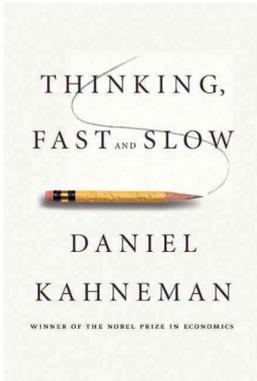


# Meg K.'s blog

## Good Pop Psych Reads



[view in catalog](#)

**ISBN:**

9780374275631

Daniel Kahneman's Thinking Fast and Slow is still a bestseller and heavily in-demand at the library, after receiving lots of publicity late last year. This exploration of intuitive vs. deliberate thinking makes fascinating points about what motivates decisions both personal and business-related. It's top notch popular psychology, a genre I really love for the way it forces you to examine actions and thoughts that seem simply natural or logical. Here are a few other great examples.

- Another newish title that's making a splash is Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that Can't Stop Talking. The subtitle pretty much sums it up. It explores the differences between introverts and extroverts and makes the case for the values of introversion, which are often ignored in a society that holds extroversion to be the ideal.
- Malcolm Gladwell is a giant in this area. One of his great books is Blink, which, like Kahneman's, uncovers what's really going on in our heads when we make decisions, illuminating everything from how prejudice works to why marriages fail.
- Oliver Saks, a neurologist, also has several great books. The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, for example, demonstrates how complex the brain is by showing how weirdly things can go wrong. It's more neuroscience than psychology, perhaps, but seeing how knocking out one little area can cause hallucinations or destroy one very limited function, is fascinating.
- Steven Pinker recently wrote a book (The Better Angels of Our Nature) proposing that humans are becoming less violent, but I really like his 2003 book The Blank Slate. It touches on the emerging field of evolutionary psychology, arguing that people aren't born with completely plastic minds, but that we all have certain (possibly very powerful) innate tendencies and capabilities.
- In The Psychopath Test, Jon Ronson teaches us how to spot a psychopath, and finds that, far from being universally confined to mental hospitals, they are all among us--especially, it

seems, in the world of business.

- [The Believing Brain](#) takes a critical look at how belief--not just religious, but in general--is formed and reinforced. Michael Shermer argues that it is natural, but that we need to temper such instincts to see the world clearly.
- [Snoop](#) has a fun (and kind of unsettling premise): the things we surround ourselves with and the way we arrange them speak volumes about who we are. Our personalities leak through in what seem like insignificant places.

For more similar books, here's a nice [Goodreads](#) list, and a [LibraryThing](#) one.

[For the Love of Reading](#) [Blink : the power of thinking without thinking](#) [Nonfiction](#) [Quiet : the power of introverts in a world that can't stop talking](#) [Science](#) [Snoop : what your stuff says about you](#) [The believing brain : from ghosts and gods to politics and conspiracies--how we construct beliefs and reinforce them as truths](#) [The blank slate : the modern denial of human nature](#) [The man who mistook his wife for a hat and other clinical tales](#) [The psychopath test : a journey through the madness industry](#) [Thinking, fast and slow](#)

Posted by Meg K. on Apr 17, 2012 [Add new comment](#)



## Night Circus Readalikes



Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus* tells the story of two competing magicians trying to outdo each other in the creation of an enchanted circus. Whether you've read it and want more of the gothic atmosphere, period charm, and dazzling detail, are on the holds list for it, or just enjoy a bit of whimsy and dark Victorianism, these books should be of interest.

[Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell](#), a tale of the resurgence of English magic in the early 19th century, is just as dense and immersive as the equally thick *Night Circus*, and like that novel features a period writing style and a fully realized magical world-within-a-world.

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Posted by Meg K. on Jan 22, 2012 [Add new comment](#)



## Downton Abbey Reads



The Times had a good [article](#) the other day about publishers trying to ride the Downton Abbey wave. In that spirit, here are some books at MCPL that share some of the period charm and dramatic power of this fantastic show. If you're like me, you can't get enough

of it.

Rose: My Life in Service: The memoir of a humble girl entering service in the 1920s, serving as Lady Astor's maid, and glimpsing a world of great glamor.

Below Stairs: the Classic Kitchen Maid's Memoir: For a bit of Daisy-inspiring perspective, this memoir of an ambitious kitchen maid is a sizzling look at the underside of great houses.

A Bitter Truth: A mystery set in WWI, in which battlefield nurse Bess finds herself entangled in a foul plot in a Sussex mansion.

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Posted by Meg K. on Jan 14, 2012 [1 comment](#)



## "Why Do We Care About Literary Awards?"



Asking that question is Mark O'Connell at [The Millions](#). He makes a good point: it is kind

of ridiculous how seriously people take these things, how offended people can get if their favorite isn't chosen. There's no way for one award to please everyone, to choose the one book that is truly, objectively the best--there is very little "objective" anything when it comes to art. However, for librarians these awards are pretty indispensable. You'll see plenty of posts on this blog, for example, about winners and shortlists. We use them when deciding what to buy, what to recommend to people, what to read ourselves. Maybe it would be better if everyone read all of the books and judged every one for themselves, but that's never going to happen.

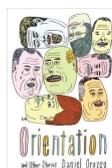
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For the [Love of Reading Information, Answers & Reviews Award Winner](#)

Posted by Meg K. on Aug 9, 2011 [Add new comment](#)



## Short End of the Stick



I have to admit, even as someone who has great appreciation for short stories, I often

find it hard to muster the same kind of enthusiasm for reading them as I do when approaching the pleasant immersion of a novel. But I've proven myself wrong so many times, as I take up a book with a sense of duty and find myself thoroughly enthralled instead. Short stories are perfect for those with a hectic schedule (or a short attention span); they offer condensed, pithy prose and plot, and they can often alert you to a new talent before everyone's going crazy for their debut novel. I was inspired to write this post by Daniel Orozco's [Orientation](#), which I just read.

"Officer Weeps" in particular is one my my favorite short stories ever. His characters are weird and liminal--a woman on a late-night cookie binge, an ex-dictator, a pair of officers falling in love amidst an odd vandalism streak--and he presents them with hilarious and terrible brevity. Here are a few other collections that I really enjoyed, written with a similarly strange focus and an

equal blend of heartbreak and humor.

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[Orientation : and other stories](#)  
[Short Stories St. Lucy's home for girls raised by wolves : stories](#)

Posted by Meg K. on Jul 17, 2011 [Add new comment](#)



## Foreign Fiction



There was a dustup not too long ago about Tim Parks' suggestion (in the [NYRB blog](#))

that foreign writers are adapting their prose--even if it's still written in their native tongue--to the structure of English. He contests that it has gotten easier to translate novels because "contemporary writers [have] already performed a translation within their own languages". Whether or not this is evidence of the English language's unfortunate dominance and bulldozing of local culture, or a natural adaptation among writers wanting to communicate as widely as possible, is left somewhat up in the air. It's an interesting argument, but I wonder how much relevance it has to most readers.

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