

something by Dickens or Hemingway is the kiss of death. Many a Student Stores purchase lies, spine intact, on my shelves.

For those with a similar problem, I have three entirely different books you can spend many a sunny afternoon perusing while you put off whatever it is you're supposed to be reading:

**Possession by A.S. Byatt**

This is one of those books that must have taken a herculean effort from the author. Byatt, a former University College, London, literature professor, won the Booker Prize for her tale of love and academic life. The novel's protagonist, Roland Mitchell, is a luckless researcher of a fictional Victorian poet, Randolph Henry Ash, who is stuck in the "Ash factory" in the bowels of the British museum.

Roland discovers a letter in a copy of an old book Ash owned that suggests the poet had a much more passionate, sensuous side, and sends Roland on a mission to investigate whether the poet had a love affair with the lesser-known poet, Christabel Lamotte. Roland runs into

the formidable but attractive Maud Bailey, a Lamotte expert, in the process, and begins a timid love affair of his own.

Byatt writes beautiful, intricate prose, and the novel is wrapped around the poetry of both Ash and Lamotte, as well as extensive journal entries from other characters. The reader follows the lives of Roland and Maud, which mimic what they and the reader uncover about Ash and Lamotte. Byatt has a penchant for detail and great description, and her depiction of the office politics and bitterness lurking behind the academic world hilarious. But most of all, *Possession* is a verdant, magical tale of mystery and two love affairs.

**Generation X by Douglas Coupland**

Any author who subtiles his novel *Tales for an Accelerated Culture* must be a genius. *Generation X* is a series of scenes from the lives of three people in their mid 20s who quit their yuppie lives and drop out to the Palm Springs desert to try to tune into themselves.

Coupland splatters the book with defini-

tions of new terms he invents, e.g. "EARTH TONES: A youthful subgroup interested in vegetarianism, tie-dyed outfits, mild recreational drugs, and good stereo equipment. Earnest, frequently lacking in humor."

The book has a style all its own and a frenetic pace to match the pace of our generation's lives. You and your friends are the main characters of this utterly modern novel.

**After Dark, My Sweet by Jim Thompson**

Actually, any Jim Thompson novel is just as good. You could add Dashiell Hammett and Ramond Chandler to your list if you want a good tale of crime and intrigue. These novels are the literary equivalents of film noir (in fact, many of them are film noir movies). Typically, you are never sure where you are in *After Dark, My Sweet* because none of the characters is particularly good and all of them are into some scheme or crime they don't want to tell their associates about.

Good is bad and up is down in Thompson's world.

Art by Alison Shepard

y t h i n g s

for Morrison and Baldwin

beautifully in *Beloved*. I can't really describe it — you've got to read it to understand. As usual with her work, this one gets better with every read-through.

**4. Go Tell It On The Mountain by James Baldwin**

Ranks right up there with Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. It's one of the finest coming-to-grips-with-yourself book I've perused in a long while. Dark and rich language fills the pages with

imagery that kicks you square in the jaw.

**5. The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara**

If all you know about the Civil War comes from network mini-series, you should check out this little chunk of historical fiction. Relying on actual letters and biographical relationships, Shaara recreates the crucial battle of Gettysburg. The novel brings the interesting characters (especially the Confederate generals) vividly to life. Not just an outstanding story, but good history, too.

You cannot go wrong with Tom

By Vicki Hyman

Write about your favorite book, she said, a book that you'd recommend unhesitatingly.

One better, I said: I'll give you Tom Robbins.

Oh, have I extolled the virtues of Robbins since I discovered him four years ago — his nuclear imagination, his outrageous metaphors, and his women. Take note: *Another Roadside Attraction*, *Still Life With Woodpecker*, *Even Cowgirls Get The Blues*, *Jitterbug Perfume*, and *Skinny Legs And All*. Read them. In that order. Then read them again.

What you will read about: immortality, perfume, pumpkin-sized thumbs, feminine hygiene, lesbian cowgirls, the moon, love, the Arab-Jew conflict, art, roadside zoos, sex, magic, and the body of Jesus Christ.

You cannot go wrong with Robbins. There's a surprise in every line, an image that will make you dance on every page, and aphorisms worthy of underlining in every chapter: "There is no such thing as weird human being. It's just that some people require more understanding than others." "Logic only gives man what he needs. Magic gives him what he wants."

And then there's the best opening ever: "If this typewriter can't do it, then fuck it, it can't be done."

Robbins does it, every time.



Some people only read three books a year. Mr. Omni is appalled. We at Omni try to read at least three books a month, to broaden our intellectual horizons and maintain a working knowledge of the classics. Plus, we don't have any friends. Books are our friends. Hmhmhm ...

While Mr. Omni realizes he could use this space to shamelessly plug *13th Gen*, written by his pal and Omni frequenter Ian Williams, he will avoid being so blatantly gauche. Even the short guy's got some manners.

Now, on to your questions.

Dear Mr. Omni, I haven't read a book in, well, I don't know when the last time I read anything besides the *Omni* was. Now that summer's coming up I guess I'll have some free time. Any suggestions?

Dear Reader, I suggest you get a job, you loser. But I understand that as the summer approaches, you must be getting pretty nervous about not having the *Omni* to read every Thursday. Go around campus and pick up old copies of the *Critic* and the *Catalyst* to read this summer — there should be plenty, seeing as how the only people who read them are the editors, and even that's iffy.

Dear Mr. Omni, books are so depressing. I like Hemingway, but the plots are kind of downers, and the guy did kill himself, and the thought of that kind of gets me down too. What can I read that's not too fluffy but won't depress me?

Dear Reader, TV Guide. Actually, my favorite book is *Franny and Zoey* by J.D. Salinger. It's about a sister and brother named — you got it — Franny and Zoey and their highly dysfunctional family. Now I know it's sounding like a bummer, but wait. The beautiful thing is how the siblings help each other through the crises their family encounters, namely the suicide of a third brother. At the end of the book, you either feel like calling your brother or sister or even your mom and telling them how much you love them. And it makes you want to have a big family.

Dear Mr. Omni, at the beginning of last semester I spent \$300 on books and sold them back for \$23. Is there anything I can do to make more money this semester?

Dear Reader, sure, fool, just tell the people at Student Stores you took *really* good care of your books and I'm sure they'll fork over some extra dough ... The APO book exchange is a good way to not get scraped. You give them your books, they sell them for you and give you part of the profits. The part they keep goes to pay for scholarships or service projects. Makes you feel kind of warm-n-fuzzy, doesn't it?

work: eye-opener to apartheid

board bed to the chaos of a police raid. He watches his father, naked and humiliated, being tormented by white police officers who were imprisoning him for an disorderly pass-book.

Mathabane says, "As I stood there watching, I could feel that hate and anger being branded into my five-year-old mind, branded to remain until I die."

From this point, he chronicles his experiences, step-by-step overcoming seemingly unsurmountable obstacles. He recalls numerous events, such as when he verbally abused and almost arrested for accidentally boarding a whites-only bus.

He channels his hate and anger, fighting authority to educate himself. He rejects tribal religions for Christianity, and despite occasional suicidal thoughts, stays focused on his goals of overcoming the oppression.

His ticket out was tennis, a world in which he found that not all whites were hateful. He received a scholarship to attend college in

America and play tennis, but even then was subject to a two hour interrogation before acquiring a passport.

He finally did beat the system, but it is obvious from this autobiographical account that the horrors of apartheid are not completely forgotten.

He now lives in High Point and wrote a follow-up in 1989, *Kaffir Boy in America: An Encounter with Apartheid*.

Only a few books have affected me in such a powerful way, and the truths learned from *Kaffir Boy* are not quickly forgotten.

Everyday was a new struggle for Mathabane in this inhumane world, and reading about his life made me realize that apartheid was a personal injustice, affecting real people, not a faceless mass thousands of miles away.

As trite as it sounds, *Kaffir Boy* is a book everyone can learn from, an enlightening account about the triumph of human spirit that promises to give insight about how lucky we really are.