

Using Rare Books to Inspire Learning

Part 2: Drama - Travel



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Editor's Note: We are pleased to publish here **Part 2** of **Gene's** list of great books. You can find **Part 1** in the February issue of **ATG**, v.20#1, p.70. — **KS**

Numerous lists of great books have been prepared, and this list contains many of the same titles, but differs in significant respects. It includes subjects that have generally been omitted from series of great books: anthropology, art history, architecture, art, book arts, correspondence, essays, exploration, geography, geology, inventions, law, sociology, speeches, and sports. It also includes shorter works that represent a turning point in the understanding of a subject.

I have included first-person accounts of major discoveries, explorations, systematic observations made possible by new instruments, sound analyses, verifiable experiments, and methodologies created for more specialized fields of knowledge. Each title set a new standard for scholarship and excellence, created a new scholarly discipline, or set a new course for the study of a subject. In my opinion, the approaches used by these authors are the ones most likely to continue to provide the best basis for adding knowledge.

Even when the information they contain has been largely superseded, these titles represent the best thinking that had been done on their subjects at the time of publication. They provide models for how to try to deal with an entire field of knowledge and how to go about solving problems. They are most worth reading to learn how major problems were finally solved.

I have had to omit many famous histories and works of literature to be able to focus on the ones that I considered most worth acquiring. I have preferred well established principles to theories. I have nearly always omitted titles by living or recently deceased authors.

In some cases, better editions than the first have been subsequently published, and these editions and translations are also needed. In some cases, such as the first printing of the **Columbus** letter or the **Gutenberg Bible**, a facsimile or later edition will nearly always have to suffice because of their extreme rarity. One first edition of a **Shakespeare** play could substitute for the *First Folio*. Regardless, every library should have as many first editions of key works as it can acquire.

To make more facsimiles and translations widely available of standard works is also a publishing opportunity. A surprising number of these titles are out of print, and some have never been fully translated into English.

As more first editions are becoming avail-

able online, what is the point of having copies that are too valuable to be handled? The point is to inspire similar accomplishments. A first edition can be as inspiring as an original work of art no matter how many copies exist. It is to make readers wonder why these books are important, what it took to create them, why they have been so influential, and why so many of them still need to be read.

For many titles and dates, I have relied on **Robert B. Downs' Famous Books: Ancient and Medieval** (1964) and on his *Molders of the Modern Mind: 111 Books that Shaped Western Civilization* (1961). His summaries are a reliable introduction to the most influential books in Western Civilization, and they provide an excellent basis to set priorities for reading. **Dr. Lawrence Simms** corrected many of my titles and translations.

Drama

Aeschylus, Aeschyli Tragoediae Sex (Greek, 1518) — established tragedy (including Agamemnon and Prometheus Bound)

Sophocles' Tragoediae (Greek, 1502; written by c. 406 BC) — tragedy perfected, particularly "Oedipus at Colonus"

Euripides' Tragoediae (Greek, 1503; written by 406 BC) — including Hecabe and Iphigenia in Aulis

Aristophanes' Comoediae Novem (Greek, 1498; written by 380 BC) — perfected comedy

Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies (1623) — perfected drama by bringing characters to life and by making situations and choices credible; particularly Julius Caesar, Henry V, and Romeo and Juliet

Economics

Smith's Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations — (1776) — established economics as an academic discipline

Education

Locke's Essay Concerning Humane Understanding (1690) — established persuasively that all knowledge is learned through the senses and formulated in the mind

Encyclopedias

Diderot's Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers (1751-1772) — an incomplete, but invaluable summary of knowledge about the arts, manufactures, and sciences of the time

Encyclopedia Britannica (1911) — unique for the high level of expertise of the signed articles and for the literacy of its contents; still widely used, read, and cited

Essays

Cicero's "Laelius: On Friendship," in *Scripta Philosophica* (1471; written by 43 BC)

Bacon's *Essaies of Sir Francis Bacon, Knight, the King's Solicitor Generall* (1612; enlarged edition) — particularly "On Friendship"

Emerson's *Essays*, particularly "On History" (First Series, I; 1841) and "On Nature" (Second Series, V; 1844)

Hazlitt's *Table Talk; or, Original Essays* (1821-1822; 2 vols.), particularly "On the Ignorance of the Learned," "On Paradox and Common-place," "On Vulgarity and Affectation," and "On Criticism"

Hazlitt's *Sketches and Essays* (1839), particularly "On Fashion"

Arnold's "Culture and Its Enemies" and "Anarchy and Authority," *Cornhill Magazine* 1868)

Thoreau's "Resistance to Civil Government;" edited by **Elizabeth P. Peabody** in her *Aesthetic Papers* (1849), 189-211.

Exploration

Columbus' *De Insulis Inuentis: Epistola Cristoferi Colom* (1493) — announced the European discovery of the New World

Polo's *De la Meravegliose Cose del Mondo* (1496; written by 1324 [Of Amazing Things in the World]) — most comprehensive early Western account of Asia

Vespucci's *Lettera di Amerigo Vespucci* (1505-1506) — accounts of four voyages established him as the mapmaker who proved the existence of North America and South America as continents rather than islands

Pigafetta's *Le Voyage et Navigation fait par les Espaignolz es Isles de Mollucques* (c.1525) — the account of Magellan's voyage around the world proving its roundness

Garcilaso de la Vega's *La Florida del Ynca: Historia del Adelantado Hernando de Soto, Governador y Capitan General del Reyno de la Florida, y de Otros Heroicos Caualleros Españoles è Indios* (1605 [The Florida of the Inca: History of the Adelantado Hernando de Soto, Governor and Capitan General of the Kingdom of Florida, and of Other Heroic Spanish Cavaliers and Indians]) — an accurate and fair account of **De Soto's** travels throughout the Southeast among Indians who had never experienced Europeans

Cook's *Voyages* (1773, 1777, and 1784) — no one had explored or mapped more of the world more systematically or accurately; estab-

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lished Antarctica as a continent and exhausted the possibilities that another continent existed and that a Northwest Passage was feasible as a shipping route; exemplary prose

Lewis and Clark's *History of the Expedition Under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the Sources of the Missouri Thence Across the Rocky Mountains and Down the River Columbia to the Pacific Ocean, Performed During the Years 1804-5-6; by Order of the Government of the United States* (1814; 2 vols. edited by Nicholas Biddle) — first recorded expedition from the Atlantic to the Pacific and back; produced accurate maps of areas not previously systematically explored, accounts of Indian tribes, botanical records, and other information.

Park's *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799) — the earliest account of the interior of Africa

Fiction

Fielding's *History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) — arguably the best novel ever written; Fielding was a judge, an excellent judge of human nature, and a superb writer

Dostoyevsky's [Brothers Karamazov] (1879-1880; first published serially in Russian) — brothers who are all Dostoyevsky

Flaubert's *Salambô* (1862) — one of the most painstakingly researched and carefully described works of fiction

Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896) — historically accurate, vivid, and made entirely credible

Geography

Strabo's *Geographia* (Greek, 1516; written by AD 21) — created geography as a separate field of study

Humboldt and Bonpland's *Voyages aux Régions Equinoxiales du Nouveau Continent fait en 1799-1804* (1805-1834; Travels in the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent During 1799-1804) — the most complete account in every respect of Hispanic Central and South America; one of the principal foundations for geography as a science; also important for biology and anthropology

Maury's *Physical Geography of the Sea* (1855) — the most comprehensive study that had been made of all aspects of all oceans with much new information on depths, currents, etc., collected systematically by Maury and others

Geology

Hutton's *Theory of the Earth, with Proofs and Illustrations* (1795) — foundation of geology as a science

Lyell, Principles of Geology: Being an Attempt to Explain the Former Changes of the Earth's Surface, by Reference to Causes Now in Operation (1830-1833) — the first comprehensive attempt to account for all land formations using natural forces

Agassiz's *Etude sur les Glaciers* (1840 [Study of Glaciers]) — established that much of Europe had been covered by glaciers

History

Herodotus' Historiae (first Greek edition, 1502; written by 425 BC) — first comprehensive history of the known world based on a careful evaluation of sources and first-hand information

Thucydides' Historia Belli Peloponnesiaci (Greek, 1502; written by 399 BC [History of the Peloponnesian War]) — first contemporary history based on the judicious use of primary sources including first-hand information

Arrian's Arrianoi Peri Alexandroi Anabases (1535 [Arrian on the Expedition of Alexander]) — first Greek edition of Arrian's history of Alexander the Great (preceded by a Latin translation in 1508)

Polybius, Polybiou Megaloplitou Historion Biblia (1530; 5 surviving books of the 40 written by 118 BC) — how the Romans created their empire in the 2nd Century BC; includes influential treatises on historical writing and government

Caesar's Commentarii de Bello Gallico (1469; written by 43 BC [Commentary on the Gallic War]) — the most literate history of a war written by the victor

Tacitus' Historiae Romanae Decades ([1469]; written by AD 120)

Sallust's Opera (1470; written by 35 BC [Jugurthine War and the Conspiracy of Catiline]) — incisive histories of two major Roman wars

Guicciardini's L'Historia d'Italia (1561[History of Italy]) — judicious use of written and oral primary sources covering the period from 1490-1534; a model for later historians

Machiavelli's Il Principe de Niccholo Machiavello al Magnifico Lorenzo di Piero de Medici (1532 [The Prince...]) — a model topical history

Marshall's General Marshall's Report (1945) — concise and uniquely well informed summary of efforts to plan and win the most widespread war in history

Inventions

Agricola's De Re Metallica (1556) — well illustrated summary of methods invented for mining and extracting minerals

Daguerre's Historique et Description des Procédés de Daguerreotype et du Diorama (1839) — first description of a photographic process by its creator

Edison's "Electric Lamp" (United States Patent Application 379770, 1879)

Wright and Wright's "Wright Brother's Aéroplane" (*Century*, 1908) — a detailed account of how the Wright brothers experimented to discover the principles of flight and to apply them successfully

Language

English — *Holy Bible* (King James version, 1611) — standardized English

French — **Voltaire's Oeuvres complètes** (1784-1789) — a model for French prose

German — **Luther's Biblia** (1545) — set the standard for German prose

Greek — **Homer's Opera** (Greek, 1488-1489; written c. 850 BC) — the basis of ancient Greek education

Italian — **Dante's La Commedia** (1472) — the most influential work of Italian literature

Latin — **Cicero's Opera Omnia, cum Castigationibus Petri Victorii** (1534-1537) — standardized syntax for Latin and languages based on it; the first critical edition of his complete works

Spanish — **Cervantes' El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha** (1605-1615) — the seminal work in Spanish literature

Law

Justinian, Codex Justinianus (1475; written by AD 565) — code of Roman law that became the basis for most later law

Bracton's De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae (1569) — established judicial precedent as a basis for applying laws

Code Napoléon (1807) — both a code and a constitution that liberalized laws throughout Europe

Mathematics

Euclid's Elementa Geometriae (Greek, 1533; written by 275 BC) — the only textbook to have been continually used since Antiquity

Archimedes, Opera Omnia (Greek, 1544; written by 212 BC) — the first mathematician to go well beyond Euclid

Medicine

Hippocrates' Omnia Opera (Greek, 1526; written by 377 BC) — father of medicine

Galen's Therapeutica (Greek, 1500; written by AD 200) — the most authoritative study of medicine until the Renaissance

Vesalius' De Humani Corporis (1543) — the most careful and complete study of human anatomy that had been attempted and the best illustrated

Harvey's Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus (1628) — established the circulation of blood

Jenner's Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the Variolae Vaccinae, a Disease Discovered in Some of the Western Counties of England, Particularly Gloucestershire, and Known by the Name of the Cow Pox (1798) — provided the basis for safe inoculations

Bell's Nervous System of the Human Body (1830) — collected papers including his seminal 1811 *New Idea of the Anatomy of the Brain* that distinguished sensory and motor nerves

Pasteur's "Mémoire sur les Corpuscules Organisés qui Existent dans L'Atmosphère" (*Annales des Sciences Naturelles [Partie Zoologique]*, 1861) — established germs as the cause of communicable diseases

Lister, "On the Antiseptic Principle in the Practice of Surgery," *Lancet* (1867), 741-745

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— demonstrated the importance of using antiseptics to avoid infection

Oslar, *Principles and Practice of Medicine* (1892) — the most authoritative summary of medical principals and practice

Methodology

Bacon's *Nouum Organum* (1620 [New Instrument]) — second part of a projected work entitled *Instauratio Magna* — the fullest exposition of Bacon's recommendations for the use of inductive reasoning in preference to deductive reasoning (most notably in Aristotle's *Organum*); Darwin acknowledged its influence

Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode pour Bien Conduire sa Raison et Chercher la Vérité dans les Sciences* (1637 [Discourse on the Methods for Best Leading to Reason and Searching for Truth in the Sciences]) — recommendations for systematic research such as reducing problems into parts capable of being solved individually

Philosophy

Plato's *Opera* (Greek, 1513; written by 347 BC) — first comprehensive philosophical system; includes the *Apology*, *Symposium*, and *Lysis*

Aristotle's *Opera Omnia* (Greek, 1495-1498; written by 322 BC) — most comprehensive attempt to systemize all knowledge for two millennia (including *De Partibus Animalium*, *Politics*, *Poetics*, *De Rhetorica Alexandrum*, *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, *Historia Animalium*, *Mechanica*, and *Rhetorica*)

Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* ([c. 1473]; written by 55 BC) — an attempt to understand the universe that has not been superceded; the first great work of Latin verse

Physics

Gilbert's *De Magnete* (1600) — the first application of the experimental method to study any phenomenon systematically and comprehensively

Galileo's *Discorsi e Dimostrazioni Matematiche, Intorno à Due Nuoue Scienze Attenenti alla Mecanica & i Movimenti Locali* (1638) — groundwork for physics as a science of experimentation based on precise measurements

Franklin's *Experiments and Observations on Electricity Made at Philadelphia in America by Mr. Benjamin Franklin, and Communicated in Several Letters to Mr. P. Collison, of London, F. R. S.* (1751) — proved that lightning was

a form of electricity, enabling Franklin to invent the lightning rod to prevent its damage

Galvani's *De Viribus Electricitatis in Motu Musculari* (1791) — established that nerves operated using electricity



Faraday's *Experimental Researches in Electricity* (*Philosophical Transactions*, 1831-1838) — experiments that resulted in the electric motor and generator

Maxwell's "A Dynamical Theory of the Electromagnetic Field" (*Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 1865) — established experimentally that light was an electromagnetic phenomenon

Rutherford's "Collision of a Particle with Light Atoms" (*Philosophical Magazine* [1919]) — first experimental proof of the existence of sub-atomic particles

Poetry

Pindar's *Carmina* (Greek, 1513)

Catullus's *Carmina* (1473)

Michelangelo's *Rime di Michelagnolo Bvonarroti* (1623)

Shakespeare's *Shake-speares Sonnets Never Before Imprinted* (1609)

Politics

Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) — argued persuasively for limits on government

Jefferson's *Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774) — Jefferson's defense of American rights led to his appointment to write the Declaration of Independence

[**Hamilton, Madison, and Jay's**] *Federalist: a Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution, as Agreed Upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787* (1788) — the rationale behind the Constitution of the United States explained by individuals involved in its creation

Mill's *On Liberty* (1850) — individual rights ably defended

Psychology

Pavlov's [*Conditioned Reflexes: an Investigation of the Physiological Activity of the Cerebral Cortex*] (Russian, 1926) — provided a foundation for psychology as an experimental science

Religion

Luther's *An den Christlichen Adel Deutscher Nation: von des Christlichen Standes Besserung* (1520) — Luther used politics to separate religion from politics, and he used religion to promote education, individual judgement, and autonomy.

Breasted's *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (1912) — using primary sources he translated, Breasted showed that as religion expanded thought contracted

Speeches

Demosthenes' *Orationes* (Greek, 1504; written by 322 BC) — one of the principal models for political oratory

Milton, *Areopagitica: a Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, to the Parliament of England* (1644)

Sociology

Dubois, *Moeurs, Institutions et Cérémonies des Peuples de l'Inde* (1899) — one of the fullest accounts of the ways of life of any people recorded in the 18th century

Eden's *State of the Poor; or an History of the Labouring Classes in England* (1797) — the first major statistical analysis of a social problem

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) — the first major statistical study of sexuality; marked a turning point in social attitudes and legal positions on the basis of established facts that could no longer be denied

Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953) — the second

Sports

Jahn's *Lehrbuch der von Friedrich Ludwig Jahn unter dem Namen der Turnkunst Wieder- weckten Gymnastik...* (1814) — the book that created the sport of gymnastics; Jahn sought a substitute for military training, which had been forbidden in Germany during the Napoleonic Period

Naismith's *Rules for Basket Ball* (1892) — another of the few major sports wholly invented by one person was basketball; Naismith's goal was to create a safe indoor sport for winter

Weismuller's *Swimming the American Crawl* (1930) — training methods of one of the most successful athletes of all time in terms of the number of world records broken and the length of time the records were held

Travel

Olmsted's *Journey to the Seaboard Slave States* (1856) — the first of his trips through the South to study slavery and although the shortest, the most vivid and influential

Parkman's *California and Oregon Trail: Being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life* (1849) — some of the best accounts written of American Indians 🐾

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