

100 MUST-READ

BOOKS FORMEN



... into rocks, was so completely wanting in the face
e, that it could not be that resemblance which had struck
her did I know the loftiness and haughtiness of Lady
's face, at all, in any one. And yet I – I, little Esther
on, the child who lived a life apart, and on whose birthday
s no rejoicing – seemed to arise before my own eyes,
out of the past by some power in this fashionable lady,
not only entertained no fancy that I had ever seen, but
perfectly well knew I had never seen until that hour.

... me tremble so, to be thrown into this unaccountable
that I was conscious of being distressed even by the
in of the French maid, though I knew she had been
richly here, and there, and everywhere, from the
I her coming into the church. By degrees, though very
t last overcame my strange emotion. After a long time, I
wards Lady Dedlock again. It was while they were pre-
ing, before the sermon. She took no heed of me, and the
no heart was gone. Neither did it revive for more than a
us, when she once or twice afterwards glanced at Ada or
gh her glass.

... ice being concluded, Sir Leicester gave his arm with
and gallantry to Lady Dedlock – though he was
walk by the help of a black stick – and escorted her out
to the pony carriage in which they had come. The
en dispersed, and so did the congregation; whom Sir
d contemplated all along (Mr Skimpole said to Mr Boy-
nith daughter), as if he were a considerable landed
n heaven.

... es he is!' said Mr Boythorn. 'He firmly believes in So-
ri, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather!
'know,' pursued Mr Skimpole, very unexpectedly to
'It's agreeable to me to see a man of that sort.'

STEPHEN E. ANDREWS
DUNCAN BOWIS

BLOOMSBURYGOODREADINGGUIDES

100 MUST-READ

BOOKSFORMEN

Stephen E Andrews and Duncan Bowis

Foreword by Toby Litt



A & C Black • London

First published 2008
A & C Black Publishers Limited
38 Soho Square
London W1D 3HB
www.acblack.com

© 2008 Stephen E Andrews and Duncan Bowis

ISBN: 978 0 7136 8873 3

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library.

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Publishers Limited.

This book is produced using paper that is made from wood grown in
managed, sustainable forests. It is natural, renewable and recyclable.
The logging and manufacturing processes conform to the environmental
regulations of the country of origin.

Typeset in 8.5pt on 12pt Meta-Light

Printed and bound in the UK by
CPI Bookmarque, Croydon, CR0 4TD

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FOREWORD

As readers, men get a pretty bad press. (Men get a pretty bad press generally, but that's another issue.)

I'm a writer, and I feel that by being a writer I'm following my vocation. As a reader, though, I feel a lot less definite, a lot more vulnerable. I know this is massively paradoxical. If I hadn't become a reader, there is far less chance that I'd have discovered novels, started writing, become a writer, etc. However, it's hard for me to look back and see myself turning out any differently. At the same time, I know that there are books I needed to encounter to be convinced, or (more importantly) re-convinced, that reading was something I wanted to spend my time doing. After all, there were my friends, my skateboard, my computer games...

For a while, I've been intending to construct an Autobiography (to be accompanied by an Autodiscography). Here's a kind of rough draft. Please note: these aren't things that were read to me; these are things I picked up myself.

In the beginning was the television. My parents used to warn me that I'd turn into Mike Teavee from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. They swore that if I sat *that* close to the screen, I'd first get square eyes and then go blind. (Perhaps because they saw TV as a form of masturbation.) They even threatened to throw 'the gogglebox' out. I was as distressed by the image of this – a smashed TV lying alongside our dustbins – as by anything I could imagine, including the total extinction of pandas.

I was also reading, though. But what I started with wasn't books. It was *The Beano*, *The Dandy* and *Whizzer and Chips*. Then I discovered Marvel comics – *The Fantastic Four*, *The Silver Surfer*. (I especially loved the ads at the back, for Hostess Twinkies – which I still haven't tasted. American kids seemed to live extremely desirable lives.) I was also keen on British comics like *Commando* and *Battle*. When *2000AD* came out, I bought it from issue one. It was on order for me at the local post office – my name biro'd on the top corner.

Then I started to pick books out of boxes at jumble sales. I read *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* – the first ever Star Wars spin-off book. I read *The Pan Books of Horror Stories*. And then, around eleven years old, I journeyed through *The Lord of the Rings*. Finishing this was the Rubicon. If I could get to the end of something *that* big, I could read anything in the world. I had books beaten.

Looking back, it seems almost a logical chain of escalation – from captions to stories to novels to multivolume epics. (*Dune* followed soon after, though I was defeated by *Dune Messiah*.) But I realise how fragile each of these links were. And, even now, I'm hit by periods when I read listlessly, unaffected by the words on the page. So the question isn't just *What should I read next?* but *What should I read that will make me love reading again?*

It's not possible that I'll ever feel the same sense of triumph I did when setting aside J.R.R. Tolkien's third hefty volume. But I know there are books out there which make we want to turn to myself and say, *Isn't this just the best thing ever? These words on the page that belong equally to writer, reader and whoever else happens upon them.* I know there are lots of these great books – it's just a question of finding them.

This book is intended to help me, and – more importantly – you, do just that.

And if this book is going to do that, then you'll have to start to trust it.

Perhaps you'll begin by looking up a couple of books you know, to see if you agree with what the authors say about them.

Or perhaps you'll read an entry and then go out and buy a novel you wouldn't otherwise have read, and you'll discover an entirely new author, a new way of looking at things, and you'll willingly dip back in for another go.

Already, probably, you'll have flicked through to have a quick look at which hundred books they've chosen. Maybe there are things you wanted to make sure were included. Hunter S. Thompson? Check. Couldn't do this without Hunter. Or maybe you were looking for surprises. Spike Milligan? Well, I suppose so. Maybe you've already started up a pub-corner argument. *Islands in the Stream* instead of *The Sun Also Rises*? Come on, guys. Deke Leonard but no Elmore Leonard? Hell no! Or maybe you've been nodding in list-boy approval. Klaus Kinski and Che Guevara. Oh, yes! M. John Harrison *and* Georges Bataille. Bingo!

But it seems to me, after hanging around it for a while, that this is a book you *can* trust. Mainly because its authors have a clear idea of what men are and what they generally like to read.

In the end, you may feel that you're a little off-centre from their chosen heartland – in whichever direction. I'd be really surprised, though, if you a. have gonads and b. fell outside their boundaries completely.

Toby Litt

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Our purpose in writing this book was not to try to establish a definitive list of the hundred ‘best’ books that would appeal to all men. Given the diversity of literary tastes amongst men from all walks of life, such an aim would not only be hubristic, but insulting. To be a man is first and foremost to be an individual, as until recently, the upper hand men have undoubtedly enjoyed from time immemorial has allowed us to define ourselves not primarily by our gender, but by the freedom of choice to select our own identities that came as our male birthright. One consequence of this freedom of choice is the common observation that one man’s unassailable canon is another man’s garbage. Popularity polls and bestseller charts are equally suspect: how many of us have discovered a book that we strongly believe would appeal to others, to find that it has languished in undeserved obscurity? All too often important tomes go unnoticed amongst massively over-hyped works by the current critic’s darlings. We think that most thinking men are healthily cynical and unlikely to be swayed by mere popularity, preferring the taint of maverick individuality instead.

Therefore, we have sought to recommend one hundred excellent books that we believe the majority of contemporary men will probably enjoy and relate to. In making our selection, we relied on our extensive expertise as readers and bibliophiles and the diversity of our

experiences as men. Also, over the decades we both spent as book-sellers, we encountered thousands of readers and discussed with them numerous books in all genres, so we feel confident in stating that although not every volume described here will appeal to every man, we think that most readers will find echoes of their own personal experiences of masculinity reflected in the voices of the majority of authors we've chosen to represent.

The individual book entries are arranged alphabetically by author. Non-fiction titles are indicated thus: **(NF)**. In selecting non-fiction, we have primarily stuck to personal narrative forms such as autobiography and biography, although you will find other categories of non-fiction represented in our choices and in the 'Read on a theme' boxes that are scattered throughout the text after appropriately related entries: these lists are designed to help you explore particular masculine literary themes in greater depth. In the fiction entries we delineate the plot of each novel, while aiming to avoid too many 'spoilers'. We offer some value judgements as well as information about the author's career and their place in the history of literature (or their chosen field if they are primarily known for achievement outside writing). We have also included the original publication date of each title. Significant film and television adaptations (with dates of release) are noted where applicable.

Each entry is followed by a 'Read on' list that includes books by the same author (including any sequels and prequels), books by stylistically similar writers or books on a theme relevant to the entry. In a small number of cases we have included full series listings arranged in order of internal chronology (i.e. in the order of events in the fictional world the author has set his stories in), as we're all too familiar with the difficulty of finding accurate bibliographies for lengthy sagas. Finally, the

symbol » before a writer's name (e.g. » Charles Bukowski) indicates that one or more of their books is covered in the A to Z author entries.

When considering titles for inclusion, we took the following factors into account: deserved popularity, cult status, critical acclaim, originality, unfair obscurity, historical significance and even personal preference. Even more important than all these were the responses of male readers themselves, for example, we have often found that some books favoured by critics and experts are not as well received by readers as titles the academics and collectors tend to underplay. Sometimes we found the converse to be true.

Except in a very small number of cases, we have generally eschewed Classics (by this we primarily mean widely acclaimed masterpieces published before 1900 now issued in imprints such as Penguin Classics and Oxford World's Classics). By definition such works have universal appeal that reaches beyond gender boundaries. Additionally, almost all the Classics we considered for inclusion in this volume were already covered expertly by Nick Rennison in *100 Must-Read Classic Novels* and *100 Must-Read Life-Changing Novels* (such as *Don Quixote*, *Crime & Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Moby Dick*, *Germinal*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and modern classics such as *The Outsider*, *A Farewell To Arms*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Hunger* plus the works of Conrad, Steinbeck and Kerouac). We have also avoided science fiction (except in two instances), again because it is extensively covered in *100 Must-Read Science Fiction Novels*. Instead, we have included some excellent general fiction titles by writers best known for their SF and fantasy. We have also included some works by authors primarily associated with crime fiction, as we felt some important titles of particular interest to men were not included in *100 Must-Read Crime Novels*,

especially in the areas of noir fiction – that step outside traditional detection tales. Graphic novels are represented with two titles.

We have generally avoided formulaic thrillers and chunky A-format paperback ‘bestsellers’ as such books already command plenty of attention, aimed as they are at the mass market – you only have to look at the chart section of your local bookshop to find these. We believe that our readers can quite happily make their own decisions when shopping for techno-thrillers and ‘beach reads’ by popular authors like Stephen King, Wilbur Smith, Dan Brown and John Grisham, plus we wanted to point you towards authors you may not have heard of that you’ll enjoy even more.

In all cases bar one (the inestimable Jack London – a man’s man if ever there was one), we have chosen to represent authors by a single book. Because men’s writing is not a genre, we have felt liberated from the requirement to conform to any existing canon and have instead focused on selecting titles that we feel illustrate the male experience in all its facets. Consequently, we have covered themes as diverse as sex, war, work, gambling, drinking, sport, fatherhood, responsibility, irresponsibility, adventure and many other aspects of masculinity. We have even included a small number of works by women and wished we could have included more, but, after all, this *is* a book for boys by boys. Incidentally, according to a survey in the London *Times* (June 2004) carried out on behalf of a major publisher, eighty five per cent of women said they would be attracted to a man who talked about literature. They also stated that they would judge a man by what kind of books he preferred. What more incentive do you need to get reading?

Regarding availability, the vast majority of the titles we’ve included are in print either in the UK or USA at the time of going to press, but

please be aware that books can become unavailable at any time. Just ask your local bookshop to help you find anything that seems to be elusive, or visit second-hand or online booksellers such as Abebooks to find used or collectable copies of titles that are currently out of print.

If we've excluded your favourite male writer, we're probably being robustly iconoclastic by slotting in another author we feel you will enjoy as well, so please forgive us – our intention is to help you discover more great page-turners you might have missed, not to disrespect your idols. We'll state again that many other brilliant writers are covered in other volumes in this series. Although we'd be hard pressed to come up with a convincing definition of contemporary man, we are nevertheless confident that our selection of books will strike a chord with anyone bold enough to label himself as such. These are the kind of works that any of your mates might recommend while you share a round at the pub, while you wait for kick-off on the terraces or as you sit drinking espresso in a music store café, tearing the shrink-wrap from that pile of remastered CDs you've just purchased.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the following individuals for their support, inspiration and suggestions:

Georgina Bowis, Patricia Jones, Beebie, Nick Assirati, Patrick Bishop, Andrew 'Bomber' Borgelin, Vincent Cassar, Mark Denton, Martyn Folkes, Indi Garcher, Ben Hamper, Laura Hassan at Jonathan Cape, Michael Heatley at Northside Press, Neil Laing, Kate Leeming, Colin Litster, Toby Litt, Clare Mitchell, Nick Newport, Suzi Williamson, Rachel and Philip Owen, Nick Rennison, Jenny Ridout, Judy Tither, Peter Waterman, Rebecca and Mark Williams, and everyone else at A & C Black.

INTRODUCTION

What does being a man mean today? Some decades after revolutionary feminism swept the Western world, many of us are confused by our role as males in the postmodern scheme of things. In a world where it is deeply patronising to open a door for a lady and unforgivably unreconstructed to turn your head to look at her retreating backside, we men easily become perplexed. We're encouraged to tolerate advertisements for moisturiser aimed at us instead of our wives and expected to be comfortable spending quality time with our offspring in the baby changing room of Marks & Spencer when we'd rather be sinking a pint. We sometimes find ourselves irritatingly redefined by the press as 'New Men' or 'Metrosexuals'. We are often told we possess little understanding of feelings, that we fail to notice many of the finer emotional nuances of interpersonal behaviour that are immediately recognised by women. Most of our partners are tolerant of our inability to grasp the impact of tiny gestures, the miniscule variations in voice-tone inflection and the subtle semiotics of small alterations in facial expressions. After all, they know we haven't got a clue, as we're only blokes. No longer the established masters in a society that is not even vaguely patriarchal any more, our status is more uncertain than it has ever been. Young men have an even tougher time as they notice the confused state their fathers and peers are in. Is it insensitive of them to read *Loaded* and sad to watch *Top Gear*?

But why should we men feel perpetually guilty? Accusations of our emotional short-sightedness may be true sometimes. But they are also arguably incorrect when considered objectively. To say that men have no feelings is itself unperceptive: better to recognise the reality that men often experience quite different feelings to those women are subject to. If we are to have sexual equality, then there must be respect for our diversity as genders (not to mention our diversity as individuals). The very word 'diversity' extends from the word difference, so to achieve egalitarianism, we must acknowledge our contrasting gender identities. We don't celebrate diversity by forcing everyone to be the same; instead we maintain diversity by having the courage to tolerate acceptable differences by allowing them to flourish, which is why we have written a book that is aimed exclusively at men. Within these pages, gentlemen, you don't have to feel guilty.

There may be exceptions to every rule, but – in case you haven't noticed – men and women *are* fundamentally different from each other. This may be a generalisation, but it is nonetheless an inescapable fact. Arguments about superiority or inferiority are fruitless, as our varying skills and abilities as genders show us to be complimentary beings – hopefully both men and women can concur that in some arenas, we are unequally matched and that as adults we should learn to live with this happily. Our contrasting natures more often than not please both sexes, as many men (though not all) celebrate these gender battles by falling in love, forming partnerships and having children. But it has become fashionable over the past thirty years to deny psychological gender differences and to claim they are socially constructed 'learned behaviours' instead of the product of biological processes. It's important to note that the nature versus nurture debate is a misleading

over-simplification, as anyone can confirm from observation and research that a combination of biological and environmental factors can both be important in influencing the characters of individuals to varying degrees. For example, while some scientific research suggests that some men have a predisposition towards homosexuality due to the particular concentration of certain hormones that washed over their foetus in the womb at crucial stages of development (the biological factor that determines much of our gender identity, all foetuses being morphologically female until this stage) other men claim they turned out gay because of the way they were brought up.

Perhaps both chromosomes and conditions play inseparable parts in making us who we are as individuals, but there is little doubt that the political correctness of recent years has influenced a bias against the scientific facts regarding the significance of biological factors in dictating some of our behaviour. To learn more about the disparity in brain chemistry between men and women, about how intrauterine hormonal events shape how male or female our brains and bodies become and why men and women generally behave differently in many respects, read *Why Men Don't Iron* by Anne and Bill Moir (1998) and *The Female Brain* by Louann Brizendine (2006). Otherwise, take it from us that neurochemistry offers the most convincing arguments for the inescapable differences between men and women, most of them centring around the fact that men generally have ten times as much testosterone racing around their bodies as do women. So we men shouldn't feel bad because we prefer getting stuck into a scrum down or crate-digging at a record fair instead of debating what colour curtains we should purchase for the guest bedroom. Although women are affected by testosterone too, their body chemistry is demonstrably more

strongly affected by other hormones, resulting in a definite tendency toward nest-building and nurturing instead of the more pronounced single-mindedness and competitive behaviour common in men.

But what has this all this gender-fixated stuff got to do with books?

Just as men and women often experience and respond to life in differing ways, they may also react to words differently. Deborah Cameron's *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (2007) disagrees with this claim, aiming to undermine the beliefs of evolutionary psychologists regarding the supposed differences between men and women's use of words. Cameron's avoidance of neurochemistry (you won't find the word 'testosterone' in the index of her book) and focus on linguistic research is firmly in the nurture camp beloved of modern feminism and sociology. We, however, follow the argument that nature remains just as important as upbringing. After all, although there are many writers enjoyed by both men and women, anyone who has worked around books will recognise that there are writers who are generally considered to be authors of 'women's reads' or 'books for blokes'. Novels in niches such as 'Chick Lit', are pretty clearly aimed at the female market, while A-format ghost-written paperbacks by former SAS operatives with guns on the jackets are doubtless intended for a testosterone-fuelled demographic. Perhaps more crucially, it's interesting to note that when a recent poll of the books men felt most affecting was run (by a team of female researchers), that the clear winner was Albert Camus' arid existentialist masterpiece *The Outsider* (1942), the iconic tale of an indifferent man drawn to murder. So while the ladies voted overwhelmingly for the majestic, slow-burning passion and quiet commitment of classic romance *Jane Eyre* (1847) as their favourite read, men opted en masse for contingency, solipsism and ambivalence.

According to some neuroscientists, men's verbal ability is less developed than that of women, whose allegedly superior linguistic abilities leave most boys behind during childhood reading progress tests. Despite this, we men can appear to be complex creatures when it comes to engaging us with prose: for example, *The Outsider* may be direct in its storytelling approach, but it engages with extremely important philosophical issues relevant to how one should live life without flinching away from the bleak and the downright difficult. Camus' masterpiece confronts these issues head-on through the outlook of his protagonist, Meursault: his mother doesn't die and the Arab isn't killed just for our entertainment, but to make us question higher morality and how we deal with our reality in practical terms. The popularity of *The Outsider* amongst male readers not only suggests how serious our inner concerns are, but how readily men relate to Meursault's indifference – like most of us, he finds it easy to retreat into his cave and be solitary, whether to contemplate the meaning of life or to enjoy it for its own sake. Comparatively, it might be argued that *Jane Eyre* might indicate that many female readers have less complex philosophical aspirations – for all her intelligence and sensitivity, Jane could be regarded as little more than a woman who wants to marry a strong, complex bloke. To be fair, this view disregards the social role man imposed upon women in the Brontës' days (and the oppression females endured for much of human history), but *Eyre's* character and aspirations still speak to many contemporary females, so perhaps this is what some women want out of a book – romance with a small R, something we men often look down upon. Or is it just that Brontë appeals because women apparently have better hearing than men and are often cited by behaviourists as superior listeners and conversation-

alists, meaning that they appreciate fine character studies more than male readers, being more aware of the complexities of relationships than we guys, consequently making them both better writers and more sophisticated readers? Perhaps; but then the majority of winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature are men, so women clearly don't have the monopoly on literary achievement. Men's reserves of testosterone drive us towards success (maybe even in fields like writing), allowing us to use our aggression to achieve even in areas we don't hold the natural advantage. Or is that many of the judges for the Nobel are male?

HUNTERS AND COLLECTORS: MEN AS 'DIFFICULT READERS'

As biology has undoubtedly played a part in determining our social development as well as the form and function of our bodies, evolution is possibly another significant explanation for behavioural differences between the sexes. For hundreds of millennia at the very least, men's fundamental role was that of the hunter. Men's excellent hand-eye co-ordination skills (remember how girls can't throw?), size, strength and sharp spatial awareness of the relationships between objects made men superior to women as hunters of large game. The most successful hunters would have lived longer than their contemporaries, passing on the genes that gave them advantages in the first place – good eyesight for example. Evolution is cumulative, building each generation's successful survival characteristics onto increasingly solid ground. Such powerful genetic heritage is not going to fade away after a few decades of social conditioning from the more diverse activities and attitudes we've adopted comparatively recently. The masculine inclination towards hunting has instead transmuted into other activities – sports,

hobbies, being competitive – all of which have kept our target-seeking attitude alive. For example, men’s predatory tendency revealed when we consider shopping: market researchers have discovered that men are more likely to ‘stalk’, seeking out specific items, while women will ‘gather’, browsing for whatever takes their fancy. Just as our forefathers proved their value to their tribe by claiming and displaying trophies of the kill, men today deal with their subconscious hunter by becoming the proudest of collectors and curators, often winning respect from their fellows based on the size their personal archives, the quality of their contents and their detailed knowledge of their showpieces. We men have sublimated our hunting urge, instead becoming steam-fixated trainspotters, military gamers concerned with precise historical accuracy and mental cataloguers of mind-numbingly tedious yet nonetheless fascinating football statistics. Consequently, when it comes to books – expert dealers and second-hand booksellers will confirm this – it is no surprise that the vast majority of serious book collectors (and by this we mean people obsessed with first printings, variant dust jackets and exclusive editions) are men. Our hunger for trophies has made us the most committed of bibliophiles, willing to pay extra for specially bound, signed, limitation-numbered volumes, something publishers are wise to take advantage of when marketing both cult and popular authors; it is no accident that the majority of small presses producing titles for the collector’s market specialise in fields popular with men such as hardboiled crime, science fiction and horror.

Collector’s editions aside, it could be argued that men have been poorly catered for by the book industry in recent times. There’s a widely held view that men generally don’t read books: or, to be more accurate, there is a common perception that the majority of men spend far less

time reading than do most women, being content to merely chug cans of Stella and stuff themselves with Pringles while watching the FA cup final in high definition on their new fifty-inch widescreen telly. However, in 2002, *The Daily Telegraph* reached the opposite conclusion, stating that if newspapers and electronic media were included, men actually read *more* than women. Yet any examination of reading habits that only includes novels will show women storming ahead. Are we to conclude that men find novels frivolous – that we forsake the lessons that can be learned from invented characters and situations in favour of hard facts?

A smaller interest in fiction amongst men partially explains why publishers might regard the male market as being more difficult to exploit than the female. An article in a 2006 issue of *The Bookseller* magazine focused on ‘brand name’ best-selling authors like Tom Clancy or Bernard Cornwell as being the key to the male market, inadvertently highlighting the fact that there may be too much reliance upon the old chestnuts of nostalgia (ripping yarns of the Edwardian era that are sometimes a little un-PC), high adventure (chunky techno-thrillers and the likes of Wilbur Smith) and military hard men with guns. While it is relatively easy to establish new genres to engage female readers (the Yummy Mummy novel is a recent example of this), clearly men are thought to be more elusive. Aside from the tendency to read proportionally fewer novels than women, we’re inclined to be more obsessive about our hobbies. Men with specific interests are sometimes unable to find titles they would like to leaf through due to the economics of bookselling for while online booksellers who only have to rent relatively cheap warehouses to stock myriads of titles on subjects like militaria and railways, bookshops with expensive high street rents cannot afford