Malcolm Gladwell

The author of "David and Goliath" compares Michael Lewis to Tiger Woods: "I'll never play like that. But it's good to be reminded every now and again what genius looks like.

What's the best book you've read so far this year?
There have been many, I loved Jonathan Dee's new novel, "A Thousand Parrots." The best science book I read was Adam Alter's "Drunk Tank Pink," which is a really provocative look at how much our behavior is contextually determined.

Which writers do you find yourself returning to again and again — reading every now and again and reading every now and again and reading?

What books, in your mind, bring together social science, business principles and narrative nonfiction in an interesting or innovative way?

Can I return again to Michael Lewis? Bringing together social science and business principles is easy. Doing that and telling a compelling story is next to impossible. I think only Michael Lewis can do it well. His nonbusiness books like "The Billionaire's Assistant" is the way, are even better. That book is as close to perfect as a work of popular nonfiction can be.

In general, what kinds of stories are you drawn to? Any you steer clear off?
I don't think I will ever write about politics or foreign policy. I feel like there is so much good writing in those areas that I have little to add. I also like to steer clear of writing about people when I do not personally like. My rule is that if I interview someone, they should never read what I have to say about them and regret having given me the interview.

What's the last book to make you laugh out loud? To cry? The last book that made you angry?
I read Jeremy Adelman's biography of Albert O. Hirschman early this year and was deeply moved by it. Hirschman wasn't just a man with a thousand extraordinary adventures (fighting insects in Spain, smuggling Jews out of France, writing "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty" and a handful of other unforgettable books). He was also wise and deeply honest. I finished that book with tears in my eyes.

What books might we be surprised to find on your shelves?
I have — by conservative estimate — several hundred novels with the word "spy" in the title.

Disappointing, overrated, just not good:
What book did you feel you were supposed to like, and didn't? Do you remember the last book you put down without finishing?
I feel terrible for saying this, but I started reading "The Cuckoo's Calling" before I knew it was by J.K. Rowling, and I couldn't finish it. Is there something wrong with me?

If you could meet any character from literature, who would it be?
I'd like to go for a long walk on the Hampstead Heath with George Smiley. It would be drizzly. We would end up having a tepid cup of tea somewhere, with slightly stale biscuits. I would ask him lots of questions about Control, and he would evade them, graciously.

What book have you always wanted to read and haven't got around to yet? Any thing you feel embarrassed not to have read?
I have never read any Tolkien, I felt badly about this until I read a Bill Simmons column where he confessed that he'd never seen "The Big Lebowski," Simmon's, it should be pointed out, has seen everything. He said that everyone should have seen it at least once. I would advise the same. I have not read a book that is at least one great cultural institution.

ONLINE: An expanded version of this interview is available at nytimes.com/books.