBR books.

Before the book reaches its end, the author tackles a difficult question: *should we really give so much credit to writers by interpreting their works in such a special and meaningful way, especially when he/she hasn't been proven to be a good writer?* His answer is illuminating and his conclusions ultimately encourage the examination of literature and the sharing of books and conversation such that we might all bring new perspectives to our shared experience.

How to Read Literature Like a Professor is a highly recommended resource for unearthing the hidden meaning interwoven in books (and film).

K says

I loved this.

Don't get me wrong. It's not one of those books you could, or would want to, read in one sitting. It's really more of a reference book, though an enjoyable one, written in a light and breezy style. I'm not sure someone who wasn't already interested in reading literature on multiple levels would be particularly interested. But if you do have an interest to read literature in a more sophisticated, insightful way (as I imagine many goodreaders do), you may enjoy this book as much as I did. You'll never look at weather, heart disease,

blindness, geography, or fiction altogether the same way again.

Meagan says

Awesome. Simply awesome. I'd recommend it for any student who has ever asked the eternal question after being assigned some obscure piece of literature in an English class - "why the HELL DO I HAVE TO READ THIS?!" Trust me. Thomas C. Foster is your friend. He feels your pain. And he's here to help.

As an English major, I have an intense love for books, obviously, even the classic texts that even I find a little hopeless and empty at times. But these essays help you to find the deeper meaning behind the words and point out the little hints and signs that you can look for in order to make *Oroonoko* or *Mrs. Dalloway* seem a little less pointless.

Furthermore, even as an English major with an intense love for literature, I am also a teenager, and I am fully aware that not every student in the world particularly wants to spend time reading a book about...books. But the thing with Foster is that he's funny, and he explains things with a rather dry sense of humor that I find simply wonderful. It is a rare thing to find a scholar with a sense of humor about their discipline. Especially those scholars that are passionate enough to write books.

Informal, light, and truly fun to read. I read it in the span of one evening, so for a normal person (read: non-bibliophile. I call them "puggles." Like "Muggles," you know?) it would take about...a week? How do puggles measure time?

How did I get to this point in my review? Anyway. Read it. You won't regret it.

Daria says

"Lively and Entertaining" it is not. I think I fell asleep a grand total of three times trying to get through these meager 281 pages. Foster attempts to be all hip and conversational, but I think he does a pretty bad job of it, and ends up being even more condescending instead. All in all, it's not really a "guide" to reading between the lines (although we can all probably agree that it's hard to create a "guide" for anything literature-related). It's more like a bunch of examples about symbolism here and weather-means-something there, pulled from the same body of work: "In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, we see examples of baptism... in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, there are excellent examples of communion..."

If you ever need to write a thesis on Toni Morrison, call up this guy. He has it all down.

I only admired one line in the whole book: "(Shakespeare's) quotes are like members of the opposite sex; all the good ones are taken."

Corny, but at least it forced a chuckle out of me.

Stephanie "Jedigal" says

Ever wonder what it means when a character steps in a puddle? Why an author suddenly goes into great detail about some otherwise unimportant event? Well, why didn't you? If you read this book, you will.

An avid reader (of both pulp and literature, in roughly equal measure) who never took a college literature class, I've always known I was not getting all I could from my reading. After reading this book, I know I am much better equipped. Just finished my second read of Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go", and was amazed at how much deeper I could see into it now. Thank you, T. Foster!!

This book serves as a great introduction to some common symbolism to watch out for when reading good lit. It also introduces the reader to the phenomenon of "intertextuality" - where an author presents something in such a way that it raises echoes of a separate text in your mind. (A rather blatant example would be the movie "O Brother Where Art Thou?", which is based on Homer's Odyssey.) The author presents many examples. A good minority of them were familiar too me, and the rest, rather than being annoying, were enough to make me salivate in the contemplation of checking out these texts for myself.

The style is conversational, and the author, an English lit professor after all, admits to his foibles and pretensions in such a likeable and approachable way that the pages fly by. After applying what I've learned a little, I'll definitely be re-reading this text to absorb even more, and widen my horizons even further.

kayla ? says

DNF

not in the mood for this book so DNF until I feel like reading it WHICH HOPEFULLY WILL BE SOON

Leo Walsh says

About a year ago, I took a MOOC (a Massively Open Online Course) on the site Coursera on fantasy literature. MOOC's grade via peer evaluations of your work. One of my papers traced the Garden of Eden symbolism in the opening of Lewis Carroll's **Through the Looking Glass**. It is in the text, which made sense, since Carroll was a clergy member telling a coming of age story. And having taken university level upper-division lit courses, I knew the paper was well thought-out, supported by the text and creative.

Solid A-, maybe an A. Or a B+ if the teacher was having a bad day or was a hard grader.

I got a B- from a peer, with a comment (not exact, but close) -- "Clear writing, but I don't like this sort of literary criticism. It's the same BS my high school English teacher tried to teach." The grader offered no argument from the text, highlighting passages contradicting my argument (if there were any, which I doubt). Nor did they offer a different interpretation of the Eden story.

Instead, I did a classic bit of literary analysis and was graded by a person either ignorant of or hostile to classical literary analysis. And, despite the professor's video lectures, which employed the same classical

literary analytical techniques I did, the student objected to the enterprise of literary critique.

I was flummoxed. It seemed an odd statement and a petty reason for an average grade in a literature class, but it goes to the point that Thomas C. Foster makes in his well-written **How to Read Literature Like an English Professor** is trying to make. Which is that reading closely and writing about literature thoughtfully is an art. It takes experience, and intention. What's more, it often takes a classical education that few have these days. Since literary authors often steal from Greek myths, the bible, fairy tales, Shakespeare... in fact, they can take from anything ever written.

This was a refresher for me, and I enjoyed it. Foster's style is informal and chatty, and while this can come across as patronizing, it made for easy reading. What's more, it reinforced the knowledge that I thought maybe was no longer taught in high school and college. At least as evinced by the comment I received from an anonymous person on my **Through the Looking Glass** analysis.

Foster breezes through a ton of material here. From myth to baptism to biblical references. He also presents a cheeky, but honest answer to his students when they ask "is this a symbol?" Which is, "If you think it's a symbol, then it probably is." He then moves on to sex in literature, Freud and Jung's influence on both novels and literary criticism, and a healthy discussion of irony.

But Foster uses two central ideas that bind the book together. The first is the idea of intertextuality, that every author is in conversation with writers in the past. Since I was first introduced to this idea in high school, it has continued to fascinate me. The second idea is mind-blowing, if maybe a little over-the-top for me: there's only one story, and all authors are writing different parts of it. Not sure if that's true, and it seems like cock and bull on one hand, but it's also intriguing.

So, since I'm pretty sure I'd have gotten an A or an A- on my **Through the Looking Glass** paper were I to have submitted said paper to Foster, I'll rate **How To Read Literature Like a Professor** four stars...

Just kidding.

I'm giving it four-stars since it feels like the discussions that go on in undergrad lit classes. And because of that, it is important because it introduces readers to "why" literature professors often take such left-field interpretations on the books they cover in class.

Riku Sayuj says

Read literature like a Pro: A Cheat-Sheet

Foster comes across for the most part of the book as Captain Obvious, or rather Prof. Obvious and maybe even as Dr. Condescending, M.A., Ph.D., etc.

But no matter how frustrated with the book I was at times, Foster does have a language that reminded me constantly of all my english professors and since I have always loved my literature classes and the teachers, it was easier to swallow.

The book treats only very obvious and surface level things like 'if he almost drowns then he is symbolically

reborn' etc. He takes us through a variety of such things 'hidden' in literature that we should be on the lookout for to truly enjoy any reading. The only problem is that he never goes deep enough to let help a reader think analytically of what can be considered challenging literature.

But sometimes obvious things are worth restating too and sometimes they help us develop a pattern of thinking that will eventually evolve by itself into what is really required. And that in the end might be the real goal of the book. In that sense Foster can consider it a reasonable success.

So here is a quick list of easy things to watch out for when you read literature:

- 1) Every time a character in the book takes any journey/trip of any sort, start looking for tropes like gatekeepers, dragons, treasures etc. Chances are high that it is a mythic **Quest** of some sort.
- 2) If you come across a scene involving the characters eating together, especially if a whole chapter is dedicated to it, possibly it is being used to explore their relations and it is an act of **Communion** with all that the word implies.
- 3) **Vampires** exist, even when they don't. If it is not Twilight, chances are that it has literary significance. And if it does, the vampire figure is probably being used to hide a lot of sexual and societal undertones about chastity and selfishness. And even when a book has nothing to do with vampires, it would serve you well to identify vampires who suck others' blood to survive.
- 4) **Sonnet** is the most used type of poetry? - Frankly I am not sure why this chapter came in and how it helps the readers in anyway except to recognize when they meet a sonnet - they look square.
- 5) You will meet historical figures like Napoleon, Caesar and Gandhi in many guises even when the situation does not seem to indicate it. If you do recognize this hidden **historical aspect** of the character, then the story will acquire a new dimension
- 6) References and quotations from **Shakespeare and Bible**, including situations and entire plots abound in literature. (Duh)
- 7) **Fairy tales** form an important part of literature too and you might want to have a look-out for Hansel and Gretel's witch anytime people get lost in unfamiliar territory.
- 8) **Greek** symbolism and myths crop up everywhere and be ready for your author being a Homer in disguise trying to tell a modern version. And most of western literature taps this well-spring
- 9) **Weather** is always symbolic and Rain, Spring, etc. have deep rooted meaning which authors exploit consistently. If it is raining and things look gloomy, that might be irony or they might have heard of London (Foster doesn't seem to have).
- 10) When **violence** is used in a text, it is probably a plot device. So start thinking about why did he have to hit him with a baseball bat and not with a table lamp and why the character had to climb that mountain to die.
- 11) Almost everything that is repeated can be **symbolic**, even events and actions. There is no way to list them out so get in the habit of being paranoid.

12) **Politics** of the day inevitably seeps into any work and knowing that helps in understanding any prejudices which might not be acceptable today and also in understanding the real motivations. Who can read and understand Hemingway without knowing of his history?

13) **Christ figures** are everywhere and anytime anyone is even slightly noble be on the lookout for christ archetypes like disciples and sacrifice and betrayal.

14) If anyone flies or falls for too long, **Icarus** and his imaginary cousins are probably being invoked.

15) Lot of things can stand for **sex** and it is important to understand the meaning of tall buildings. If they write about sex when they mean strictly sex, we have another word for that - pornography.

16) If anyone gets wet in a book, they might change their life after that. They might be **baptized** into another life in short

17) Geography is probably the most important part of any novel. **Geography and Season** - think about why the author used that setting and the motifs of the novel will become clearer.

18) There is only One Story - whatever that means.

19) If any character has a scar (lightening?), it usually is a means to set him/her apart and the nature of the scar is symbolic. It could be **scar/defect** or even a mild skin coloration - but it is a device to set up for greater things.

20) If a character is **blind**, ask what he is blind to or what others are blind to. It certainly is not just about physical sight.

21) Whenever any sort of **illness** comes in, it is usually a metaphor - especially if it is heart disease, TB (consumption), AIDS, Cancer or mysterious in some way. In literature disease is never caused by microscopic mundane things - it is caused by society and character.

22) Read any work from the **time frame** in which it was written.

23) **Irony** trumps everything else. If the author defeats your expectation with any symbol, he is so ironing you. This can work at many levels of course, he might defeat your expectation of being subject to irony by using the actual meaning and so on.

So. Long list? Not if you read a lot. You can see all this in three days of light reading. In fact I am tending to be lenient in this review mostly due to that wonderful last chapter where he gives an example short story and analyses it. That one chapter makes the whole book worth reading. The reading list at the end is also useful and I have reproduced it here.

But getting back to the means of analyses listed above.

Were they too obvious? Or are you not confident that you will start spotting them from tomorrow? Either way, it might help us get into the habit as I said earlier and that is what really matters.

The only way to catch on to all these devices and symbols is to be familiar with them. And the only way to do that? Read, of course. Read a hell lot.

So you can see that you need to have read a lot. I mean a lot. And be very conversant with all the tropes and history of literature and myth to fully enjoy or critique serious works - that is, you need to have had a life dedicated to reading to enjoy reading.

In other words, to read literature like a professor you need to be a professor of literature. Bingo. Insight

PS. Of course the iterative growth in the pleasure of reading is known to every bookworm - we are addicted to books as it keeps getting better with every new book we read - the connections, the intertextuality and the by-lanes all become clearer and more and more FUN.

PPS. Susan Sontag makes another arbitrary appearance, haunting my reading list.

Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says

Now that I've read this book, you may as well not bother trying to read my book reviews; yes, that's right, I will now be examining themes and motifs and character motivation and other things like that and I'll probably be writing such amazing stuff that no one else will be able to understand me. Like a professor, right? No, my days of "Uh, I liked it" or "Well, I don't know" are over; I'll be finding things like water imagery and mother archetypes and references to obscure lines from Ulysses. So if you want to try to understand even a glimmer of what I'm writing about, you may need to read this book, too. ;->

Terri Lynn says

This is a very friendly book and I suspect the author is one of those feel-good professors who attract a lot of students to his classes because they are what is known as "easy A" classes. Sort of like an academic finger-painting class. He presumes that you are an idiot and rather stupid. He's still chummy with you while thinking that and gives you plenty of pats on the head little boys and girls but this was supposed to be for college students. I went to an excellent elementary school in the 1960's and we learned all of this there. The bottom line is that this book will NOT teach you to read literature like a professor. A professor has a PhD and this is very elementary. If you hope to read literature like a 5th grader, this is for you. Otherwise, I'd pass if you are serious about literature.

