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## [Cville Reads, Vol 16](#)

Surveying the Greats with Norman Woolworth

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One of the joys of a local bookshop is celebrating local writers. And Charlottesville is full of writers.

The launch party we hosted for Norman Woolworth was one of the most fun evenings of the Fall. Norman just published a new novel, [The Bolden Cylinder](#), and, as you'll see below, has great taste in literature.



**Thanks for doing this, Norman. Tell me: where can we find you around town?**

When not ensconced in my lonely writer's garret, I am most likely headed to Twice is Nice, where I enjoy the *esprit de corps* of the volunteer pick-up and delivery team; or perhaps to Shenandoah Joe for my favorite cuppa (French Roast -- black, please). On Friday afternoons, you can probably find me comparing tasting notes with my friends at The

Wine Guild. And in the evenings, I've been known to catch the occasional show at the Jefferson or Southern.

**Those are some real Charlottesville institutions. Wonderful. Given that we are stuck in this polar vortex of freezing temps, tell me: what do you like to read during the cold, dark months of the winter?**

When the weather turns cold I'm apt to delve into weightier tomes than normal, particularly histories and biographies. This winter I finally made it through Ron Chernow's colossal [Mark Twain](#), and now I'm onto [The Fate of the Day](#), the second installment in Rick Atkinson's masterful American Revolution trilogy. I also recently read, and loved, Daniel Mason's [North Woods](#), which while not set exclusively in winter did feature some chilly atmospherics.

**Is there a subject or book trope that you return to over and over again?**

Yes. I am an absolute sucker for the "grand cabal," that distinctive literary terrain explored most famously by [Thomas Pynchon](#), but also Robert Stone, John Fowles, Ralph Ellison, and many others, wherein there is on the one hand this palpable notion that unseen hands are controlling events, and on the other, an acutely paranoid protagonist and/or narrator. Where one ends and the other begins, the reader is rarely certain.

I also can never seem to get enough of the musicality of the Irish voice. [Tana French](#), John Banville, and [Niall Williams](#), to pick just three of my contemporary favorites, explore very different literary themes and interests; but in each, it is the lyric vernacular of their mother tongue that lingers longest in my memory.

**Ok, let's make some news. Do you have authors who you think are over-hyped? What about under-read?**

Let's start with the over-hyped. I'd say ...

- F. Scott Fitzgerald. (Or maybe just [The Great Gatsby](#), in relation to the far superior *Tender is the Night* and [The Beautiful and The Damned](#).)
- All the gurus of the self-help and business genres.

The many talented practitioners of current affairs non-fiction, who rarely achieve more than long-form journalism, and almost never withstand the scrutiny of later-day historians. One notable recent exception: Kurt Andersen's *Evil Geniuses*.

And as for the under-read, how about:

- The short stories of [Raymond Carver](#).

- John Updike, [Wendell Berry](#), [Peter Matthiessen](#) and other exemplars of a vanishing archetype: The Renaissance person of letters.
- [Kate Atkinson](#).
- [Walker Percy](#).
- Longfellow, Tennyson, and other masters of the regrettably passé narrative poem.

**Got it. Finally, do you have any 2026 reading goals?**

I've never been much of a goal setter, which may explain my aversion to self-help books. That said, it is always my intention to read well and widely.

**Well we're here for that. Thanks so much, Norman. And stay warm!**

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