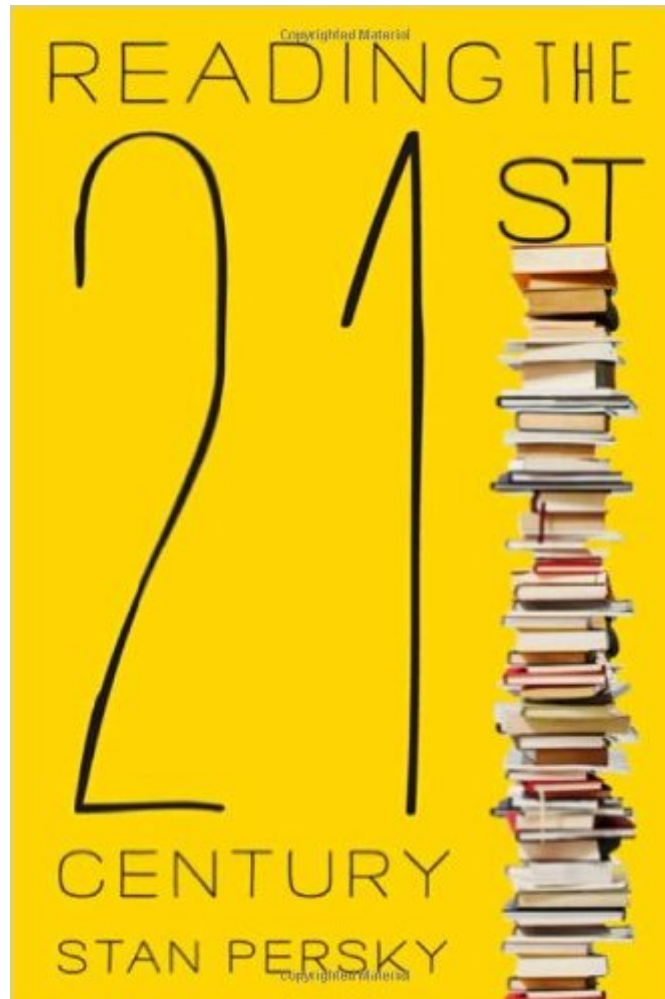


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Reading The 21st Century: Books Of The Decade, 2000-2009



Synopsis

In wide-ranging and innovative criticism, Stan Persky examines international non-fiction and fiction to engage with both the triumphs and tensions of reading and writing today. Evaluating works by established authors Philip Roth, Orhan Pamuk, J.M. Coetzee, and Jos  Saramago, as well as emerging writers like Naomi Klein, Javier Cercas, and Chimamanda Adichie, Persky also showcases a remarkable group of reporters - Steve Coll, Dexter Filkins, and Rajiv Chandrasekaran - who have written essential books about global issues. An illuminating and accessible work about the present age, *Reading the 21st Century* introduces new ways of thinking about the world's most significant cultural, political, and moral problems.

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Customer Reviews

A bright yellow book that jumped from the library shelf. A possible subtitle would be: "Reminding you of all the books you read from 2000-2009, and introducing you to a few that you didn't." Some chapters are thorough review of one book (hint: Dr. Persky is a Philip Roth fan), and others are shorter reviews of several books organized by topic (books at the end of an authors' life, books on the War on the Global War on Terror)." Comments:-The book is strongest in the thorough reviews. I admittedly missed many of the fiction titles reviewed, and am going back to remedy that gap. Mr. Persky makes a strong case that we should all be reading Amos Oz, Larry McMurtry, Javier Cercas, and others.-Maybe I missed it, but I didn't see the name "Jonathan Franzen" anywhere in the book. That's a striking omission, so striking that it practically demands explanation. Certainly you can argue for or against Franzen, but to ignore him? No mention of Murakami (again, as far as I

remember) is another surprise.-The book is weaker on the grab-bag chapters organizing shorter reviews by topic. For example, the final chapter on the economic crisis is an afterthought, with far too much focus on Krugman. Also, the "other voices" chapter feels like an apology.-The book is weakest when discussing, both independently and in discussing books about, a nebulous and nefarious crisis. The crisis is that literature is dying, literary criticism is dying, we are becoming a culture adrift from reading, and generally everything is getting worse. Persky expressly declines to identify any remedies for this crisis, and tacitly declines to identify the upshot of this crisis. The crisis serves as the excuse for the book - the professor's essay-like chapters have not been published elsewhere because the former outlets for his criticism are closing up shop. However, the book doesn't need an excuse - it is an interesting and well-written selection of reviews. Two surprises for me about "the crisis." The first is how many of "the crisis" books I had read over the past ten years. They appear, they go on the NYT "best of" lists, and I read them. Dr. Persky's book serves as an inadvertent reminder that maybe I would be better off reading, say, Ryszard Kapuscinski than yet another "middlebrow" (and yes, Persky still uses that word) book about our crumbling culture/economy/mores/etc. The second is the steadfast refusal of Persky and others to identify a touchstone to which our crumbling economy should be compared. From what are we declining? Ancient Greece? The 1960's? The 1990's? When were the good old days? At best, the dumbing-down identified by Persky and others is the end-result of the democratization of culture (probably) sought by Persky and others in their youthful 1960's heyday - what better way to overthrow the dominant hegemony than Twitter? At worst, "the crisis" smacks of snobbery and elitism - traits Persky would have lamented in his own stuffy professors back in that same 1960's heyday. The end result of both surprises is, again, that I will think twice before picking up yet another "the crisis" book, and perhaps seek out books of greater lasting literary value. I think that Dr. Persky would agree with this result, if not how I reached it.

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