The Professional Visits the Poor

Strolling by tents and tenements, leading his
Media Director to a spot with perfect sunlight and
Framing, a crowd gathers to see

The Professional visiting the poor!

Perhaps he will talk about his awards, or
Take a photo for his website, or
Inspire them to accumulate wealth.

The Professional,

With his briefcase of credentials, with
His finely cut jib, with
His catered box lunch, is

Visiting the poor!

Perhaps you saw me in his photo? I am
The asshole in the back.
other collected works
a declaration of self in an emerging postmodern world

we hold these truths to be self-evident, that we each have one life, that we have one world to share, that to live deliberately we must critically engage that world, that among these engagements are such basic inquiries as “How should I live?” and “How should I build?”, that despite the uncertainties of the emerging postmodern world, despite the cynic’s disparagements and the optimist’s pipe dreams, we act, we declare ourselves courageously, one small project at a time, believing, in earnest, that any difference is big
On History

Roman legions
Rape and leave and

It costs too much
To build
Empire.
Where is the theme? This is far too anecdotal!

It’s up your ass, I say!
The theme is *up your ass*!
I smell like popcorn when I write poems

And my roommate comes downstairs and says
Do you smell popcorn?

And I say, YES!
I am writing poems!

He says,
Is this really a poem?

And I say, YES!
Don’t you smell the popcorn?
A Meditation on my Summer that isn’t Meant to be Snooty at all

If you tell a factory worker that you go to school
He will ask you what you study.
Do not say “English.”

Then, do not say you don’t know what you’re doing.
Do not say there’s time enough to figure things out.
Because to a factory worker there isn’t time enough to figure things out.
There isn’t time at all, between work and life and paying bills.
There isn’t time enough. There’s never time enough.

Talk about sports and beer and sex. Talk about close relations. Talk about TV.
Or don’t talk at all.
Because the life you know about going to school
Isn’t the life he knows about life.

If you ask a factory worker how he’s doing
He will talk.
Listen.
Hospice

I wept&wept&wept
Because Grandma is
Dying

And then I met a
Woman who had never met
Her mother
A Portrait of My Parents for their Birthdays

When my mother is old
She will sit sit sit on
Park benches and feed
Varieties of waterfowl

When my father is old
He will sit sit sit with
My mother on park
Benches and wonder

Of course they will hold hands
Life Sestina

Between
Birth
And Death
There is Fear
And Tears
And Joy.

If you’re lucky, mostly Joy.
Between
Tears
And Birth
There is Fear
And Death.

If you’re lucky, mostly Death.
Scratch that; make it Joy.
I Fear
That Between
Birth
And Tears—

Wait. Birth and Tears?
I just did that one. But between Death
And Birth?
I did that one too. It was mostly Joy.
If you’re lucky, at least. Between
Fear

And Fear—
Between Fear and Fear? Only Tears.
Between
Death
And Joy
There is Birth.

There is Birth.
Despite Fear
Joy
Tears
Death
There is birth. Between—

Between Birth
and Death there is Fear
and Tears and Joy.
Wings like bugs do

I don’t believe in evolution because
If there was evolution people would have
Wings
By now and they don’t

Only
Bugs
Have wings and people aren’t
Bugs

And you can trust me on this because
I wish evolution was real and not just made up
I’d evolve me a
Tail
So I could WHAP WHAP WHAP all those
Scientists
Who are too dumb to notice that people don’t have
Wings
Like
Bugs
Do
Why I don’t believe I swallow 12 spiders a year in my sleep

Before I sit down on the toilet
I become stricken with worry that a spider is
Lurking in the bowl above the water
Searching for a new cozy abode

And I wonder how surprised he’ll be when instead of napping he’s
Captaining a half-pound brown ball (if he’s lucky—
A waterfall if he’s not)
To a cold watery hell

And just before I pull the flus her he wonders the
Meaning of Life and All The Big Questions
(because he has a poet’s soul) and
Remembers his mother and
His father too even though he was busy working and
Says to himself that he should’ve spent more time really getting to know people and
Cries out in his lonesome spidery voice “The Horror! The Horror!”

But my body tenses so
I fall and
Sit and
Finish and
Wash my hands of the whole situation before it bothers me any longer.
the difference between you and a clipped toenail

The difference between you and a clipped toenail
Is that I prefer the clipped toenail

I know,
The clipped toenail does not make coffee in the morning
Or take out the trash sometimes or
Go dancing with me on Fridays or
Call when it plans on being late or early or
Do the laundry,
Either

But that’s because it’s a clipped toenail,
You fucking moron
Silent Hill

Does it make me a pervert
If
I see two women, on-screen,
About to be sliced by a human-sized machete
And all I can think is
“I hope that blade comes just close enough to pop the buttons off those blouses”

Or maybe I’m the product of a culture that’s so sexualized
That even death turns me on. I mean, maybe violence gets me off.

Is that so wrong?

This is my rifle, this is my gun,
This is for killing, this is for fun too
On Gruntlings

A gruntling gruntled gruntledly:
I gruntle because I'm gruntled,
And gruntling makes me so!
Hey, Tortilla Chips

You better stop being so delicious or I'm going to eat all of you
Your numbers are quickly dwindling
Soon you'll be extinct

Don't look at me like that--
It's your own fault for sitting in this bag

Maybe you should just stop traveling in herds
introduction to philosophy

Philosophy is philosophy is
philosophy is
philosophy is
philosophy is
philosophy is
The Theorist and the Theoree

I know Freud said
"Sometimes a cigar is just a penis"
But

Who sits down and wonders
"Is that a fence, or a penis patch?
A lamp, or an emblem of patriarchal illumination?"

And I know I'm just an undergraduate
And not a doctorate in psychoanalysis
But if it made evolutionary sense for phalluses
To be shaped like watermelons
Does anyone think Gallagher would become
The new figurehead of Feminism?
the new american family

if hugs and shoulders were sold in
vending machines we'd still prefer the
speed and anonymity of the
instant message
Desperate People and Situational Ethics

So it's deathly cold outside and when I say deathly cold I mean the cold is killing people.
So it's deathly cold outside and when I say deathly cold I mean the cold is killing people and
It's your job to collect rent today. It's your job to collect rent today because it's deathly cold and
when I say it's deathly cold I mean the cold is killing people who are outside too long and you
don't want to be outside too long because you don't want to die so you have to pay your own
rent and to pay your own rent it's your job to collect rent from other people. Okay.

So what do you do when they don't have the money to pay rent again? We're talking final
notice here. We're talking eviction. We're talking they have to get out today. They have to
move because it's not fair for them to live for free or because everyone else has to pay or for
another reason or for any number of reasons. We're talking cut and dry, black and white, charts
and graphs explanations here. So what do you do when they don't have the money to pay rent
again?
At the Flint Journal

There's a journalist in Flint and he has a camera and photographs people who
Don't usually get photographed and he says unassuming things like

I'm not real controversial and
Hey Flint, all isn't lost here guys

(he has the most popular page in the newspaper)
Who doesn’t want to live where the poor are fat and the rich are thin?

Okay, so Milton Friedman says—the Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman—says we can’t have an open border AND have a welfare state. This just means that, being realistic, we can’t afford all the people who want to come into the country.

Now, this guy Cameron says that they did polls, and apparently a lot of people hate America. But more people want to be American than hate America. So that’s good news, right?

Also:

There’s at least a billion squatters worldwide and in another 20 years squatters will be one-fourth of the world population (squatters are people who don’t have land rights but live on the land anyway, like the American Indians).

So suppose you had to choose between living in squalor and living in America. I know I’d choose America. I’d cross a desert to choose America. Hell, though, I’d even choose Nazi over squalor. In fact, people did. Or Baath.

Have you heard that Al-Qaeda is in West Africa now?
Things An Australian Said While Drunk At The Hostel

This country is fucked up. I walk down the streets and beggars ask me for
Money and now I'm poor. The media—

Is fucked. People think it's how Americans live, but no one knows how people live here. Anna
Nicole Smith—

Fuck Anna Nicole Smith. She died unhappy and now people are arguing about who gets her
money. Fuck her. People living on the streets, with no healthcare, but sending people off to a
war—

That's okay? Got kicked out of the bar for not tipping. Tipping? I paid the tax. I live in
Australia. Pay taxes? For what—

Your war and your no healthcare? Fucking talking politics all the time, fucking,
Wears me down, you know—

Maybe this country is
So fucked up that the
Only way to feel normal is
To feel sick
Salvation Mountain

Out in the desert there’s an old man he
Has DVDs and jigsaw puzzles and postcards he
Says God is love and that’s all anyone needs
To know about anything just God is love
And he doesn’t get mixed up in the churches or the
Religions just God is love so there’s God and
There’s love and they’re the same thing so
Love each other just love each other so
There’s a God there is
Love just
God is love and this is a real place
I swear I have the DVD out in my car
Section II: Letters
For this section of my thesis, I contacted close and well-read friends, influential teachers and professors, family members, and a few others, some of whom never got back to me (so it goes), asking the following two questions:

1) What are the books/films/albums/etc. that have been most essential to you as a person (as opposed to you as, say, a professional)? Pick as many or as few as you’d like.

2) Make some comments about your picks. Maybe you could give some reasoning, or pick out a favorite passage, or explain why your picks are so essential to you.

I am leaving college with many more questions than I entered with (at eighteen, for example, I had most of the world figured out), and am realizing that most of my education will be on my own (as opposed to formal schooling). As such, my primary goal with this project was to create a reading list of texts that people—the people I most respect, or who have had large personal impacts on me—find most essential. In other words, I wanted to read the influences of my influences, to find deeper ways of understanding the way we are choosing to live. What’s more, I requested that no one spend “too much time” on this task, as I didn’t want to overburden anyone. Another reason for suggesting a time limit is that, arguably, every text that a person has encountered is in some way “essential,” and I wanted these lists to be semi-exclusive (no one can, of course, read everything). Following this line of thought, I fought the urge to contact a much larger volume of people, as the sheer amount of responses would become increasingly difficult to make personally meaningful. I hope no one takes personal offense if an invitation was not extended—these people have my assurance that their exclusion was merely circumstantial; on the same token, I hope those who did receive my requests understand that they were sent in earnest.

My reading list, as a final product, is fairly successful and I am truly excited to have the free-time to start reading. This project, however, has unexpectedly resulted in much more than a reading list.

Firstly, my requests doubled as thank-you notes and I was surprised not only at the amount of kindness I received in return, but at the level of shock expressed in simply being thanked at all. I’m reminded of a line from one of my own most essential films, It’s a Wonderful Life, that “one man’s life touches so many others, when he’s not there it leaves an awfully big hole.” I am certainly flattered by many of the responses and am happy to have wonderful people in my life to thank.

Also, I got to thinking that the United States is a so-called “Christian nation” not because of how it acts, but simply because a majority of people are relatively familiar with the Bible. This led me to imagine a country that’s a “Hemingway nation” or a “Woolf nation,” and then I realized that those places are instead called “The English Department” and “The Honors College.”

In the least, this project has renewed the idea of the person-as-text, of the influence of ideas, and of the influence that people have on one another, asking the questions of why anyone is attracted to a particular text and how that text, in turn, shapes the individual. Of course, my project was explicitly NOT a sociological study or scientific survey, but I can imagine a project as such becoming overwhelmingly huge and interesting (a la Joyce’s Ulysses). What’s also interesting to me is how many of these lists contain works that I already consider “essential,” and how many
contain works that were introduced at early ages. I worry what will happen to children who
don’t have easy access to books and teachers, who are instead reading only a corporate culture of
advertisements, popular music, and blockbuster films.

In a Harper's “Findings” sort of way, I am left thinking of a recent survey that suggests music
compatibility is a better indication of relationship strength than religion or politics; of a recent
survey that suggests people who listen to sexually explicit music are more inclined to have sex;
of a character in Nick Hornby’s High Fidelity who wonders if he listens to pop music break-up
songs because of his bad relationships or if he has bad relationships because he has heard so
many pop music break-up songs; and of Malcolm Gladwell’s suggestion in The Tipping Point
that people are presently seeking social permission for their actions from such places as
television, music, and film.

Because many of the responses are more personal and candid than I anticipated, and because I do
not think I made my intentions clear enough concerning how these responses would be used, I
removed the names of the list-writers and also removed varying amounts of information that
could be used to identify them. I left most of the commentary, as I find it inherently interesting.
I edited the text for readability, though I tried to change as little as possible. Please remember
that “lists” of this sort are rarely, if ever, grammatically correct, and I intentionally left
untouched several instances of grammatical error, for effect.

Each list starts several lines from the top of the page and, if it carries onto another page, restarts
at the very top. Though I recognize this fact in the acknowledgements portion of this thesis, it
should be duly noted that this section was inspired by one of my advisor’s books, Poet’s
Bookshelf, in which he wrote to contemporary poets and asked for the books that they found
“most essential to their poetry.”

Now for the letters, in no particular order:
Favorite books are all by 20th century American authors. They are:

**Gone With the Wind by Margaret Mitchell.** I got hooked on this novel at age 13, when my mother grounded me for a month because I threw a brick through a big picture window! In her mercy, my mom let me go to the library to get some books to keep me occupied for the duration of my confinement. I figured I'd pick a great big one to last all month (GWTW is 1,000+ pages). Truthfully, that month was one of the best of my youth!

**The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck**

**Giant; So Big; and Showboat; by Edna Ferber**

I think I selected these because they are all historical fiction, which has always been my favorite way to learn about history. I also love the major themes running through all of these books, which include tenacity, “can-do” spirit, hope in the face of despair (all quintessential American values!) I also love these books because the characters are so interesting and flawed. Most go through the realization that relationships, not money or youth, are what brings happiness.

My favorite genres of music are Broadway show tunes (especially the mid 20th century canon, such as Lerner & Lowe, Rodgers & Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim, and Leonard Bernstein) and anything by Barry Manilow (yes, the man is prolific enough to be considered his own “genre!” And, if one would listen to some of his less commercial stuff, one would realize what a fine song writer and arranger he is. Just ask any “Fanilow.” There are plenty of us, the trouble is getting one of us to step out of the closet).

I love both Barry and Broadway with all my heart and both have informed my way of seeing the world: Very theatrically, a bit romantic, a whole lot sappy, and always hopeful.

Hint: Don't reveal these particular picks to your honors thesis advisor--he/she will not allow you to graduate! :)

Finally: Favorite films (this is hard, but I'm thinking about the kinds of films that would actually make me stop what I'm doing and sit down to watch them if they were on TV).

**1776, To Kill a Mockingbird, Gone With the Wind, Giant, Evita, Forrest Gump** (Are you seeing a theme develop? Sappy, “can-do” OR film versions of historical fiction OR Musicals (1776 and Evita have the added bonus of being all three of these!).

Also, I adore ANYTHING in that cheesy, late 50's/early 60's technicolor-tawdry-over-the-top-melodrama-can't-believe-I'm-watching-this-but-I'm-enjoying-myself-immensely genre.

Such movies would be things like: **Valley of the Dolls, Imitation of Life, and Peyton Place.** I don't care what I'm doing. If I see any movies like this on TV, I'll stop dead in my tracks and
WATCH! This probably also harkens back to my teen years, when the 10:30 "Saturday night movie" was my primary entertainment when babysitting. Ask your parents. They'll know what I'm talking about.

Interestingly, as I reflect back on all of my picks, I realize that with a few small exceptions, I was introduced to most of these at age 13! There really IS something to the theory that if we are introduced to something at a formative age, it melds with our personality.
Books:

Gravity's Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon,
The Once and Future King by T. H. White
Catch-22 by Joseph Heller
Of Grammatology by Jacques Derrida
Discipline and Punish by Michel Foucault
The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1 by Michel Foucault
Gender Trouble by Judith Butler
A Thousand Plateaus by Deleuze & Guattari
The Pleasure of the Text by Roland Barthes

Films:

Mulholland Drive
2001: A Space Odyssey
The Godfather
Apocalypse Now
Pulp Fiction
Hedwig & the Angry Inch

Albums:

Music for 18 Musicians by Steve Reich
London Calling by The Clash
Dark Side of the Moon by Pink Floyd
If You're Feeling Sinister by Belle & Sebastian
The Soft Bulletin by The Flaming Lips
Alice by Tom Waits
Seventeen Seconds by The Cure
Illinois by Sufjan Stevens
Agaetis Byrjun by Sigur Ros
As a child, my mother read the Gospels to me as bedtime stories. As I got older, I started reading the Casper the Friendly Ghost comics. As a teenager I read My Shadow Ran Fast by Bill Sands and Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin. As far as films go, the Nuremberg Trials and The Robe.
### Anne Ross And Don Robins, The Life And Death Of A Druid Prince.

The story of Lindow Man, an archaeological sensation (1989)—an unlikely (though true) detective story about the discovery of a body in the Welsh bogs and the forensics that allowed a team of scientists and historians to identify it from the distant, mystical past and reconstruct the circumstances of the murder. Makes the past come alive—okay, not literally. But a damn good read, way outside my field of interest, and a good example of how different disciplines can be marshaled to come up with some truth. Saw the real remains in the British Museum a few years ago. Why I wanted to look, I do not know.

I became a serious reader with the works of Bernard Malamud. I've grown less enthusiastic over the years, but when I was a college sophomore I ran across BM's work in a really dreadful film with Elliot Gould in it, called Getting Straight. Gould plays an English grad student fresh from combat in Vietnam who is understandably impatient with the anemic violence of academic politics. Talks about Malamud in bed with his girlfriend, which I thought was very cool at age 19. Malamud's A New Life is the funniest academic novel I've ever read; some of his short stories (check out Idiots First) are magic realism before the term became hackneyed.

I read a lot of detective fiction, as do almost all of my colleagues, it seems. Maybe too much, but since I've given up smoking I cherish the other vices. Dennis LeHayne is a good writer—probably Mystic River would be the place to start, just because every living character in it is pretty distasteful and yet we sympathize with them anyway. Carl Hiassen is funny; George V. Higgins writes dialog better than anybody (watch how little narrative glue he uses to advance a plot which is almost solely rendered in talk).

Other favorites: Dickins, because he creates a world and makes me believe it. Faulkner too, for the same reason. Try reading a Faulkner novel in one sitting (pack a lunch).

Poetry: I think Amy Lowell is unappreciated; see what you think. Anything by Adrienne Rich is good—tough, not whiny. I used to like Gary Snyder, but not so much any more: all that Zen stuff seems so ‘70s now. I had a good friend from graduate school, now deceased, named Ali Shahid Agha, whose poetry seems to me intensely personal without ever being self-indulgent. Great sense of humor and could make words dance. He was nominated for the National Book Award the year he died and didn’t win it. He should have. He wrote about 7 books of poetry.
Emerson's works intrigue me because he had every reason to be pessimistic as a young man, but wasn't; and he had every reason to be a starry-eyed optimistic as a mature man, and wasn't that, either. His metaphors are so numerous that it's like being shotgunned from a distance--hardly anything hits you, but what does, you feel. Read *Experience* for instance.

I like biography--not just because I study it, but because it's the genre that combines imagination and reportage in the most complicated ways. A couple years back I read *Stephen Greenblatt's Will in the World* (2004), a bio of Shakespeare constructed almost wholly of plausible speculation and context. (I.e., Shakespeare must have seen the heads of executed prisoners impaled on sticks when he walked into London ... ) Fascinating stuff. For the same reason I liked *Gary Collison's Shadrach Minkins*, the bio of an escaped slave about whom we know darn near nothing for sure. And also for the same reason, *Alfred Habegger's bio of Emily Dickinson*. 
Books:

**The Things They Carried.** Because it is the ultimate story about war and stories and the boundaries between fact and fiction.

**Dance to the Music of Time by Anthony Powell.** Although fiction, the best social history of 20th century Britain I have ever read.

**The Waste Land,** because it made my brain hurt when I was 19, and it still does.

Movies:

**Godfather I and II.** The supreme combination of the American Dream (perverted) and the Italian-American Family (also perverted)

Music:

**Beethoven Piano Sonatas and Mozart operas** because of the sublime beauty. **Miles Davis** (1950s) for a different kind of sublime beauty. **Bob Dylan’s first four albums,** because of the poetry and because that was what Joanne and I listened to while we were dating (plus some early Beatles).
A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY by J.L. Carr--I discovered this while in the U.K. in the early 80s and have been reading and teaching it ever since. Because it wasn't initially in print in the U.S., Cheryl Bove and I brought enough copies back when we traveled so that between the two of us, we could lend copies to humanities students. I've gotten so much in the habit of stockpiling copies that I can't resist any old editions I find in used book stores. By now, I have a pretty good collection.

In fact, if you'll stop by H.C. before you leave, you'll find a copy that I'd like you to have--just ask at the desk.

Why do I like the book? Partly, I'm a sucker for things set in the English countryside, partly because Carr himself ran the "Printing Office, Cross-roads of Civilisation" that published the edition I'm giving you, and mostly because it's about ways that creations from the past sustain us in the present.

During the years I've been reading this book, I've discovered things about Carr that make me enjoy him as a "character" as well as writer. For instance, he was headmaster at a school in Northamptonshire, where he liked to organize unorthodox "events" for his students--such as an Arithmetic Race in which contestants, running across a field, stopped at blackboards set up along the way to solve equations.

The Complete Poems Of Emily Dickinson--Obviously, there are many things to admire in Dickinson. What I especially enjoy is all of the selves, both living and dead, the Dickenson persona becomes. Tony says her poems make his head hurt, and he's right; I can never completely wrap my mind around a Dickinson poem.

Gaudy Night by Dorothy L. Sayers--Sayers wrote a series of detective novels, and this is one of them, but more than that, it's a meditation on women and education. It's set at Somerville College between the world wars at a time when people, many of them Oxford dons, believed that women's small brains couldn't cope with higher education.

A Dance To The Music Of Time by Anthony Powell--This is a series of novels set in the U.K. and often called a "social history" of the period 1921-71, with a flashback to 1914. There are lots of set pieces--dinner parties, funerals, protest marches, and so on--that bring together a mix of characters and show the "dance" in progress. What I like especially is the first person narrator, Nick Jenkins, and the way he tells the story.
KING LEAR--familial and cosmic: a play for all seasons.

A Fairly Honorable Defeat by Iris Murdoch--I like almost all of Murdoch but this is my favorite. Murdoch's characters are usually smart and educated people who should behave rationally but don't.

Collected Poems by Mary Oliver--If Wordsworth were alive today, he might be Mary Oliver.

The Optimist's Daughter by Eudora Welty--I'm a Southerner (and a Mississippian) by marriage, and this book opens up the South but also shows me families not that different from my Midwestern one.
The Baltimore Catechism taught Catholic religion to me from 1st grade through 8th grade with a modified version in high school. The Catechism was a quasi-philosophy/religion question/answer book. So, by the age of 5 or 6 I knew that God made me and that He was a Supreme Being (or "Bean," not sure which) who made all things. I memorized the Catechism not unlike a good Chinese or North Korean memorizes the leader's thoughts in his country. Along with the teachings was a behavioristic touch of going to hell or heaven depending on what you did or did not do. It certainly resulted in me thinking about things, although in a limited way. It also led me to be an attorney and has enabled me to defend people charged with a crime by using the law against the law-givers. The catechism taught me that not even God can send me to hell without being able to demonstrate that I did wrong--so I was my first client and there was no way I was going to be convicted. Anyway, due to my age and the catholic culture at the time, this was a very influential book(s) - different versions - for longer than I would like to admit.

Albert Schweitzer's Out Of My Life And Thought offered a more universal and satisfying way of looking at values and life. For Schweitzer, the value of life itself was the primary ethical and universal basis for ethics.

Norman Vincent Peale's The Power Of Positive Thinking was a book out of my parents' generation--his books did have a powerful influence upon me in that they enabled me to recognize the necessity to believe in myself. Along with recognizing the inherent value of life, belief in myself seemed of fundamental importance.

Clarence Darrow for the Defense by Irving Stone and An Affair with Freedom by Edwin Bennet Williams--just a couple of influences in my choice of occupation.

The Art of Loving by Eric Fromm, and Man for Himself, and a number of other Fromm Books look at the meaning and value of life. Also, Victor Frankl's Man's Search For Meaning/Will To Meaning/Search For Ultimate Meaning--valuable books to me and written by men who have my deep respect.

Truth is the First Casualty--non-fiction about the Gulf of Tonkin and the basis for the resolution giving President Johnson the authority to use armed force in Vietnam. I read the book and, even though I was opposed to the war at that time based on non-violent beliefs, I could not fully believe the facts that the incident at the Gulf was probably all a mistake (at best) and quite likely made up. With age I found that the book was true. The ridiculous nature of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution is what made me aghast at the stupidity of the congress when they gave Bush the authority to invade Iraq. Did these people read no history? Also many other books on the War in Vietnam, but this one was the most interesting and surprising.

Thich Nhat Hanh's Living Buddha/Living Christ--just plain fun to read a book by a man who lived through the worst days of Vietnam and was friends with some of the people who truly protested the war, and to see that true and worthwhile beliefs are united in recognition that no
one has a monopoly on the truth. Humanity must accept that fact and the humanness of each individual.
If you wish to add a novel to your list, I'd recommend Stendhal's Le Rouge et Le Noir, definitely a man's novel in terms of its impact. It's interesting that women readers have a harder time with it. In terms of defining one's thinking, Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding has a tremendous impact for me. After you've ploughed through its almost 800 pages, you know that this is one of those few books that has altered and enriched your whole mode of thinking. In terms of music, Brahms's Second Piano Concerto is the most ethereal piece that I know, and Bach's unaccompanied cello concertos the most cerebral. I can't remember who it was who said that our ability to create fine music is the best proof of the existence of God, but I like the idea! And then there's that Shakespeare...! And Dante! And Homer! I don't have to read those writers in the classroom to know how essential they are to me. Perhaps we can pursue this again at a less busy hour! I have not even tried to address popular culture here!
Books:

Growing Up by Russell Baker
The Things They Carried by Tim O’Brien
A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson
This Boy’s Life by Tobias Wolf
Black Like Me by John Howard Griffin
Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury by Michael S. Lief et. al.
The Catcher in the Rye by JD Salinger
Dr. Seuss’s ABC’s
Tuesdays with Morrie--one of my all time favorite books--was the first one that came to mind as being influential to me. Every time I read it, I'm reminded that my priorities lie with the people and relationships in my life. Being in Romania and physically away from many people that I care about, I from time to time think about an idea (paraphrased) from this book--that death (or in my case, being physically far away from people) is the end of a life, not the end of a relationship. I can continue to learn, continue to live, continue to be influenced by people or a particular person, regardless of whether they are physically with me or not--it has more to do with how much I remember about the person and how much of an influence that person has had on me than on whether they are physically close to me.

Man's Search for Meaning is a good one to pick up at a bookstore and read in a sitting or two. Victor Frankl's premise is that life is about finding meaning in what you do, as well as finding things to do that give your life meaning. One of the reasons I love being an occupational therapist is because I feel like that's what my job description is--to help a person go back to doing the things in life that give them meaning. I also think a lot about a point he makes in his book. Asking myself “what is the meaning of life?” is similar to asking myself what the best chess move is--there isn't a “best” chess move because it all depends on who you are playing and in what position your pieces are in at any given time. In the same game, the “best” chess move changes with each move. Life meaning changes with each move as well.

The Bible, not because I am particularly religious (especially right now in my life), but I have to admit to myself that I was raised by parents that used the bible as a means to guide morality and, on the whole, I think that it was a good thing. I appreciate the basic premise of the New Testament that says that it's important to love other people. Probably because the stories were repeated so often to me (from church mostly), but I do often think of bible stories here, and they do tend to take on a different meaning to me depending on my life situation. What I mean is, it is nice to have some sort of story/influence in my head from growing up, to think about, even if it doesn't determine (exclusively) what my morality is today.

Dr. Seuss's Green Eggs and Ham. This is the first book I remember reading, and I remember it being kind of a big deal for me to read part of it at Show and Tell.

Not a particular book, but learning about Elaine Pagels, who is known for her study of the Gnostic Gospels, especially in relation to women in Christianity. I read about her more in-depth during my freshman year of college, first semester. I was in the midst of already feeling exposed to new ideas, and then having the idea that much of the Bible that westerners are exposed to is politically based and seemingly almost lies, well, it really made me question everything else in life too. I don't feel so strongly today, but her books and ideas did influence me to question the ideas and views around me that I'd always taken as true without thinking twice.

“Romance” op. 36 by Camille Saint-Saens. I prepared this sometime during college. This was one of the first pieces that I played that I realized that music communicates, that as a musician I was like an actor if I wanted to be. Not just that, if the piece strikes me (like this one did) I could
communicate a piece of myself by physically buzzing my lips into a piece of metal, but that mentally--I don't know how--I can say something with music. This piece was instrumental (ha ha! can't help but make that pun...) (I just wrote that so that I could make the pun). But really, before doing this piece, I didn't realize that music is something bigger than I am--it's about communicating emotion, stories--what's neat about this kind of music is that it doesn't even use words to do it.

"Life's a Dance." This is a country song that every now and then I hear on the radio--I don't even know who wrote it. The lyrics, though, are "life's a dance / you learn as you go / sometimes you lead / sometimes you follow / don't worry about what you don't know / life's a dance / you learn as you go." I remind myself of this when I feel like I don't know what the heck I'm doing.
Books:

*Stranger In A Strange Land* by Robert Heinlein
*The War Prayer* by Mark Twain
*Ishmael* by Daniel Quinn
*The Bible*
*The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien
*Plato’s Republic*
*The Illustrated Man* by Ray Bradbury
*Dr. Seuss’s The Cat In The Hat*

Films:

*Reservoir Dogs* directed by Quentin Tarantino

Other:

*Brunelleschi's Dome*
Books:

Lord of the Flies by William Golding
To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf
Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut
Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
Falling into Theory by David H. Richter
Books:

The Bible
Cat’s Cradle by Kurt Vonnegut
Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman
A Good Man Is Hard to Find by Flannery O’Conner
Anton Chekov’s short stories
The Stranger by Albert Camus
William Carlos Williams
The Posthumous Poetry of Wallace Stevens (especially “Adagia” and “Metaphors of the Magnifico”)
Certain Things Last by Sherwood Anderson (especially “The Triumph of the Egg”)
Emily Dickinson
The Catcher in the Rye by JD Salinger
Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabokov
Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller

Music:

More important than anything was Bob Dylan: Bringing in all Back Home; Blonde on Blonde; Highway 61 Revisted; Nashville Skyline; New Morning; Planet Waves; Basement Tapes; Desire; Blood on the Tracks; (I really like his last two too, Modern Times and Love and Theft)

More recently (past 6 or 7 years):

I Remember by Joe Brainard
The Tunnel by Russell Edson
Frank O’Hara
Blank Generation by Richard Hell
Yankee Hotel Foxtrot by Wilco
A Defense of Poetry by Gabe Gudding
Ron Padgett
James Tate
Charles Simic
I think the book that was the most essential to my growth as a person is the dictionary. It took me four years, three months, and two days of reading a page a day of the *Webster's College Dictionary* (Random House). I forgot the vast majority of new words that I tried to remember, so it gave me a sense of humility. I did pick up quite a few words nevertheless, and more importantly, I've gotten a wider appreciation for words and language.

I have a harder time deciding which films or albums have been most essential to me as a person. I guess *Public Enemy's Fear of a Black Planet* had a pretty big impact for me. I didn't really know hip-hop before hearing this album, and I didn't realize that the human voice could channel so much energy and say so much while being mixed with irresistible rhythms and general musical creativity.
High Fidelity, both the book and movie. It justified my CD collection and complete tomfoolery in the adulthood department.

Noah Baumbach’s Kicking and Screaming helped me realize that maybe staying around my alma mater isn’t as bad as most people make it sound, especially (only) when you don’t have anything better lined up. I’ve watched it so many times--I go back to it when I feel off-center. It’s like my church.

Chuck Klosterman’s Fargo Rock City was good for me to reconcile all the metal I listen to, still, despite adulthood.

NIN’s Pretty Hate Machine got me through more than a few breakups. I used to be angry. Now I’m just sullen.

Sugar’s Copper Blue. You might not know it, but you should. Bob Mould is my guardo camino.
My favorite book is *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I love everything about it, including the message, the story, the characters, and the way Harper Lee constructed it. The way Scout tells the story is compelling, funny, and touching. Great book.

**The Sound and the Fury** is another favorite because Faulkner's stream of consciousness technique is compelling to read, especially the part told through the eyes of Benjy. I love the way Faulkner put it all together.

I just finished reading *Catch-22* for the first time. My students in Great Books class chose to read it. We all loved it. Again, the construction of the novel was interesting and confusing, which I liked, and I laughed aloud through most of the book. I am easily amused, but rarely do I laugh aloud while reading.

I'm not a film buff. I usually just go to the movies my friends want to see and keep trying to find enough light to look at my watch to see when we can finally go out and get something to eat. My favorite movies, though, are *Annie Hall* and *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I'm sure there are more, but I can't think of any. I love stupid, dorky movies like *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* and romantic comedies like *When Harry Met Sally*. I would like to see the Reno 911 movie. My feelings about movies are this: Have a happy ending. Real life doesn't always have happy endings, but in movies you can always have them. That's why they say life isn't like the movies. I don't need movies to depict real life. Just make me laugh and have a happy ending. That's all I ask. Oh, yeah, and no violence. I just remembered. I loved *The Graduate*.

I almost never buy albums. I think I had two in high school: *Carol King's Tapestry* and something of Crosby, Stills and Nash. My favorite songs were “So Far Away” and the best song ever, “Suite Judy Blue Eyes.”

I love all Motown. Love it. Mostly I listen to the jazz albums that Mike buys me. He is always right on it. I love every album he has ever given me, and not just because he's my son! He has given me *Miles Davis, Boney James*, and some other instrumental jazz artists. I would like them for constant background music to my life.
Let me answer your questions in order. First, my favorite books deal with literatures outside my professional activities outside my area of expertise (i.e., medieval and Renaissance studies) and linguistic milieu (i.e., French). For this reason I am especially interested now in modern Latin American texts, especially those of Isabel Allende or Borges, and in English and American literary texts. I am also interested in literature that deals with "rites de passage," such as John Knowles's A Separate Peace and Philip Roth (e.g., "The Human Stain" and "American Pastoral"). I am fascinated as well with classical music, especially baroque, classical, and Romantic, and with art (classical, medieval, Renaissance, baroque, and impressionism). I read texts from cultural history to support my appreciation of these texts.

I enjoy these activities for two reasons. First, since my professional interests require the study of Renaissance texts, I seek variety during leisure. Second, I learn as much contrastively as comparatively. And an appreciation of texts outside my area of expertise enables me to draw interesting connections and, then, to enjoy more expansively other interests, such as travel and study of other areas, especially in Europe and Latin America.
Albums:

Steel Pulse by Earth Crisis
Workers Playtime by Billy Bragg
Friendly Fascism by Consolidated
Storms by Nanci Griffith
Anthem by Black Uhuru
Linton Kwesi Johnson (anything before 1990)
Mutabaruka
Joshua Redman
Paris
The Best of and More of Romanovsky & Phillips
Rufus Wainwright

Films:

Babe, directed by Chris Noonan
All About Eve directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz
Pulp Fiction directed by Quentin Tarantino
Repo Man directed by Alex Cox

Books:

Love in the time of Cholera by Gabriel García Marquez
A Theory of Justice by John Rawls
Mortal Questions by Thomas Nagel
Burdened Virtues by Lisa Tessman
The Politics of Reality by Marilyn Frye
Books:

The Moral Choice by Daniel Maguire
The Greek Passion by Nikos Kazantzakis
History of God by Karen Armstrong
I Believe in Hope by Jose Maria Diez Allegria
Bread and Wine by Ignacio Silone
Guernica by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts
Man's Search for Meaning by Victor Frankl
German Catholics and Hitler's Wars by Gordon Zahn
Search for the Meaning of Life by Willigis Jager
A Question of Torture by Alfred W McCoy---I'm still reading this
No Turning Back by Elizabeth Q White
People of the Blue Water by Flora Gregg Iliel
Water Follies by Robert Glennon
The Confessions of an Economic Hit Man by John Perkins

I think we are influenced in little ways by everything we experience. Sometimes the books we read give words to those beginning understandings that we are forming into ideas from our experiences. Other times books raise experiences and ideas and information that are new to us. Influence seems to suggest that we would change and even act in a different way as opposed to just thinking about something differently. I think it is probably all on a continuum from thinking about ideas to action and experience bringing forth new ways of thinking. Did these books influence or clarify my ideas? Definitely. Have they cause me to act differently? In part, certainly. But I'm still working on it.
Books:

*Hymn of the Universe* by Pierre Teilhard Chardin
*Jesus* by Edward Schillebeeckx
*I and Thou* by Martin Buber
*Honest to God* by John A Robinson
*The Moral Choice* by Daniel Maguire
*Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell
*Labor’s Untold Story* by Richard Boyer
*Eugene Debs*
*The Prophet Armed; The Prophet Unarmed;* and *The Prophet Outcast,* by Issac Deutscher
*Ten Days that Shook the World* by John Reed
*Noam Chomsky*
*Christopher Lasch*
*Red Star Over China* by Edgar Snow
*The Other America* by Michael Harrington
*Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl
*Bread and Wine* by Ignasio Silone
*For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway
*The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Sherer
*An American Requiem* by James Carroll
*The Age of Extremes* by Eric Hobsbawm
*The Old and New Testaments*
Music:

**The Smith.** They just seem to age well, even with melodramatic lyrics. Also Morrissey is one of the few last crooners. Anyone who can write the lyric: "I smoke cigarettes because I hope for an early death and I need to cling to something" has my nod. I love the word "cling."

**Angry girl bands.** From The Donnas to Sleater-Kinney to Hole and so on, I just like angry women singing F-YOU to the world. I just really enjoy the energy and authenticity.

Any burned CD Ander Monson gives me. Ander keeps his ear to the street, mostly through his hipster students. So he sends me the underground cool stuff. It's all good.

**Wesley Willis.** I am very sad he died, but he still is the psychotic king of repetition.

Books:

**A Wild Sheep Chase by Haruki Murakami.** A book about sex, beer, jazz, dreams, miso soup, an ill cat, magic hotels, a Sheep professor, flawlessly cooked noodles, more beer, otherworldly elevators, ghosts, a miniature Sheep Man, and a girl with perfectly formed ears (so perfect she works professionally as an ear model and must keep them covered with her hair to avoid mesmerizing all who view them). Who would not want to read this book?

**Self-Help by Lorrie Moore.** An angry girl band on the page, though more clever and acidic and thoughtful than most angry girl bands. Who pulls off a second person POV? Lorrie Moore. She also blasts the self-help genre in the process. Kudos!

**Gary Snyder poetry.** The man is zen. He left our culture and lived in the Japanese wilderness for years. We should all. Read the “Robin” poems and you will know what missing a lost love means.

**Philip Larkin poetry.** Go read “This Be the Verse” right now. Go read “Aubade.” Get into this cranky man.

You want to know who kicks ridiculous ass? **Jim Harrison.** Read Warlock and Sundog and Wolf. Get back to me and say, “That kicked ass.”

The early **Martin Amis:** money, information, success, London fields. WOW.

**“Drown” by Junot Diaz.** Can we say voice?

I'll end with a good ol' summer read that will blow your mind: **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.**
I just realized that all the stuff that meant things to me were from centuries ago--appropriately enough since I belong to those times. I think even Homer is part of my life. Imagine what that was all about and why and the silly reasons men go to war.

And then Vonnegut’s demise made me think of Slaughterhouse Five and the other side of war.

Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath and the results of poverty and the degradation of people’s spirits and then Morrison's Beloved or Ellison's Invisible Man. But I’m not all doom and gloom. I marvel at Shakespeare. Just recently I thought about Henry V and the St. Crispen’s Day speech. Marvelous. Soaring. Inspiring! And I saw Laurence Olivier do it when I was a child. What a thrill!

And of course there is Dickens (I think Morrison, Dickens and Shakespeare are the three greatest ever). But don’t forget Austin who’s got it all together when you need to find out about “polite” society. And Thackeray and Eliot.

And then there are the other poets. Too many to name here, but Hopkins and Eliot are the two that come to mind this a.m.

But in the summer when there is a beautiful blue sky, lie in a hammock with a trashy novel of any kind, with a drink (alcoholic or non) available and Mozart playing or Beethoven to make you weep is a idyllic way to spend the time.

In music--Miles Davis’ Sketches of Spain or Oscar Peterson of Wes Montgomery or Charlie Parker of Casals (I’m into guitar players). But Gene Kelly in Singin’ in the Rain makes me happy or nearly everything Charlie Chaplin ever did. Just saw him do the imitation of Hitler in The Great Dictator where he does a ballet with the globe of the world making an extremely ironic statement about how politicians toss the world around so casually.

On the other hand there are the other artists and their messages: Michelangelo’s David and The Creation or the Moses. Or Caravaggio, the man and the paintings. And Dali and the portrait of Christ on the cross as God must have seen him. Or Donatello’s wooden statue of Mary Magdalene which shows her so haggard after her sojourn in the desert following the death of Christ. And then those wonderful post-impressionists who saw light in such a glorious way, especially Van Gogh.

And you have to get to Europe sometime to see the Louvre and the Vatican, and Pisa and Florence and Dante and Machiavelli and the world--the Western world that is. And then the East--and write about it.

Never stop thinking deeply, bravely, and truly.
Kurt Vonnegut generally, when I was in high school, got it through to me that books could be about important contemporary things and be funny at the same time. I think that was my first experience of the aesthetic I like most--serious and funny--. I read *Breakfast of Champions* so many times the cover fell off and the pages fell out. *Cat's Cradle* is probably the one that stays with me the most; though it's hard to argue with *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

The trajectory of the funny/serious line goes then through Updike (especially *Rabbit Redux*--one doesn't have to read all the Rabbit books--each stands well on its own) and Bellow (I took great comfort from my third or maybe fourth reading of Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* while we were tending to my mother-in-law, who has cancer, this past December--though the book's racism bugs me. I do think there are cases in which a book's truth (the racism is part of its truth) should outweigh one's censorious impulses.) The end of the line for serious and funny is Joyce, and reading *Ulysses* as an older undergrad (29-ish) was one of those moments where you think you’ve just realized that the world is different from what you thought.

Reading Blake's "A Poison Tree" in high school showed me that poems aren't just about rosy lips and cheeks, and reading Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode" showed me that poems can make a detailed and convincing argument, and reading "Paradise Lost" showed me that intellectual heat can come off the page.

I would utter the sacrilege that Shakespeare isn't and won't be a big part of my intellectual life, but I do think *King Lear* is as good as anything ever made by a person--when I read it and understood it I said, “That's true. That's what madness is really like.” Heartbreaking.

The other thing I like in books is a very convincing feeling of the interior lives of people (something I've since learned to think of as profoundly ideological, which doesn't make me like it less). The queen of this is Virginia Woolf, whom I often describe as my favorite person whom I've never met. *To the Lighthouse* is the peak of this material, though honestly it sailed over my head when I read it as a 19-year-old undergrad. I re-read it on my own in the summer after my first year in grad school, slowly, 15-20 pages at a sitting, and I think it's just the greatest thing. I've spent more time reading Woolf than anyone else, and the sense of herself that emerges in her diaries is really something else. I get a feeling of intimate contact with Woolf when I read her, which is what she was going for. Her essays, which are dazzling and playfully tricky but nonetheless more open and generous and accessible than most of her fiction, often show up at Half-Price Books in cheap paperback reprints of the Hogarth Press titles Leonard Woolf edited in the 40s and 50s. Titles include *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, *Granite and Rainbow and other Essays*, and *The Moment and Other Essays* (though this veers into my life as a professional).

As a much younger person, this feeling of interiority, subjectivity, etc. (fancy words I didn’t have then) came to me through Bob Dylan’s *Blood on the Tracks* (1974), which I heard at age 11 and explains such things as why I fought with my wife until she let me go to see Dylan, for like the 30th time, at a minor league ball field in Kentucky on a hot August day three days after I had an
asthma attack. A couple years later, as a self-dramatizing high school student, *Highway 61 Revisited* offered a model of giddy linguistic play that seems formative from this vantage.

There are a small number of films I go back to again and again. The *Maltese Falcon* (see "giddy linguistic play"), *Vanya on 42d Street* (King Lear-ish in its heft, and the best performance of the gorgeous and brilliant Julianne Moore), *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (I love that mid-period Woody Allen, also *September* and *Hannah and her Sisters*--file under "funny and serious." Just so dispiriting the way his career has melted down in recent years).
Albums

The Doors (by The Doors) -- The Doors make clear, powerful statements of what it means to be alive (at least for me). I love the mix of Ray Manzarek's organ and Morrison's deep voice. The first album, The Doors, best exemplifies that mix. The song Break on Through has the lyrics "You know the day destroys the night / Night divides the day / Tried to run / Tried to hide / Break on through to the other side." I interpret this as a call to break out of what you daily accept as normal or truthful.

My favorite song on the album is The End. The music sounds disturbing and revolutionary at the same time. This is what is so intense and incredible about the song. It is clearly about death. My favorite lines are "It hurts to set you free / But you'll never follow me / The end of laughter and soft lies / The end of nights we tried to die." Earth-shattering.

By the way, my favorite Morrison quote can be found in his poem An American Prayer: "We're reaching for death at the end of a candle. We're trying for something that's already found us." This quote states so well a truth that is important to my Christian faith--that death is imminent.

Books

Crossing Open Ground by Barry Lopez. Lopez is very eclectic--part scientist, part Thoreau-esque nature writer. For me, Lopez captures what it means to be a human interacting with the natural environment--scientifically and humanistically. Another good Lopez book is About This Life, which autobiographically recounts some of his travel experiences.

Capital, Vol. 1 by Karl Marx. This is definitely the best Marx book because it is absolutely all-encompassing. It is economically empirical, social-scientific-oriented, and epistemological all at once. An absolute eye-opener.

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The humanities folks have really grabbed onto his other major work, Philosophical Investigations. However, I like how Tractatus is written. Very organized, very thorough. A very close look at how language actually operates in an environment. Lots of equations, but don't let that distract/discourage you. The ending is great, because he realizes he has gone full-circle with logic. Like Marx, you probably know many of the truths in there, but the way he frames it is good.

Imagined Communities by Benedict Anderson. This semi-Marxist work explores the origins and spread of nationalism as an ideology. Very interesting examples, and well-written. Anderson has influenced much of geography and anthropology.