

Three Classic Reads That Are Still Relevant Today

Summer is the best time to catch up on the reading that, for one reason or another, you haven't had time to do the rest of the year. But instead of reading the average beach paperback, why not dig deeper and check out some classics from the past? Here are three that I believe to be worth a look.

1. **Slaughterhouse-Five** (Kurt Vonnegut, 1969)

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Vonnegut's masterpiece, [*Slaughterhouse-Five*](#).

A science fiction work, *Slaughterhouse-Five* tells the story of Bill Pilgrim, an American soldier captured by the Nazis and imprisoned in a former slaughterhouse located in the German city of Dresden. This setting allows Bill to witness one of the most dramatic episodes of World War II: the bombing of Dresden which killed 25,000 people.

When Bill Pilgrim returns home, he's interned in a mental hospital for veterans to recover from the traumatic events he went through during the war. At this point, the author introduces his science-fiction element: Pilgrim's abduction by toilet-plunger-shaped aliens, who take him to a planet called Tralfamadore to be exhibited at a zoo.

Such a twist in the story seems to be motivated by Vonnegut's aim to denounce how the horrors of the war can impact the life of a person, leading him to create an alternative existence to elude the realities of life. In an era that experiences war on a regular basis, we would do well to remind ourselves of its horrors and effects on everyday life.

2. **Conversation in the Cathedral** (Mario Vargas Llosa, 1969)

Another work celebrating its 50th year is [*Conversation in the Cathedral*](#). A masterpiece of Nobel winner Mario Llosa, the book depicts Peru under Manuel Odría, the military dictator who ruled the country between 1948 and 1956.

Odría's dictatorship was characterized by corruption, populist policies, and political repression of the opposition. In this sense, Odría's regime can be included in the long list of populist dictatorships that have ruined Latin American countries (and continue to do so) since the early 20th century.

Yet *Conversation in the Cathedral* isn't a historical novel. It is a work which reflects upon the political and social ills afflicting Peru, pitting characters with different social backgrounds against one another: the businessman who made his fortune collaborating with the dictatorship; the journalist who distances himself from a past connected to the dictatorship; the henchman in charge of repressing the democratic opposition. These characters offer important insight into modern day Latin America, as such scenarios still play out today.

3. The End of Eternity (Isaac Asimov, 1955)

This one is for science-fiction lovers. If you've read Asimov's *Foundation* saga ([review](#) here), [*The End of Eternity*](#) should be the next on your list.

"Eternity" is an organization created in the 24th century whose main goal is to avoid catastrophic events affecting humankind. For that purpose, the "Eternals" travel through time, making small amendments to change the course of history for good. Yet these interventions have unintended consequences, preventing humankind from ever reaching its full potential.

In this novel, Asimov deals with the classic dichotomy between freedom and security. He makes a strong case for the former as

a way of unleashing the creative ability and inexhaustible ingenuity of human beings. This dichotomy becomes apparent at the end of the book when the novel's protagonist, Andrew Harlan, has to make a decision that could change the past, present, and future of humankind. The question of giving up freedom for security that Harlan faces is one that many of us still wrestle with today.

We often overlook books from the past, preferring to look at something fresh and relevant. But might these works from the past give us fresh insight into present issues?

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