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2nd Place: "An Appreciation for Angst"

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An Appreciation for Angst

This collection is something very close to me, in fact, the characters in these novels have been with me since middle school. I have collected these books off of dying thrift stores and pristine Barnes and Noble's. The protagonists in them are seemingly the worst characters: flawed, depressed, even selfish at times, but at the end of the day they are relatable. A quality that is often lost in mainstream media with its oppressive obsession with 'perfection'. However, the protagonists of these books are honest, heartfelt and reflect the dark sides of ourselves that, too often, we are afraid to show others out of fear of being 'different'.

For me, there is no beginning or end to this collection, rather it has taken on a life of its own as a living, breathing, archive of every lightless thought that has encountered me in my life. From the first work added, probably "Catcher in the Rye", which paved the way for young adult literature that provides honesty, rather than the pristine happiness that is often expected of children. To the most recent addition, "Let the Right One In", which uses multiple perspectives to show the dismal lives and inner turmoils of several individuals within a small Swedish town. It is the youth of these characters, along with their disconcert for everyday life, that defines their person and the feelings they experience.

My aim for this collection was to portray what true angst feels like in all of its oppressive, despotic and stifling glory. Due to the nature of these titles, they enlighten us to a truth that is all too often masked over in society; no one is always happy. With our social media pages of model lives and perfect pictures, I think it's high time we take a more honest and open look at ourselves. Because those people do not live perfect lives, you do not live a perfect life and guess what, neither do I; "And we're all very, very pissed off".

Annotated Bibliography:

1. Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Smith, Elder & Co. of London, 1847.

I always find it amazing when a book written in such a different time can be so relevant today. *Jane Eyre* is one of those books, with a main character who is funny and somewhat self loathing the reader really gets a sense for what angst looked like in the early 1900s.

2. Dostoyevsky, Fyodor. *Crime and Punishment*. The Russian Messenger, 1866.

Rodyna is unhappy, he feels mediocre and like he is wasting his potential. He is depressed and looking for a way to hold some meaning in the dismal place he calls home. This book perfectly describes his angst and his unethical methods of dealing with it.

3. Gaiman, Neil. *Coraline*. Bloomsbury and Harper Collins, 2002.

I have read this book so many times I can't even tell you. This book is captivating, sinister and shows how sometimes we don't really appreciate what we have until someone comes and tries to replace it.

4. Lindqvist, John Ajvide. *Let the Right One In*. St. Martin's Press, 2004.

The newest addition to this list, as I just finished this captivating Swedish novel. It follows multiple characters all of whom are unsatisfied in their current lives and one of whom is a vampire. This book is full of people trying hard to make the best of their situations and ultimately failing to do so, making it the perfect accompaniment to my list.

5. Palahniuk, Chuck. *Fight Club*. W. W. Norton, 1996.

This book birthed the subculture movements of the 90s by showing contempt towards our consumerist based society, while not sounding preachy. This book is an ode to anyone who ever felt 'they don't fit in' and reads like their bible.

6. Plath, Sylvia. *Ariel*. Harper & Row, 1965.

Something about Plath's poetry just makes sense when you read it. Her language is simple, but her syntax compelling. Full of metaphors for sadness, this is a collection of poetry that for anyone who has ever felt depression explains it perfectly.

7. Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. Harper & Row, 1971.

I know another Sylvia Plath book... but trust me this one is just as necessary as "Ariel". This novel shows high functioning depression at its worst, in addition to addressing the stigma's around being a woman in the the early 20th century. It is a classic and a personal favourite.

8. Quick, Matthew. *Forgive Me, Leonard Peacock*. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2014.

This book is about one student's journey as he plans the mass murder of his fellow classmate. Told in first person you get to experience the main character's drives towards insanity and how he slowly pulls himself out of it.

9. Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Little Brown & Company, 1951.

Probably my favourite of all time book on this list, when I read "Catcher in the Rye" the summer of my freshman year of high school I felt as though no character had ever spoken to me like Holden did. He is crass, relatable and just searching for meaning, everything an angst driven character needs.

10. Shakespeare, William. *The New Clarendon Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*. Oxford University Press, 1947.

Romeo and Juliet is about as teen angst as it gets for the 1500s. This play demonstrates how social pressures can cause impulsiveness and can create tragedgy in their wake.

11. Silverstein, Shel. *The Giving Tree*. Harper & Ro, 1964.

This is a classic children's story about a tree who gives everything she has to a young, unappreciative boy. The boy is never satisfied with his life, always craving more and more, despite always getting what he asked for. This beautifully illustrates the angst of 'want' in our society as well as the need to overcompensate for those we love.

12. Teller, Janne. *Nothing*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2000.

A not so well known young adult novel. This book, originally in Danish, is about a classroom of children who go to extremes to try and prove to their nihilist peer that life has meaning. What one discovers by reading this book though, is that life's meaning is not measured by an accumulation of things or events, but rather just living is meaning enough.

Wishlist Annotated Bibliography:

1. Burgess, Anthony. *A Clockwork Orange*. William Heinemann, 1962.

Here we have a main character so evil and conniving, yet who represents angsty English youths subculture in the 1960s much of which involved joining gangs and raging on citizens. This book is a warning to not let emotions get out of control, which is why I would love to read and add this book to my collection.

2. Burroughs, William. *Naked Lunch*. Grove Press, 1959.

“Naked Lunch” explores the drug riddled, non-linear life of Lee who is controlled by his addictions. This book demonstrates where angst can lead a person on a downward spiral. It is critically acclaimed and I’ve never read it, but have wanted to for quite a while.

3. Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*. Vintage Books, New York, 1991.

What Ellis describes as “coming from a very personal place” this book is not about a serial killer per se, rather it is about a loss of control. It is a testimonial to anyone who feels they are caught on the hamster wheel of life and are too afraid to jump off. And that feeling is in and of itself angst.

4. Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. Scribner’s, 1925.

I have read “The Great Gatsby” and I found it to be such a great novel. With it’s heavy use of symbolism and its critique on the mainstream culture of the 20s, I felt sad when I had to return this book to my teacher. However, it would be in my collection otherwise.