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FICTION REVIEW LIVE LIT TOP 10 SUBSCRIBE

My Literary Top 10 by Neil Cross

TOP 10

- 1 **Best Short Story I Ever Read**
Fat by Raymond Carver. Oh, I don't know: anything by Raymond Carver. How do you choose? But Fat was the first I read, so it's special.
- 2 **Book I Finished Reading but Wanted My Time Back Afterwards**
No contest. American Psycho by Brett Easton Ellis. Corrupted, self-important nonsense smothered in blubber. The skeleton of a fine novella — something with the potential length and stature of Heart of Darkness. As it is, American Psycho continues a steady cultural decline — from controversy, through the alternative canon, to kitsch. The only book in the history of publishing that might conceivably have been improved by a Reader's Digest Condensed Edition.
- 3 **Book I Wouldn't Blush to Be Seen Reading on the Tube**
If I'm enjoying a book, I wouldn't be ashamed to be seen reading it anywhere: I don't care if it's by St Augustine or Terry Pratchett. I don't read books to impress other people. Never have, never will. Nor am I impressed by what someone else might be reading, which would be a staggering kind of intellectual vulgarity. You read what you want, mate.
- 4 **Best Film of Book I've Seen**
Minghella's The Talented Mr Ripley is a fine example of how to adapt for the screen. Although it's structured much like the novel, Ripley (essayed by Matt Damon) has been humanised — his neuroses externalised, his sexuality clarified. This is a character sensitively re-drawn according to the requirements of a different medium.
- 5 **Most Under-Rated Second Novel**
Something Happened by Joseph Heller. Catch-22 is not a satire on war: it's a satire on the logic of consumerism, on the individual's attempt to exercise freedom within the moebius strip of insanity. I don't know if it's the best first novel ever written, but it would certainly be my candidate. Something Happened, more than a decade in the writing, was not such a hit. But it inspires in fans of Heller an equally rabid devotion. It's a bleak satire on corporate life, on middle-age, on marriage. It'll come to be regarded as Heller's masterpiece, one of the great books of the previous century.

- 6 Most Out of Date/Photoshopped Author Photo**
An old and entirely misleading photograph of me is still doing the rounds — largely, I suspect, because everyone involved knows exactly how excruciating I find it.
- 7 Most Famous Author I've Met Who Acted Like an Idiot**
I've met a number of famous authors, and a number of 'celebrity' writers, too. With only the rarest exception, they have all been idiots. One expects it from celebrities, but from the authors it always comes as a disappointment. Most, in fact, are only technically human. And if the people who write books are idiots, the people who review them are usually worse. Time and again the industry is saved by the people who sell books and the people who buy them. I've met a few drunk booksellers (quite a few, actually) but I've never met a stupid one.
- 8 Favourite Bookshop**
Unity Books in Wellington, New Zealand. Small. Supernaturally well-stocked (one imagines its stockroom is some kind of closed but infinite space, like something from Borges). A hopelessly arcane loyalty scheme. And Waterstones, Leeds. The smaller one. The small ones are always more dangerous.
- 9 Author I'd Like to See Win More Awards**
Michael Moorcock. I wish he'd write more slowly — his prose doesn't always do justice to his ideas. *Mother London* is the book most people will admit to having read, because it's a 'proper' novel — see question 3, above. But Moorcock is one of our greatest living writers, part of that circle of visionary contemporaries that included JG Ballard and Angela Carter, who I suppose he most closely resembles. (If you scoff at that idea without having read him, you're in trouble). But because his ideas are political, and complex, and sometimes contradictory, he's often written off by lazy publishers as a fantasy author — much like, say, Edmund Spenser or John Milton.
- 10 Celebrity Author I'd Like to See Beaten With Sticks**
He's not a celebrity, but he'd like to be, so I'll admit to a dislike of James Delingpole, author of *Fin* and *Thinly Veiled Autobiography*. I've been lucky enough never to meet him, but still he's the best example I know of the inverse relationship between self-regard and talent. Not only would I like to see him beaten with sticks, I'd supply the sticks. I'd do the beating too, if the Stick Beater's Union would allow it.

Neil Cross was born in Bristol in 1969, and grew up in Scotland. He claims to have once been lead singer in a band called the Atrocity Exhibition. As there is no surviving evidence of his musical career we must take his word that the band 'achieved mediocrity just before the end', and be thankful Cross went on