

# READING MATTERS

## LUMINOUS BOOKS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

By Chris Dodge

**CONFESSION TIME—I DO NOT LOVE MAGAZINES. I WORK FOR ONE (YOU'RE READING IT), WRITE ABOUT THEM IN MY STREET LIBRARIAN COLUMN, AND USE THEM FREQUENTLY. BUT I DO NOT LOVE THEM.**

I love rivers, trees, birds, humans, the sky, water in all its forms, libraries, and . . . books. There, I've said it. There's still nothing like the magic of the right book at the right time. And nothing like the pleasure of discovery.

At 17, I dropped out of college and my education commenced. For the next few years books were my best friends. I recall discovering the novels of Yukio Mishima, shelved in my hometown library under H for the author's real name, Hiraoka. I remember seeing a book with Charles Bukowski's acne-pocked face on the cover in a modular bookstore in Iowa City, buying it, reading it, feeling enthralled. I remember, thanks to Bukowski, being turned on to the wild picaresque novels of Louis-Ferdinand Celine.

I devoured *Crime and Punishment* in the dark basement of the Loras College

library, turned up Arthur Rimbaud in Dubuque, learned that Jack London (an author whose writings, like Bukowski's, have been massively popular outside academia) wrote more than *The Call of the Wild*, and met countless more friends, each special somehow.

Reading these books, and others through the years, changed my life. Perhaps even saved it. They posed questions, proffered maps, rang alarms, and shone light in dark places. In his zine, *For the Clerisy*, Brant Kresovich posits that some people read for comfort, consuming books like drugs, seeking satisfaction. Others, he asserts—and he is one of them—read to explore, to awaken, and to get outside themselves. I recognize myself in both types.

At their best, books connect us somehow. *The Stone Reader*, a 2002 film by Mark

Calligraphy by Elvis Swift