


the princess academy, shannon waite

many long years ago, oghden nash

plots, william wallace cook

TEN

The 80 best novels of all time



According to Hilary Mantel, author of *Wolf Hall* and its blockbuster sequels, “a novel should be a book of questions, not a book of answers.” There are certainly questions galore in this feast of fiction, meta-fiction, fantasy and memoir. Spanning five centuries of populist page-turners and cult classics, there is something here for every literary taste.

Contact concierge if you need help sourcing any of these books or for more recommendations. It’s worth noting that anyone with children should sign up to Audible, which is currently offering a selection of free audio books for children while schools are shut.

About the writer

Stephen Dalton first began writing about music, films and books way back in analogue times when the legendary *New Musical Express* was still an inky printed weekly. He is now a regular contributor to *The Times*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Uncut*, *Classic Rock* and more. His work has also been published in *The Guardian*, *The Quietus*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Huffington Post*, *Wallpaper* and other august publications.

80**What I Talk About When I Talk About Running - Haruki Murakami (2008)**

Training log meets travelogue in Murakami's meditative memoir, which finds playful parallels between running marathons and writing novels.

78**High-Rise - JG Ballard (1975)**

The residents of a new residential skyscraper slowly descend into violent civil war in Ballard's eerily detached depiction of urban psychosis.

76**A Confederacy of Dunces - John Kennedy Toole (1980)**

Posthumously published 11 years after its troubled author's suicide, this anarchic satirical romp through early 1960s New Orleans swiftly established itself as a cult classic before winning the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1981.

74**The Talented Mr. Ripley - Patricia Highsmith (1955)**

Highsmith's ice-cool eye gave literature one of its most suave, likable psycho-killers in Tom Ripley, a pathological narcissist who later achieved iconic status on page and screen.

79**The Secret Agent - Joseph Conrad (1907)**

Inspired by real events, Conrad's politically charged espionage thriller strikes a timely chord today with its tense depiction of terrorist bombers on the loose in London.

77**2666 - Roberto Bolaño (2004)**

Cult Chilean author Bolaño was facing his own imminent mortality as he completed this massive, surreal, wildly ambitious swansong novel about mass murder, chiefly the ongoing femicide epidemic in Mexico.

75**The Bell Jar - Sylvia Plath (1963)**

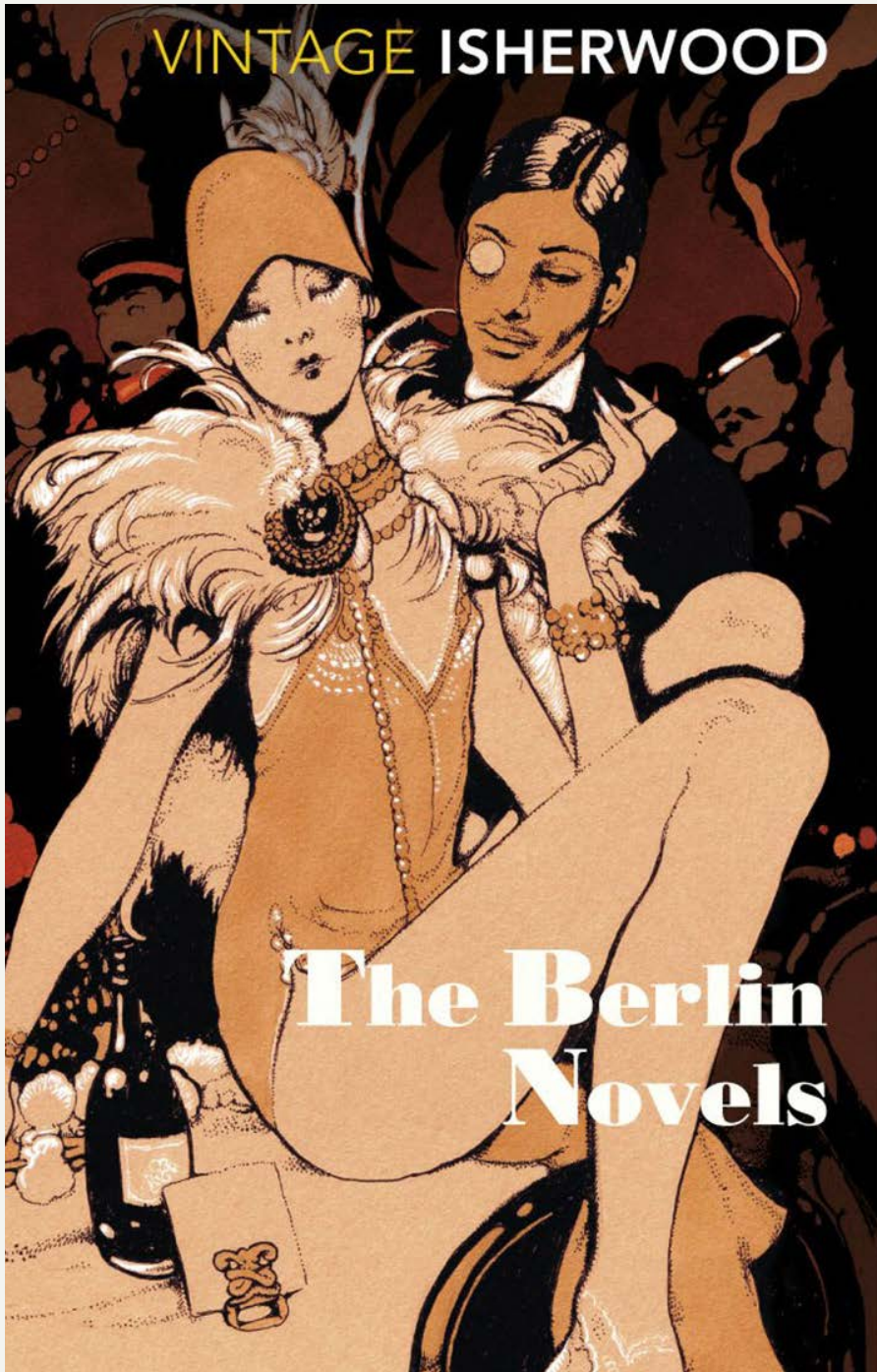
Plath took her life shortly after publishing this intense, harrowing, surprisingly funny account of a young woman's descent into mental illness, reinforcing its autobiographical echoes.

73**The Turn of the Screw - Henry James (1898)**

The chilling tale of a governess desperately trying to protect her young charges from ghostly forces, *The Turn of the Screw* defined the template for superior gothic mystery yarns.

72**The Berlin Stories - Christopher Isherwood (1945)**

Combining two autobiographical volumes, both set in early 1930s Berlin just as Hitler comes to power, Isherwood's piquant fictionalised memoir later inspired the stage and multi-Oscar-winning film musical Cabaret.



“

The only classification of the novel that I can understand is into that which has life and that which has it not.

Henry James



71**The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe – C S Lewis (1950)**

Magical adventures laced with Biblical subtext await young WWII evacuee Lucy in this well-loved children's favourite from CS Lewis, the first of his hugely successful Narnia series.

69**The Road - Cormac McCarthy (2006)**

A father and son navigate a grim, lethal, post-apocalyptic America in McCarthy's richly poetic dystopian fable.

67**A House for Mr. Biswas – VS Naipaul (1961)**

Naipaul's semi-autobiographical breakthrough novel concerns a hapless Indo-Trinidadian struggling to navigate love, marriage and family in the post-colonial West Indies.

66**I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings - Maya Angelou (1961)**

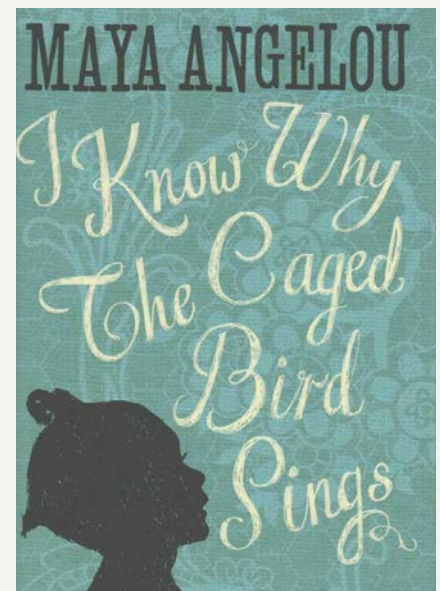
The powerful, poetic first volume of Angelou's autobiography attest how love and literature helped her overcome sexual abuse, racism and injustice.

70**Les Misérables - Victor Hugo (1862)**

Fugitive ex-convict Jean Valjean joins a ragtag band of would-be revolutionaries in Hugo's vast, sprawling exploration of social injustice in post-Napoleonic Paris.

68**Maurice - E M Forster (1971)**

Forster was wary of sharing his eloquent, groundbreaking, autobiographical portrait of illicit gay love with the general public, only allowing its publication posthumously, a year after his death.



65**The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie - Muriel Spark (1961)**

Spark's sharp-witted coming-of-age classic about a charismatic, domineering schoolteacher gave post-war Scottish literature one of its most memorable anti-heroines, later played on screen by Maggie Smith.

63**Possession - AS Byatt (1990)**

A pair of contemporary literature scholars research the lives and loves of two factionalised Victorian poets in Byatt's warm, witty, playful, time-jumping Booker Prize-winner.

61**The Secret History – Donna Tartt (1992)**

Cerebral yet riveting, Tartt's elegant debut novel about a murder at a New England college is artfully marbled with allusions to ancient Greece.

59**Cloud Atlas – David Mitchell (2004)**

Weaving together six interlinked stories scattered across different locations and centuries, Mitchell's speculative epic is an imaginative, exhilarating, grand-canvas affair.

57**Trainspotting - Irvine Welsh (1993)**

Welsh's punky patchwork of interwoven stories about heroin addicts and petty criminals in Edinburgh is darker than the celebrated film version, but still full of lusty energy and subversive humour.

64**Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban - JK Rowling (1999)**

The third novel in the hugely popular Potter series is a firm fan favourite, winning multiple prizes and lending more complex emotional shading to the young boy wizard.

62**Another Country - James Baldwin (1962)**

Set in late 1950s New York, Baldwin's bold, passionate, long-gestating novel about young bohemians engaged in interracial affairs and bisexual love triangle became a divisive, scandalous hit.

60**Rebecca – Daphne du Maurier (1938)**

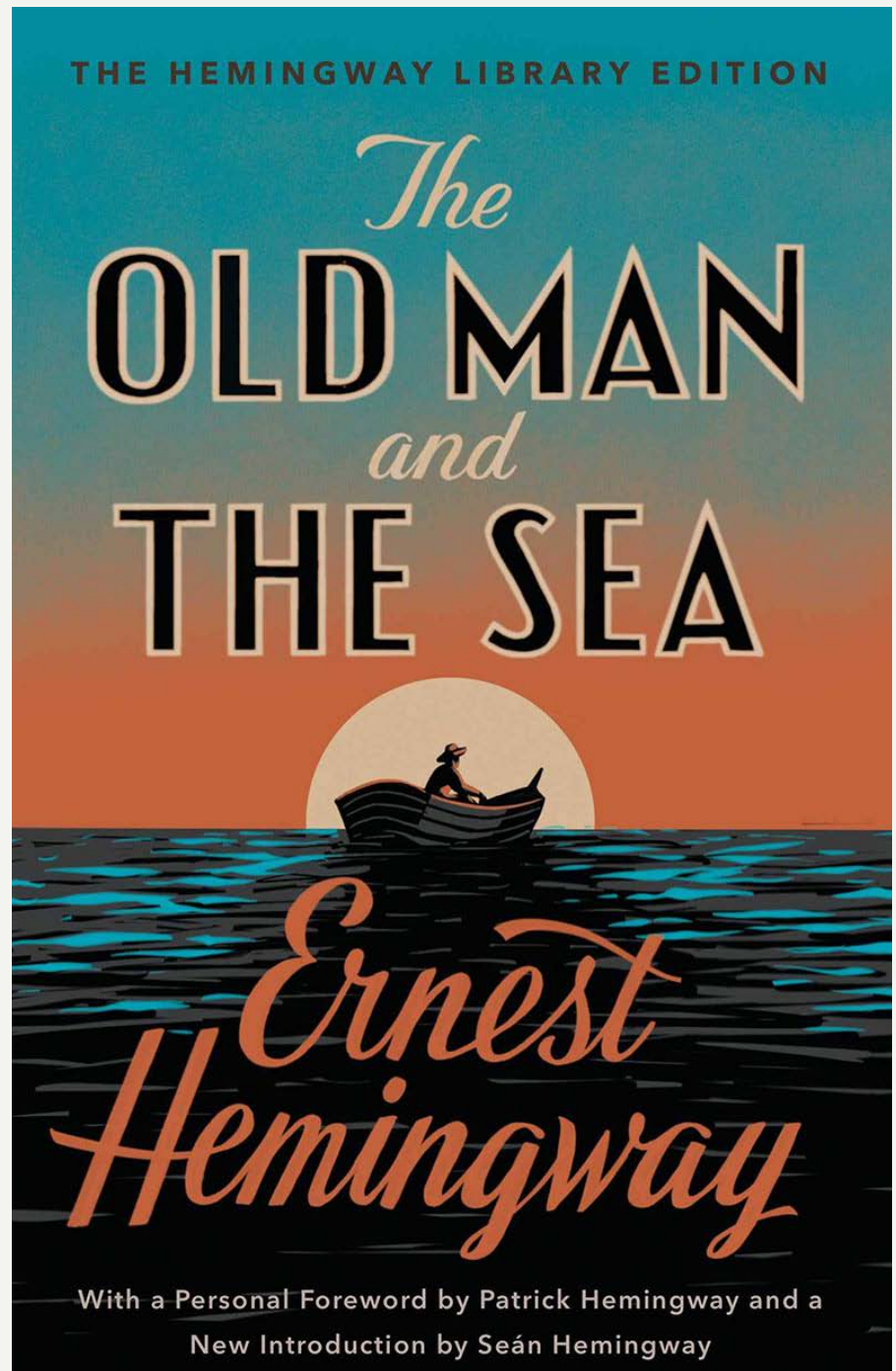
Partly inspired by her own stormy marriage, Du Maurier's atmospheric gothic melodrama about a vulnerable young woman married to a charismatic, moody widower was later adapted into an Oscar-winning hit film by Alfred Hitchcock.

58**Middlemarch – George Eliot (1872)**

Mary Anne Evans, writing under a pen name, scored instant success and lasting critical acclaim with her multi-layered depiction of social and apolitical life in a small Midlands town.

56**The Old Man and the Sea – Ernest Hemingway (1951)**

This quintessential, late-career Hemingway novella about an old Spanish fisherman patiently battling to land a giant marlin is both a tribute to human resilience and a love letter to Cuba.



55**A Visit from the Goon Squad - Jennifer Egan (2010)**

Bold in style and structure, Egan's dazzling Pulitzer-winner shifts between various decades and multiple characters all loosely connected to a legendary music business executive. In one devastatingly moving chapter, the power of Egan's storytelling is showcased beautifully, despite being presented in the form of a PowerPoint document.

53**The Little Prince – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1943)**

The planet-hopping protagonist of this magical little gem of a novel makes pithy, wise observations on grand themes like love, loss and loneliness.

51**Bonfire of the Vanities - Tom Wolfe (1987)**

Wolfe deftly applied his forensic New Journalism skills to this panoramic, multi-layered depiction of New York City at its greed-is-good 1980s peak.

49**A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius – Dave Eggers (2000)**

This archly titled memoir, in which Eggers chronicles his guardianship of his younger brother following the death of their parents, is profoundly moving and savagely funny.

47**Remembrance of Things Past – Marcel Proust (1913)**

"Proustian" became an adjective thanks to this symphonic seven-part rumination on life and death, nostalgic yearning, romantic obsession and haunting memory.

54**Disgrace – J. M. Coetzee (1999)**

Coetzee wrestles with the post-apartheid moral landscape of his native South Africa in this complex, controversial story of public shaming, sexual violence and historic vengeance.

52**The Life of Pi – Yann Martel (2001)**

This charmingly idiosyncratic, multi-million-selling philosophical novel concerns a shipwrecked young Tamil boy musing on the meaning of life while stranded on lifeboat with a Bengal tiger.

50**Lord of the Rings – J. R. R. Tolkien (1954)**

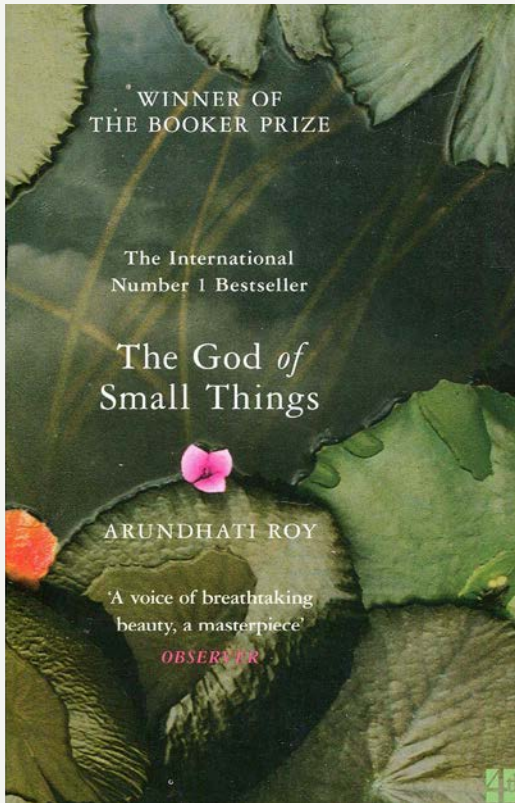
A richly embroidered high-fantasy saga set in the kingdom of Middle Earth, Tolkien's sequel to *The Hobbit* exploded into a massive cult phenomenon, selling 150 million copies and later inspiring multiple blockbuster films.

48**Brideshead Revisited – Evelyn Waugh (1945)**

Illicit passion and religious devotion collide in Waugh's epic novel charting protagonist Charles Ryder's complicated relationship with the wealthy, dysfunctional Flyte family.

46**Carrie – Stephen King (1974)**

Future superstar horror maestro King's first published novel is a pulpy psycho-thriller about a telekinetic schoolgirl wreaking revenge on her bullying classmates and abusive mother.



45

The God of Small Things - Arundhati Roy (1997)

Roy's Booker prize-winner is a sublime meditation on fate, social class, misogyny, injustice and Indian politics, all filtered through the parallel lives of fraternal twins Rahel and Estha.

44

Portnoy's Complaint - Philip Roth (1969)

Narrator Alexander Portnoy has much to share with his patient psychoanalyst in Roth's classic satirical novel about masturbation, neurosis and Jewish-American cultural identity.

43

Orlando: A Biography - Virginia Woolf (1928)

Woolf's most outlandish literary experiment is a lively, gender-bending, proto-feminist romp through English literary history inspired by her bohemian lover, Vita Sackville-West.

42

The End of the Affair - Graham Greene (1951)

Sex, jealousy, hate, obsession and God collide in Greene's taut, beautifully written metaphysical love triangle.

41

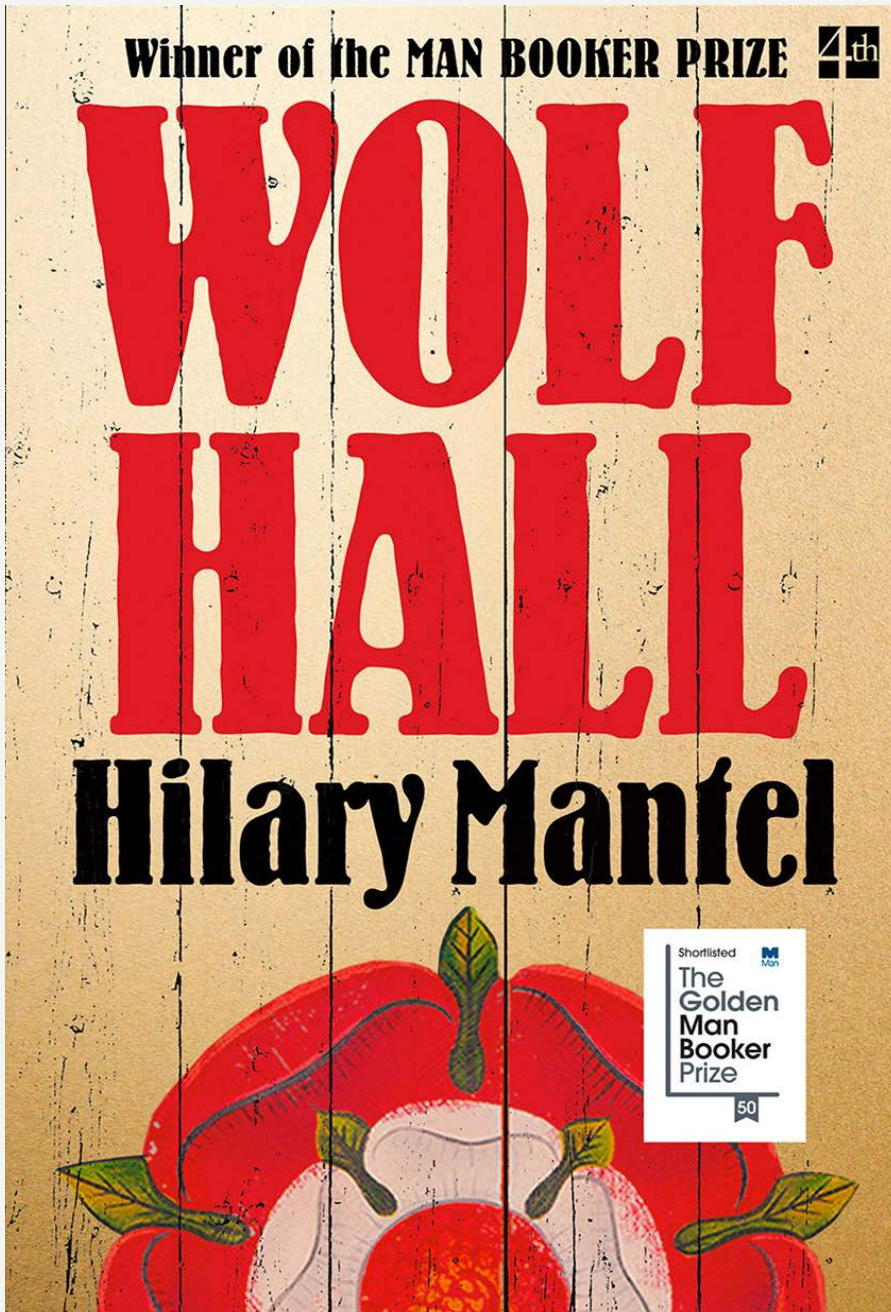
The Prince - Niccolò Machiavelli (1532)

Less a novel, more a self-aware 16th century instruction manual for ruthlessly powerful rulers, The Prince is responsible for bringing the word "Machiavellian" into everyday language.

40

A Clockwork Orange - Anthony Burgess (1962)

Burgess created an immortal modern anti-hero with this ultra-violent dystopian satire, which is narrated by a juvenile sociopath in a fictional future street slang loosely based on Russian.



39

Wolf Hall – Hilary Mantel (2009)

The first in a trilogy of hugely popular historical bio-novels, Mantel's richly detailed, superbly written page-turner tracks the rise of wily outsider Thomas Cromwell through the treacherous ranks of Henry VIII's court.

38

Perfume: The Story of a Murderer – Patrick Süskind (1985)

Selling more than 20 million copies, Patrick Süskind's unorthodox best-seller relates the creepy antics of an 18th century French serial killer with a superhuman sense of smell.

37

Midnight's Children - Salman Rushdie (1981)

Rushdie's poetic, postmodern retelling of India's transition from colonialism to independence and partition dances along in a richly woven magical realist style.

36**Pride and Prejudice - Jane Austen (1813)**

Austen's wittiest romcom is fueled by its spirited protagonist Elizabeth Bennet's acerbic observations on manners, money and marriage in Regency England.

34**The Handmaid's Tale – Margaret Atwood (1985)**

Atwood's chillingly plausible dystopian feminist allegory is set in a near-future America where a totalitarian, theocratic, patriarchal regime has seized control over women's bodies.

32**To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee (1960)**

A classic of Civil Rights-era American literature with enduring universal resonance, Lee's autobiographical coming-of-age novel revolves around racial injustice in Depression-era Alabama.

30**Vanity Fair – William Thackeray (1847)**

Social mores, corruption, skewed morals, human frailty and lust/sex/passion in 19th century Britain. Leading lady Becky Sharp is the ultimate feminist icon or cunning parvenu depending on your point of view.

35**One Hundred Years of Solitude – Gabriel García Márquez (1967)**

The bittersweet saga that defined the "magic realism" genre charts the major turning points in the lives of the Buendías family, founders of an isolated Colombian mountain town.

33**A Dance to the Music of Time – Anthony Powell (1951-1975)**

By turns moving and funny, the 12-volume cycle of novels chart the ups and downs, lives and deaths of a kaleidoscope of Nicholas Jenkins' friends and acquaintances across art, music, literature, politics and the military from 1921 until 1971. Kenneth Widmerpool, the mediocre student and relentless social climber, is one of the great characters of 20th century literature.

31**Catch-22 – Joseph Heller (1961)**

Heller drew on his own WWII experience in Italy to write this caustic, irreverent satire on the futility of war and the tragicomic absurdity of military life.

29**Wide Sargasso Sea – Jean Rhys (1966)**

Jean Rhys's most prized novel is a brilliantly conceived and executed response to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Told from the point of view of Mr. Rochester's first wife, depicted in Brontë's novel as the "madwoman in the attic", Rhys's novel explores her youth in Jamaica and her crushing marriage to an English gentleman.

28**The Picture of Dorian Gray – Oscar Wilde (1890)**

A timeless fable of beauty and decay, sex and decadence, morality and mortality, Dorian Gray remains Wilde's finest creation and the perfect vehicle for his sophisticated wit.

26**On the Road – Jack Kerouac (1957)**

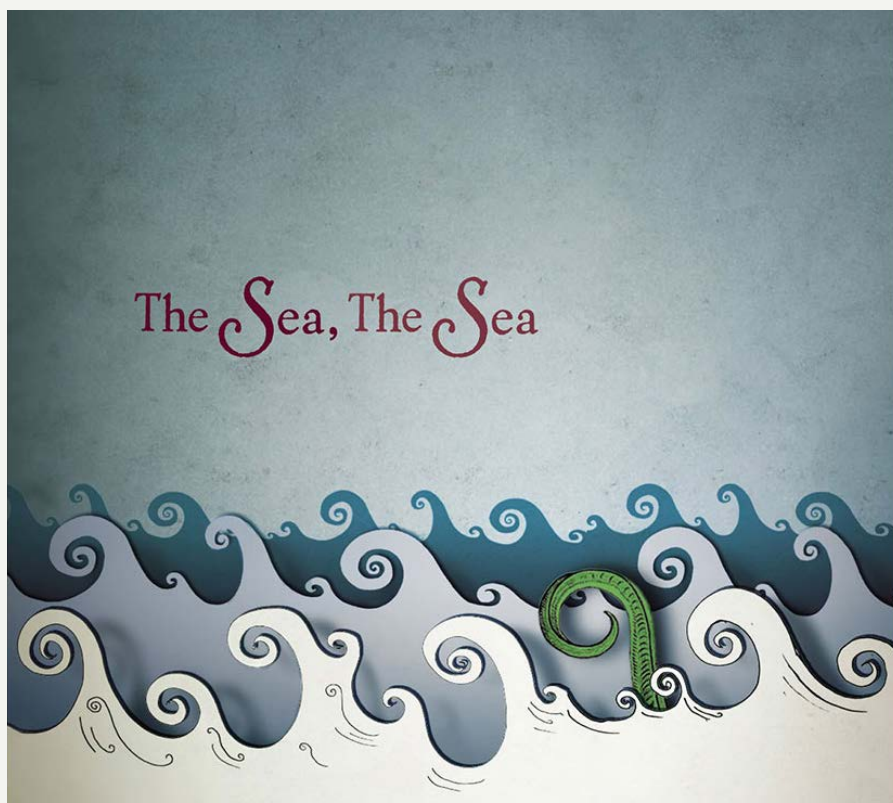
This freewheeling beat-generation travelogue gave the emerging counterculture a florid new vocabulary of jazz, sex, drugs and wide-open highways.

27

Frankenstein – Mary Shelley (1818) Future Shelley's seminal gothic horror yarn would later inspire a string of horror films, but the original story remains richer in meaning, a cautionary parable about the arrogant overreach of science and the dawning industrial revolution.

25**Infinite Jest – David Foster Wallace (1996)**

Wallace's enduring posthumous cult reputation rests largely in this huge, audacious, verbose, groundbreaking experiment in postmodern meta-fiction. That said, his non-fiction writing, while stylistically poles apart, is equally compelling.

**24****The Sea, The Sea - Iris Murdoch (1978)**

Murdoch's gloriously funny Booker-winner chronicles the bizarre obsessions that haunt an egotistical playwright and director living in seclusion in a remote seaside town.

23**The Golden Notebook - Doris Lessing (1962)**

Lessing's multifaceted story of a divorced mother's ambitious quest for personal and political identity in post-war London was instantly hailed as "the feminist Bible" on publication in 1962.

21**Brightness Falls - Jay McInerney (1992)**

Set against the glittering backdrop of late 1980s New York, *Brightness Falls* dissects a collapsing marriage in merciless, gorgeously composed prose.

19**Dead Souls - Nikolai Gogol (1842)**

Exposing the corrupt underbelly of Russian 19th century, Gogol's "epic poem in prose" chronicles protagonist Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov's macabre money-making scams with deliciously dark absurdist wit.

17**Great Expectations - Charles Dickens (1861)**

Dickens examines class, poverty, social status, love, marriage and moral redemption through the eyes of his young hero Pip in this much-filmed saga of Victorian crime and punishment.

15**The Trial - Franz Kafka (1935)**

Published posthumously after Kafka's death, *The Trial* is a cryptic but potent allegory about all-powerful state bureaucracy and private paranoia.

22**Things Fall Apart - Chinua Achebe (1958)**

Told from the perspective of Okonkwo, local wrestling champion belonging to the fictional Nigerian Umuofia clan, *Things Fall Apart* is a classic of post-colonial African literature.

20**The Corrections - Jonathan Franzen (2001)**

Franzen's sharply observed, phenomenally successful breakthrough chronicled the dysfunctional dynamics of a Midwestern American family at the end of the 20th century.

18**Money: A Suicide Note - Martin Amis (1984)**

Amis hit a new stylistic hot streak with this era-defining paean to 1980s excess narrated by one of contemporary fiction's most compelling anti-heroes, the insatiably greedy John Self.

16**Moby-Dick - Herman Melville (1851)**

A richly poetic monster of a book, Melville's semi-autobiographical epic chronicles whaling ship captain Ahab's obsessive quest revenge on the giant white sperm whale that attacked him.

14**Jane Eyre - Charlotte Brontë (1847)**

The groundbreaking first-person psychodrama that earned Charlotte Brontë the title of "first historian of the private consciousness" chronicles the life of a proto-feminist heroine and her stormy relationship with the broodingly arrogant Edward Rochester.

13

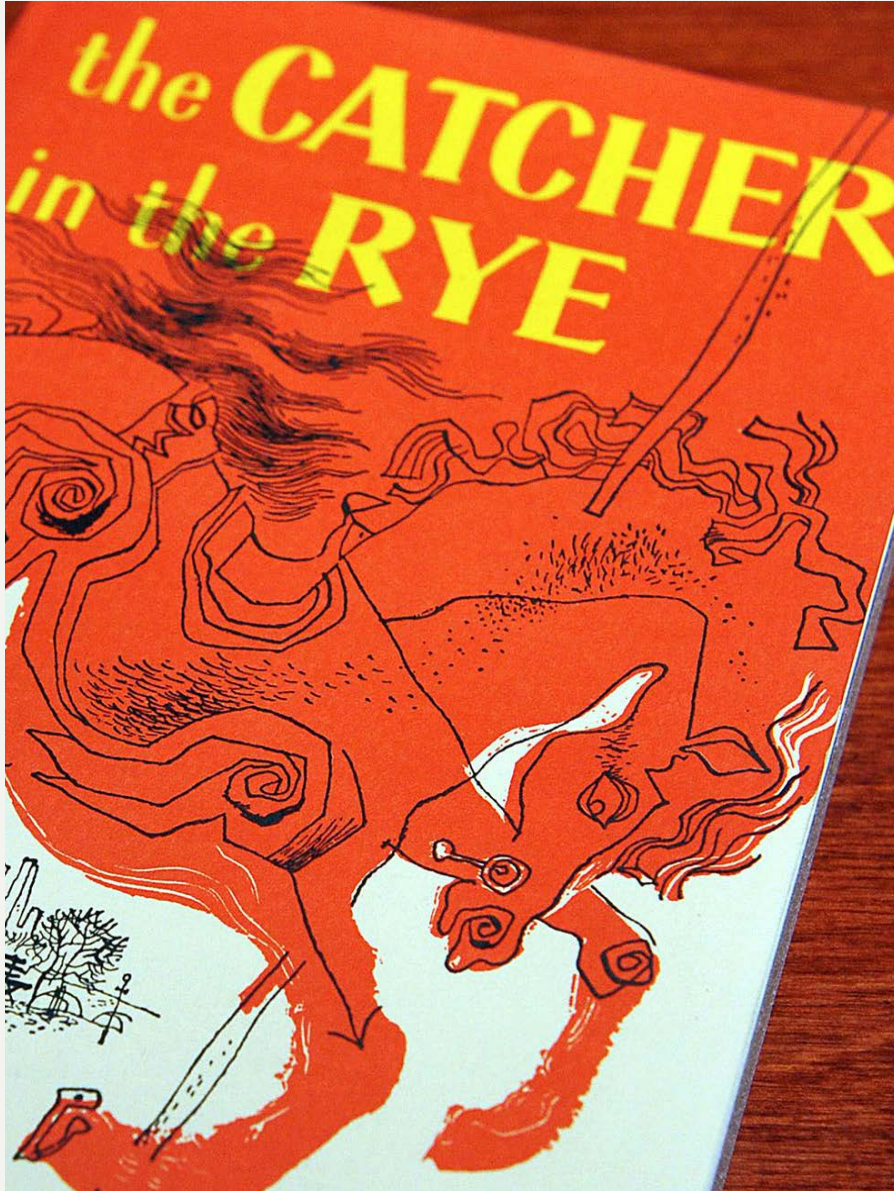
Atonement – Ian McEwan (2001)

McEwan made the Booker prize shortlist with this metafictional masterpiece about an English upper-class family scarred by gully secrets and youthful mistakes.

12

War and Peace – Leo Tolstoy (1869)

Widely regarded as Tolstoy's magnum opus, this mammoth literary saga chronicles the impact of the Napoleonic era on Tsarist Russia.



11

The Catcher in the Rye – JD Salinger (1951)

Salinger's acutely observed rites-of-passage novel turned protagonist Holden Caulfield into an evergreen anti-hero poster boy for rebellious teens and would-be assassins.

10

Lord of the Flies – William Golding (1954)

Future Nobel prize-winner Golding's debut novel chronicles the antics of a group of pre-adolescent boys stranded on an isolated island in the Pacific Ocean in the middle of a non-specific world war. Liberated from adult supervision, these callow castaways soon descend into feral savagery. An evergreen allegory for the eternal conflict between anarchy and civil society, *Lord of the Flies* still feels chillingly relevant.

09

Never Let Me Go – Kazuo Ishiguro (2005)

The young protagonists at the heart of Ishiguro's beautifully composed mystery novel appear to be orphaned children living in an ostensibly normal but mildly sinister boarding school. With its increasingly grim plot revelations, *Never Let Me Go* combines dystopian thriller elements with a complex, tender, heartbreaking love story.

08**White Teeth - Zadie Smith (2000)**

Smith became a literary sensation at just 24 with this dazzling debut novel, a multiple award-winning best-seller that follows the intertwined lives of Samad Iqbal and Archie Jones, British imperial subjects who meet when they serve together in WWII, then raise their families in London. Musing on assimilation and ancestral roots, racism and patriotism, *White Teeth* is a lively, bustling, nuanced love letter to multicultural Britain.



07**L'Etranger - Albert Camus (1942)**

A concise study in alienation that still feels strikingly modern almost 80 years later, Albert Camus' 1942 debut novel revolves around an emotionally detached young man. At first unmoved by his own mother's death, he then refuses to show remorse for casually killing an unnamed man during a beach dispute. A quietly unsettling, accusing book, but still highly compelling.

05**Beloved - Toni Morrison (1987)**

Inspired by the tragic true story of Margaret Garner, a slave who attempted to escape by crossing the Ohio River in 1856, Morrison's magic-infused historical novel follows its fictionalised heroine Sethe from her pre-Civil War slavery days to her eventual free life in Cincinnati in 1873, where the memories of her traumatic experiences continue to haunt her. Published to huge acclaim in 1987, *Beloved* was adapted into a film starring Oprah Winfrey in 1998.

03**Crime and Punishment – Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866)**

A desperate young man is driven to murderous extremes in Dostoevsky's feverish philosophical novel, written following his return from a decade in Siberian exile. In late 19th century Saint Petersburg, penniless ex-student Raskolnikov needs money fast, and is prepared to kill to get it. But his crimes come with a steep price, his soul torn between damnation and redemption.

06**The Great Gatsby – F Scott Fitzgerald (1925)**

An elegantly compact volume packed with big ideas about class, sex and double lives, Fitzgerald's most feted novel still holds a special place in American folk memory. Set in swanky Long Island during the summer of 1922 and told in memoir form by its callow narrator Nick Carraway, the story focuses on the charismatic Jay Gatsby, a wealthy playboy with a shadowy past.

04**The Grapes of Wrath – John Steinbeck (1939)**

Steinbeck's Pulitzer Prize-winning dustbowl saga, set in America during the Great Depression, humanely chronicles the struggles of an anguished tenant farmer family driven out of Oklahoma to seek work in California. Following publication, the book was banned in several US states and denounced as "communist propaganda" by some California farmers. Even so, it swiftly became an enduring best-seller and strong candidate for the Great American Novel.

02**Nineteen Eighty-Four - George Orwell (1949)**

Orwell's seminal dystopian allegory held up a dark mirror to Stalinist Russia, but it remains a cautionary tale about totalitarian repression in any form. Britain has become a province of the Oceania superstate led by the despotic Big Brother and controlled by the Thought Police. When intellectual dissident Winston Smith tries to fight back, he is confronted with his worst fears. A sharply observed, evergreen warning from history.

01**Wuthering Heights - Emily Brontë (1847)**

Initially published by Brontë under the male pseudonym Ellis Bell, this highly charged saga of doomed love, obsessive jealousy, bitter betrayal and pan-generational revenge set against the rugged Yorkshire Moors gave the English Victorian novel its most charismatic anti-hero. The arrogant, wounded foundling Heathcliff would become a brooding sex symbol and archetype for future generations of gothic bad boys behaving badly.

