

**LINDA SARVER
TOM MARKUS**



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NOVEL
APPROACH
• TO •
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**FROM ADAMS
TO ZOLA**

A NOVEL APPROACH

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Linda Sarver and Tom Markus

Illustrations by Linda Sarver



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2 CLASSICS

A classic is “a work of enduring excellence,” says our dictionary. The entries we have included in this chapter are by authors who have achieved universal respect for the intellectual complexity, memorable style, and compelling characters of their novels, and they are the authors whose audacious tales and insightful stories have been read for many generations. A good way to describe how we have distinguished a classic novel from what is merely a good piece of writing is by comparison to similar distinctions in the other arts. Sibelius is a classic composer, Neil Sedaka is not. Watteau is a classic painter, Warhol’s celebrity has endured for only 15 years. Aeschylus is a classic playwright, Albee has yet to be tested in the crucible of time. As with these composers, painters, and playwrights, so with the novelists who approach theatre. Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* is a classic, when comes such another?

BARMY IN WONDERLAND

P. G. Wodehouse

London: Herbert Jenkins, 1952, pp. 176.

The author who gave us the indomitable Jeeves and who wrote the book for such delicious Broadway shows as *Anything Goes* wrote this wacky excursion into Broadway show biz which remains a classic (and novel) introduction to how to succeed in show business without knowing what you’re doing. His title character is Cyril Fotheringay-Phipps, known as “Barmy,” a hotel clerk with just enough money saved up that a Hollywood confidence man tries to take



it from him. Happily, in the Lewis Carrollesque "wonderland" of Broadway, everything that should go wrong doesn't, and the innocent who are what the English call "barmy" always prevail. Along the way, we readers are given a healthy dose and insider's view of the whiz of 1940s show biz, and more laugh lines than most comedies dream of having. To enjoy this novel, you must delight in brittle turns of phrase and you should have a taste for a pocket full of wry.

BEHIND A MASK

Louisa May Alcott

New York: Morrow, 1975, pp. 95.

ISBN 0-688-00338-9

[Reprint of 1866 edition as by A. M. Barnard.]

Before ever she published *Little Women* in her own name, Alcott published several short stories and novellas she referred to as "blood & thunder tales" under the *nom de plume* of A. M. Barnard. *Behind the Mask* is the most celebrated of these, and it falls into that category we call "what if an actor acted in real life?" A young actress passes herself off as someone else in order to win a wealthy young man and ruin a hypocritical and prosperous family. Only non-actors would believe an actor could do this. Yet this is a fascinating example of early feminist writing.

BETHEL MERRIDAY

Sinclair Lewis

New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1940, pp. 390.

After using religion, science, and journalism for the backgrounds for his hugely successful novels *Elmer Gantry*, *Arrowsmith*, and *It Can't Happen Here*, Lewis explored the world of between-the-wars American theatre in this delightful and informative story of the maturation of a young actress. Lewis was no outsider to the theatre, as his introductory "Notice" reveals and as those who know the plays he co-authored, notably *Dodsworth*, understand. As a quintessentially American novelist, Lewis provides us with an excellent approach to the quintessentially American theatre.

BETWEEN THE ACTS

Virginia Woolf

New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1941, pp. 219. • B

The elegant world of between-the-wars small town English society is Virginia Woolf's home turf, and in this story of Miss La Trobe's mounting of a massive theatrical pageant, Woolf gives us a fine portrait of Edith Craig, Edward Gordon Craig's sister and therefore daughter of Ellen Terry. A gentle and well-wrought tale by one of our century's finest writers.

BLACK SNOW

Mikhail Bulgakov

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967,
pp. 190.

One of three novels by the great Russian author, this fictionalizes the story of the authorship and first production of his most celebrated play, *The Days of the Turbins*, which he adapted from his controversial novel *The White Guard*. Here we meet Stanislavsky, who directed Bulgakov's play, and we see first-hand how the Moscow Art Theatre conducted its business and its art. Not very differently from any other theatre company, as it turns out. This was originally published in Russian under the title *A Theatrical Novel* in 1965, twenty-five years after Bulgakov's death. The novel is bright, and filled with the vitality of theatrical production, and it makes us feel good to live for a couple of hundred pages in the world of the Moscow Art Theatre.

CAPTAIN FRACASSE

Theophile Gautier

New York: Collier, 1902, pp. 435.

Gautier crashed into celebrity in 1830 at the age of nineteen and wearing his rose-colored doublet. He was one of the leading figures in the battle of *Hernani*. Six years later, and obviously influenced by Victor Hugo, he had

written most of *Captain Fracasse*, one of his most successful and enduring novels, though he did not publish it until 1863, long after his reputation as a Romantic novelist had been established



with what many feel is his best and master work, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. We don't know if *Captain Fracasse* has been made as a film by the French, though we'd like to see it if it has, and it would delight us if it were made into a television series for Masterpiece Theatre. We'd suggest a romantic leading man like Robert Powell for the title