

A book list

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An idiosyncratic list of books I have enjoyed,
or at least found valuable or important,
and (at some level) can recommend

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- Abbey, Edward

Black Sun
Desert Solitaire
The Monkey Wrench Gang

Comments: Edward Abbey is known for his writings about ecology and the Southwest. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* tells the tale of a motley crew fighting to maintain “pristine beauty” against corporate despoilers. *Desert Solitaire* is a “spirit of place” book ...

- Alther, Lisa

Kinflicks
Five Minutes in Paradise

Comments: *Kinflicks* will make you laugh at the absurdities of the Twentieth Century.

- Atwood, Margaret

Cat’s Eye
The Handmaid’s Tale
Surfacing
Life Before Man
Bodily Harm

Comments: Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* is probably her best known book – a commentary on the possible consequences of

putting too much faith in fundamentalism, conservatism, and “family values.” While I think the book is worth reading, I don’t consider it her best. Others of her books, such as *Cat’s Eye*, I find much more moving.

- The Mahabharata and the Bhagavad Gita
Classic ancient works. Try various translations. Try to find the video of the Peter Brooks play also. Ask yourself “what would Arjuna do?” (WWAD)
- Baba Ram Dass (a.k.a. Richard Alpert)
Be Here Now
The Only Dance There Is
Comments: Sometimes didactic (he was a Harvard professor, after all :-), but worth reading. The titles are almost enough in themselves, if you can embrace them, and remember . . .
- Barth, John
The End of the Raod
The Floating Opera
Giles Goat-boy, Or, the Revised New Syllabus
The Sot-weed Factor
Lost in the Funhouse
Comments: I find John Barth a fascinating author. *The End of the Road* is a strong beginning – not a fun read, but definitely worth it. Some of his other books express a “post-modern move.”
- Beckett, Samuel
Malloy
Malone Dies
The Unnamable
Murphy
Waiting for Godot
Endgame
Comments: Beckett is best known as a playwright, but his novels, particularly the trilogy (*Malloy*, *Malone Dies*, *The Unnamable*), are well worth reading.
- Bellow, Saul
Herzog
Seize the Day
Henderson the Rain King
The Adventures of Augie March
Mr. Sammler’s Planet
The Actual
Humboldt’s Gift

Comments: Bellow has many books worth reading. *Herzog* is probably his best known, but I encourage you to read his earlier works, like *Seize the Day*, *Henderson the Rain King*, and *The Adventures of Augie March*. His work continues strong – keep reading his work, and you will find much.

- Berger, Thomas

Rhinehart in Love
Crazy in Berlin
Little Big Man

Comments: Be sure to see the movie too, especially if you like Dustin Hoffman and/or Faye Dunaway. Remember that sometimes the magic works, and sometimes it doesn't . . .

- Borges, Jorge Luis

Ficciones
Labyrinths

Comments: More post-modern moves. His short stories will make you think, and take you inside a strange mind and to strange worlds.

- Brautigan, Richard

A Confederate General from Big Sur
In Watermelon Sugar
The Pill versus the Springhill Mine Disaster
Revenge of the Lawn
The Hawkline Monster
Rommel Drives on Deep into Egypt
Trout Fishing in America

Comments: *Trout Fishing in America* knocked me out when I first read it. Brautigan's spare prose will surprise you, and help you look at the world in new ways. I like his post-beat poetry too.

- Burroughs, William

Junky
Naked Lunch
Nova Express
The Soft Machine
The Ticket That Exploded

Comments: Burroughs' work is a classic dark view of the Twentieth Century, with hallucinatory, visionary imagery. He isn't gentle, but you'll never think about the underside of life the same way again.

- Butler, Octavia

Dawn
Clay's Ark

Imago
Parable of the Sower
Parable of the Talents
Patternmaster

Comments: Strong science fiction – much of it near future. Dark, but rewarding.

- Camus, Albert

The Plague
The Stranger
The Myth of Sisyphus

Comments: Existentialism. We all need to read some.

- Card, Orson Scott

Ender's Game
Speaker for the Dead
Children of the Mind
Xenocide
Seventh Son

Comments: I'm not sure what to make of Orson Scott Card. The *Ender's Game* series is strong, with interesting ideas, particularly about the place of children in society, and how we might relate with aliens. Card also has a strong current of magic and mystical powers in others of his works, some of which I enjoyed, others of which were just frustrating.

- Chandler, Raymond

The Long Goodbye
The Big Sleep
Farewell, My Lovely

Comments: I could probably list hundreds of mystery/"defective thriller" works. Chandler is always good. See the movies, but read the books too.

- Conrad, Joseph

Heart of Darkness

Comments: *Darkness* earlier in the Twentieth Century. See the movie *Apocalypse Now* also.

- Cortazar, Julio

Hopscotch
Blow-Up : and Other Stories
62: A Model Kit

Comments: *Hopscotch* is a fascinating book. Cortazar suggests a variety of paths through the chapters of the book, overlaying stories in various ways. I first read this because he wrote the short story which inspired

the movie "Blowup" (which is worth seeing – Antonioni's take on the sixties in England).

- DeLillo, Don

White Noise
Libra
Ratner's Star

Comments: I keep trying DeLillo. I haven't been able to get off the ground in *Underground*, and I'm carrying *Mao II* with me. His writing is strong and evocative, but it often leaves me cold (which is probably one of his goals . . .).

- Dick, Philip K.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
The Man in the High Tower
Radio Free Albemuth
Ubik

Comments: More science fiction. Again, I could probably list hundreds of these (and maybe will someday . . .). See the movie too (*Bladerunner*).

- Durrell, Lawrence

The Alexandria Quartet
(Justine, Balthazar, Mountolive, Clea)
Bitter Lemons
The Black Book
Tunc
Nunquam

Comments: I found the *Alexandria Quartet* to be an amazing, evocative, moving work. The four books (often sold bound in a single volume) will take you to another world, which you'll see through multiple eyes, with multiple takes on the same events.

- Eco, Umberto

The Name of the Rose
Foucault's Pendulum

Comments: Eco is known for his work on semiotics, his cultural/literary criticism, and his fiction. I like both of these novels a lot. See the movie (with Sean Connery) too.

- Faulkner, William

A Light in August
As I Lay Dying
The Sound and the Fury

Comments: Faulkner is generally not an easy read, but he captures the ebb and flow of thought – again with evocative and visionary textures.

- Ferlinghetti, Lawrence
 - Coney Island of the Mind
 - The Secret Meaning of Things
 - A Far Rockaway of the Heart
 - Starting from San Francisco

Comments: Among my favorite poets – still hard at work. His work can be fun to read aloud – he captures the rhythms of the spoken word.
- Forster, E. M.
 - A Passage to India

Comments: The clash of cultures, with an overlay of the mystical ...
- Foster, M. A.
 - The Gameplayers of Zan
 - The Warriors of Dawn

Comments: Somewhat obscure science fiction, worth reading.
- Fowles, John
 - The French Lieutenant's Woman
 - The Collector
 - The Magus
 - Mantissa

Comments: Somewhat self-conscious “post-modern” work sometimes, but I like his writing.
- Ginsberg, Allen
 - Howl
 - Kaddish

Comments: You need to read these ...
- Golding, William
 - Lord of the Flies
 - The Spire

Comments: Parables of good and evil ...
- Grass, Gunter
 - The Tin Drum

Comments: German to the core. Keep reading.
- Heinlein, Robert
 - The Moon is a Harsh Mistress
 - Stranger in a Strange Land

Comments: Over the years I have read more Heinlein than maybe I should. These two are very much worth reading. When he's good, he's very good.

- Heller, Joseph
 - Catch 22
 - Something Happened
 - Good as Gold
 - Closing Time

Comments: *Catch 22* is a true classic – how things work, and don't, and the terrible truth of the process of war. This is one I reread when I need a dose of deadly absurdity. The others are worth reading too.
- Herbert, Frank
 - Dune, Dune Messiah, Children of Dune, etc.
 - The Santaroga Barrier

Comments: *Dune* is a true classic of sci-fi – cosmic themes, good writing, characters you can care about (up to a point ...). The series maunders a bit, but even the later books are often worth reading. *The Santaroga Barrier* is a good read too.
- Herrigel, Eugen
 - Zen in the Art of Archery

Comments: It's not enough just to read Zen. Be the arrow
- Hershey, John
 - The Child Buyer

Comments: I read this when I was ten or twelve. It gave me some insights into how the world works, but also made me wonder what might make a life worthwhile ...
- Hesse, Herman
 - Siddhartha
 - Demian
 - Steppenwolf
 - Journey to the East
 - Magister Ludi (the Glass Bead Game)

Comments: I particularly like *The Glass Bead Game* (but then, I would ...).
- Hofstadter, Douglas R.
 - Godel, Escher, Bach : An Eternal Golden Braid

Comments: A tour-de-force – amazing book. Not exactly fiction, but everybody should read this sometime. If you get frustrated, put it down for a while and come back later.

- Huxley, Aldous
 - After Many a Summer Dies the Swan
 - Brave New World
 - Chrome Yellow
 - Island
 - The Perennial Philosophy
 - Point Counter Point
 - Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell

Comments: Huxley is one of my favorite authors. Many people have read *Brave New World*, but I encourage you to explore his other writings as well.
- The I Ching

Comments: Again, try several translations. Maybe not quite as “supermarket tabloid” as *Linda Goodman’s Sun Signs*, but much deeper and much better for you . . .
- Irving, John
 - The Water Method Man
 - Hotel New Hampshire
 - Setting Free the Bears
 - The World According to Garp
 - Cider House Rules

Comments: I read *The Water Method Man* long ago, and could see the beginnings of a talent. I’ll have to admit I have been frustrated by Irving over the years – too much of his fiction reads (to me) like the fulfillment of a contract. *Garp* is a meditation on castration, if you’re into that sort of thing. On the other hand, I find *Cider House Rules* to be a wonderful book – another one that moved me (the movie is worth seeing too). It feels like the book he kept meaning to write, but only finally got around to. It’s why I kept reading his work all those years . . .
- Jong, Erica
 - Fear of Flying
 - Fear of Fifty
 - Half-Lives
 - How to Save Your Own Life

Comments: What fictionalized autobiography can become – mostly fun to read, but often depressing in the end. Twentieth century life . . .
- Kapleau, Philip
 - The Three Pillars of Zen
- Kerouac, Jack
 - On the Road

Desolation Angels
Dharma Bums
Maggie Cassidy
The Subterraneans
Visions of Cody
Vanity of Duluo
Scriptures of the Golden Eternity

Comments: I find Kerouac uneven, but worth reading. Give *Maggie Cassidy* a try.

- Kesey, Ken

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
Sometimes a Great Notion

Comments: Two amazing books, both definitely worth reading. *Sometimes a Great Notion* is classic americana. I'm ambivalent about both movies, but so it goes ...

- Keyes, Daniel

Flowers for Algernon

Comments: And see the movie (*Charly*) too.

- Kosinski, Jerzy

The Painted Bird
Being There

- Lao Tzu

The Tao Te Ching

Comments: Try various translations. Some days (when I'm not thinking Hindu) I think I'm a Taoist.

- Lawrence, D. H.

The Rainbow
Sons and Lovers
Women in Love
Lady Chatterly's Lover

Comments: Sure, he's another one famous for censorship battles – but read some of the less famous books. Also, try his short stories, like *The Woman Who Rode Away* or *The Rockinghorse Winner*.

- Leary, Timothy

Diary of a Hope Fiend
The Intelligence Agents
The Tibetan Book of the Dead (with Richard Alpert)

Comments: You may not be able to find some of these (like the *Diary*), but try anyway. If Leary hadn't come along when he did, our culture still would have had to invent him. What happens when pop culture and celebrity meet the mystical and visionary? It may not be a pretty sight, but we ought to look anyway.

- LeCarre, John

The Spy Who Came in From the Cold
Our Game
Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy
The Tailor of Panama
The Little Drummer Girl
Russia House

Comments: Spy thrillers, but with something more. I keep reading whatever he publishes, and continue to find them worthwhile. Richard Burton is good in the *Cold* movie.

- Lee, Harper

To Kill a Mockingbird

Comments: Good movie too.

- Le Guin, Ursula

The Lathe of Heaven
The Left Hand of Darkness
The Dispossessed

Comments: I like her science fiction – I'm not so fond of her other work (like sword-and-sorcery). I've used both of these books in classes.

- Lem, Stanislaus

The Futurological Congress
Solaris

Comments: What if it is all a dream (or a hallucination)? *The Futurological Congress* is a pretty quick read – quirky, but good. See the (Russian) movie of *Solaris* too.

- Lessing, Doris

The Golden Notebook
Shikasta

Comments: *The Golden Notebook* is a portrait of disillusionment, and the various faces of a life. More autobiography through fiction. Think about Freudianism vs. Communism . . .

- Maugham, Somerset

The Razor's Edge

Comments: For what do we search?

- McCarthy, Mary
The Group
- McCullers, Carson
The Heart is a Lonely Hunter
Comments: Coming of age – but a woman, not a boy ... See the movie, but read the book.
- Miller, Henry
Tropic of Cancer
Tropic of Capricorn
Comments: Breaking fiction free from old rules – in many ways.
- Miller, Walter
A Canticle for Leibowitz
- Nabokov, Vladimir
Lolita
Pale Fire
Invitation to a Beheading
Comments: Luminous writing. I keep coming back to Nabokov, and reading more.
- Nichols, John
The Magic Bus
The Milagro Beanfield War
Nirvana Blues
The Sterile Cuckoo
Comments: Some might wonder if he has the right to write about these issues. I think he's an artist – an observer – who will write about what he sees, wherever he is. Another outsider – I guess I'm attracted to them ...
- Orwell, George
Animal Farm
Nineteen Eighty-Four
Comments: Read *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Are we there yet? Are we still there?
- Percy, Walker
Love Among the Ruins
The Moviegoer
- Piercy, Marge
Woman on the Edge of Time

- Pirsig, Robert
 - Lila
 - Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

Comments: *Zen* is another of those astonishing books. His insights into how to approach problems are alone worth the price of admission. And remember that the motorcycle is your own self (or not :-) ...
- Powers, Richard
 - The Gold Bug Variations
 - Galatea 2.2
 - Gain
 - Prisoner's Dilemma
 - Plowing the Dark

Comments: Powers is one of my favorite writers these days. "Muscular" writing, allusions and references abound. I sometimes have trouble caring about his characters, but you should run out right now and get copies of *The Gold Bug Variations* and *Galatea 2.2*.
- Pynchon, Thomas
 - V.
 - The Crying of Lot 49
 - Gravity's Rainbow

Comments: Three classics from one author. You should run out and get copies of these three too. Keep reading. There keeps being more. I'm still working through *Vineland* and *Mason and Dixon*. Give them a try.
- Quinn, Daniel
 - Ishmael
 - The Story of B

Comments: Didactic with a vengeance, but worth reading. You're likely to think differently about this modern world (but then I wouldn't have been born in the twentieth century if I didn't want to take hot showers and drive fast ...).
- Robbins, Tom
 - Another Roadside Attraction
 - Still Life With Woodpecker
 - Even Cowgirls Get the Blues
 - Jitterbug Perfume

Comments: Robbins keeps being fun, although sometimes a little too self-consciously quirky for my taste. *Another Roadside Attraction* is probably my favorite, and probably the strongest commentary on contemporary (American) culture among his works.

- Rossiter, Oscar
Tetrasomy Two
Comments: A one shot wonder, but a classic bit of sci-fi.
- Roth, Phillip
American Pastoral
Goodbye Columbus
I Married a Communist
Letting Go
Portnoy's Complaint
Comments: There are times when I think Roth is the most American of authors. His writing grabs me and holds me, and I still care about various of his characters. He has written a lot, and I have only listed a very few. Keep exploring Roth, and he'll keep rewarding you for it.
- Salinger, J. D.
Catcher in the Rye
Frannie and Zooey
Nine Stories
Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenter
Comments: Sure, he's famous for *Catcher*, but there's a lot more to Salinger than just that. You should definitely read all of these. *Frannie and Zooey* may be my favorite.
- Sartre, J. P.
No Exit
Comments: More existentialism. We still all need to read some.
- Selby, Richard
Last Exit to Brooklyn
Comments: Gritty. Not an easy read. Life in the inner city.
- Snyder, Gary
Earth House Hold
Rip Rap
Cold Mountain Tales
Comments: One of my favorites among the Beat poets. Some of his later work is more didactic than I would like, but he is always evocative.
- Southern, Terry
Flash and Filligree
Candy
Red Dirt Marijuana and Other Stories

Comments: Southern has an edge you won't find in many other writers. He gets extra points for co-writing the movie *Dr. Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (which everyone should see!). Southern is Twentieth Century satire, while it was still possible . . .

- Stewart, George R.

Earth Abides

Comments: This is a great book. It moves me every time I read it. It explores what we value in life, and why, and what we could do without if we needed to.

- Stoppard, Tom

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
Arcadia

Comments: Wonderful plays. Read them. See them in a theater. (See the movie . . .)

- Suzuki, Shunryu

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

- Thompson, Hunter S.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas
Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail
Hell's Angels

Comments: Thompson is sometimes too full of himself, and his gonzo persona – but he has an hallucinatory clarity of vision that sometimes can't be beat. Read *the Campaign Trail* before the next big political campaign (whichever the “next” one is for you . . .).

- Updike, John

Toward the End of Time
The Centaur
Couples
Rabbit Run, Redux, Is Rich, at Rest

Comments: I can't help it, I like Updike's writing. He has a way of reminding me of the difference between transcendence and immanence. *The Centaur* spoke to me as a teenager, as did *Rabbit Run*.

- Van Vogt, A. E.

Slan
The Weapon Shops of Isher
The Weapon Makers
The World of Null A

Comments: Sci-fi. Sometimes “space-opera”. Oh, well. Pretend you are twelve years old, and read them for fun.

- Vonnegut, Kurt
 - Slaughterhouse Five
 - God Bless You Mrs. Rosewater
 - Ice Nine
 - Breakfast of Champions

Comments: Another author I kept reading – and *Slaughterhouse Five* was the payoff. I find most of his work amusing (although too often too self-consciously quirky), but *Slaughterhouse* moved me.
- Wallace, David Foster
 - The Infinite Jest
 - A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again
 - Broom of the System

Comments: More muscular writing. I confess I'm still working my way through *Infinite Jest* and *Broom* – but I recommend them anyway. He always seems to have more things to say than will fit on the page. Some of the essays in *Supposedly Fun* are simply marvelous (and charmingly snide :-).
- West, Nathanael
 - Day of the Locusts
 - Miss Lonelyhearts

Comments: Just find them and read them.
- Wolfe, Thomas
 - Look Homeward, Angel
 - Of Time and the River

Comments: Some would say the author of the Great American Novel. Make the time to read at least one of these ...
- Woolf, Virginia
 - Mrs. Dalloway
 - To the Lighthouse
 - The Waves
 - A Room of One's Own

Comments: A luminous writer. Like Updike, for me, a reminder of the difference between immanence and transcendence. Be sure to find and read *A Room*.
- Wouk, Herman
 - The Caine Mutiny
 - Marjorie Morningstar
 - Youngblood Hawke
 - The Winds of War

Comments: A variety of writers came out of WWII. Wouk made his name with *The Caine Mutiny*, but I like much of his other work too.