

Literature 2.0: *Twenty-Something Books That Will Make You Cooler.*

~ An Adventure in Reading ~

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“If your library isn’t unsafe, it probably isn’t doing its job.” - John Berry III

***Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel**

Bechdel, of "Dykes to Watch Out For" fame, delivers a coming-of-age memoir in graphic novel form that's anything but ordinary. Get this: Bechdel tells her parents she is a lesbian, expecting fireworks or recriminations, only to find out that her father has been having affairs with men and even his own high school students for years! Stunning, riveting and riddled with questions. See also: *Epileptic* by David B. *Rent Girl* by Michelle Tea; Julie Doucet's *My Most Secret Desire*; *The Quitter* by Harvey Pekar; *Carnet de Voyage* by Craig Thompson; *Need More Love: A Graphic Memoir*, by Aline Kominsky Crumb; *I Love Led Zeppelin*, by Ellen Forney.

***Willful Creatures*, by Aimee Bender**

Like any good fairytale, these surreal stories do not offer the reader an escape from real life, but rather plunge us into the primal reality of our dreams and nightmares. Put away childish things and plunge into the dark forest with Aimee. See also *The Collected Stories of Amy Hempel*; Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus*; Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones*; Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love*; *Wide Eyed*, by Trinie Dalton; *Saffron and Brimstone*, by Elizabeth Hand; *The Thin Place*, by Kathryn Davis.

***Post Office*, by Charles Bukowski**

Love him or hate him, this magnificent bastard will not be ignored, and his jaw-dropping frankness continues to attract new legions of fans sick to death of words, words, mere words. A library with no Bukowski just can't be trusted. See Also: John Fante's *Ask the Dust*; Dan Fante's *Short Dog*; Henry Miller's *The Tropic of Cancer*; Jack Kerouac's *The Subterraneans*; *Black Coffee Blues*, by Henry Rollins; *The Outlaw Bible(s) of American Literature / Essays / Poetry*, Alan Kaufman, ed.

***Overclocked: Stories of the Future Present*, by Cory Doctorow.**

Intellectual Freedom fighter Doctorow is on our side, and liberty loving librarians should rush to his website – www.craphound.com - where they can download free copies of his novels and stories, taking one small step towards the infinitely receding utopian propertyless ad-hocracy that these stories long for. Sure, you can buy his books as well. See also: Matthew Derby's *Super Flat Times*; Steve Aylett's *Slaughtermatic*; George Saunders's *Pastoralia* and *In Persuasion Nation*.

***Notes from Underground*, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky**

The quintessential anti-social anti-novel has enervated and inspired underground writers and readers for over a century. See Also: *Crime and Punishment*; Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*; Albert Camus' *The Fall* and *The Stranger*; Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*; Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

***Best American Non-Required Reading 2007*. Dave Eggers, ed.**

There's always something interesting, arresting, amusing going on in these annual mélanges of stories and sketches culled by the irreverent Eggers and his rotating crop of high school helpers. For readers who feel totally lost in today's literary scene, this is a great way to get found fast. See also: *The Anchor Book of New American Stories*, Ben Marcus, ed; *Best New American Voices*, annual. *The Best Creative Nonfiction*, Vol. 1, Lee Gutkind, ed; *The New Kings of Non-Fiction*, Ira Glass, ed, *Bookmark Now, Writing in Unreaderly Times*, Kevin Smokler, ed.: *Bookaholic's Guide to Book Blogs*, by Catherine Kilgarriff; *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples*, by Walt Crawford.

***Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, by Nick Flynn**

Memoirs are *it* right now, especially if they bear a passing resemblance to Dante's *Inferno*. Flynn works excoriating and wildly inventive prose out of quality time spent with his drunken ex-con father while working at a homeless shelter. See Also: Jim Carroll's *Basketball Diaries*; Frank Conroy's *Stop Time*; Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life*; Mary Karr's *Liar's Club*; Augusten Burroughs's *Running With Scissors*; Dave Eggers's *Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*; Sean Wilsey's *Oh the Glory of it All*; Bee Lavender's *Lessons in Taxidermy*; James Frey's you-know-what.

***The Shock Doctrine*, by Naomi Klein**

Boomers and Busters who wonder where the materialistic Generation Y's idealism is hidden should check out this vigorous condemnation of the corporate world order. Klein is also the author of *No Logo*, an influential rallying cry against what passes for culture in a world dominated by soulless conglomerates. See Also: Alissa Quart's *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*; Maxx Barry's *Jennifer Government*; Howard Zinn's *The People's History of the United States*; *Politically Inspired*, and *Stumbling and Raging: More Politically Inspired Fiction*, Stephen Elliott, ed.

***Indecision*, by Benjamin Kunkel**

When a charming young writer is universally touted as 'the voice of his generation?', it is worth checking him out, if only to find out what the rest of us think his generation's voice might sound like. In Kunkel's case, it is a wry, intelligent, sweetly neurotic voice that gawps in the face of millennial ennui and wonders, isn't there a pill I can take for this? See Also: Arthur Nersesian's *The Fuck Up*; Eric Bogosian's *Mall*; Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*; *The Gum Thief*, by Douglas Coupland; *Someday this Pain Will be Useful to You*, by Peter Cameron; Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero*.

***Magic for Beginners*, by Kelly Link**

Jaded young readers in search of something different, something wonderful and strange, need look no further, for Link's pages teem with aliens, zombies, cheerleaders, ghost dogs, and guardian rabbits. So much for the strange: what's wonderful is how beguiling, amusing and affecting she makes all this. See Also: *Feeling Very Strange*, James Patrick Kelley ed; *Paraspheres*, Rusty Morrison, ed; *Interfictions*, Theodora Goss, ed; *Trampoline*, Kelly Link, ed; *The Best of Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, Kelly Link & Gavin Grant, eds.

***Cloud Atlas*, by David Mitchell**

Speaking of literary virtuosos, here's a young writer who seems poised to take the postmodernist crown from David Foster Wallace. Beginning, middle, end? How passé! Mitchell refracts his theme into six seemingly unrelated narratives that pursue their strikingly independent courses, only to rush back together in a miraculous coda – a remarkable trick that is exactly what meta-fiction is supposed to do. See Also: Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*; Mark Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* and *House of Leaves*; David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*; David Markson's *Vanishing Point*; John Barthes's *Lost in the Funhouse*.

***McSweeney's #23*, Dave Eggers, ed.**

It is hard to overestimate the influence of McSweeney's back-to-books ethos on today's literary scene, and these two issues provide ample evidence of both how serious and screwy these bookish hipsters can be. See Also: *The Believer*, *n+1*.

***Kafka on the Shore*, by Haruki Murakami**

Two runaways: young seeker Kafka Tamura, and Satoru Nakata, a half-wit who speaks to cats and can control the weather. Follow them on their strange quest, joining legions of fans who step into Murakami's vaguely familiar surreal dreamscapes with each new title. Just don't be surprised if you bump into Colonel Sanders. See Also: Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*; *Woman in the Dunes*, by Kobo Abe; *Death and the Penguin*, by Andrei Kurkov; *The Master and Margarita*, by Michael Bulgakov.

***Fugitives and Refugees: A Walk in Portland Oregon*, by Chuck Palahniuk**

From strip joints to thrift stores to the Apocalypse Café, Portland's most famous provocateur takes you on a tour of his beloved home town. See also: Palahniuk's fiction, and his *Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories*; Douglas Coupland's *City of Glass*; *Douglas Coupland's Vancouver*; *Assassination Vacation*, by Sarah Vowell; *Car Camping*, by Mark Sundeen; *Home Land*, by Sam Lipsyte.

***Pimp*, by Iceberg Slim**

A worldwide underground classic since it first came out in 1969, this swaggering memoir by the ultimate Old School player has become a seminal work for hip-hop music and the gangsta chic. See also: *The Art of Mackin'*, by Tariq Nasheed; *The*

Scene, by Clarence Cooper Jr.; *Whoreson*, by Donald Goines; *From Pieces to Weight*, by 50 Cent; *Tha Doggfather*, by Snoop Dogg; *Death of a Primitive*, by Chester Himes.

***The Coldest Winter Ever*, by Sister Souljah**

30 years after *Pimp*, an outspoken social activist and feminist helps bring urban fiction out of the shadows, spawning a publishing boom with this wildly popular, cleverly conceived crime family saga in which mob princess Winter Santiago gets the better of her conscience, represented in the book by Souljah herself. See also: *No Disrespect*, by Sister Souljah; *Push*, by Sapphire; *True to the Game*, by Teri Woods; *Hip Hop Story*, by Heru Ptah.

***Let That Be the Reason*, by Vickie Stringer**

Written in prison while the author was serving a seven year bid for drug trafficking, off-the-street sales of this self-published autobiographical novel helped its author found her own publishing house – Triple Crown – which has given a start to other rising stars of urban fiction such as K’wan, Nikki Turner, Tracy Brown, Shannon B Holmes, and many others. See also: QBoro Books, Urban Books, etc.

***Battle Royale*, by Koushon Takami**

In a fascist dystopia, 42 Junior High School students are forced to play a cruel game in which only one of them can survive. This is the face of teen terror in the age of reality programming. See Also: *Battle Royale*, the graphic novel; *Battle Royale I & II*, the movies; Spike TV’s ‘Extreme Elimination Challenge!’, *Grotesque*, by Natsuo Kirino; *Ring*, by Koji Suzuki; *V for Vendetta*, by Alan Moore; *Demo*, by Brian Wood.

***Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, by Hunter S. Thompson**

This wild, paranoid, drug-fueled spree through the great American microcosm really did begin as a journalistic assignment, but it wound up changing the face of journalism forever. From an author who walked the walk, right up until the end, and beyond. See also: Carlton Mellick’s *Punk Land*; *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, by Lester Bangs; *Peace Kills*, by P.J. O’Rourke; *Thank You for Smoking*, by Christopher Buckley; *Where You’re At: Notes from the Frontline of a Hip-Hop Planet*, by Patrick Neate; *Fargo Rock City*, by Chuck Klosterman; *The Joke’s Over*, by Ralph Steadman; *The Gonzo Way*, by Anita Thompson.

***Acme Novelty Library #17*, by Chris Ware**

In this issue, we witness the childhood adventures (!?) of Rusty Brown and Chalky White. Ware combines a wildly inventive sense of graphic space with simple line illustration and the downbeat, alienated tone common to many of today’s coolest graphic novelists. See also: *Ice Haven*, by Daniel Clowes; *Shortcomings*, by Adrian Tomine; *Black Hole*, by Charles Burns; *Clyde Fans*, by Seth; *Year’s Best Graphic Novels, Comics & Manga (2006 & 2007)*; *The Best American Comics (annual)*; *An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons and True Stories*, Ivan Brunetti, ed.

LITERATURE 2.0

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~ A Surfing Safari ~

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“Irony is just honesty with the volume turned up.” - George Saunders

The Believer (www.believermag.com) “We will focus on writers and books we like. We will give people and books the benefit of the doubt. The working title of this magazine was *The Optimist*.”

The Blooker Prize (www.lulublookerprize.com) Best Books that began as blogs!

Boing boing (www.boingboing.net) “A Directory of Wonderful Things” See also contributor Cory Doctorow’s site: (www.craphound.com)

Chuck Palahniuk: A Writer’s Cult (www.chuckalahniuk.net) The author’s official website. See also Neil Gaiman’s Blog (www.neilgaiman.com), Kelly Link’s site (www.kellylink.net) and about **a zillion** other author pages out there. Get in the habit of thinking ‘Hmm, cool author, I’ll have to check out their website!’

The Comics Journal (www.tcj.com/) Owned and operated by Fantagraphics Books, *The Comics Journal* is a magazine that covers the comics medium from an arts-first perspective. See Also: Drawn & Quarterly www.drawnandquarterly.com/home.php

The Complete Review (www.complete-review.com) “A selectively comprehensive, objectively opinionated survey of books old and new, trying to meet all your book review, preview, and information needs.”

Entertainment Weekly Online (www.ew.com): Get your daily or weekly dose of pop culture gossip and celebration here. Some other cultural survey sites that include books are PopCandy Blog (<http://blogs.usatoday.com/popcandy/>) Openculture (www.oculture.com/) and Pop Matters (www.popmatters.com/)

Erotica Noir (www.eroticanoir.com) Website of author Zane: where it all began.

If: Book (<http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/>) Blog discussing the state of literature today and where its headed.

LibraryThing (www.librarything.com) The premiere cataloging and literary social networking site. See Also: Shelfari, anobii, GoodReads, Delicious Books, Librarianous, Guru Lib, Bibliophil, etc etc.. My LibraryThing and Shelfari handle is Guybrarian.

Maud Newton (www.maudnewton.com) One of the earliest and best established lit/culture blogs, with a huge number of links. Or try Toronto's best known book blog: Bookninja.

New Pages (www.newpages.com) Provides extensive links to many online and print literary journals.

Myspace (www.myspace.com) Where do young people hang out? Coffee Shops? Dance Clubs? More of them hang out *here* than anywhere else on earth. See also, Facebook, LiveJournal, Twitter, 43Things, StumbleUpon, Delicious, etc. etc.

Open City (www.opencity.org) "The editors... strive to keep the literary journal vital for each new generation by publishing a dynamic array of poetry and prose with a daring, youthful spirit." "An athletic balance of hipster glamour and highbrow esoterica."— The Village Voice (www.villagevoice.com)

Pop Goes the Library (www.popgoesthelibrary.com) "We're librarians. We're pop culture mavens. We're Pop Culture Librarians." See also Librarian.net (www.librarian.net), an early library blog, still going very strong.

Rawsistaz (www.rawsistaz.com/index.html) The reading and writing sistaz. Check out the links. See also Smart Bitches Who Love Trashy Novels (www.smartbitchestrashybooks.com/index.php)

Street Fiction (www.streetfiction.org) A really good blog about Street Fiction and Urban Erotica, maintained by a corrections librarian in Hennepin County.

Timothy McSweeney's Internet Tendency (www.mcsweeneys.net) Come in, look around, think, laugh.

Urban Book Reviews (www.urban-reviews.com) Grass-roots review site for African American popular fiction. See also Urban Book Battles (www.urbanbookbattles.com/home.htm) Street Gangs Bookclub (www.streetgangs.com/bookclub) Hoodstories (www.hoodstories.com) Street Hop (www.streethop.com) cb book distribution (www.cbbooksdistribution.com/index.html) etc. etc. etc

Your Own Blog: What, you don't have one? *wft* ? Get with the program! See also: Your library's blog. (or see other library's blogs, such as (www.genre-x.com)).

Literature 2.0

Twenty-Something* • Bullet Points • *That Will Make You Cooler.

~ ***Go! Do! Be!*** ~

Thanks to **Misha Stone**, *librarian extraordinaire*, Seattle Public Library Fiction Dept.

“The worst crime is faking it.” - Kurt Cobain

- **No piercings/tattoos required:** Our young patrons come as varied as we are, and being yourself is truly the best way to connect with any patron, especially youth. They can smell a poser as quick as they can click to the next song on their iPod. But really, the adage don't judge a book by its cover works well here—interest and enthusiasm alone will make the most jaded young turk do a double-take.
- **Listen to your patrons:** If there is any way to find out what's cool, it's from your patrons. Ask them what they like, how they heard about it and why they like it. They are the widest net for catching what's new and exciting, and your curiosity and interest is what will keep them coming back.
- **Pay attention:** If a twenty-something patron walks up to you wearing a “Vote for Pedro” t-shirt or carrying a copy of *n+1* or something equally mystifying, ask them about it. Pay attention to where they are getting their information, what their interests are and by all means, engage them! You might be pleasantly surprised.
- **Watch TV:** Being conversant with younger patrons can be as easy as being a sponge—become a pop culture junkie by clicking around through your TV channels or checking out some popular TV shows and movies from your library or video store. Find out what the all fuss is about.
- **Read a magazine:** Continuing in the pop culture junkie vein, read popular and alternative youth magazines now and again on your lunch break: *Essence*, *BUST*, *Rolling Stone*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Eye Weekly*, *Now*, *Montreal Mirror*, *Broken Pencil*, *Mote*, *The Gate*, *The Comics Journal*, *The Believer*, *Blender*, etc.
- **Devote an hour to pop culture web surfing each week.** Just start somewhere cool and interesting, and follow the links! Add a comment to a blog, or search out who posted something on that strange new book you heard about.
- **Subscribe to a few LitBlogs.**
- **Tune into a radio station playing stuff you don't know about:** Check out a local alternative radio station on the airwaves or through podcast. Tune into radio programs like NPR's “This American Life” occasionally—big names like David Sedaris and Sarah Vowell got their start there.
- **What's Old is New Again:** Just because a reader tells you they've read Burroughs, that doesn't mean they have read or even know about some of the other cult greats like Kerouac, Bukowski, Dostoyevsky or Vonnegut. Use your own knowledge and cult fiction and classics resources for finding the dissidents and groundbreakers of the past. Champion lesser-know cult writers; obscurity is cool.

- **Make Connections:** The thing with cool is that it's *all connected*. Music, TV, Video Games, Graphic Novels, Manga and Novels are linked together in wonderful and surprising ways. Again, talk with your patrons about how they make connections between their interests, and look for crossover potential. Notice how bands reference other bands, and even books or authors! And think outside the box: our suggestions could be for non-fiction or a blog or a band you might think they'd like.
- **Read outside of your comfort zone:** Readers' advisory asks that we read outside of our comfort zone in order to be well-rounded. Plus, it helps challenge our assumptions of what we *think* we don't like. Lively up your reading and try something edgy, risky, new.
- **Put up a Display:** Try putting together some displays aimed at a younger audience: Cult Fiction, Urban Fiction, Chick Lit, Music Fiction, Coming-of-Age, Graphic Novels, Dire Memoirs, Authors under 35, First Novels, etc.
- **Make a List:** There's nothing like creating a read-alike list for a hot author, or a thematic list on a new genre, to get yourself intimately acquainted with what's going on, and let your patrons know how au courant your library is.
- **Don't forget non-fiction:** Memoirs, biographies and narrative non-fiction are not to be forgotten when helping 20-something patrons. Look for attitude, humor and style.
- **Follow the blurbs:** Sometimes it's as easy as finding out who's friends with who. Finding out what Dave Eggers, Chuck Palahniuk, or David Sedaris gave their stamp of approval can be a helpful hook when helping readers. Checking out book-jackets, review sites, and author sites can give you good leads on what's hot from those in the know.
- **Read a First Novel:** Pay attention to articles and reviews that talk about first novels—there tend to be breakout names every year. Also, don't solely rely on starred reviews—sometimes the hottest books don't get critical acclaim.
- **Get to know the hot publishers and imprints:** Pay attention to which major and independent publishers and imprints are taking chances. Watch small presses.
- **Talk to Your Teen Librarians, Student Assistants, Pages, or even your Kids:** They're smart. They really are.
- **Remember, you don't have to like all of this stuff!:** You don't have to like *any* of it: it's just important to stay on top of the trends and understand why your patrons like it. In the same way that we have to develop an understanding of why readers enjoy the "Left Behind" series, or cozy mysteries, or romances, it is important to understand why many of our younger readers enjoy Gen-X authors and themes.
- **Don't Stress Out!:** Helping our younger patrons and finding out what's cool at the moment shouldn't be hard—it should be fun! Don't worry if you don't know how to spell that new manga series title or don't know how to pronounce 'Palahniuk' to save your life. Be loose and interested and you too will be cool.
- **Never give up:** It's never too late and you're never too old to catch-up with what's going on. And give yourself props—librarians are the quickest studies around!