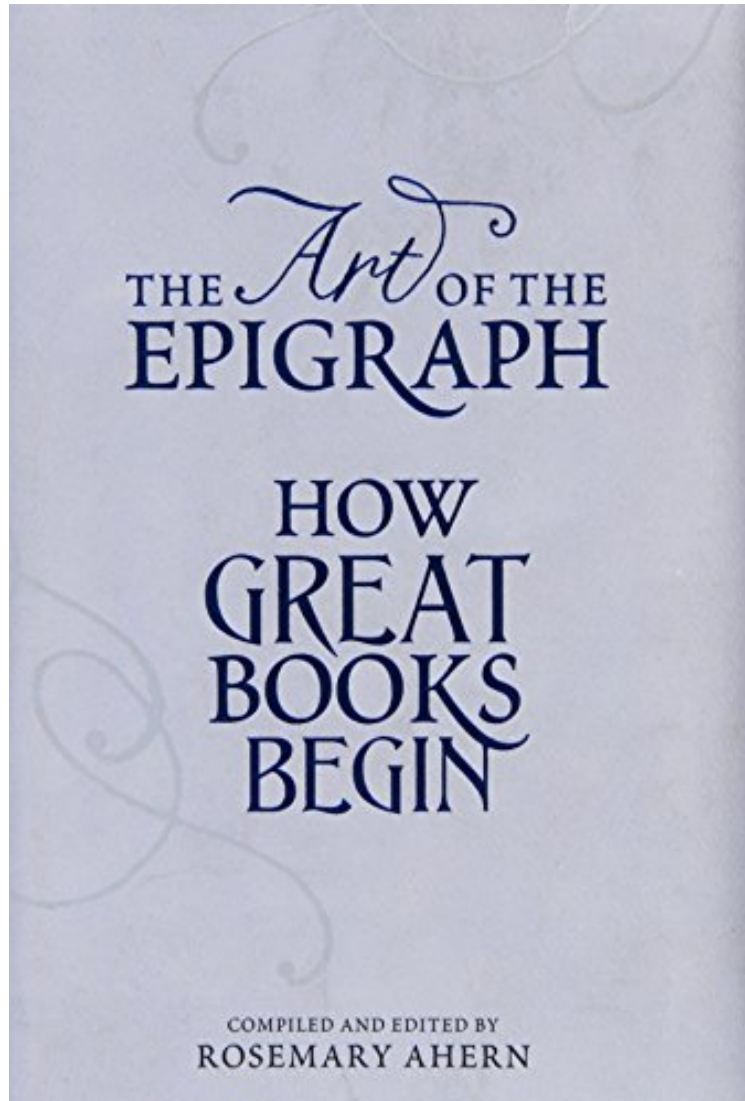


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The Art of the Epigraph: How Great Books Begin

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From Atria Books : The Art of the Epigraph: How Great Books Begin before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Art of the Epigraph: How Great Books Begin:

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content or feeling of the epigraph with that of the content to come, and I love how an epigraph simultaneously introduces and summarizes the writing to come. Often when I've enjoyed the portion of the work precluded by an intriguing one, I'll go read the source of the epigraph, just to see. So when I saw a book dedicated to these little guys, I looked no further. Unfortunately, the claim made in the short description on the page, that "The Art of the Epigraph collects more than 250 examples ... and offers insights into their meaning and purpose..." just isn't true. The examples are there, to be sure, but this is a book of quotations. It is not a meaty, explanation-laden volume. The insights that are offered are few, and they're not very insightful, generally explaining only who some of the more obscure (or fictional) authors of the original works were with respect to time and place. There's no discussion of the content of the original work from which the epis were pulled, nor why they were chosen for the particular bit of writing to which they were attached. I've read many of the works mentioned and don't mean that I was hoping for precis, but rather that some discussion of the point of the epigraph or some neat tidbit - even for just a few, maybe the more esoteric or ones particularly subtly connected to the writing at hand - would have made this a much more interesting work. If you read, with one or two Google searches you'll know as much about the epigraphs you encounter as this little book will show you. One star because I was so hopeful for something fascinating and am sadly disappointed.

A collection of more than 250 epigraphs from across 500 years of literature, a quick and lively way to immerse yourself in the world of books and ideas. For many book lovers, there is no more pleasing start to a book than a well-chosen epigraph. These intriguing quotations, sayings, and snippets of songs and poems do more than set the tone for the experience ahead: the epigraph informs us about the authors sensibility. Are we in the hands of a literalist or a wit? A cynic or a romantic? A writer of great ambition or a miniaturist? The epigraph hints at hidden stories and frequently comes with one of its own. The Art of the Epigraph collects more than 250 examples from across five hundred years of literature and offers insights into their meaning and purpose, including what induces so many writers to cede the very first words a reader will encounter in their book to another writer. With memorable quotations ranging from Dr. Johnson to Dr. Seuss, Herodotus to Hemingway, Jane Austen to Karl Marx, and A. A. Milne to Marcel Proust, here is a book that allows us a glimpse of the great writer as devoted reader. This lively and distinctive literary companion traces not only the art of the epigraph but the history of the book.

About the Author Rosemary Ahern is a writer and editor living in New Yorks Hudson Valley. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. INTRODUCTION I'm always surprised when someone claims not to read epigraphs. To me, that's an offering refused, a pleasure skipped. Those intriguing quotations, sayings, snippets of songs and poems, do more than just set the tone for the experience ahead: the epigraph informs us about the authors sensibility. Are we in the hands of a literalist or a wit? A cynic or a romantic? A writer of great ambition or a miniaturist? The epigraph hints at hidden stories and frequently comes with one of its own. In hunting for epigraphs, I've discovered them as far back as the fourteenth century, in The Canterbury Tales, and I wouldn't be surprised if a more serious scholar traced the tradition back even further. The cumbersome (occasionally amusing) prefaces found in early novels like Don Quixote (1605) and Gullivers Travels (1726) can be considered the literary forebears of the crisp, succinct epigrams that became the fashion in the twentieth century. Glamorous modernists like Hemingway and Fitzgerald popularized epigraphs, challenging authors to appear as learned and clever in their use of them ever since. Some of my favorite authors are purists who present their work without outside association or adornment, without a wink or a clue. Flaubert, Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf, Patti Smith. I respect and admire their silence before their books begin. However, this book celebrates the generosity of authors willing to part the curtain and show us a glimpse of their mental furniture; to give us a preview of what they think is vital, funny, and true. George Eliot, Vladimir Nabokov, C. S. Lewis, Lorrie Moore. Of course, their books would be every bit as memorable and important without epigraphs appended, but wouldn't we miss that extra element of anticipation? It would be like going to see Vertigo or Midnight in Paris and not taking your seat until after the opening title sequence. I always want to see how mood is established and to submit. Epigraphs appeal to those of us who occasionally need the kind of bolstering an ingenious turn of phrase or inspiring piece of wisdom can provide. I'm with Dorothy Parker when she says, I might repeat to myself, slowly and soothingly, a list of quotations beautiful from minds profound if I can remember any of the damn things. Thankfully, memory aides abound in the front matter of many of the worlds best books. All that truth, humor, and novelty of expression presorted for us by consummate artists and cherished friends. So yes, The Art of the Epigraph can be enjoyed like any quotation book. Here you will find advice on how to live well, be brave, avoid mistakes, apply the correct etiquette, adjust your expectations, appreciate quirkiness (your own and others), attract a lover, break out of a rut, and dodge obligations. But you will also encounter fascinating conversations conducted over centuries and across cultures and genres. Writers communing with other writers, sometimes resulting in odd but delightful coincidences, like the fact that Susan Sontag and Mary Higgins Clark both turned to Tennyson when selecting epigraphs for their books. Divisions disappear; ideas and affinities are more clearly revealed. Epigraphs remind us that writers are readers. I suppose that is what I like best about them. The experience I have when I read, encountering lines that perfectly express what I believe but can't articulate, that open up a new point of view, that make me feel understood or

filled with joy, as brilliant and lofty as I might consider that books authorit happens to them too. And thats whats on display in the epigraph: an author acknowledging his or her place in the fellowship of readers. |LIFE One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever . . . The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose . . . The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits . . . All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. ECCLESIASTES In *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), Ernest Hemingway Taking it slowly fixes everything. ENNIUS In *The Red and the Black* (1830), Stendhal One of the many pleasures of reading Stendhal is his liberal use of epigraphs, which offer wry commentary on the chapters they announce. The great translator Burton Raffel warns that Stendhal had a notorious habit of writing the epigraphs himself and ascribing them to elevated or otherwise unlikely sources. We could be skeptical, but why not play along? Hailed as the Homer of Rome, Quintus Ennius (239-169 BC) was born in southern Italy, in what is today Calabria, where Greek was then the language of the upper classes. He learned Latin as a soldier in the Second Punic War and was taken to Rome by Cato the Elder. Working as a teacher and translator of Greek, Ennius began writing poetry, eventually producing the epic *Annales*, which recounted Romes history from the fall of Troy to Enniuss own time. It was the most famous poem in the Roman world until Virgils *Aeneid* supplanted it nearly three hundred years later. Remember that the life of this world is but a sport and a pastime . . . KORAN, LVII 19 In *A Sport and a Pastime* (1967), James Salter Somebody said lift that bale. RAY CHARLES SINGING OL MAN RIVER In *Beautiful Losers* (1966), Leonard Cohen Life treads on life, and heart on heart; We press too close in church and mart To keep a dream of grave apart. MRS. BROWNING In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W. E. B. Du Bois This epigraph opens the chapter *Of the Sons of Masters and Men*, in which Du Bois meditates on the history of colonialism and race relations, concluding that only by a union of intelligence and sympathy across the color-line . . . shall justice and right triumph. The quotation comes from *A Vision of the Poet* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861), who was outspoken in her opposition to slavery. Some of it wasnt very nice, but most of it was beautiful. DOROTHY GALE, *THE WIZARD OF OZ* In *Beautiful People* (2005), Simon Doonan O my soul, do not aspire to immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible. PINDAR, *PYTHIAN III* In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Albert Camus Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay To mold me Man, did I solicit thee From darkness to promote me? PARADISE LOST (X. 743-45) In *Frankenstein* (1818), Mary Shelley Mary Shelley was just nineteen when *Frankenstein* was published anonymously. Although the novel sold well, Shelley was too dogged by scandal and debts incurred by her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, to receive any benefit from it. In fact, most people believed that Percy Shelley was the true author, doubting that a young girl could possess the kind of experience that would produce such a dark imagination. In fact, Shelley was well acquainted with death and the desire to resurrect life. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, feminist and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, had died of an infection two weeks after giving birth to her. Mary herself had already suffered the death of one child before writing *Frankenstein*, and the child she was carrying while writing the novel would survive less than a year. A journal entry from 1815 reads: Dream that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lives. February 19. Hopes? February 20. Unnoticeable life. Noticeable failure. February 25. A letter. FROM KAFKAS DIARY, 1922 In *Running the Books: The Adventures of an Accidental Prison Librarian* (2010), Avi Steinberg Nineteen twenty-two was not a good year for Kafka. Suffering from tuberculosis, his health declined to such a degree that he gave up writing fiction. He instructed his friend and literary executor, Max Brod, to burn all his manuscripts and papers after his death. Brod can be forgiven for not granting his friends dying wish, as we wouldnt have *The Trial*, *The Castle*, or *Amerika* otherwise. All the lives we could live, all the people we will never know, never will be, they are everywhere. That is what the world is. ALEKSANDAR HEMON, *THE LAZARUS PROJECT* In *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), Colum McCann There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved. CHARLES DARWIN, *ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES* In *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* (2008), David Wroblewski The dirty nurse, Experience . . . TENNYSON In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2002), Susan Sontag If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrels heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. GEORGE ELIOT In *Unless* (2002), Carol Shields Traveling is a brutality. It forces you to trust strangers and to lose sight of all that familiar comfort of home and friends. You are constantly off balance. Nothing is yours except the essential things: air, sleep, dreams, the sun, the sky: all things tending toward the eternal or what we imagine of it. PAVESE In *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), Ian McEwan Cesare Pavese (1908-1950), a towering figure in twentieth-century Italian cultural history, fell in love with American literature as a student in Turin. He wrote his thesis on Walt Whitman, and *Moby-Dick* was his favorite book. He began writing stories, poems, and novels, but his anti-Fascist activities landed him in one of Mussolinis prisons for three years. With his own work censored, Pavese began translating Herman Melville, Gertrude Stein, William Faulkner, Charles Dickens, and others, and it is through his translations that most Italian readers first encountered these authors. After the war, Paveses novels *Before the Cock Crows*, *August Holiday*, and *Dialogues with*

Leuc earned him great acclaim. Yet, at the height of his success, he committed suicide after a failed love affair. He was forty-one years old. After all, my dear fellow, life, Anaxagoras has said, is a journey. BERGOTTE In The Dream Life of Balso Snell (1931), Nathanael West The journey was cut short for Nathanael West (1903-1940), who died at thirty-seven, his literary talents unrecognized. He had spectacular bad luck as an author: one of his publishers went bankrupt, and his darkly comic vision never caught on with Depression-era readers. Broke, West went to Hollywood to work as a screenwriter. There he fell in love with Eileen McKenney, heroine of her sister Ruth's popular book, My Sister Eileen. The couple was married less than a year when a car crash killed them both. This tragedy provoked interest in West and led to reissues of his novels and his posthumous fame. Bergotte is the author young Marcel worships in Proust's In Search of Lost Time; Anaxagoras was an influential Greek philosopher during the golden age of Pericles. But there are two quite distinct things given the wonderful place he's in that may have happened to him. One is that he may have got brutalized. The other is that he may have got refined. HENRY JAMES, THE AMBASSADORS In Foreign Bodies (2010), Cynthia Ozick