

Selectors:

Russell Banks, fiction writer, previously served as New York State Author from 2004 to 2008. His novels include *The Reserve* (2008), *The Darling* (2004), a *Los Angeles Times* Book Award Finalist, and *Cloudsplitter* (1998), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He lives in Keene and Saratoga Springs.

Lydia Davis, 2003 MacArthur fellowship winner and 2007 National Book Award Finalist for *Varieties of Disturbance* (2007), has just published her *Collected Stories* (2009). She makes her home in Columbia County.

Donald Faulkner, director of the New York State Writers Institute, is the author of two books of poetry and four critical works, including *Portable Malcolm Cowley*. A Danforth Fellow, he is an advisor to the PBS documentary, *Paris: The Luminous Years*. He lives in the Capital Region.

William Kennedy, novelist, and founder and executive director of the New York State Writers Institute, is known for fiction set in his native city of Albany. His novels include *Legs* (1975), *Ironweed* (1983), winner of the Pulitzer Prize, and *Roscoe* (2002). He lives in Albany and Averill Park.

James Lasdun, poet and fiction writer, winner of the first United Kingdom National Short Story Prize (2006), is the author of the new short story collection, *It's Beginning to Hurt* (2009). He lives in the Catskill Mountain region of New York.

Ed Sanders, poet, is a past winner of the Frank O'Hara Prize and the American Book Award. He is the author of the three-volume, *America: A History in Verse* (2000-2004). He lives in Woodstock.

Le Anne Schreiber, former sports editor of the *New York Times*, and winner of a National Magazine Award, is the author of the memoir, *Midstream* (1996), a *New York Times* Notable Book. She lives in Copake in the Taconic foothills.

Edward Schwarzschild, fiction writer, is the author of the novel *Responsible Men* (2005), a *San Francisco Chronicle* Best Book of the Year, and the story collection *The Family Diamond* (2007). He lives in Albany.

Lynne Tillman, a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist for the novel *No Lease on Life* (1997) is the author most recently of the novel, *American Genius: A Comedy* (2006). She lives in Manhattan.

Rebecca Wolff, National Poetry Series winner for *Manderley* (2001), and founding editor of FENCE magazine and FENCE Books is the author most recently of *The King: Poems* (2009). She resides in Athens, NY.



the first 10

THE HOUSE OF MIRTH
TIME AND AGAIN
HOWL AND OTHER POEMS
ENORMOUS CHANGES AT THE LAST MINUTE
SEIZE THE DAY
BRONX PRIMITIVE
THE ADIRONDACKS: ILLUSTRATED
THE STORIES OF JOHN CHEEVER
TURN, MAGIC WHEEL
HARDWATER COUNTRY: STORIES



the first 10

As part of the 25th Anniversary celebration of the New York State Writers Institute, we have invited 25 distinguished New York authors to choose a notable book about New York—State or City. Books that focus on New York themes and landscapes have impacted readers for generations. We think it is appropriate to draw attention to some of these books to provide a glimpse of the rich literature that New York State has to offer. This is not intended to be a “best of” list, but a distinctive and slightly unconventional guide to reading more deeply into the spirit of the Empire State. We have made no attempt to rank our choices. Here we list our first ten picks. Additional choices will be released in the coming months, so visit our website for updates. We hope our list of “uniquely New York books” will persuade readers to explore publications and authors with which they may not be familiar, as well as revisit well-known names and titles with a fresh look and deeper appreciation.



The New York State Writers Institute gratefully acknowledges Barnes & Noble, Inc. and the University at Albany’s Office of the Provost for their generous support of our 25th Anniversary Celebration season.

William Kennedy, Executive Director
Donald Faulkner, Director

University at Albany, Science Library 320
1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12222
Tel: (518) 442-5620 | Fax: (518) 442-5621

e-mail: writers@uamail.albany.edu | website: www.albany.edu/writers-inst

REBECCA WOLFF ON



Turn, Magic Wheel (1936) by Dawn Powell

“A novel as fascinating for its flaws as for its dazzling array of successes. Skewering with vicious certainty and disconcerting prescience everything from the marketing impulses of literary publishers, to the self-perceived poverty of the very rich, to the novelist’s own work of spinning fine experience—especially of those most dear to us—into pure dross, *Turn, Magic Wheel* is at times lavishly overwritten, but ever in the spirit of nailing the dirty hearts of those who live (in this case in the vivid social provinces of 1930s New York City) and those who write about them.”

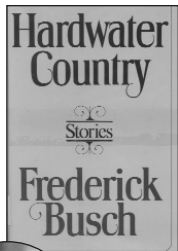


Dawn Powell (1896-1965) was a prolific prose writer who has in recent years been rediscovered and cherished for her bracing and rueful insight into the social, personal and literary mores of the Midwest and Manhattan of her day. She published plays, novels, and many articles and reviews in all the major venues of her era, and was counted a peer with Dorothy Parker, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Muriel Spark, Anthony Powell, and Evelyn Waugh.

DONALD FAULKNER ON

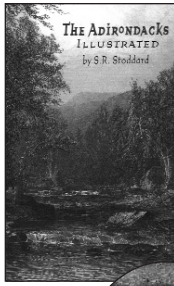
Hardwater Country: Stories (1979)
by Frederick Busch

“There are at least six collections of Frederick Busch’s marvelous, spare, evocative short stories set in that broad region of landscape and imagination known as ‘upstate New York.’ I list *Hardwater Country* because it was my first encounter with a writer who should be celebrated like Chekov or Trevor. And, as each of those writers explored human nature in literary settings that became uniquely their own, Busch laid claim to those tough semi-rural places that are near-forgotten in the literature of New York. Someday there will be a ‘Collected Stories of Frederick Busch,’ but for now I encourage any reader to wander among the fictions of *Absent Friends*, *Don’t Tell Anyone*, and *Rescue Missions*.”



Frederick Busch (1941-2006), fiction writer, taught English at Colgate University in Hamilton, NY, from 1966 to 2003. Apart from his short stories, Busch wrote another twenty books of essays, collections on the writing craft, and significant novels. He won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the PEN/Faulkner Award for *The Night Inspector*, a speculative novel focusing on Herman Melville in Manhattan.

RUSSELL BANKS ON



The Adirondacks: Illustrated (1874) by Seneca Ray Stoddard

“*The Adirondacks: Illustrated* had a significant influence on the legislation that created the Adirondack Park and was a major influence in opening the region to tourism and later economic development. It’s a story of a love affair with a region told in the form of a guide book. It imagined the northeast corner of New York State so vividly that it made the region in the public imagination a permanent part of the state. It’s personal, humorous (modeled on Twain’s *Innocents Abroad*), informed and still a pleasure to read.”



Seneca Ray Stoddard (1844-1917), celebrated for his pioneering work in the field of landscape photography, was also a writer, poet, mapmaker and early environmentalist. Born in Saratoga County, Stoddard taught himself how to use a camera as a young man in the 1860s.

LYNNE TILLMAN ON



The House of Mirth (1905) by Edith Wharton

“Edith Wharton lived in Paris, but New York was her birthplace and psychological home, where she started writing, about which she never stopped writing. In Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, the interiors and exteriors of New York City and Rhinebeck resonate with the characters; they’re never just settings for encounters. As few other protagonists in literature, Lily Bart’s entanglements, and the consequences of her actions, are implicated, and doomed, by the rooms, buildings, and streets she frequents. Wharton’s first love was architecture and design. She created work that stands as magnificently as Grand Central Station, where *The House of Mirth* begins.”



Edith Wharton (1862-1937) was the first American woman to receive major literary awards and one of the most renowned authors of her time. She received the Pulitzer Prize for *The Age of Innocence* (1920), a novel of betrayal set among the unforgiving elite of New York’s Golden Age. Her other notable works include *Ethan Frome* (1911) and *The Custom of the Country* (1913). The Edith Wharton Citation of Merit, the official title of New York’s State Author Award, presented biennially by the Writers Institute, is named in her honor.

WILLIAM KENNEDY ON

The Stories of John Cheever (1978) by John Cheever

“John Cheever turned the suburbs north of Manhattan into a three-ring circus where a clownish fatalism attached to most lives. He made ordinary places sacred and absurdly profane at the same time. He raced his characters through their improbable lives with such extraordinary language that the improbable became inevitable, and exquisite, and suburbia became a mythic community whose boundaries reached the ends of America. His masterpiece is his stories, splendid proof of what a superb writer he was all his life.”



John Cheever (1912-1982), novelist and short story writer, set much of his fiction in Westchester County. Though a native of Quincy, MA, he made the bedroom communities of New York iconic in literature. His books include the story collections, *The Way Some People Live* (1943) and *The Enormous Radio* (1953), and the novels, *The Wapshot Chronicle* (1957), winner of the National Book Award, *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964), and *Bullet Park* (1969).

LYDIA DAVIS ON

Time and Again (1970) by Jack Finney

“What is extraordinary about the experience of reading this 1970 time-travel mystery story, a minor classic, is the patience and persuasiveness with which the narrator evokes, with his 20th-century eye, New York City as it was in 1882. His experience of entering that past time with his modern culture intact is so utterly believable, because it is so meticulously detailed. It actually teaches one how to stand in any landscape of the present and “see” a past version that in a sense has not disappeared but merely underlies the present and is accessible with enough effort of the imagination. After I read it, not only was the city changed for me, but all other landscapes as well, because the book had changed my way of looking and imagining.”

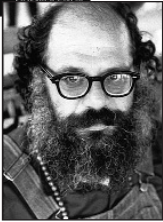
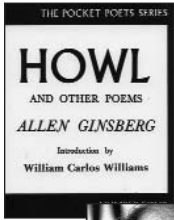


Jack Finney (1911-1995), a writer of fantasy and winner of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the 1987 World Fantasy Convention, was a groundbreaking figure in his field. Finney’s best known work is his 1955 novel, *The Body Snatchers*. His other books include the novels, *The Woodrow Wilson Dime* (1968) and *From Time to Time* (1995), and the story collections, *The Third Level* (1957) and *About Time* (1986).

ED SANDERS ON

Howl and Other Poems (1956) by Allen Ginsberg

“Allen Ginsberg’s great “Howl,” from his epoch-stirring 1956 book, *Howl and Other Poems*, while truly a rhapsodic long-breathed poem celebrating all of America, has many qualities that make it a New York State classic. When I first read it as a senior in high school in 1957, it seemed like a clear path to a New Holiness. I often tell those at readings that if it weren’t for the great poem beginning “I saw the best minds of my generation...” I’d have settled on a job driving an Eskimo Pie truck in Kansas City. It blew through the era and it was both sacred and shocking. It revealed to an entire generation a kind of New Autobiography. It beckoned to poets, challenging them to dare to be part of the history of their era. *Howl* is the book that most changed my life.”

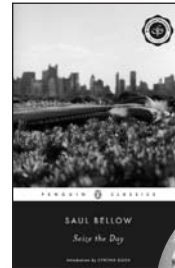


Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), founding poet of the Beat Movement and a central figure of the American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s, is celebrated for visionary poetry inspired by the works of William Blake and Walt Whitman. Ginsberg’s masterworks include the Beat manifesto, *Howl* (1956), and *Kaddish* (1965), a remembrance of his mentally ill mother. Ginsberg received the National Book Award for *The Fall of America: Poems of These States* in 1974.

JAMES LASDUN ON

Seize the Day (1956) by Saul Bellow

“I love this book. For a long time it functioned as my own private style manual (there’s nothing to touch it for the sheer crackling brilliance of the prose), and even today its Broadway streetscapes are more real to me than anything I see with my own eyes. As for the lives unraveling in the magnificently depressing Hotel Gloriana where most of the action takes place – hapless, big-hearted Tommy Wilhelm and his coldly shrewd father; Tamkin the hypnotic charlatan – they have a scale and scope and intensity that seems, quite simply, unimaginable anywhere else but New York.”



Saul Bellow (1915-2005) received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976. Although his work is generally associated with his home city of Chicago, Bellow lived in New York City for several years during the 1950s and early 1960s. His best known novels include *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970), and *Humboldt’s Gift*, (1975).

EDWARD SCHWARZSCHILD ON

Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (1974) by Grace Paley

“I was a nineteen year-old pre-med university student and Grace Paley was almost invisible behind the auditorium’s podium. But I heard her voice loud and clear. She began by reading “Wants,” the opening story from *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*. I was immediately, forever entranced. Early on, she mentioned a “new library” somewhere in the New York City of my dreams. I followed that tough, street-smart, vital voice long after that day and it led me to make many enormous last minute changes to my life. I set off to find Paley’s new library. Then I read and read and read.”



One of America’s most revered short story writers and an icon of both the feminist and anti-war movements, Grace Paley (1922-2007) served as the first official New York State Author under the sponsorship of the New York State Writers Institute from 1986 to 1988. Her landmark story collections include *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974) and *Later the Same Day* (1985).

LE ANNE SCHREIBER ON

Bronx Primitive (1982) by Kate Simon

“New York would not be New York without Ellis Island, and the immigrant millions who disembarked there to remake the city and themselves. Of the many classic accounts of life straight off the boat, my favorite is *Bronx Primitive*, Kate Simon’s rigorously unsentimental memoir of her 1920s girlhood. Its reigning virtues are clarity and candor about the physical and emotional environment that surrounded a young girl, transplanted to the Bronx from the Warsaw ghetto, a girl so lethally observant and renegade in spirit that she took pride in her tyrannical father’s epithet for her — ‘the silent white snake.’”



Kate Simon (1912-1990) earned distinction principally as a travel writer. Her ten travel works included the landmark—and best-selling—*New York Places and Pleasures: An Uncommon Guidebook*, which has undergone four revisions since 1959, and parallel studies of Rome, London, Paris and Mexico City. Simon received the National Book Critics Circle award for *Bronx Primitive* in 1982.