A book list

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

Tom Carter
http://cogs.csustan.edu/~tom/

April 19, 2003

• 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

• 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 maulders 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 Duluoz
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 Disposessed*

  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*


- 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
  Pnin
  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.