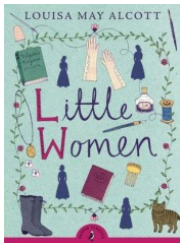


Desert Island Books

These are the contenders for Favorite Book, the life-changers, the books I re-read over and over again. Ordered by oldest to newest read.

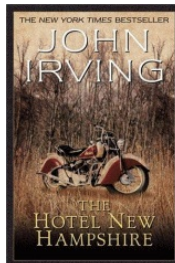
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Little women

Louisa May Alcott ; introduced by Louise Rennison.

My very first favorite book, and still a defining one.



The Hotel New Hampshire

John Irving.

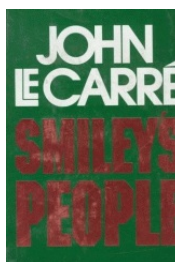
Read this when I was 16 and became an immediate John Irving completist. This one has bears, Vienna, prostitutes, Exeter, AND wrestling, which means it's the platonic ideal of Irving Tropes.



The waste land

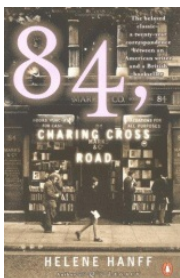
T. S. Eliot ; with an Introduction by Paul Muldoon.

My favorite 20th century poem -- studied this in college, can still recite whole sections from memory.



Smiley's people.

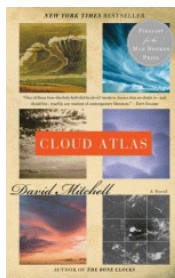
If I had to pick ONE favorite book from sheer sentimentality, it would be Smiley's People -- and particularly, the copy my father gave me, betting me \$50 that I'd love it. He was right.



84, Charing Cross Road

by Helene Hanff.

The best epistolary book ever, made all the sweeter for being a true story. A book lover's book.



Cloud atlas

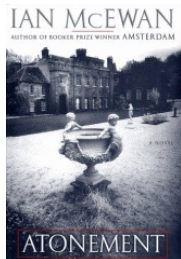
David Mitchell.

The second, more modern contender for True Favorite, Cloud Atlas is an exquisite epic on a grand scale and also searingly memorable in specific parts (Frobisher particularly. Frobisher forever.)

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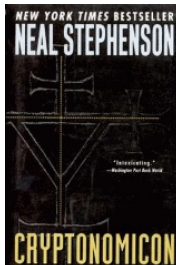
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Atonement

Ian McEwan.

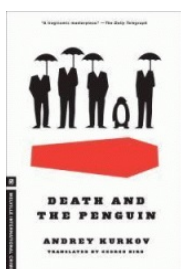
No one does the small, portentous moments like McEwan. This book stands for me as the best-written single day in literature -- nothing holds a candle to the tension and subtlety of the first third of the novel.



Cryptonomicon

Neal Stephenson.

I resisted reading this for years, but when I finally did it was worth it. Such incredibly memorable characters, such a deep dive into his obsessions.



Death and the penguin

Andrey Kurkov ; translated by George Bird.

So delightfully absurd, so deadpan, so subtly eviscerating of post-Soviet life -- Kurkov is one of the funniest writers I've ever read.