

T

ime Critics

Lev Grossman and
Richard Lacayo pick the
100 best English-language
novels from 1923
to the present

[Read the Complete List »](#)

About the List

» Managing Editor James Kelly talks about the

list and shares his John Le Carre favorite

(which didn't make

the cut).

» Richard Lacayo lays bare the process (and

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100 novels.

Reader's Choice

1:

2: *Lolita*

3: *A Passage to India*

4: *A Death in the Family*

5: *Ubik*

[See the full list »](#)

The Complete List

In Alphabetical Order

[PRINT](#)

A - B

• [The Adventures of Augie March](#)

Saul Bellow

• [All the King's Men](#)

Robert Penn Warren

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• [American Pastoral](#)

Philip Roth

[Read the Original Review »](#)

• [An American Tragedy](#)

Theodore Dreiser

• [Animal Farm](#)

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• [Appointment in Samarra](#)

John O'Hara

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• [Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret](#)

Judy Blume

• [The Assistant](#)

Bernard Malamud

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• [At Swim-Two-Birds](#)

Flann O'Brien

L - N

• [Light in August](#)

William Faulkner

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• [The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe](#)

C.S. Lewis

• [Lolita](#)

Vladimir Nabokov

[Read the Original Review »](#)

• [Lord of the Flies](#)

William Golding

• [The Lord of the Rings](#)

J.R.R. Tolkien

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• [Loving](#)

Henry Green

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• [Lucky Jim](#)

Kingsley Amis

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• [The Man Who Loved Children](#)

Christina Stead

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• [Midnight's Children](#)

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—Susan Sayfan; Longwood, Fla.

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Ernest Hemingway
"Make no mistake, Ernest Hemingway is somebody; a new, honest, un-'literary' transcriber of life...."
Writer 1/18/26

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• Atonement

Ian McEwan

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• Beloved

Toni Morrison

[Read the Original Review »](#)

• The Berlin Stories

Christopher Isherwood

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Raymond Chandler

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• The Blind Assassin

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• Blood Meridian

Cormac McCarthy

• Brideshead Revisited

Evelyn Waugh

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• The Bridge of San Luis Rey

Thornton Wilder

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C - D

• Call It Sleep

Henry Roth

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• Catch-22

Salman Rushdie

• Money

Martin Amis

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• The Moviegoer

Walker Percy

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• Mrs. Dalloway

Virginia Woolf

• Naked Lunch

William Burroughs

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• Native Son

Richard Wright

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• Neuromancer

William Gibson

• Never Let Me Go

Kazuo Ishiguro

[Read the Original Review »](#)

• 1984

George Orwell

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O - R

• On the Road

Jack Kerouac

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• One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Ken Kesey

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Schickel offer their list of 100 great films

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Joseph Heller

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• **The Catcher in the Rye**

J.D. Salinger

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• **A Clockwork Orange**

Anthony Burgess

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• **The Confessions of Nat Turner**

William Styron

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• **The Corrections**

Jonathan Franzen

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• **The Crying of Lot 49**

Thomas Pynchon

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• **A Dance to the Music of Time**

Anthony Powell

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• **The Day of the Locust**

Nathanael West

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• **Death Comes for the Archbishop**

Willa Cather

• **A Death in the Family**

James Agee

• **The Death of the Heart**

Elizabeth Bowen

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• **The Painted Bird**

Jerzy Kosinski

• **Pale Fire**

Vladimir Nabokov

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• **A Passage to India**

E.M. Forster

• **Play It As It Lays**

Joan Didion

• **Portnoy's Complaint**

Philip Roth

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• **Possession**

A.S. Byatt

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• **The Power and the Glory**

Graham Greene

• **The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie**

Muriel Spark

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• **Rabbit, Run**

John Updike

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• **Ragtime**

E.L. Doctorow

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• **The Recognitions**

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- **Deliverance**

James Dickey

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- **Dog Soldiers**

Robert Stone

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F - G

- **Falconer**

John Cheever

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- **The French Lieutenant's Woman**

John Fowles

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- **The Golden Notebook**

Doris Lessing

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- **Go Tell it on the Mountain**

James Baldwin

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- **Gone With the Wind**

Margaret Mitchell

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- **The Grapes of Wrath**

John Steinbeck

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- **Gravity's Rainbow**

Thomas Pynchon

William Gaddis

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- **Red Harvest**

Dashiell Hammett

- **Revolutionary Road**

Richard Yates

S - T

- **The Sheltering Sky**

Paul Bowles

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- **Slaughterhouse-Five**

Kurt Vonnegut

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- **Snow Crash**

Neal Stephenson

- **The Sot-Weed Factor**

John Barth

- **The Sound and the Fury**

William Faulkner

- **The Sportswriter**

Richard Ford

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- **The Spy Who Came in From the Cold**

John le Carre

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- **The Sun Also Rises**

Ernest Hemingway

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- **Their Eyes Were Watching God**

[Read the Original Review »](#)

- **The Great Gatsby**

F. Scott Fitzgerald

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H - I

- **A Handful of Dust**

Evelyn Waugh

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- **The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter**

Carson McCullers

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- **The Heart of the Matter**

Graham Greene

- **Herzog**

Saul Bellow

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- **Housekeeping**

Marilynne Robinson

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- **A House for Mr. Biswas**

V.S. Naipaul

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- **I, Claudius**

Robert Graves

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- **Infinite Jest**

David Foster Wallace

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Zora Neale Hurston

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- **Things Fall Apart**

Chinua Achebe

- **To Kill a Mockingbird**

Harper Lee

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- **To the Lighthouse**

Virginia Woolf

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- **Tropic of Cancer**

Henry Miller

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U - W

- **Ubik**

Philip K. Dick

- **Under the Net**

Iris Murdoch

- **Under the Volcano**

Malcolm Lowry

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- **Watchmen**

Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons

- **White Noise**

Don DeLillo

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- **White Teeth**

Zadie Smith

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- **Invisible Man**

Ralph Ellison

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- **Wide Sargasso Sea**

Jean Rhys

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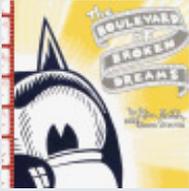
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- **The Adventures of Augie March** (1953)
Saul Bellow
- **All the King's Men** (1946)
Robert Penn Warren
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Salman Rushdie
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Martin Amis
- **The Moviegoer** (1961)
Walker Percy
- **Mrs. Dalloway** (1925)
Virginia Woolf
- **Naked Lunch** (1959)
William Burroughs
- **Native Son** (1940)
Richard Wright
- **Neuromancer** (1984)
William Gibson
- **Never Let Me Go** (2005)
Kazuo Ishiguro
- **1984** (1948)
George Orwell
- **On the Road** (1957)
Jack Kerouac
- **One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest** (1962)
Ken Kesey
- **The Painted Bird** (1965)
Jerzy Kosinski

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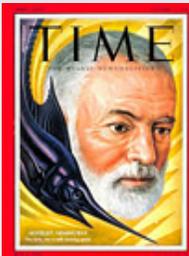
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Raymond Chandler

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Readers Top Rated

Your rankings of our ALL-TIME best novels

RATING	TITLE
5	Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret
5	The Adventures of Augie March
5	Invisible Man
5	A Death in the Family
5	Lolita
5	Blood Meridian
5	A Passage to India
5	The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe
5	A Clockwork Orange
5	Beloved
5	At Swim-Two-Birds
5	Ubik
5	Watchmen
5	Appointment in Samarra
5	Money
5	Gone With the Wind
5	Under the Volcano
5	Gravity's Rainbow
4.57	The Catcher in the Rye
4.17	1984
4	To Kill a Mockingbird
4	Rabbit, Run
4	The Sound and the Fury
4	The Sheltering Sky
4	Housekeeping

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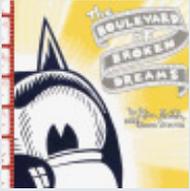
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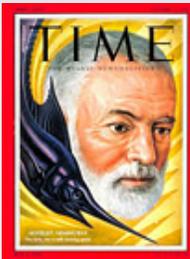
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All-TIME Graphic Novels

"Graphic novel" is a vague moniker that gets applied to any extended form of comics, including non-fiction and short story collections. But here, at least, the term fits. Following the rules of the All TIME 100 books — focusing exclusively on book-length fictional stories originally written in English — here are the All TIME top ten graphic novels, in alphabetical order by title.

— Andrew D. Arnold



Berlin: City of Stones by Jason Lutes

(Drawn & Quarterly; 2000)

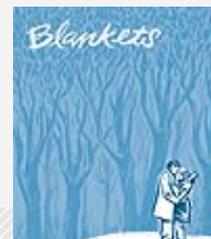
Part of an incredibly ambitious, years-in-the-making project, this is just the first

volume of a series of novels that will all take place during the combustible Weimar era of the titular city. Drawn with clean lines and an attention to architectural detail that pays homage to such European comics as Hergé's "Tintin," *City of Stones* follows a young woman art student who starts an affair with a weary leftist journalist against a background of boiling politics and decadence. Filled with rich characters and period detail, even if the follow-up books never come, it will still be one of the premier works of historical fiction in the medium.

Blankets by Craig Thompson (Top Shelf;

2003)

This semi-autobiographical novel set in the



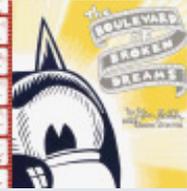
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snowy hinterlands of Wisconsin tells the

story of a lonely, artistic young man who

struggles with his fundamentalist Christian upbringing when he

falls in love. Fluidly told over 582 pages, *Blankets* magically

recreates the high emotional stakes of adolescence. Thompson

has set new bars for the medium not just in length, but breadth.

[TIME.comix: Curl up with a Great Book](#)



Bone by Jeff Smith (Cartoon Books; 2004)

A series of black-and-white comics about
three odd-looking creatures lost in a valley
of dragons, talking bugs and rat creatures
published over twelve years are collected

here as a 1,300-page soft cover. *Bone* combines the humor and

look of early Disney movies with the scope of the *Lord of the*

Rings cycle. Smith draws characters that are both cute and scary,

infusing every panel with dynamic energy. The best all-ages novel

yet published in this medium, while children will read *Bone* for its

breathless adventure and sight gags, older kids and adults will

appreciate the themes of blind fanaticism and corrupting power.

[TIME.comix: No Bones About It](#)

The Boulevard of Broken Dreams by

Kim Deitch (Pantheon; 2002) Deitch, an

overlooked veteran of the 1960s

"underground" comix movement, finally

got his due with this trade-published

novel. It follows the career of Ted Mishkin, a brilliant animator of

the 1930s driven to madness by a (possibly imaginary)



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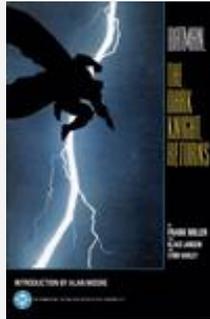
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malevolent, bipedal cat named Waldo. Using a charming drawing style reminiscent of 1930s cartoons Deitch explores the nature of reality, the mystery of inspiration, the exploitation of pop culture and the redemptive power of art.

[TIME.comix: The Transgressive Comix of Kim Deitch](#)



The Dark Knight Returns by Frank Miller

(DC Comics; 1986)

One of the best-selling graphic novels of all time, this black comedy version of

Batman's latter days masterfully combines

satire with superhero antics without betraying it's central

character's core of danger. Along with Alan Moore & Dave

Gibbon's *Watchmen*, it redefined the concept of "superhero," and

helped spark the first wave of "serious" interest in comics.

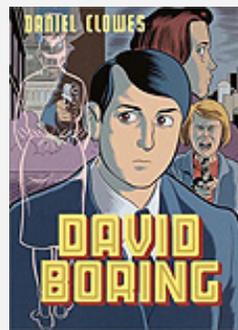
David Boring by Daniel Clowes

(Pantheon; 2000)

Although best known for his book *Ghost*

World, thanks to the movie version,

Dan Clowes' *David Boring*, about a guy



in search of a woman while the world may be ending, marked his

first truly novelistic approach to graphical storytelling. Peerless in

his ability to create offbeat characters and write sardonic humor,

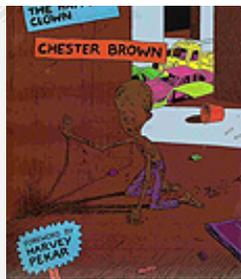
Clowes has lately gotten more experimental in his form, but *David*

Boring remains his most readable and unified book.

[TIME Magazine: Boring's Exciting Ride](#)



Ed the Happy Clown by Chester



Brown (Vortex; 1989)

Brown, who has sustained a career as one of comicdom's maverick creators, first became known with this

fantastically funny, violent and absurd

debut novel, a bizarre farce that includes Martians, vampires,

Ronald Reagan and a doleful, miserable protagonist named Ed

the Happy Clown. Montreal's Drawn & Quarterly has just begun

re-publishing the chapters as individual comics with new covers.

[TIME.comix: The Weird World of Chester Brown](#)

Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid

on Earth by Chris Ware (Pantheon;

2000)



The most perfect novel yet seen in this format, Ware innovates in

form and in content to create a uniquely American story, both

tragic and gut-splittingly funny. Neither smart nor a kid, Jimmy

reunites with his long-lost dad, finds him a great disappointment,

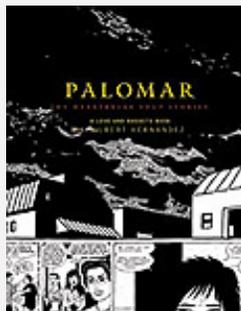
and discovers an African-American sister he never knew about.

Confronting race, history, and family this book proved

incontrovertibly that the form could be as deep and complex as

any prose novel.

[TIME Magazine: Right Way, Corrigan](#)



Palomar: The Heartbreak Soup

Stories by Gilbert Hernandez

(Fantagraphics Books; 2003)

A kind of über graphic novel that

collects a series of smaller graphic

novels all situated in a small town "somewhere south of the U.S. border," this giant tome by a seminal comic artist will likely be the author's magnum opus. Part of the creative team behind the deeply influential "Love and Rockets" comic book series (along with his equally talented brother Jaime) Gilbert has created a pan-American epic that spans multiple generations of a family run almost exclusively by women. Hernandez' *Palomar* combines the look of Archie comics with Faulkner's richness of character and place into the melodramatic sweep of a sexy soap opera to create one of the most remarkable works of any narrative art.

[TIME Magazine: Graphic Sketches of Latino Life](#)

Watchmen written by Alan Moore /

drawn by Dave Gibbons (DC Comics; 1986)

Moore, who has become one of the most successful graphic novelists of the



age (*From Hell*; *League of*

Extraordinary Gentlemen), first broke out with this, his

deconstruction of the superhero. Working with U.K. compatriot

Gibbons, Moore created a complex murder mystery with intense,

unforgettable characters that explored the themes of absolute

power, love and the medium of comic books. It is the only graphic

novel to also be included in the [All-TIME 100 Novels](#) list.

Andrew Arnold writes the [TIME.comix](#) column, covering the world

of graphic literature. For more graphic novel recommendations,

see [A Graphic Literature Library: 25 books from 25 years for](#)

smart, sophisticated readers. Thoughts about this list? Write to

Andrew Arnold at timecomix@timeinc.com.

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- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

[See the full list »](#)

Tell us your thoughts about TIME's ALL-TIME 100 Novels

This week, TIME presents the [All-TIME 100 novels](#), our list of the 100 best English-language novels published since the magazine began. What do you think we should have left off the list— and what would you add instead? Our critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo will answer questions in this space for the next week:

Some of Your Responses:

You guys got about 30 right. You need to rework this list, fast.

Nomi

Laytonsville, MD

We are so blessed to have too many REALLY GREAT books from which to choose, that a list of 100 could never begin to incorporate a fraction of them. But I must say, if you are going to narrow it to 100, *Ender's Game*, *Dune* and *The Wheel of Time* should be in there. Oh and Amy Tan's *y Luck Club*!!! I could go on and on.

Alison Moore

Bixby, OK

A nice list. There is no way to please everybody, of course - there

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are too many competing standards for how to judge a book as
one of the greatest of the past 80+ years. That being said, I would
have chosen *The Long Goodbye* over *The Big Sleep* as
Chandler's contribution. *The Big Sleep* is a great novel, but *The
Long Goodbye* is Chandler at his most mature, transcending the
detective genre and becoming a thriller with the emotional depth
to compare to any novel from any genre.

Michael Ferges

Phoenix, AZ

The list seems to be too American male-centric. A female view
could have included *Birth of Venus* by Sarah Dunant, *Five
Quarters of the Orange* by Joanne Harris, *Anna's Book* by
Barbara Vine, *The Secret History* by Donna Tartt. Glad at least
Possession and *The Blind Assassin* were included.

Maria

Manila, Philippines

What about *Lonesome Dove*? Several McMurtry novels are
worthy of the list, but *Lonsome Dove* is a masterpiece. In it,
McMurtry creates timeless, larger-than-life characters who wrestle
with issues of honor, personal sacrifice & selflessness.

David Young

Benbrook, TX

As with any list, you can never satisfy everyone. Picking the top
100 books is very challenging, do you pick the most socially
influential books, the most popular, etc. The criteria used is so
interpretive. My list would include books that influence young

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readers to read more. While *Harry Potter*, *Series Of Unfortunate Events*, etc. are not necessarily great literary works like a *War and Peace*, they do have significant influence on getting young readers to read more. And this is what writing is all about, getting people to read more and think about what they have read.

Al Bischoff

Highland, MD

You were right! *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* is the better John Le Carre novel! And *East of Eden* should replace *The Grapes of Wrath* too. But I can't believe you left off *The Bonfire of the Vanities* Tom Wolfe and *Accidental Tourist*. Ann Tyler is one of my favorite authors.

Monica Bouweraerts

Camarillo, CA

What about Anita Diamants *The Red Tent*? A female opinion is definitely missing.

Candy

Milwaukee, WI

I'm sure it took a lot of work to come up with this, but leaving out Paul Auster is a MAJOR mistake. He should be there at least twice.

Rosa Kruger

New York, NY

You missed *The English Patient*. What an oversight! Also, you can tell that this list was compiled by two men; women would

have selected a somewhat different list, I think. .

Beth Creveling

Perkasie, PA

Thank you for not including any *Harry Potter*. I would have lost all respect for TIME magazine if that had been included (they are okay books, they're just nowhere near list worthy). The list, however, seems to be missing *Dune*, and anything from Asimov, Bradbury, and HP Lovecraft. These are serious errors of judgement.

Matthew

Tacoma, WA

One of my 5 favorites that didn't make the list: *THE PRINCE OF TIDES* by Pat Conroy. He is one of the few writers who can pull you right into the characters he writes about and make you feel that you're involved in what happens to them.

Marsha Striesfeld

Marietta, Georgia

Thank you so much for including *Watchmen* on your list. It truly is an important work in English literature, and basically allowed graphic novels and comic books to take off into the millions of different directions that they have today. Do not be surprised if Alan Moore is the first graphic novelist to win a Nobel Prize.

Alexa Dickman

Newton, MA

WHY ISN'T THE *HARRY POTTER* SERIES ON THERE!?? IT

DEFINITELY SHOULD BE ON THERE!!

Robin

Seattle, WA

I think you've done a very fine job here. I appreciate the attention paid to "niche" genres (Sci-fi, childrens lit, graphic novels), and while I have some personal favorites that didn't make the list; *Watership Down*. I think you've captured a great cross-section of the art of the novel over the past 100 years or so.

Dave Provost

Cape Cod, MA

Where is Ayn Rand and John Irving? I checked your list twice, I can't believe you did not list either author. Not to be sexist, perhaps you need a female opinion.

Susan Sayfan

Longwood, FL

I was disappointed that the *Kite Runner* was left off your list. I found it to be truly thought provoking and have recommended it to all my friends. I was glad to see my favorite book, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, on your list.

Mary Ann Doerr

Dansville, NY

Great list except for one - how did *Possession* get on there? That book was awful. It was slow, boring, and too long. I had to struggle to get to the end.

Sara

Johnson City, NY

Red Harvest may be a seminal novel of the genre, but that shouldn't qualify it as listworthy. Your list should have either of Harriet Arnow's two great novels and I'd vote for *Hunter's Horn*. Annie Dillard's *The Living* should be there and at least one of Thomas Harris' thrillers, *Black Sunday* or *Silence of the Lambs*, representing the best of the thriller genre.

Dave DeInnocentis

Andover, Ma

Where was *A Farewell to Arms*?

John

Sayville, NY

How can we take this list seriously when you left off the great American novel: *Lonesome Dove*? Back to the drawing board for you.

David Scheiderer

Los Gatos, CA

I like the list, as it gives me some nice titles to seek out when I have some spare time next, but I am disquieted by the lack of science fiction titles on it. *Neuromancer* is a fine choice, but there are so many fine titles in the genre, *Enders Game*, *Foundation*, and *Dune*, just to name a few.

Kenneth Alford

San Antonio, Texas

Why did you not include one horror novel on that list? Certainly

Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* or Stephen King's *The Shining*

deserve a spot if *Snow Crash* deserved one???

Andrew

Tampa, FL

John Irving's books are among my favorite novels. *The World According to Garp* and *A Prayer for Owen Meany* are masterful stories and I am a better person for having read them. I also find Richard Adams' book, *Watership Down* one that I can never forget. I read the book first in 1979, and think about Hazel and Bigwig everytime I see a wild rabbit.

William Cannon

Coffeeville, AL

It's wonderful that you chose *Are You There God? It's me, Margaret* to include in your list. It was a wonderful book for just the right time in a young girl's life. Every girl I knew read it. And I think parents were happy that kids were able to get true, accurate information - without their own embarrassment.

Maria

Albany, New York

One title comes to mind when I am asked what is the greatest book ever written: *The Fountainhead*, by Ayn Rand. It celebrates individuality in the face of societal pressures to constantly conform and comply. Not only is it a great book, but the philosophy running through this novel is one that should be brought forth in schools around the world.

Dina Evanson

Syosset NY

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How We Picked the List

By Richard Lacayo

Welcome to the massive, anguished, exalted undertaking that is the ALL TIME 100 books list. The parameters: English language novels published anywhere in the world since 1923, the year that TIME Magazine began, which, before you ask, means that *Ulysses* (1922) doesn't make the cut. In May, Time.com posted a similar list, of 100 movies picked by our film critics, Richard Corliss and Richard Schickel. This one is chosen by me, Richard Lacayo, and my colleague Lev Grossman, whom we sometimes cite as proof that you don't need to be named Richard to be hired as a critic at TIME, though apparently it helps. Just ask our theater critic, Richard Zoglin.

For the books project, Grossman and I each began by drawing up inventories of our nominees. Once we traded notes, it turned out that more than 80 of our separately chosen titles matched. (Even some of the less well-known ones, like *At-Swim Two Birds*.) We decided then that we would more or less divide the remaining slots between us. That would allow each of us to include books that the other might not have chosen. Or might not even have read. (*Ubik*? What's an *Ubik*?) And that would extend the list into places where mere agreement wouldn't take it.

Even so, there are many titles we couldn't fit here that we're still anguishing over. Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* dropped in and out. Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* hovered for a while at the edges. There were writers we had to admit we love more for their short stories than their novels—Donald Barthelme, Annie Proulx, Flannery O'Connor, Eudora Welty. We could agree that some of Gore Vidal's novels are an essential pleasure, but it's his non-fiction that's essential period. Then there was the intellectual massif of Norman Mailer, indisputably one of the great writers of our time, but his supreme achievements are his headlong reconfigurations of the whole idea of non-fiction, books like *Armies of the Night* and *The Executioner's Song*. Dawn Powell, Mordechai Richler, Thomas Wolfe, Peter Carey, J.F. Powers, Mary McCarthy, Edmund White, Larry McMurtry, Katherine Ann Porter, Amy Tan, John Dos Passos, Oscar Hijuelos—we looked over our bookcases and many more than 100 names laid down a claim. This

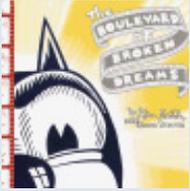
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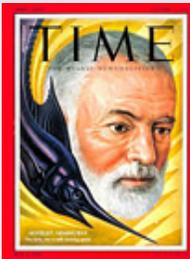
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means you, Stephen King.

This project, which got underway in January, was not just a reading effort. It was a re-reading effort. It meant revisiting a lot of novels both of us had not looked into for some time. A few titles that seemed indispensable some years ago turned out on a second tasting to be, well, dispensable. More common was the experience I had with Saul Bellow's *Herzog*, about a man coming to terms with the disappointments of midlife by directing his questions everywhere. It was one of the first adult novels I attempted in late adolescence. It left its treadmarks on me even then, but this time his experienced heart spoke to me differently.

There were also first time discoveries. Having heard for years that Richard Yates' *Revolutionary Road* was one of the great but underappreciated American novels, I searched it out. I have spent the months since then pressing it into the hands of anybody who will take it, including yours. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston's great story of a black woman surviving whatever God and man throws at her, was not part of the required reading list when I was in school. It is now part of my personal canon. Henry Green? Hadn't read Henry Green. Finally read *Loving*. Loved it.

Lists like this one have two purposes. One is to instruct. The other of course is to enrage. We're bracing ourselves for the e-mails that start out: "You moron! You pathetic bourgeoisie insect! How could you have left off...(insert title here)." We say *Mrs. Dalloway*. You say *Mrs. Bridge*. We say *Naked Lunch*. You say *Breakfast at Tiffanys*. Let's call the whole thing off? Just the opposite—bring it on. Sometimes judgment is best formed under fire. But please, no e-mails about *Ulysses*. Rules are rules.

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- 4: A Death in the Family
- 5: Ubik

[See the full list »](#)

Lolita (1955)

Author: Vladimir Nabokov

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It had a troubled birth; Nabokov almost burned the manuscript of *Lolita* halfway through and its first publisher was a French pornographic press. But *Lolita* would go on to become a huge best-seller and the unlikeliest of American

classics. Our hero, who goes by the self-mocking name of Humbert Humbert, is a pedophile. He is a highly cultured, endearingly ironic man, and he loathes himself about as much as a human being can, but he loves, and can only love, nubile young girls, whom he calls "nymphets." *Lolita* is the story of Humbert's romance—if that's the word, which it isn't—with a 12-year-old girl named Dolores Haze. Their story is as vile and obscene as one can imagine, but Humbert's voice, an endlessly inventive stream of angry, cosmopolitan invective, elevates it to the level of a tragic, twisted epic.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Unlike Oscar Wilde, who earlier at the same port in America said he had nothing to declare but his genius, Nabokov declared a set of boxing gloves”

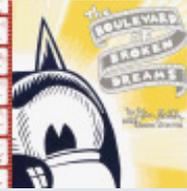
—TIME Magazine, Sept. 1, 1958 ([Read This Review](#))

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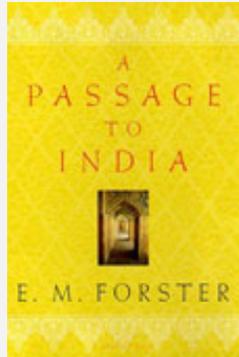
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A Passage to India (1924)

Author: E.M. Forster

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By the time the great Edwardian novelist, in this last and best of his novels published in his lifetime, addressed himself to the British presence in India, his moral sense was more fully equipped than ever. Mindful of the imponderables of human conduct, alert to all the reciprocal misjudgments and the wearying false appraisals we make as a matter of course, he looked at empire and saw its weak foundations. Adela Quested is a British visitor to the Raj who is anxious to know "the real India." On a visit to the Malabar caves an assault of some kind does or does not happen to her, perhaps at the hands of Dr. Aziz, the solicitous Indian Muslim who has arranged the trip. Has she imagined things? Is he not what he seems? In his other great novel, *Howard's End*, Forster directed us to "only connect." What he demonstrates here, in a story of the greatest and saddest subtleties—and comic subtleties, too—is how nearly impossible that is to do.—R.L.

Next: [Play It As It Lays](#) »

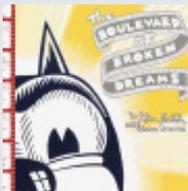
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Time Critics
Lev Grossman and
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novels from 1923
to the present

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- » Managing Editor James Kelly talks about the list and shares his John Le Carre favorite (which didn't make the cut).
- » Richard Lacayo lays bare the process (and the pain) behind stacking up 100 novels.

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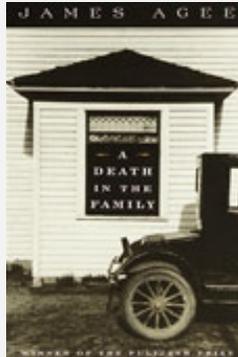
- 1:
- 2: Lolita
- 3: A Passage to India
- 4: A Death in the Family
- 5: Ubik

[See the full list »](#)

A Death in the Family (1958)

Author: James Agee

- [PRINT](#)
- [« Previous | Next »](#)



Agee was a poet, a penetrating film critic for TIME and other magazines, an intricate public conscience, and a man who carried all his life the burden of his father's death in a car accident when Agee was six. (Forty years later to the day Agee would die of a heart attack.) He brought all of that, both his gifts and his psychic injuries, to this grave and lyrical story of Rufus Follet, a boy whose world is upended by his father's sudden death in an auto accident. What this book lacks in form it more than makes up for in subtly delineated feeling. Agee's forgiving embrace of the deeply imperfect people he describes, a kind of Whitmanesque tenderness, stays with you a long time.—R. L.

Next: [The Death of the Heart »](#)

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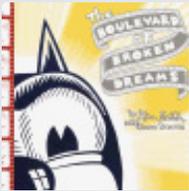
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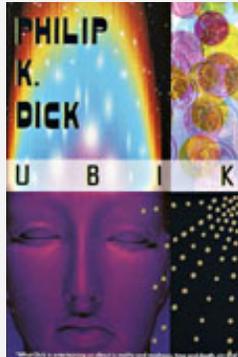
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Ubik (1969)

Author: Philip K. Dick

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An accident has occurred. Joe Chip and his colleagues—all but one of them—have narrowly escaped an explosion at a moon base. Or is it the other way round? Did Joe and the others die, and did the one fatality, Glen

Runciter, actually survive? If Glen is dead and Joe alive, why does Joe keep getting weird messages from Glen? Is Joe's experience of his post-accident life just a hallucination, played out as his flash-frozen body lies in suspended animation? Joe's reality begins to fall apart, and a mysterious, vaguely mystical substance called Ubik—available in a handy spray can—appears to be the only thing that can stabilize it. From the stuff of space opera, Dick spins a deeply unsettling existential horror story, a nightmare you'll never be sure you've woken up from.—L.G.

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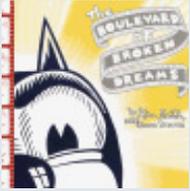
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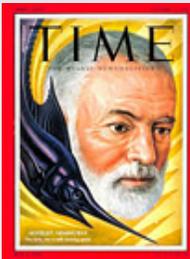
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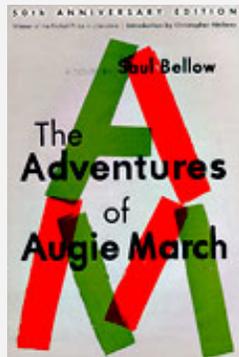
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The Adventures of Augie March (1953)

Author: Saul Bellow

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Augie comes on stage with one of literature's most famous opening lines.

"I am an American, Chicago born, and

go at things as I have taught myself,

free-style, and will make the record in

my own way: first to knock, first

admitted." It's the "Call me Ishmael" of mid-20th-century American

fiction. (For the record, Bellow was born in Canada.) Or it would

be if Ishmael had been more like Tom Jones with a philosophical

disposition. With this teeming book Bellow returned a Dickensian

richness to the American novel. As he makes his way to a full

brimming consciousness of himself, Augie careens through

numberless occupations and countless mentors and exemplars,

all the while enchanting us with the slapdash American music of

his voice.—R.L.

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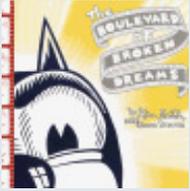
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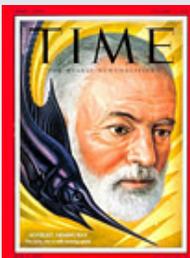
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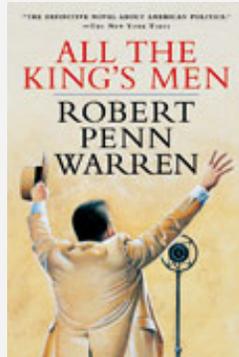
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2: *Lolita*3: *A Passage to India*4: *A Death in the Family*5: *Ubik*[See the full list »](#)

All the King's Men (1946)

Author: Robert Penn Warren

• [PRINT](#)• [« Previous](#) | [Next »](#)

More than just a classic political novel,

Warren's tale of power and corruption in

the Depression-era South is a sustained

meditation on the unforeseen

consequences of every human act, the

vexing connectedness of all people and

the possibility—it's not much of one—of goodness in a sinful

world. Willie Stark, Warren's lightly disguised version of Huey

Long, the onetime Louisiana strongman/governor, begins as a

genuine tribune of the people and ends as a murderous populist

demagogue. Jack Burden is his press agent, who carries out the

boss's orders, first without objection, then in the face of his own

increasingly troubled conscience. And the politics? For Warren,

that's simply the arena most likely to prove that man is a fallen

creature. Which it does.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“In all his writing, even at its slickest, there is a sense of doom and blood on the moon that Warren has gradually shifted into

religious terms”

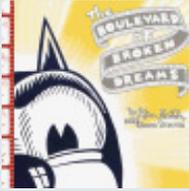
—TIME Magazine, Aug. 26, 1946 ([Read This Review](#))

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American Pastoral (1997)

Author: Philip Roth

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AMERICAN
PASTORAL

PHILIP ROTH

To decipher the late 1960's through the story of Swede Levov, whose life is cast into the fires of those years, Roth calls again upon the saturnine side of his disposition. It answers to the purpose as never before. Good-looking,

prosperous Swede, who has inherited his father's glove factory in Newark, N.J., and married a former beauty queen, is not stupid, merely fulfilled. Is it this that gives him insufficient means to comprehend the Newark riots of 1967 or the transformation of his beloved daughter into a venomous teenage radical, a child capable of cold-blooded terrorism? Roth's own means are more than sufficient. A writer who is unafraid to linger in the minds of furious men, he leads us fearlessly through this man's grief, bewilderment and rage.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“You will search the shelf of contemporary fiction long and hard to find a parental nightmare projected with the emotional force and verbal energy that Roth brings”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 28, 1997 ([Read This Review](#))

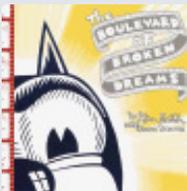
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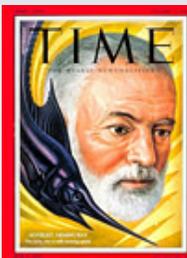
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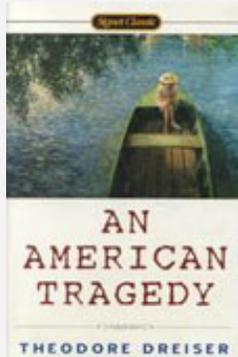
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An American Tragedy (1925)

Author: Theodore Dreiser

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Clyde Griffiths is a young man with ambitions. He's in love with a rich girl, but it's a poor girl he has gotten pregnant, Roberta Alden, who works with him at his uncle's factory. One day he takes Roberta canoeing on a lake with the intention of killing her. From there his fate is sealed. But by then Dreiser has made plain that Clyde's fate was long before sealed by a brutal and cynical society. The usual criticism of Dreiser is that, line for line, he's the weakest of the great American novelists. And it's true that he takes a pipe fitter's approach to writing, joining workmanlike sentences one to the other. But by the end he will have built them into a powerful network, and something vital will be flowing through them.—R.L.

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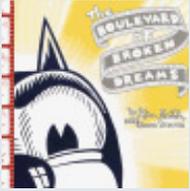
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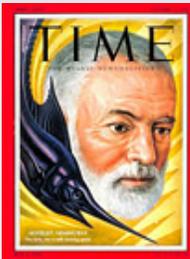
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- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
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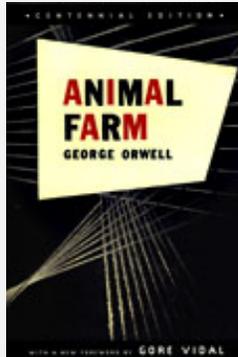
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Animal Farm (1946)

Author: George Orwell

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George Orwell. In *Animal Farm* he

restages the hypocrisies of the Russian Revolution with the

principal figures played by, of all things, farm animals. By

presenting atrocities in the terms of a fairy tale, he makes them

fresh, restoring to readers numbed by the 20th century's parade

of disasters a sense of shock and outrage. Paradoxically, by

turning Trotsky and Lenin and their followers into pigs and horses

and chickens, he reveals them as all too human.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ Britons chuckling at *Animal Farm* are calling its author the most brilliant political satirist since Swift ”

—TIME Magazine, Feb. 4, 1946 ([Read This Review](#))

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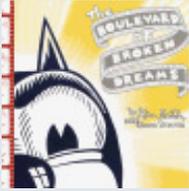
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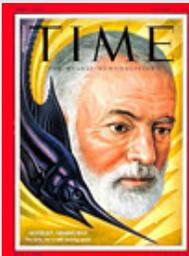
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- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

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Appointment in Samarra (1934)

Author: John O'Hara

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O'Hara did for fictional Gibbssville, Pennsylvania, what Faulkner did for



Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi:

surveyed its social life and drew its

psychic outlines. But he did it in utterly

worldly terms, without Faulkner's taste

for mythic inference or the basso profundo of his prose. Julian

English is a man who squanders what fate gave him. He lives on

the right side of the tracks, with a country club membership and a

wife who loves him. His decline and fall, over the course of just 72

hours around Christmas, is a matter of too much spending, too

much liquor and a couple of reckless gestures. (Now Julian, don't

throw that drink in the well-connected Irishman's face. Don't make

that pass at the gangster's mistress.) That his calamity is petty

and preventable only makes it more powerful. In Faulkner the

tragedies all seem to be taking place on Olympus, even when

they're happening among the lowlifes. In O'Hara they could be

happening to you.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“O'Hara writes with swift realism, wisely avoids sentimentality

—TIME Magazine, Aug. 20, 1934 ([Read This Review](#))

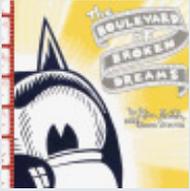
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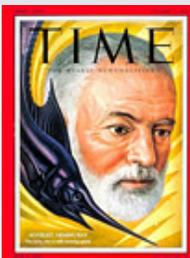
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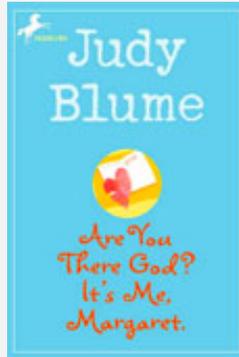
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Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret (1970)

Author: Judy Blume

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You could almost hear the collective generational sigh of relief in 1970 when Blume published this groundbreaking, taboo-trampling young adult novel: finally, a book that talks frankly about sex without being prim or prurient, and about religion without scolding or condescending. A few months shy of her 12th birthday, Margaret Simon is starting school in a new town and asking God some serious questions. Like, when is she going to get her period? What bra should she buy? And if her mom is Jewish and her dad is Christian, is she supposed to join the Y or the Jewish Community Center? Blume turned millions of pre-teens into readers. She did it by asking the right questions—and avoiding pat, easy answers.—L.G.

Next: [The Assistant](#) »

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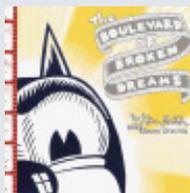
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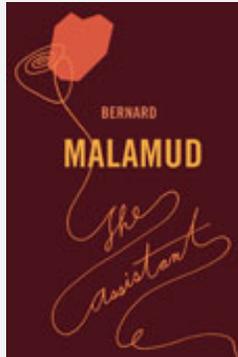
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The Assistant (1957)

Author: Bernard Malamud

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Malamud was a writer who always had one eye fixed on the eternal and one on the here and now. The eternal was the realm of moral quandaries. The here and now was usually a world of struggling 20th-century Jews. It was his genius to show the two constantly intersecting. In this book, his masterpiece, Morris Bober is a woebegone neighborhood grocer whose modest store is failing and whose luck actually takes a turn for the worse when he is held up by masked hoodlums. Or is it worse? When a stranger appears and offers to work without pay, "for the experience", it doesn't take long for the reader to realize that the stranger is one of the men who robbed Bober. But just what are his motives in returning? He seems to be seeking to atone, but he soon begins quietly robbing the till, while also falling in love with Bober's daughter, theft of a different kind. From this intricate material Malamud builds a devastating meditation upon suffering, penance and forgiveness, and the ways in which the weight of the world can be lifted, just a little, by determined acts of grace.— R.L.

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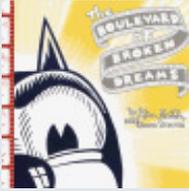
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“ Though Malamud's people have a bad time of it, they are never just helpless victims of life ”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 29, 1957 (Read This Review)

Next: At Swim-Two-Birds »

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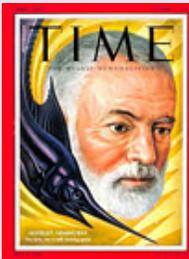
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2: *Lolita*3: *A Passage to India*4: *A Death in the Family*5: *Ubik*[See the full list »](#)**At Swim-Two-Birds (1938)**

Author: Flann O'Brien

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masterpiece. One of the best-kept

secrets of 20th-century literature, *At Swim-Two-Birds* is ostensibly

a novel about a lazy, impoverished college student who's writing a

novel ("One beginning and one ending for a book is a thing I did

not agree with," he opines), but his characters won't stay put, and

they get mixed up with all kinds of local Dublin types and figures

out of Gaelic myth—it's like Ulysses played out in a comic mode,

on a more human scale. Dylan Thomas said of it, "This is just the

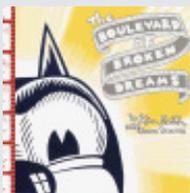
book to give your sister if she's a loud, dirty, boozy girl." Even

better to keep it for yourself.—L.G.

Next: [Atonement](#) »**More From the Archive:**[Great Books for Grown-Ups \(6/10/46\)](#)**Current Issue**[Table of Contents](#)

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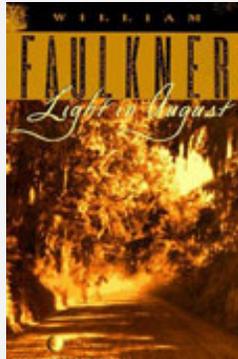
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Light in August (1932)

Author: William Faulkner

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This book, Faulkner's grave meditation on race, violence and all the fraught legacies of the South, is the first in which he confronted head-on the poisons of racism. Joe Christmas believes himself to be of mixed race.

(His parentage is uncertain.) He has escaped from a miserable childhood to the town of Jefferson, Miss., where he unleashes his demons. Lena Grove has come there, too, looking for the father of the child she is carrying while Christmas fulfills his wretched destiny. This book is less daring structurally than *The Sound and the Fury* or *As I Lay Dying*. Though time still folds back on itself, so that events seem to take place in a zone beyond normal chronology, the flashbacks are easier to follow. But the force of Faulkner's genius is in entirely in play.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Faulkner depends on madmen for his best effects. From the vasty deep of nightmares and bogeymen he can summon up ghosts that haunt nurseries and still frighten some grownups”

—TIME Magazine, Oct. 17, 1932 ([Read This Review](#))

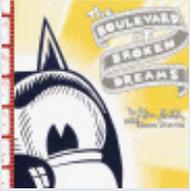
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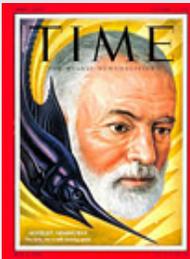
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 novels from 1923
 to the present

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Reader's Choice

- 1:
- 2: *Lolita*
- 3: *A Passage to India*
- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

[See the full list »](#)

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe (1950)

Author: C.S. Lewis

- PRINT
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Four English children playing hide-and-seek accidentally wander through an enchanted wardrobe and into Narnia, a land locked in a deep magical winter by the spells of an evil witch-queen. Only

the fierce, benevolent lion Aslan (with a little help from the children) can vanquish the tyrant and bring summer back to Narnia and the talking animals who live there. Lewis was a Christian philosopher, and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (and the six more Narnia novels that followed) can be read as Christian morality tales, but they're not just kid stuff: Lewis had a surprisingly sharp eye for the dark shades of the human soul, sin and anger and temptation, and readers of any faith, or none at all, will feel the enormous power of Lewis's irresistible, transporting sense of wonder.—L.G.

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Next: *Lolita* »

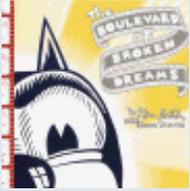
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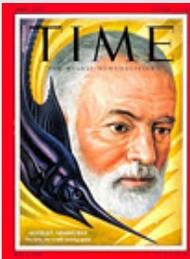
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2: *Lolita*3: *A Passage to India*4: *A Death in the Family*5: *Ubik*[See the full list »](#)**Lord of the Flies (1955)**

Author: William Golding

• [PRINT](#)• [« Previous](#) | [Next »](#)

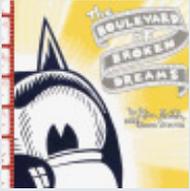
The premise: A planeload of young boys is marooned on a nameless tropical island and they are forced to fend for themselves. If this novel had been written in the 19th century it would have been about the cheery, whimsical

never-neverland the boys created. But in Golding's version, the veneer of childish purity wears away quickly in the absence of adults, and the boys become two warring tribes, one under the saintly Ralph and his asthmatic sidekick Piggy, one under the savage ex-choir-leader Jack. Golding tracks the fall of this new Eden with pitiless, meticulous care and total psychological clarity, and in the process he ruthlessly strips away the myths and cliches of childhood innocence forever.—L.G.

Next: [The Lord of the Rings](#) »**More From the Archive:**[Great Books for Grown-Ups \(6/10/46\)](#)[Dirty Book of the Month \(4/22/66\)](#)**Current Issue**[Table of Contents](#)

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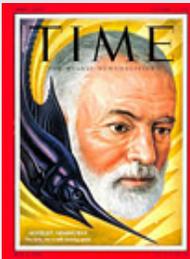
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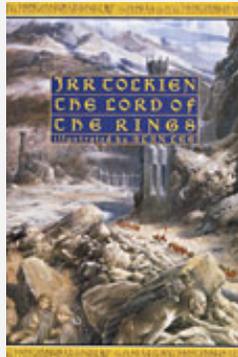
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The Lord of the Rings (1954)

Author: J.R.R. Tolkien

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When a tweedy, Catholic, pipe-smoking Oxford professor named John Ronald Reuel Tolkien sat down to write a novel, who could have anticipated that his volcanic imagination would give rise to an entire continent, populated by elves,

dwarves, orcs, wizards and ambulatory trees? Tolkien drew on his deep knowledge of ancient languages and mythology, and his agonizing memories of the Somme, to create a 20th-century fable of magic and heroism, misty mountains and mystical forests, goodness and temptation, wherein a tiny gnomelike hobbit, Frodo, goes on a quest to destroy the One Ring, a malevolent artifact that could be the downfall of all of Middle Earth. The founding text of modern fantasy literature, *The Lord of the Rings* also carries with it a profound, melancholy nostalgia for the innocent pre-industrial England that was lost forever in the muddy trenches of World War I.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ This year, the unquestioned literary god on college campuses is a three-foot-high creature with long curly hair on his feet and the improbable name of Frodo Baggins ”

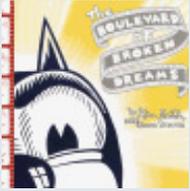
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—TIME Magazine, Jul. 15, 1966 (Read This Review)

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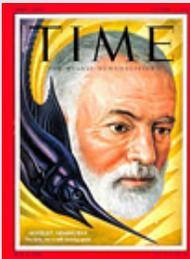
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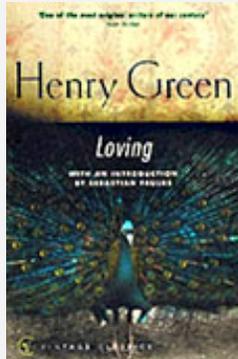
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Loving (1945)

Author: Henry Green

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Green remains a dim figure for many Americans. He stopped writing in 1952, at age 47, with just nine novels and a memoir behind him. In the last years of his life—he died in 1973—he became a kind of British Thomas Pynchon,

agreeing to be photographed only from behind. But those who knew him often revered him. W. H. Auden called him the finest living English novelist. His real name was Henry Vincent Yorke. The son of a wealthy Birmingham industrialist, he was educated at Eton and Oxford but never completed his degree. He became managing director of the family factory, which made beer-bottling machines. But first he spent a year on the factory floor with the ordinary workers, and his fiction is forever marked by an understanding of the English at all levels of society, something rare in class-bound British literature. *Loving* is a classic upstairs-downstairs story, with the emphasis on downstairs. You see the life of a great Irish country house during World War II through the eyes of its mostly British servants, who make a world of their own during a period when their masters are away. Green's generosity towards even the most scheming and rascally of them offers a

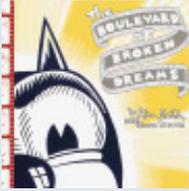
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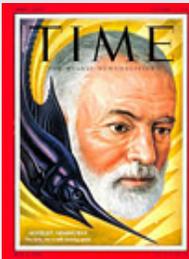
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lesson you never forget.— R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

““ In each of his works Henry Green has tried to investigate a
new condition of life. His special "experiment" is to catch his

variegated Britons in a situation from which they cannot escape

””

—TIME Magazine, Oct. 10, 1949 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: [Lucky Jim](#) »

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Lucky Jim (1954)

Author: Kingsley Amis

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Jim Dixon doesn't feel lucky. He's a junior lecturer at a no-account college in provincial England. His daily life is a litany of hilariously (from our perspective, anyway) petty humiliations at the hands of his superiors—notably the odious, conceited Professor Welch—his students and his co-dependent sort-of-girlfriend Margaret. Jim may be the single bitterest character in all of English literature; Amis certainly crafts the most brutally accurate description of a hangover ever written. A punishingly, viscerally funny attack on hypocrisy and self-importance in all their many and varied forms, *Lucky Jim* gave rise to much of the angry-young-man fiction that followed, but it never met its equal.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“This display of self-serving clownmanship has catapulted his saga through 18 printings and left countless Britons alternately fuming and guffawing”

—TIME Magazine, May. 27, 1957 ([Read This Review](#))

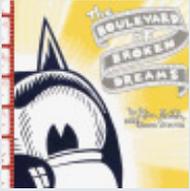
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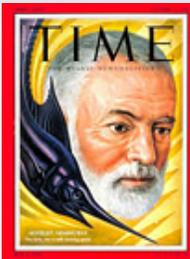
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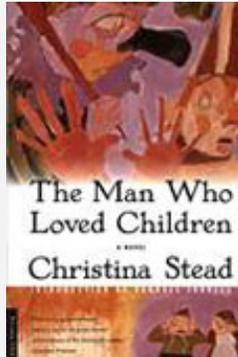
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The Man Who Loved Children (1940)

Author: Christina Stead

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Though it was first published in 1940, it wasn't until a reissue 25 years later that Stead's novel was recognized for the masterpiece it is—the greatest picture ever of the lousiest family of all time.

Sam Pollit is an exhausting monstrosity

of a husband and father, not always cruel, but always self-regarding— "Sam the Bold" is his name for himself—and self-deluding. (He's anything but bold.) His wife Henny, the one he barely speaks to, is nervous, self-pitying and neurotic, the kind of mother who steals from her children's piggy banks, diverts herself with a half-witted boyfriend and devolves into a sniffing hag. Their children, six of them, are appalled witnesses to the spectacle of their parents' collapse and the helpless recipients of their toxic attentions. Stead, an Australian with a wonderful style, both headlong and sturdy, is fearless in her depiction of the Pollits and more compassionate in her judgments than you or I could ever be. When you know how heavily this novel was based upon her own childhood, that compassion seems even more remarkable.—R.L.

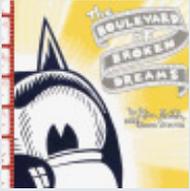
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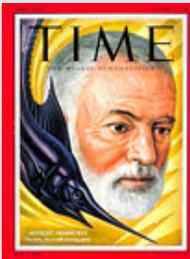
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“*The Man Who Loved Children* is one of the most truthful and
terrifying horror stories ever written about family life”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 2, 1965 ([Read This Review](#))

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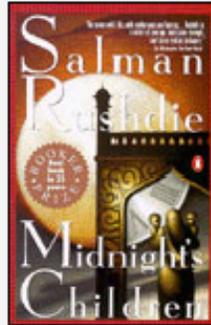
Reader's Choice

- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

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Midnight's Children (1981)

Author: Salman Rushdie

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Rushdie's version of *The Prince and the Pauper* becomes a cartwheeling

parable about the fate of modern India.

At the stroke of midnight on August 15,

1947, the date on which India

proclaimed itself independent from

Great Britain, 1,001 children are born with supernatural powers.

Two are switched at birth, the illegitimate son of a poor Hindu

woman and the offspring of wealthy Muslims. Rushdie follows

them through 30 years of partition, violence and Indira Gandhi's

iron-fisted rule. The personal is the political here with a

vengeance, as history becomes farce, becomes legend becomes

memory becomes history again.— R.L.

Next: [Money](#) »

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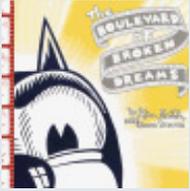
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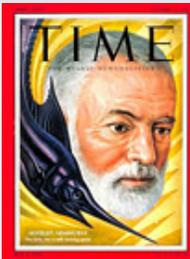
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First book reviewed in TIME:

Black Oxen, written by Gertrude Atherton, great-grandniece of Ben Franklin, was the first book reviewed in TIME. According to the review, the book was about "society, sophisticates, and a highly modernized fountain of youth."

First writer on TIME's cover:

Joseph Conrad appeared on TIME's sixth cover, April 7, 1923. George Bernard Shaw was the second writer to be on TIME's cover. He appeared on the Dec. 24, 1923, issue with the description "Mocking, mordant, misanthropic."

First woman writer on TIME's cover:

Amy Lowell, poet, critic, and Keats biographer.

Writer on the most covers:

Eugene O'Neill was pictured on four TIME covers from 1924 to 1946.

Who was J.F.?

During the first couple of years of TIME, a half-century before TIME used bylines, the initials J.F. appeared at the end of many book reviews. Who was the mysterious J.F.? A Yale classmate of TIME's founders Hery Luce and Briton Hadden, John Farrar was an organizing member of PEN and later began the publishing houses Farrar and Rinehart, and Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Farrar contributed his first-person reviews gratis as a favor to his old friends.

Who reviewed books for TIME?

Because TIME did not use bylines until the early seventies, we can't always be sure about who wrote what. We do know that TIME's early reviewers included Stephen Vincent Benet, John Farrar, Thomas Matthews, Robert Cantwell, Nigel Dennis, John Skow, Max Gissen, Robert Fitzgerald, and Whittaker Chambers (who was responsible for the 1946 review of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.)

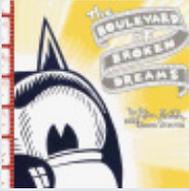
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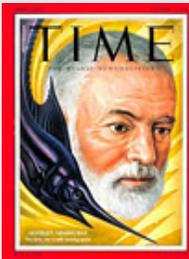
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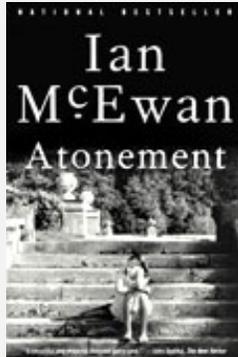
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Atonement (2002)

Author: Ian McEwan

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A magnificent deception. Briony Tallis, the intricate English girl at the center of *Atonement*, is a budding writer. At the age of 13 she believes that through her powers of invention and language, "an unruly world could be made just so." In

a complicated way, she turns out to be right, but only after she turns out to be catastrophically wrong. In the first half of the book, she passionately misunderstands a series of events she witnesses on a summer day in 1935, which leads her to formulate a lie that ruins the lives of her older sister Cecilia and Cecilia's lover Robbie. So much for the virtues of the imagination. But McEwan is crafty. Even as he shows us the deadly force of storytelling, he demonstrates its beguilements on every page. Then he leads us to a surprise ending in which the power of fiction, which has been used to undo lives, is used again to make heartbroken amends.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“It's McEwan's subtle game to show fiction working its worst kind of curse, then leading us unawares to give it our blessing”

—TIME Magazine, Mar. 25, 2002 ([Read This Review](#))

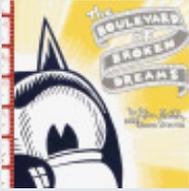
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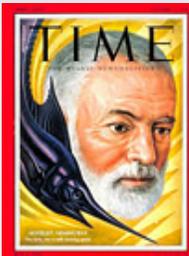
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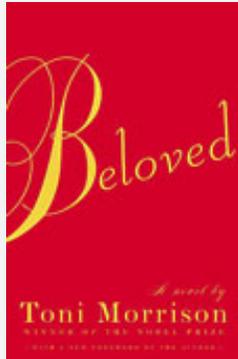
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Beloved (1987)

Author: Toni Morrison

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Sethe is an escaped slave in post-Civil War Ohio. Her body is scarred from the atrocities of her white owners, but it's her memories that really torture her: she killed her 2-year-old daughter, Beloved, so the child would never know the sufferings of a life of servitude. But in Morrison's novels the present is never safe from the past, and Beloved returns as an angry, hungry ghost. Sethe must come to terms with her, exorcise her, if she ever wants to move forward and find peace. Rich with historical, political and above all personal resonances, written in prose that melts and runs with the heat of the emotion it carries, *Beloved* is a deeply American, urgently important novel that searches for that final balance between grief, anger and acceptance.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“*Beloved* is full of vivid images, freshly rendered”
—TIME Magazine, Sept. 21, 1987 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: [The Berlin Stories](#) »

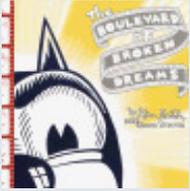
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The Berlin Stories (1946)

Author: Christopher Isherwood

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"I am a camera with its shutter open."

There is something unmistakably 20th

Century about this, the opening line to

Goodbye to Berlin. In their coolness and

clarity and melancholy detachment

these words express more about a

moment in time than most entire novels do. *Berlin Stories* is not

quite a novel; it's actually two short ones stuck together, *The Last*

of Mr. Norris and *Goodbye to Berlin*. But they form one coherent

snapshot of a lost world, the antic, cosmopolitan Berlin of the

1930's, where jolly expatriates dance faster and faster, as if that

would save them from the creeping rise of Nazism. One of

Isherwood's greatest characters, the racy, doomed Sally Bowles,

took center stage in the book's musical adaptation, *Cabaret*, but

the theatrical version can't match the power and richness of the

original.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ This portrait of an old rascalion is satire too cold to be amusing; it is written with the analytic distaste of one who

watches without pity the dwindling of a pathologically older

generation ”

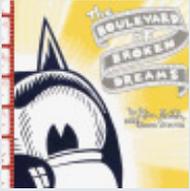
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—TIME Magazine, May. 20, 1935 (Read This Review)

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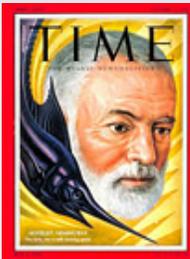
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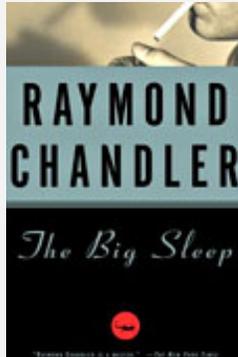
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The Big Sleep (1939)

Author: Raymond Chandler

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Sleep, marks the last time you can be

fully confident that you know what's going on. The first novel by Raymond Chandler, who at the time was a 51-year-old former oil company executive, is a mosaic of shadows, a dark tracery of forking paths. Along them wanders Philip Marlowe, a cynical, perfectly hard-boiled private investigator hired by an old millionaire to find the husband of his beautiful, bitchy wildcat daughter. Marlowe is tough and determined, and he does his best to be a good guy, but there are no true heroes in Chandler's sun-baked, godforsaken Los Angeles, and every plot turn reveals how truly twisted the human heart is.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Detective Marlowe is plunged into a mess of murderers, thugs and psychopaths”

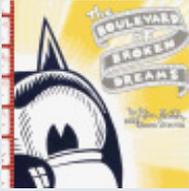
—TIME Magazine, Mar. 6, 1939 ([Read This Review](#))

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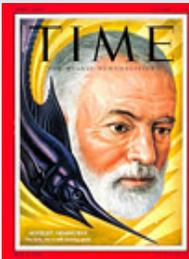
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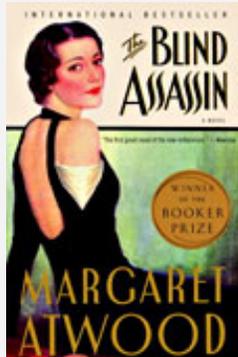
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The Blind Assassin (2000)

Author: Margaret Atwood

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Frosty, reserved Iris and her hot-blooded sister Laura grow up wealthy and privileged in a chilly Canadian town. But when the family fortune falters in the Depression, Iris is married off to a cruel industrialist, and Laura drives her car off a bridge, leaving behind a pulpy science fiction novel (presented in parallel to the primary plot) that seems to contain a coded, masked guide to the secrets that ruled her life and brought about her early death. Told in the brittle, acerbic voice of the elderly Iris, who is left behind to decode Laura's legacy, *The Blind Assassin* is a tour-de-force of nested narratives, subtle reveals and buried memories.—L.G..

From the TIME Archive:

“ Iris Chase is a brilliant addition to Atwood's roster of fascinating fictional narrators. Not only is her story sinuously complex, but she is entertaining company ”

—TIME Magazine, Sep. 11, 2000 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: [Blood Meridian](#) »

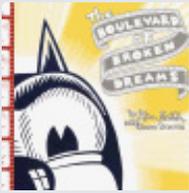
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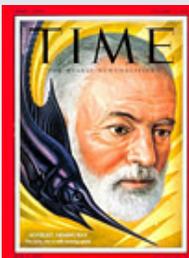
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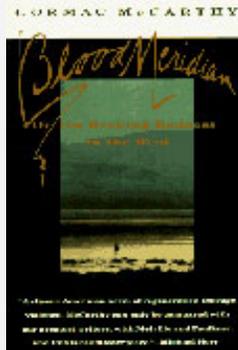
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Blood Meridian (1986)

Author: Cormac McCarthy

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"The floor of the playa lay smooth and unbroken by any track and the mountains in their blue islands stood footless in the void like floating temples." McCarthy's prose has the

character of the landscape it describes:

Harsh and pure, as if it had been sculpted by wind and sand, like a naturally occurring phenomenon. In *Blood Meridian* McCarthy uses it to spin a yarn of gothic violence: In the 1840's a young boy joins a band of cutthroats who hunt Indians on the border between Texas and Mexico, under the leadership of an amoral, albino arch-monster known as the Judge. Rarely has literature presented spectacles of violence more extreme or less gratuitous. *Blood Meridian* summons up shadows of Dante and Melville, and demands of every reader that they reexamine why and how they cling to morality in a fallen world.—L.G.

Next: [Brideshead Revisited](#) »

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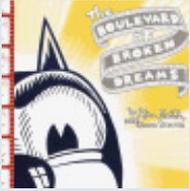
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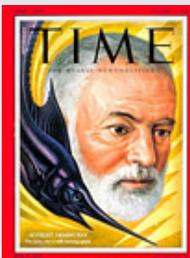
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Brideshead Revisited (1946)

Author: Evelyn Waugh

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Once and only once in his career the bitter, urbane, howlingly funny satirist Evelyn Waugh screwed up all his nerve and his talent and produced a genuine literary masterpiece. Though it's saddled with a faded doily of a title,

Brideshead Revisited is actually a wildly entertaining, swooningly funny-sad story about an impressionable young man, Charles Ryder, who goes to Oxford in the 1930's and falls in love with a family: the wealthy, eccentric, aristocratic Flytes, owners of a grand old country house called Brideshead. In the first half of the book the exquisite, hilariously fey Sebastian Flyte, who is Charles's classmate, teaches the young man about beauty, booze and witty conversation. In the second half every one grows up and everything goes spectacularly to smash. Told in flashbacks from the dark days of WWII, *Brideshead* is aglimmer with the guttering-candle glow of an elegant age that was already passing away.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“To many U.S. readers this book will be their first exposure to one of the wittiest, most corrosively mocking and violently serious

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minds now writing English prose ””

—TIME Magazine, Jan. 7, 1946 (Read This Review)

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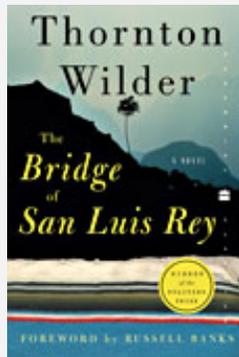
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The Bridge of San Luis Rey (1927)

Author: Thornton Wilder

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Whatever happened to Wilder? He was a lion in his day, prized—Pulitzer-prized, as this book was—a star of stage and page. Today, notwithstanding the occasional production of *Our Town*

or *The Skin of Our Teeth*, he's ever in

danger of falling out of fashion. He seems too courtly, too

composed. For proof of how powerful those qualities can be,

there's this book. In 1714, "the finest bridge in all Peru" collapses

and five people plunge to their deaths. Brother Juniper, a

Franciscan missionary, decides to track down their individual

stories to prove that even what seem to be random misfortunes

are consistent with God's plan. That his discoveries turn out to be

more complex will come as no surprise. What may surprise are

the beguilements of Wilder's teasing, ironic, beautifully written

tale, unlike anything else in American fiction.— R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“The delicacies of Author Wilder's prose cannot be intimated in so rude a summary of the material of his book”

—TIME Magazine, Dec. 5, 1927 ([Read This Review](#))

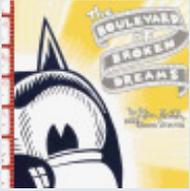
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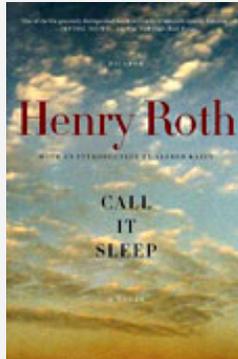
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Call It Sleep (1935)

Author: Henry Roth

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New York City, 1911. A young, painfully sensitive boy named David is growing up in the grimy Jewish slums of the Lower East Side, with his unemployable, rageoholic father and his angelic, nurturing mother. *Call It Sleep*

has the setting of a gritty, naturalistic political novel—and it works perfectly well as such—but it is at heart a profoundly interior book. Roth tirelessly and unflinchingly records the daily damage that the harshness of slum life inflicts on David's quiveringly receptive, emotionally defenseless consciousness; as a precise chronicler of minute impressions, and of the growth of an intellectually precocious mind, Roth's only equal is James Joyce. After its publication in 1934 *Call It Sleep* sank from view for 30 years, before a new edition became a bestseller in the 1960's. It will never be forgotten again.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“The story of three years in the life of a sensitive Jewish slum-child, told with painstaking and pain-giving fidelity”

—TIME Magazine, Feb. 25, 1935 ([Read This Review](#))

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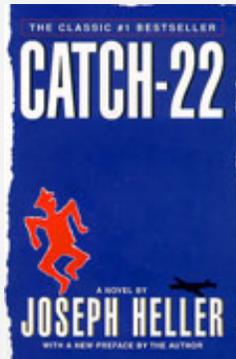
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Catch-22 (1961)

Author: Joseph Heller

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Captain John Yossarian is a bomber pilot who's just trying to make it through WWII alive. But the only excuse the Army will accept for refusing to fly a mission is insanity, and if Yossarian refuses to fly he is, by definition, sane.

This is the self-devouring logical worm that lies at the heart of *Catch-22*, the story of Yossarian, his colleagues—who respond to the horrors of war with a range of seriocomic neuroses and psychoses—and his superiors, who respond to the horrors of war by sending Yossarian on ever more pointless and dangerous missions for the purpose of enhancing their own reputations. *Catch-22* is a bitter, anguished joke of a novel that embraces the existential absurdity of war without ever quite succumbing to it.—L. G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Heller can write with a fire not often found in today's muted mood-piece novels”

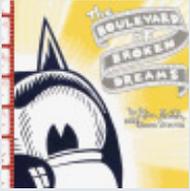
—TIME Magazine, Oct. 27, 1961 ([Read This Review](#))

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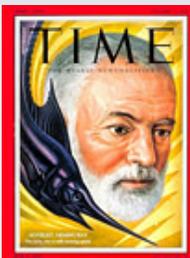
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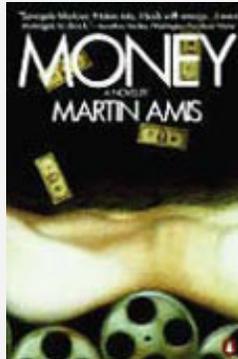
- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

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Money (1984)

Author: Martin Amis

- [PRINT](#)
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John Self, the extravagantly wretched man at the heart of this wonderfully funny book, is no ordinary pig. A slave to his countless vices, a monster of lustrous indulgence, he's the kind of sleazeball who puts the id back in idiot.

Naturally, he's in the movie business. To be precise, he's a director of TV commercials who is making his first feature while perfecting his gift for self-destruction. (And, by the way, offering what is frequently an astute take on this profane world of ours.) Self's spectacular lusts, his raw craving for money, sex and stimulants, his low cunning, his sheer, bewitching awfulness—somehow it all makes him perfectly irresistible.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“The novel's underlying theme: a culture geared to profit from the immediate gratification of egos and nerve endings is not a culture at all, but an addiction”

—TIME Magazine, Mar. 11, 1985 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: [The Moviegoer](#) »

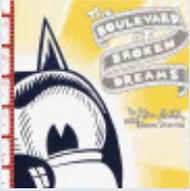
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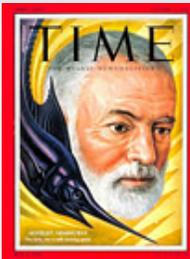
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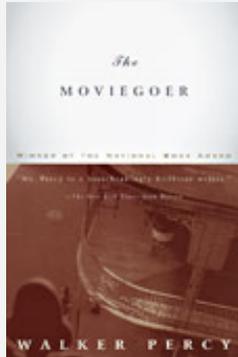
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The Moviegoer (1961)

Author: Walker Percy

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"What is the nature of the search? you ask. Really it is very simple; at least for a fellow like me. So simple that it is often overlooked. The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own

life." Percy's novel, his first, is a philosophical quest in which the question marks are worn lightly. Binx Bolling is a New Orleans investment broker who chafes over the difficulty of bringing life into high relief. Mere existence lacks flavor. Movies give him a glimpse of a higher possibility. That and sex with his succession of pretty secretaries. But he longs for a more enduring solution. You marvel at how lightly he addresses his displeasures—Percy's book is like Sartre's *Nausea* without the nausea. But Binx is still a man who always has his despair at the ready, and his story can shift toward the tragic with ease.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Percy appears, his first time out, clothed in originality, intelligence and a fierce regard for man's fate”

—TIME Magazine, May. 19, 1961 ([Read This Review](#))

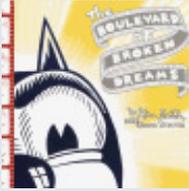
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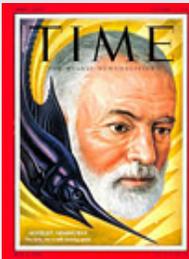
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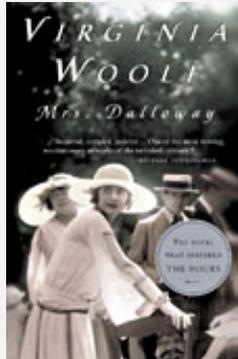
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Mrs. Dalloway (1925)

Author: Virginia Woolf

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Woolf draws aside the veil of her placid

exterior to reveal the dreams, fears, foibles, passion and pain that swirl endlessly just beneath it. *Mrs. Dalloway* follows Clarissa through the course of a single day, and as she goes about her errands, preparing for a party she's giving that night, we drift and rock on the ebb and flow of her lost love for an old flame who resurfaces unexpectedly; her never-consummated lesbian longing for a childhood friend; and her endless yearning for some firm sense of what, in the swirling detritus and ephemera that make up daily life, is true and good and permanent.—L.G.

Next: [Naked Lunch](#) »

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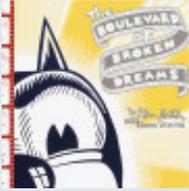
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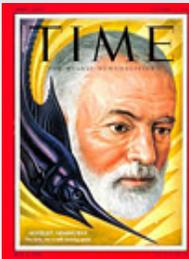
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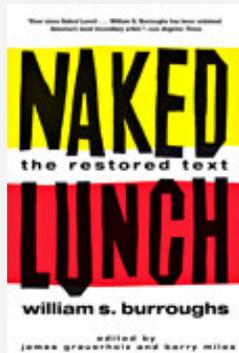
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2: *Lolita*3: *A Passage to India*4: *A Death in the Family*5: *Ubik*[See the full list »](#)

Naked Lunch (1959)

Author: William Burroughs

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An heir to the Burroughs adding

machine fortune, Burroughs the novelist

hated the despots of Squaresville and

the whole world where money makes its

fist. This is his greatest book and the

template for all the ones that followed.

With its fractured account of junkies and assorted urban

desperadoes, its fang-baring humor and its sudden excursions

into sheer hallucination, it instantly made him the depraved

scoutmaster for generations of would-be hipsters. He once said,

"My purpose in writing has always been to express human

potentials and purposes relevant to the Space Age"—by which he

meant addiction and willful extremity, both of which of course

have turned out to be virtues in the modern market economy. Like

Jean Genet, Burroughs trafficks in the utmost degradations, but

he doesn't go to them looking for unsuspected sources of

radiance. He likes them for what they are. His conversations in

hell with the Marquis de Sade must be very entertaining.—R.L.

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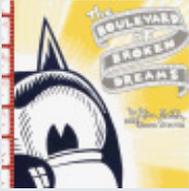
“Burroughs fancies himself a satirist and occasionally resembles one when the diary's heroin fog clears a little”

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—TIME Magazine, Nov. 30, 1962 (Read This Review)

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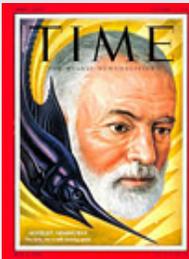
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Native Son (1940)

Author: Richard Wright

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It would have been easy to write a book about a black man unjustly accused. Wright wrote the hard one. In Chicago of the 1930's, where Bigger Thomas has found work as a chauffeur, he murders a young white woman, the only child of the wealthy family who has just hired him. Though the killing is accidental, it becomes a kind of retroactive act of will. It leads Thomas to an inquiry into his own injuries and humiliations at the hands of a sometimes literally bloodthirsty white society. There are passages of standard social preachment in this book, but Wright brings Bigger's situation into the most uncomfortable places of the American racial standoff. That's exactly where it had to go.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Laid in Chicago, only a Negro could have written it; but until now no Negro has possessed either the talent or the daring to write it”

—TIME Magazine, Mar. 4, 1940 ([Read This Review](#))

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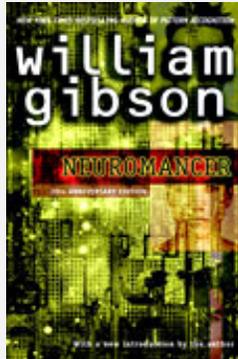
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Neuromancer (1984)

Author: William Gibson

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There is no way to overstate how radical Gibson's first and best novel was when it first appeared. He combined a shattered, neon-chased, postmodern cityscape—its inhabitants rendered demi-human by designer drugs, tattoos and rampant surgical body modifications—with his vision of a three-dimensional virtual landscape created by networked computers, through which bad-ass bandit hackers roam like high plains drifters. When one such hacker, Case, gets banned from this "cyberspace"—Gibson was among the first to use the word—he'll do anything to get back in, including embarking on a near-suicidal cyber-assault on an all but unhackable artificial intelligence. Violent, visceral and visionary (there's no other word for it), *Neuromancer* proved, not for the first or last time, that science fiction is more than a mass-market paperback genre, it's a crucial tool by which an age shaped by and obsessed with technology can understand itself.—L.G.

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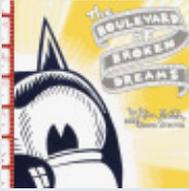


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Lev Grossman and
Richard Lacayo pick the
100 best English-language
novels from 1923
to the present

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- » [Richard Lacayo lays bare the process \(and the pain\) behind stacking up 100 novels.](#)

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- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
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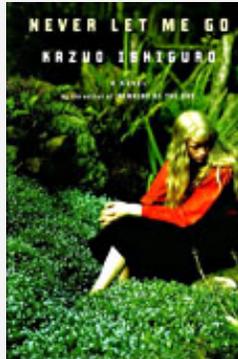
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Never Let Me Go (2005)

Author: Kazuo Ishiguro

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Kathy, Tommy and Ruth are students at Hailsham, a very exclusive, very strange English private school. They are treated well in every respect, but as they grow older they come to realize that there is a secret that haunts their

lives: Their teachers regard them with fear and pity, and they don't know why. Once they learn the secret it is already far, far too late for them to save themselves. Set in a darkling alternate-universe version of England, and told with dry-eyed, white-knuckled restraint, *Never Let Me Go* is an improbable masterpiece, a science fiction horror story written as high tragedy by a master literary stylist. It's postmodern in its conception, but Ishiguro isn't playing games or chasing trends: The human drama of *Never Let Me Go*, its themes of atrocity and acceptance, are timeless and, sadly, permanent.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ It's an existential fable about people trying to wring some happiness out of life before the lights go out ”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 11, 2005 ([Read This Review](#))

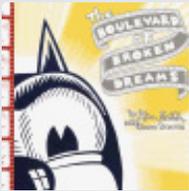
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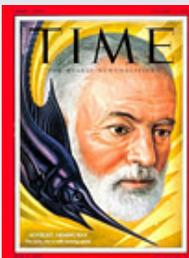
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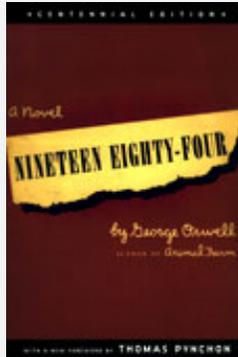
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1984 (1948)

Author: George Orwell

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The time is 13 o'clock; the date doesn't matter; the year goes without saying. Winston Smith, a bureaucrat at the Ministry of Truth, toils day and night in the service of Big Brother, the remote, faux-benign ruler of this eerily familiar

dystopia. Orwell's novel is a study of every possible way a nation can be beaten down by its government: spiritually, physically, intellectually, by the media, torture, surveillance, and censorship, to the point where the state can manipulate reality at will. When Smith is tempted by a beautiful resistance fighter into an act of rebellion, *1984* becomes something more: a strange, tragic, deeply sad love story. It is Orwell's triumph, and the century's misfortune, that *1984* is as prescient as it is pessimistic.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“In *1984* there is not a smile or a jest that does not add bitterness to Orwell's utterly depressing vision of what the world may be in 35 years' time”

—TIME Magazine, Jun. 20, 1949 ([Read This Review](#))

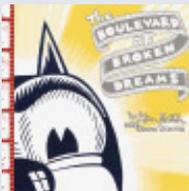
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On the Road (1957)

Author: Jack Kerouac

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The book that launched a thousand trips. For his hyperkinetic, endearing, culture-changing novel, Kerouac admitted whole worlds through his windshield. An account of a few pinwheeling characters in perpetual cross-country motion, it has room to spare for rivers, landscapes, starry skies, Benzedrine addicts, endless marathons of driving, the hipster demiurge Dean Moriarty and lots of other fast-talking madmen. "Because the only people for me are the mad ones," Kerouac's narrator, Sal Paradise, tells us. "The ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved." Capote's famous putdown of the book got it exactly backwards. That's not typing, Truman. That's writing.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Kerouac has a Wolfelike love of the U.S. and a Whitmanesque weakness for cataloguing nearly every experience

”

—TIME Magazine, Sept. 16, 1957 ([Read This Review](#))

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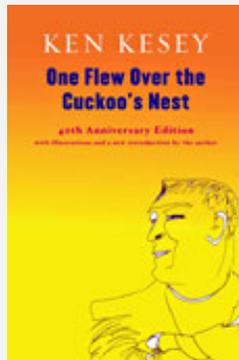
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One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1962)

Author: Ken Kesey

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When Kesey decided to take on the hypocrisy, cruelty and enforced conformity of modern life, he dug into his own experiences as a test subject in a mental hospital. In *Cuckoo's Nest* the irrepressible inmate Randle McMurphy

does battle with the icy, power-mad Nurse Ratched to liberate, or at least breathe a little life into, the crushed and cowed patients she lords it over, while the book's stonily silent narrator Chief Bromden looks on. Both an allegory of individualism and a heart-tearing psychological drama, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* manages to be uplifting without giving an inch to the seductions of sentimentality.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Sordid sights and sounds abound, but Novelist Kesey has not descended to mere shock treatment or isolation-ward

documentary”

—TIME Magazine, Feb. 16, 1962 ([Read This Review](#))

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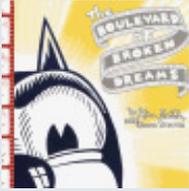


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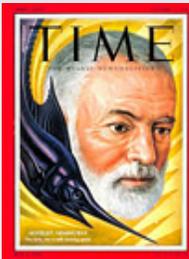
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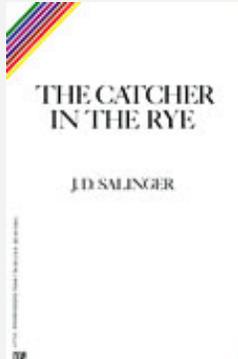
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The Catcher in the Rye (1951)

Author: J.D. Salinger

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No matter how many high school

English teachers try to domesticate *The*

Catcher in the Rye in class, it will never

lose its satirical edge. When Holden

Caulfield learns he's going to be kicked

out of yet another private school, he

bails in the middle of the night ("Sleep tight, ya morons!" he yells)

and heads to New York City to bum around for a few

days—hitting on girls, thinking about his dead brother, worrying

about where the ducks go in the wintertime—before he deals with

his parents. The time passes in an agony of anhedonia that

transcends the merely adolescent: It's a permanent reminder of

the sweetness of childhood, the hypocrisy of the adult world, and

the strange no-man's-land that lies in between.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Some of my best friends are children,” says Jerome David Salinger, 32. “In fact, all of my best friends are children.”

—TIME Magazine, Jul. 16, 1951 ([Read This Review](#))

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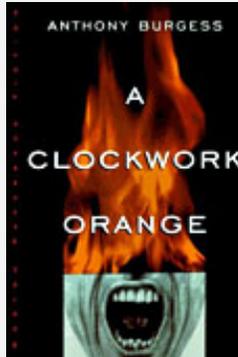
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A Clockwork Orange (1963)

Author: Anthony Burgess

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Like *1984*, this is a book in which an entire social order is implied through language. And what language! To hint at the vile universe of the 15-year-old delinquent Alex and his murderous buddies, Burgess created "nadsat," a rich futuristic patois. "Sinny" for "cinema." "Viddy" for "see," "horrorshow" for "good"—from the Russian, *khorocho*, which gives you some idea of which political system has prevailed. The words locate him in a world of corrupted values, violence and boundless infantile indulgence. (His drug is "milk plus.") When Alex is apprehended by the authorities and subjected to psychological conditioning to make him nauseated at any impulse towards violence, Burgess's book becomes a meditation on whether a world in which evil can be freely chosen might still be preferable to one in which goodness is compelled. Stanley Kubrick's coldly magnificent "sinny" adaptation has sometimes threatened to overshadow this great novel. Don't let it happen.—R. L.

From the **TIME** Archive:

“Anthony Burgess has written what looks like a nasty little

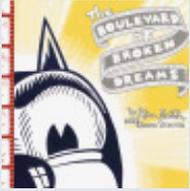
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shocker but is really that rare thing in English letters—a
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—TIME Magazine, Feb. 15, 1963 (Read This Review)

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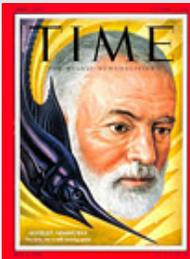
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2: *Lolita*

3: *A Passage to India*

4: *A Death in the Family*

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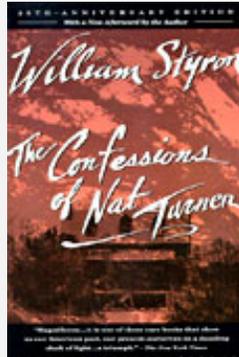
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The Confessions of Nat Turner (1967)

Author: William Styron

• [PRINT](#)

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It's a novel that has its sources in history—the only sustained slave revolt in American history, an 1831 uprising led by Turner, an educated slave who led a group of fellow escapees on a bloody trail through southeastern

Virginia. Before they were stopped, just short of seizing an arsenal, they had killed about 60 whites. And before he was hanged, Turner dictated a final testament, a document that still exists. But Styron's book is not that one. It's an invented version of that text, one ringed with bitterness and fire. He plumbs the mind of a man who believed himself ordained to slaughter whites in retribution for the ordeals of slavery, but who found himself nearly incapable of putting in the blade. Turner as Styron imagines him is not a plaster saint, not a cardboard monster. He's a man, one whose ferocious yearnings were formed in the cauldron of a hateful institution.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Styron's narrative power, lucidity and understanding of the epoch of slavery achieve a new peak in the literature of the South

”

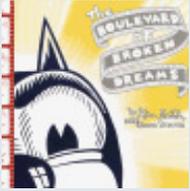
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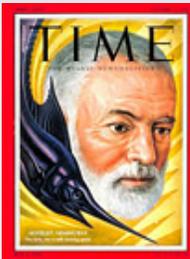
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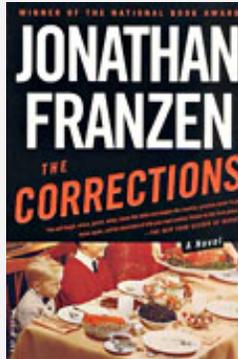
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The Corrections (2001)

Author: Jonathan Franzen

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If family is a machine for making you crazy, has there ever been a machine better oiled than the Lamberts? The elderly father, Alfred, is a retired railway engineer sliding into the mental and physical chaos of Parkinson's disease.

Wife Enid fashions ever more ingenious varieties of denial. Son Chip is helping con men in Lithuania. His brother Gary is consoling himself with booze for the miseries of his own disintegrating home life. Their sister Denise, in the time she can spare from her career as a celebrity chef, makes reckless thrusts into other people's marriages. Their miseries are an opening onto the larger discontents of the society that they—we—live in, but Franzen keeps his terrible focus on the family. This can be a very funny book in places, but the laughs come hard, very hard.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“*The Corrections* does not "solve" the mystery of family life, but it renders its mysteries with the fine filament and moral nuance

they require ”

—TIME Magazine, Sep. 10, 2001 ([Read This Review](#))

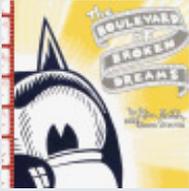
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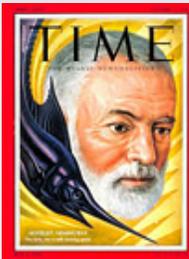
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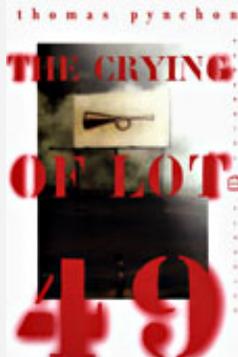
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The Crying of Lot 49 (1966)

Author: Thomas Pynchon

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Summoned to serve as executor for the will of her ultra-rich former lover, Oedipa Maas is led into the mystery of Trystero, a shadowy band of, of—of what exactly? They have operated for centuries, connecting the dispossessed,

the discontented and the strung out by way of their secret underground postal system, a network that may also serve other ends. As she wanders through California in the mid-1960's, trying to unravel their secret, Oedipa senses for the first time a larger, weirder universe of the disinherited, a scampering, fugitive reality just beneath the placid surface of what she thinks she knows.

With its slapstick paranoia and its heartbreaking metaphysical soliloquies, *Lot 49* takes place in the tragicomic universe that is instantly recognizable as Pynchon-land. Is it also a mystery novel? Absolutely, so long as you remember that the mystery here is the one at the heart of everything.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“What is the meaning of the gibberish literature that is currently being published as fast as it can be gibbered?”

—TIME Magazine, May. 6, 1966 ([Read This Review](#))

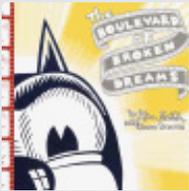
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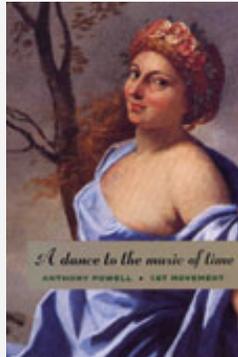
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A Dance to the Music of Time (1951)

Author: Anthony Powell

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1920's, *A Dance to the Music of Time*

follows the lives of a group of English friends and acquaintances as they make their various ways through life: meeting and parting, succeeding and failing, loving and hating, living and dying. There is ample room for both comedy and tragedy in this capacious, large-hearted work, but Powell's real triumph is the way he catches the rhythm of fate itself, the way it brings people together, only to spin them apart, then reunite them later as near-strangers, transformed in unexpected ways by the intervening years.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Powell invites his dedicated (though still small) readership to think of his work in musical terms”

—TIME Magazine, Mar. 28, 1969 ([Read This Review](#))

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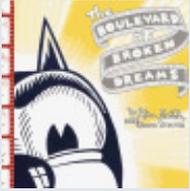


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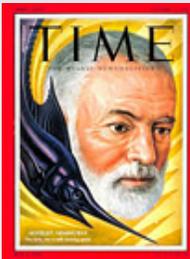
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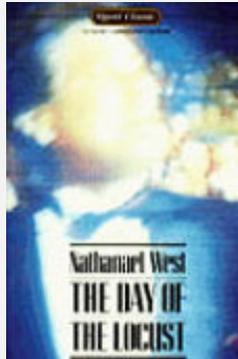
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The Day of the Locust (1939)

Author: Nathanael West

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Nathanael West's Hollywood novel

takes place mostly at the margins of the

movie kingdom, the universe of set

painters and extras, frustrated small-

timers, hangers-on and oddities. There

are prostitutes here, transplanted

Eskimos, a failed comic who sells silver polish door to door so

that he can force luckless customers to watch his act. No one in

this book has found the promise that California was supposed to

offer, and at the end their anger and resentments collect into a riot

in the streets that is the sum of their individual discontents. "They

realize that they've been tricked and burn with resentment.... The

sun is a joke. Oranges can't titillate their jaded palates. Nothing

can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and

bodies." This was West's last novel. He died the following year in

a car accident, at age 37, rushing to the funeral of F. Scott

Fitzgerald. How he would have loved that last grotesque

detail.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“In the 25 years Hollywood has been waiting, no novelist has yet written a good book about it”

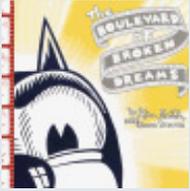
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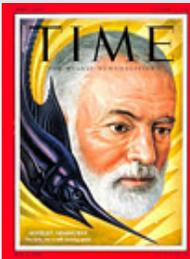
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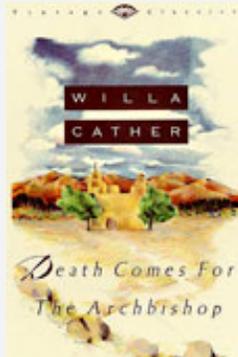
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Death Comes for the Archbishop (1927)

Author: Willa Cather

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Cather at her most matter-of-fact and, as a consequence, her most powerful.

She based this book on the life of

Bishop Jean Baptiste L'Amy—she calls him Father Latour—the French-born

Ohio cleric who was assigned by the

church to rebuild the faith in New Mexico after the territory was annexed by the U.S. in 1831. With an old friend, Father Vaillant,

Latour sets out for Santa Fe. He will find the church there to be fragmented and corrupt, with priests taking wives and charging

exorbitant fees to perform marriages. Latour embarks on a

decades-long effort to reform and reinvigorate the diocese. The

style and structure of this book are strange, unemphatic, as if

Cather had simply laid the scenes side by side in a tapestry. She

compared the book to a legend, in which no event is given much

dramatic weight. If this sounds like a formula for boredom, it's not.

Her serene language, with its immemorial simplicity, gives the

story a weight mere drama could never provide.—R.L.

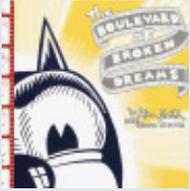
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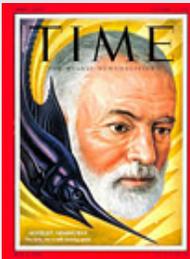
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- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

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The Death of the Heart (1938)

Author: Elizabeth Bowen

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Portia Quayne is that most dangerous commodity, an innocent child. At 16, after years of dragging around European hotels with her parents, she's been orphaned. She finds herself now in the care of her prosperous older half brother and his reluctant wife. What they and their heedless friends will show to Portia is the disenchanted kingdom of adulthood. But Bowen's real genius was in recognizing what Portia will show to them. In the mirror of her innocent eyes, experience will catch a glimpse of its own reflection. It's not a pretty picture.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Ironic comedy as well as tragedy, *The Death of the Heart* tells a story as old as wickedness: the world's betrayal of innocence”

—TIME Magazine, Jan. 30, 1939 ([Read This Review](#))

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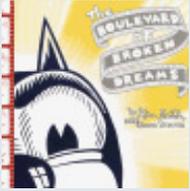
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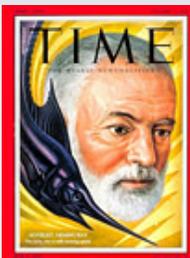
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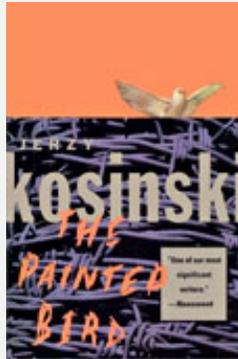
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The Painted Bird (1965)

Author: Jerzy Kosinski

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The onset of World War II cuts a young Jewish boy off from his family and sets him adrift among the peasants of rural Poland. There, wide-eyed like a camera with its shutter stuck open, he witnesses atrocities and degradation, sexual and otherwise, that beggar the imagination: the title image refers to the hobby of a man who likes to capture a bird, paint its feathers different colors, and watch as its former fellows tear it apart as an intruder. The surreal carnival of violent depravity is made all the more horrifying when seen from the point of view of a boy who perceives all this as unsurprising and normal: He knows no better, and suffers it all with the endurance of the truly innocent.—L.G.

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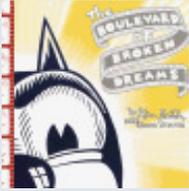
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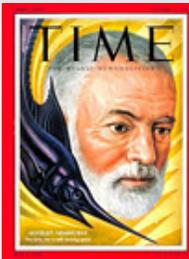
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- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

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Pale Fire (1962)

Author: Vladimir Nabokov

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A bizarre, three-legged race of a novel, *Pale Fire* is composed of a long, narrative poem followed by a much longer set of footnotes written by an obsessive, increasingly deranged annotator. Charles Kinbote, a gay

professor at a small New England college, may or may not be a noble-born expatriate from the exotic Eastern European principality of Zembla. He may or may not have stolen the manuscript he's annotating, which he is convinced is really all about him. He is unquestionably unhealthily obsessed with John Shade, the placid, Robert Frost-like poet who composed the poem. Beyond that all bets are off, and the questions ramify without end. *Pale Fire* is the kind of novel you can happily get lost in: a house of mirrors with no exit, a labyrinth with no endpoint.—L. G.

From the TIME Archive:

“*Pale Fire* does not really cohere as a satire; good as it is, the novel in the end seems to be mostly an exercise in agility”

—TIME Magazine, Jun. 1, 1962 ([Read This Review](#))

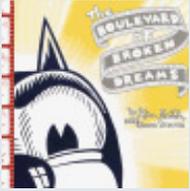
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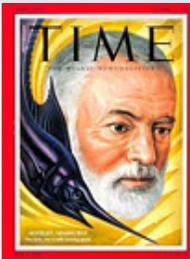
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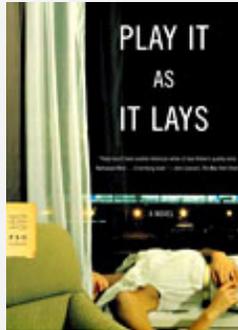
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Play It As It Lays (1970)

Author: Joan Didion

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JOAN DIDION

Didion's mordant lucidity is like L.A. sunlight, a thing so bright sometimes it hurts. She's a descendant of the old California, the great- great-granddaughter of pioneers. But she was also schooled at Berkeley and in the literary circles of Paris and New York, so she's fully versed in the predicaments of a shaky modernity that she does not care for in the least. To drive home her belief that the world, or at least the part around L.A., is coming to a bad end, she gives us Maria Wyeth, a model turned actress turned hollowed-out woman who speaks to us from the mental institution where she has fetched up after a long slide into despair. Passing through a pointless career, a toxic marriage, an abortion, finally holding the hand of a close friend while he commits suicide; when she tells you, "I know what 'nothing' means," you believe her.—R.L.

Next: [Portnoy's Complaint](#) »

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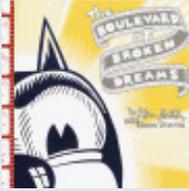
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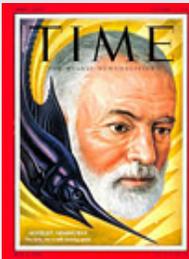
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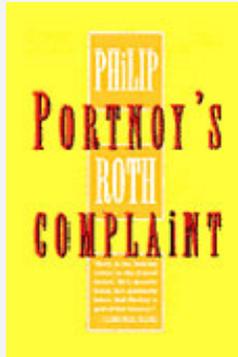
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Portnoy's Complaint (1969)

Author: Philip Roth

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Of course it's vulgar. How could it not be? The sustained cry of a ferociously perplexed, ferociously lucid New York City Jew—you expected maybe Jane Austen? Roth's barbaric yawp of a book was a literary instance of shock and

awe, a dirty comic masterpiece that can stand with *Tristram Shandy*. (For the masturbation scenes alone it will endure forever.) It's also, once you crawl out of the rubble of its most infamous passages, tender and charitable, and not just towards the main character. How else to describe a book that, while it charts the wild arc of Portnoy's sexual and romantic misadventures—all of this being recounted by him to his therapist—discovers exactly the most painful question about relations between children and parents. "Doctor what should I rid myself of, tell me, the hatred... or the love?"— R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“*Portnoy's Complaint* is too funny not to be taken seriously”

—TIME Magazine, Feb. 21, 1969 ([Read This Review](#))

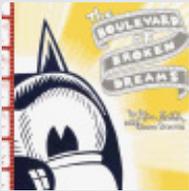
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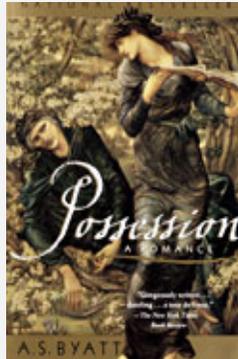
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Possession (1990)

Author: A.S. Byatt

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Academics were sexy long before Sophie and Robert from *The Da Vinci Code*. Roland is a beleaguered graduate student laboring in the British Library. Our heroine, Maud, is an icy, repressed professor at a provincial

English university. By chance they jointly stumble on a cache of hot-blooded love letters by a famous (albeit fictional) Victorian poet named Randolph Ash. Their discovery lights the fuses on both a literary mystery and their own slow-burning romance, which Byatt adroitly braids together with the story of Ash's love affair. An intricate novel, laced with poems and letters, *Possession* has the narrative structure of a thriller, but Byatt uses that narrative engine for her own, more sophisticated purposes: a moving exploration of the hidden wellsprings of love and art. —L. G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Its manifest intelligence, subtle humor and extraordinary texturing of the past within the present make *Possession* an original, and unforgettable, contribution”

—TIME Magazine, Nov. 5, 1990 ([Read This Review](#))

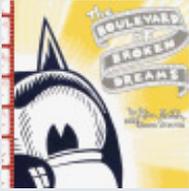
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- » Managing Editor James Kelly talks about the list and shares his John Le Carre favorite (which didn't make the cut).
- » Richard Lacayo lays bare the process (and the pain) behind stacking up 100 novels.

Reader's Choice

- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

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The Power and the Glory (1939)

Author: Graham Greene

• [PRINT](#)

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Another of Greene's intricate moral landscapes, where corrupt characters might still be capable of goodness and virtuous ones indulge their virtues

murderously. The central figure is a

"whisky priest," on the run in Mexico in

the 1930's, during years when the Catholic Church was being

suppressed by the Mexican government. The priest, never

named, is being pursued by an unnamed police lieutenant, a

ruthless idealist who will not hesitate to take hostages from every

village where the fugitive priest might stop and shoot them if the

priest's visit is not reported. Guilt-ridden, always craving

alcohol—at one point he downs the communion wine—the priest

manages all the same to carry out his duties on the road and to

perform small acts of grace, even the ones that seal his fate.

Those did not turn out to be enough for the Vatican. Thirteen

years after this book was published, the Church condemned it

and insisted that Greene make changes. A sincere Catholic but

also a dextrous operator, he replied that the copyright belonged to

his publishers. — R.L.

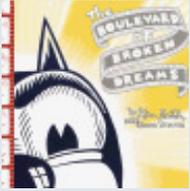
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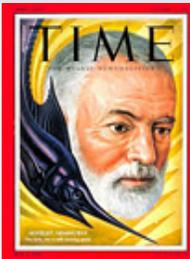
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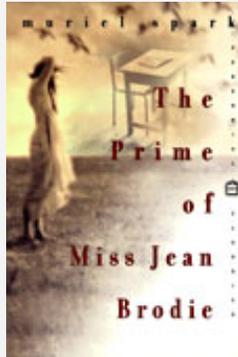
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The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961)

Author: Muriel Spark

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A slender novel but far from flimsy, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* enrolls the reader at Edinburgh's fictional Marcia Blaine School for Girls under the tutelage of one Jean Brodie, a magnetic, unconventional instructor

whose favorite pupils—"the Brodie set"—are set apart from the rest of the student body by their superior attitudes and their intellectual awareness. The archly, tartly narrated adventures of these young girls and their eccentric, autocratic leader form a delightful group portrait, and something more: an immortal parable of the temptations of charisma and the dangers of power.

—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“At the end of a Muriel Spark novel most readers find themselves wondering why other writers must babble on and on to twice that length”

—TIME Magazine, Jan. 19, 1962 ([Read This Review](#))

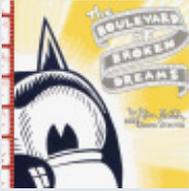
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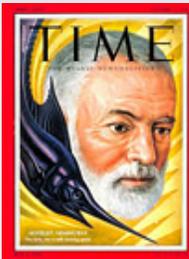
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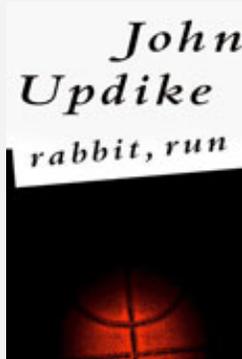
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Rabbit, Run (1960)

Author: John Updike

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Updike, modern American literature's smoothest and most limber stylist, chose an unlikely soul for his great fictional hero: Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, an ignorant, philandering 20-something ex-jock, long past his high school glory days and feeling trapped in a job, a marriage, a town, a family that bore him. In a situation like that, running away is exactly what comes naturally to him. Rabbit is not a character calculated to inspire affection, but he is an unflinchingly authentic specimen of American manhood, and his boorishness makes his rare moments of vulnerability and empathy that much more heartbreaking.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“If the power to shock may be taken as a yardstick of fiction, John Updike, 28, has written one of the year's most important novels”

—TIME Magazine, Nov. 7, 1960 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: [Ragtime](#) »

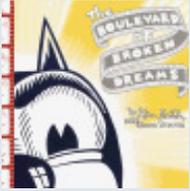
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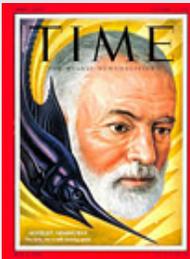
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Ragtime (1975)

Author: E.L. Doctorow

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Doctorow's fever dream of the American past remade the historical novel. In a story spanning the first decades of the 20th century, three groups of fictional characters—a white middle-class family, a family of Jewish immigrants, and an African-American couple—lead lives entwined with one another and with some of the great public figures of the day, including Harry Houdini, Emma Goldman, Henry Ford and Sigmund Freud. The presiding concerns and undertakings of the decades that would follow—technology, race, power—all announce themselves and are tied by Doctorow into narrative configurations so odd, yet so oddly persuasive in their dream logic, you laugh out loud, at least until the ultimate tragedy unfolds. The interaction of real and fictional characters wasn't new in itself, but with this pulsing, delightful book, Doctorow made it feel that way.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Like ragtime, Doctorow's book is a native American fugue, rhythmic, melodic and stately”

—TIME Magazine, Jul. 14, 1975 ([Read This Review](#))

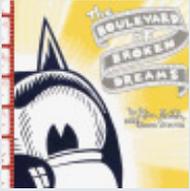
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The Recognitions (1955)

Author: William Gaddis

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You approach this immense book wondering whether you should have done a week of roadwork and calisthenics to get ready for it, and not just because of its more than 900-page length. Gaddis' ferocious discontent

with the world as he finds it and his daunting erudition make for a demanding read, but also a hugely rewarding one. Wyatt Gwyon is a forger. In the service of a crooked art dealer he expertly counterfeits Early Renaissance masterpieces. He longs to live in a more authentic time, one unlike his world of simulations, substitutes, impostures and pale resemblances. What Wyatt wants in every realm of life is the true antecedent, and he struggles across three decades and three continents in search of it. This is a serious book, but it's also the highest of high comedies, full of outraged wit. It took decades for *The Recognitions* to be recognized as the masterpiece it is and as a book that inaugurated the great age of black humor in American fiction that would come into its own in the 1960's with Pynchon, Vonnegut and Roth—R.L.

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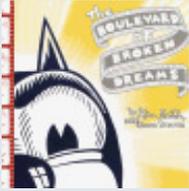
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—TIME Magazine, Mar. 14, 1955 (Read This Review)

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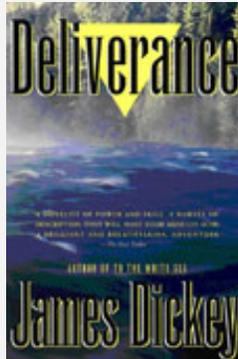
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Deliverance (1970)

Author: James Dickey

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Four friends set out on a canoe trip through backwoods Georgia—a lark, a weekend's diversion, a blissful, beery break from their day jobs. But their itinerary unexpectedly swings into darker territory when they meet a gang of savage, sodomitical mountain men, and by the time they emerge again—most of them—from the wilderness, they have been through some of the blackest terrain, both geographical and spiritual, since Marlowe went up the river in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Though it's been partially eclipsed by the movie version—you know it for that "Dueling Banjos" scene—the original *Deliverance* is a visceral, dangerous thriller packed with forbidden knowledge.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“A fast and shapely adventure tale is a rare enough creation. Dickey has surely achieved that”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 20, 1970 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: *Dog Soldiers* »

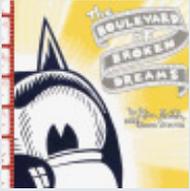
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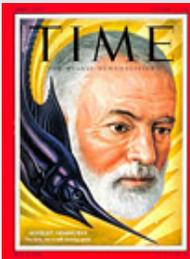
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Reader's Choice

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- 2: [Lolita](#)
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- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

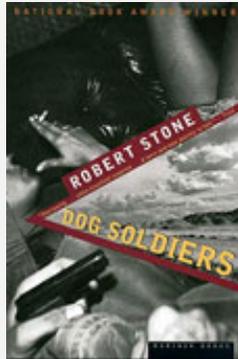
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Dog Soldiers (1974)

Author: Robert Stone

• [PRINT](#)

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A weird current pulses through this book. The tale of a heroin deal gone very bad, it's also a merciless picture of America at the ragged end of the Vietnam era. John Converse is a journalist preparing to head home from

Saigon when he's persuaded to join a dope-smuggling scheme.

Once back in California, he's ambushed by a pair of ex-cons in the service of a corrupt federal drug agent who wants to pocket the drugs. The hapless goons, who also indulge in occasional sex with each other, drag Converse on a trek across the Southwest in search of the strung-out intriguers who are actually holding the stuff. Those would be Converse's wife Marge, who's blandly stupefied by prescription drugs, and his sad-sack confederate Hicks. Do we need to tell you it all ends badly? Or that the heroin is a stand-in for Vietnam? It's the poison that came home, like the war, to pollute an already bleak and sawtoothed social landscape. Bleakness is all in Stone's world, which is unrelenting and unforgettable.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“With fearful accuracy it describes a journey to hell and

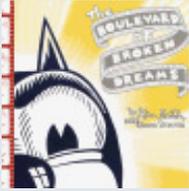
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pronounces an epitaph on a time that has not ended ”

—TIME Magazine, Nov. 11, 1974 (Read This Review)

Next: Falconer »

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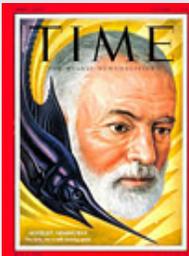
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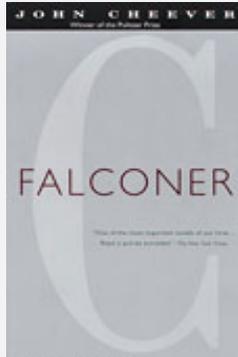
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Falconer (1977)

Author: John Cheever

• [PRINT](#)

• [« Previous](#) | [Next »](#)



A story of suffering and redemption, told in Cheever's fullest register. Ezekiel Farragut, university professor, family man, drug addict, is in Falconer State Prison for having killed his brother with a poker. In this shabby purgatory, he struggles with his memories, his guilt, and his need to remain human in a dehumanizing place, until an affair with a fellow prisoner reawakens his ability to love, even if the young man is a cynical operator and love is just another burden to bear. In some ways this book represented Cheever going far afield from the suburbs where he had made his name. (Not too far: Sing Sing was near his home in Ossining, N.Y. He had taught prisoners there in the early 70's.) But Farragut is not so different from Cheever's lawn-mowing householders. Yearning, wayward, beset by anger and need—he's just a Cheever character *in extremis*. He suffers beautifully, but he suffers to a purpose. When he finds a rapprochement with the world, however tenuous, it speaks to the prisoner in us all.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Cheever's great strength has always been his ability to charge

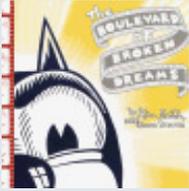
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—TIME Magazine, Feb. 28, 1977 (Read This Review)

Next: The French Lieutenant's Woman »

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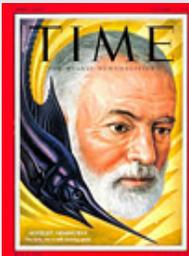
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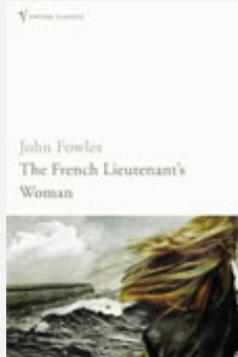
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The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969)

Author: John Fowles

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amateur paleontologist living on the

southwestern coast of England. Ernestina is his drearly upright

fiancee. Sarah Woodruff is an enigmatic local governess, said to

be pining for a French soldier who has misused her. The fourth

major figure in this book is not a character but the author. By no

means all-powerful, he discovers early on that he has lost control

of his characters and proposes in that case to let them have their

freedom. And he means it. The story proceeds through alternative

episodes—in one Charles marries Ernestina; in another he

doesn't—and multiple endings, with the author sometimes turning

up to walk among his characters and comment tartly on their

actions. In its final pages—don't dare to call them a conclusion; in

a book so open-ended, what could that word mean?—he opens a

vista onto freedom that's both dazzling and devastating.—R.L.

From the **TIME** Archive:

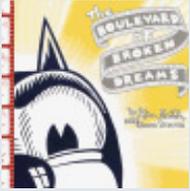
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—TIME Magazine, Nov. 7, 1969 (Read This Review)

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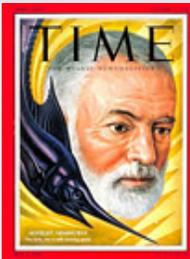
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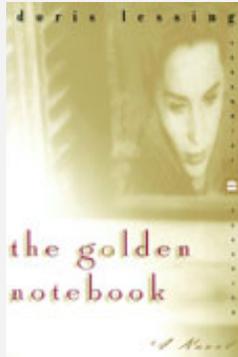
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- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
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The Golden Notebook (1962)

Author: Doris Lessing

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Anna Wulf is a writer who keeps four notebooks, each a different color, each reflecting a different part of her. The black one contains recollections of her youthful wartime years in West Africa, experiences that went into her first novel. In the red one she reflects on her later life in London's leftist and intellectual circles. The blue notebook analyzes her fraught relations with men. The yellow contains her fragmentary attempts at new fiction. With the fifth, the golden notebook, and with *The Golden Notebook*, Wulf/Lessing struggles to tie all the threads fearlessly back together again. All the currents of her time flow through Anna—Marx and Freud and the burgeoning dissatisfactions among women that would eventually explode into feminism. Lessing's earnestness can be too much at times, but as a portrait of a woman coming to grips with the realities of her time her book is indispensable.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“ Lessing copes with not just one literary chestnut but a whole treeful ”

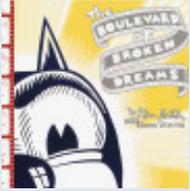
—TIME Magazine, Jul. 13, 1962 ([Read This Review](#))

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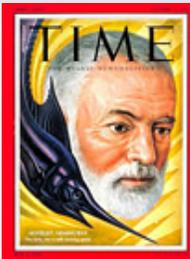
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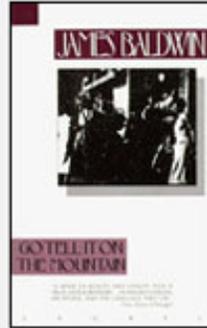
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- 2: Lolita
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- 5: Ubik

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Go Tell it on the Mountain (1953)

Author: James Baldwin

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For his ferocious debut novel, Baldwin reached back to his experiences as a teenage Pentecostal preacher in Harlem and set them down in language steeped in the high and mighty rhetoric

of Scripture. At age 14 John Grimes is bedeviled by the new stirrings in "his treacherous and bewildering body" and resentful of his preacher stepfather, once an energetic sinner, whose dual nature is now divided between the dutiful but restless John and John's older brother Roy, another hell-raiser in training. The boys' mother, Elizabeth, labors to keep the passions of her men in check, all the while holding secrets of her own. Their stories run dark and deep, while the fierce music of Baldwin's voice courses through those stories and lends them majesty.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“The sufferings of Baldwin's race have brought forth the harsh resentments of author and characters alike”

—TIME Magazine, May. 18, 1953 ([Read This Review](#))

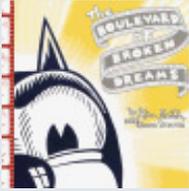
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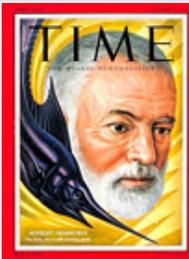
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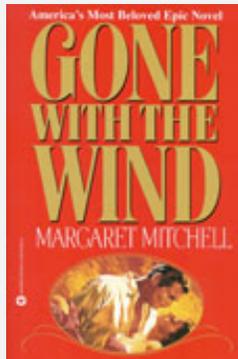
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Gone With the Wind (1936)

Author: Margaret Mitchell

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It's one of the best-selling books ever bound between covers, but that's not what makes Margaret Mitchell's magnificent mint julep of a novel great. The ultimate, original sweeping historical romance, it follows high-spirited Scarlett O'Hara, roguish Rhett Butler and romantic, infinitely good-looking Ashley Wilkes as the world that nurtured them is swept away in the cataclysm of the Civil War. As quintessentially American as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is English, *Gone with the Wind* is a colossally readable romance novel—love stories do not come more triangular—but it's also the definitive telling of one of the basic American mythologies: the passing away, in blood and ashes, of the grand old South.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Last week readers had an opportunity to learn about Atlanta's history in an imposing first novel chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club for July”

—TIME Magazine, Jul. 6, 1936 ([Read This Review](#))

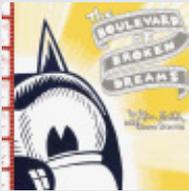
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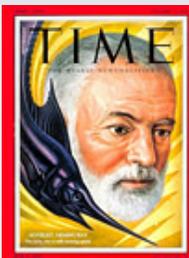
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- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

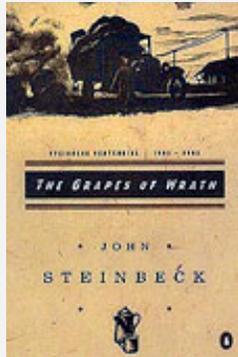
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The Grapes of Wrath (1939)

Author: John Steinbeck

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The storms of the great Dust Bowl had barely settled when Steinbeck published *The Grapes of Wrath*, which follows a family of impoverished "Okies," the Joads, as they chase the mirage of a good life westward from their devastated midwestern farm to California. The Joads find only bitterness, squalor and oppression as migrant agricultural workers living in "Hoovervilles," but their indomitable strength in the face of an entire continent's worth of adversity makes Steinbeck's epic far more than a history of unfortunate events: It's both a record of its time and a permanent monument to human perseverance.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“The publishers believe it is 'perhaps the greatest modern American novel, perhaps the greatest single creative work this country has ever produced.' It is not ”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 17, 1939 ([Read This Review](#))

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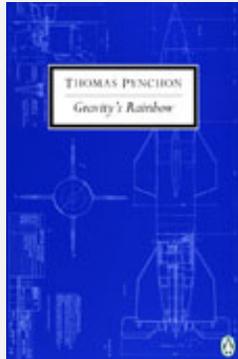
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- 2: *Lolita*
- 3: *A Passage to India*
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- 5: *Ubik*

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Gravity's Rainbow (1973)

Author: Thomas Pynchon

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No, it is not unreadable. For most of its 700-plus pages it's so crazily, scarily, sumptuously readable that you hate to put it aside even as the last paragraph thunders down on your head. The unsummarizable plot centers, to the extent that it centers at all, on Tyrone Slothrop, an American who comes to the attention of British intelligence during World War II when a map indicating the locales of his sexual encounters with London women shows that they correspond with the places struck by German V-2 missiles. Can his erections predict the random distribution of agents of death? From there we proceed into a massive continent-wide effort to construct a V-2, which is itself an occasion for a fantastic multitude of meditations upon the human need to build systems of intellectual order even as we use the same powers of intellect to hasten our destruction. (Did we mention that this is also a comedy, more or less?) Among American writers of the second half of the 20th century, Pynchon is the indisputed candidate for lasting literary greatness. This book is why.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

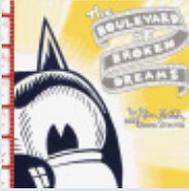
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“ Pynchon catalogues and tickles fantasies so elaborately detailed that most of his readers will come away feeling illiterate in the terms of the 20th century ”

—TIME Magazine, Mar. 5, 1973 (Read This Review)

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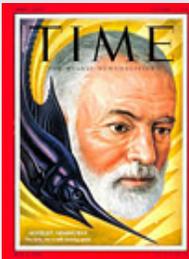
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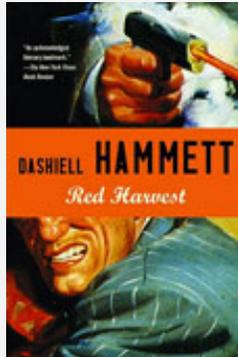
- 1:
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- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

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Red Harvest (1929)

Author: Dashiell Hammett

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Where did we first hear the voice of the world-weary American tough guy in its purest distillation? In Dashiell Hammett, a former Pinkerton detective, and in this book, his first novel. Though less famous than *The Maltese Falcon* or *The*

Thin Man, which both have the advantage of their pitch-perfect movie adaptations, this tale of omnidirectional treachery is the man at his deadly best. (For the record, there is a movie of this book, too. Transferred to samurai-era Japan, it was the basis for Kurosawa's great film *Yojimbo*.) With the Continental Op, a detective he had been developing for years in short stories, Hammett created the prototype for every sleuth who would ever be called "hard-boiled." And with his witty, economical prose—"I said: 'Hello.'"—Hammett gave machismo its own terse lyricism. Here the Op finds himself in a corrupt western town where there's a power struggle among contending factions. Virtually all of them, the hoods, the lawmen, the lowlifes, the local grandees, are lying and corrupt. Short, overweight, often a little drunk, the Op is no movie star. He's a hero all the same, a man on his own, maneuvering among the crocodiles, frequently with fists and

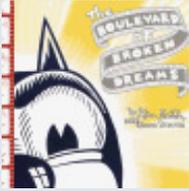
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firepower, always with a brutal and amusing efficiency.—R.L.

Next: Revolutionary Road »

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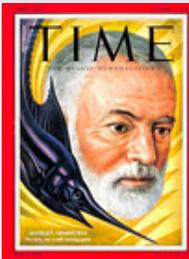
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- 3: A Passage to India
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- 5: Ubik

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Revolutionary Road (1961)

Author: Richard Yates

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We think of Updike and Cheever as the masters of postwar American suburbia, of its sunlit euphorias and its drunken discontents. Add Yates to the master list, just subtract the euphorias. His great novel is a bitterly funny and bitterly unfunny account of lethal disappointment in the Connecticut suburbs in 1955. When they were single and in love, Frank and April Wheeler thought of themselves as different—smarter, hipper, more alive. Then comes marriage and the steamroller of daily existence—his job for a big company, her wife-and-motherhood. The rewards of the material life seem like small compensation for the daily blows to the ego, which eventually detonate their lives. This may sound like a common predicament, but Yates gives it uncommon force. Though none of his six other novels enjoys the enduring prestige of this one, it doesn't matter. If *Revolutionary Road* doesn't make him an immortal, immortality isn't worth having.—R.L.

Next: [The Sheltering Sky](#) »

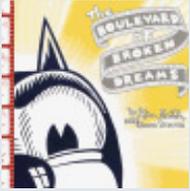
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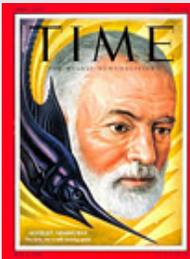
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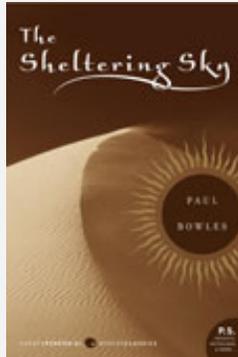
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The Sheltering Sky (1949)

Author: Paul Bowles

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A very strange book, and a very seductive one. Port Moseby and his wife, Kit, are traveling in North Africa with their annoying friend Tunner. They turn out to be en route to oblivion, a passage that brings them up against the desert, the Arabs, the French colonizers, a very unsavory mother/son combination and their enigmatic selves. Bowles, who lived much of his life in Tangiers, knew the enticing other-ness of Algeria and Morocco, enough to know that you can write about it in straightforward, unadorned prose—are you listening, Lawrence Durrell?—and still not fail to convey its treacherous beguilements. The last of this book's three sections, when Kit is given over to her fate in the desert, is one of the damndest things you will ever read.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“All this may be taken straight as simply a lurid, supersexy Sahara adventure story completely outfitted with camel trains,

handsome Arabs, French officers and a harem”

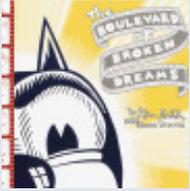
—TIME Magazine, Dec. 5, 1949 ([Read This Review](#))

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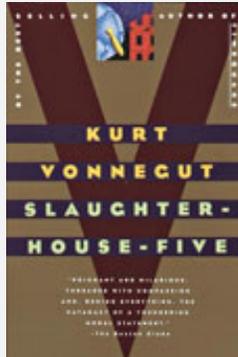
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Slaughterhouse-Five (1969)

Author: Kurt Vonnegut

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Vonnegut is still more cult favorite than literary lion (and he probably prefers it that way), but he deserves full canonical marks for this kaleidoscopic koan of a novel about Billy Pilgrim, a man who has "become unstuck in time." Pilgrim

ricochets helplessly from decade to decade, living the episodes of his life in no particular sequence, not excluding his own death, his capture by aliens called Tralfamadorians, and his traumatic service in World War II, when he lives through the firebombing of Dresden. *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a cynical novel, but beneath the bitter, grim-jawed humor is a desperate, painfully honest attempt to confront the monstrous crimes of the 20th century.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“For Vonnegut, man's worst folly is a persistent attempt to adjust, smoothly, rationally, to the unthinkable”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 11, 1969 ([Read This Review](#))

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- 1:
- 2: [Lolita](#)
- 3: [A Passage to India](#)
- 4: [A Death in the Family](#)
- 5: [Ubik](#)

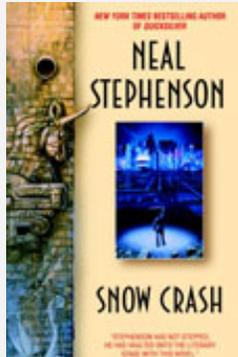
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Snow Crash (1992)

Author: Neal Stephenson

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Hiro Protagonist—yeah, that's his name—is a freelance hacker and unemployed pizza deliveryman lost in a post-lapsarian, hyper-capitalist future America in which the central government has withered away, leaving

behind a landscape of gated communities and endless strip malls lined with cookie-cutter retail franchises. When a virulent computer virus (or is it a drug? or a religion?) called Snow Crash gets loose and somehow starts infecting humans, Hiro teams up with a sassy skateboard messenger to save both the real world and cyberspace. Stephenson is that rare—no, unique—thing, both a virtuosic literary stylist and a consummate observer of a brave new world where information flows freely between humans and computers, to the point where the two are no longer easily distinguishable.—L.G.

Next: [The Sot-Weed Factor](#) »

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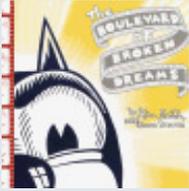
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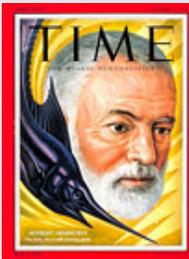
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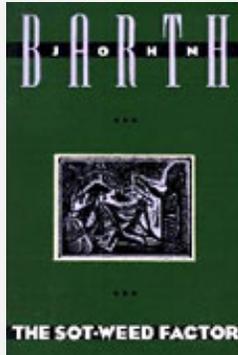
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The Sot-Weed Factor (1960)

Author: John Barth

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A feast. Dense, funny, endlessly inventive (and, OK, yes, long-winded) this satire of the 18th-century picaresque novel—think Fielding's *Tom Jones* or Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*—is also an earnest picture of the pitfalls

awaiting innocence as it makes its unsteady way in the world. It's the late 17th century and Ebenezer Cooke is a poet, dutiful son and determined virgin who travels from England to Maryland to take possession of his father's tobacco (or "sot weed") plantation. He is also eventually given to believe that he has been commissioned by the third Lord Baltimore to write an epic poem, *The Marylandiad*. But things are not always what they seem. Actually, things are almost never what they seem. Not since *Candide* has a steadfast soul witnessed so many strange scenes or faced so many perils. Pirates, Indians, shrewd prostitutes, armed insurrectionists—Cooke endures them all, plus assaults on his virginity from both women and men. Barth's language is impossibly rich, a wickedly funny take on old English rhetoric and American self-appraisals. For good measure he throws in stories within stories, including the funniest retelling of the Pocahontas

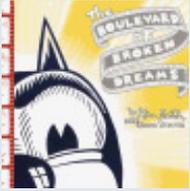
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tale—revealed to us in the "secret" journals of Capt. John
Smith—that anyone has ever dared to tell.— R.L.

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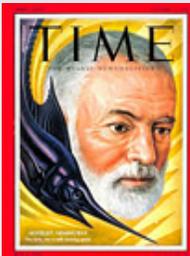
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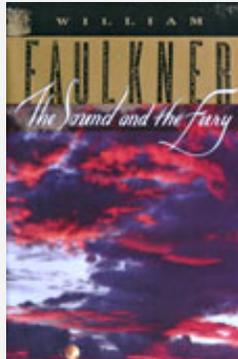
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The Sound and the Fury (1929)

Author: William Faulkner

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Flannery O'Connor's nickname for Faulkner was "the Dixie Limited." She didn't mean it entirely kindly: His huge talent and towering ambition made him a literary freight train that other southern writers were often forced to dodge. Both qualities are on full display in *The Sound and the Fury*, which describes the bitter, incestuous dealings of a Mississippi family fallen on hard times. A formal and stylistic tour de force (in other words, a tough but profoundly rewarding read), the book unfolds in four sections, centered in turn on each of the three Compson brothers—Benjy, a mentally disabled man; Quentin, a depressed, neurotic Harvard student; and Jason, an avaricious jerk—as well as on a black servant named Dilsey. All the brothers are obsessed with the dishonored Caddy, the slutty Compson sister, and with the family honor (and the family fortune) that the Compsons have frittered away. From these ruined fragments and damaged spare parts Faulkner builds a brutally moving epic of love, lust and endurance.—L.G.

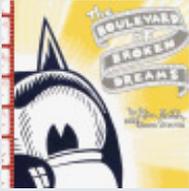
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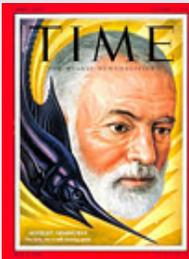
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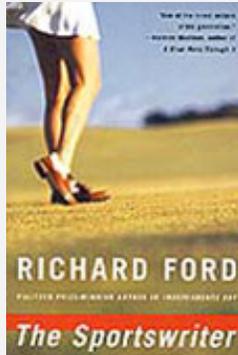
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The Sportswriter (1986)

Author: Richard Ford

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Frank Bascombe is scrupulously out of touch with himself. Devastated by the death of his young son, divorced now from his wife, he is tiptoeing his way through bereavement, using work—he's a magazine writer—to dislodge his grief, self-medicating with a strenuously pursued normalcy. In this beautifully calibrated book, he finds his way to something like peace, which is a different matter. Ford is masterful at describing hard-won and precarious emotional equilibriums of a kind you very well may recognize as your own. This book led to a no less brilliant sequel, *Independence Day*. As portraits of a man who has lingered in despair but who refuses in the end to remain there, they have no equal.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Richard Ford should have little trouble becoming a literary heartthrob”

—TIME Magazine, May. 24, 1986 ([Read This Review](#))

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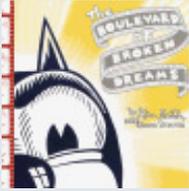
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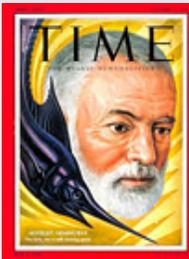
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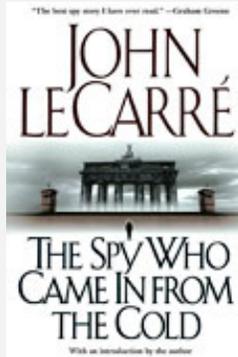
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The Spy Who Came in From the Cold (1964)

Author: John le Carre

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No one wears a tuxedo in le Carre's spy novels. His agents are middle-aged, disappointed, disillusioned men in stained overcoats. In *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* a worn-out

English spy named Alec Leamas

undertakes a terrifying mission in the hope that it will be his last:

He pretends to defect to East Germany, the better to infiltrate the

enemy's espionage network. Written from personal experience (le

Carre—real name David Cornwell—did a hitch in MI6) with

pitiless, elegant clarity, *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* is a

first-rate thriller and more: a sad, sympathetic portrait of a man

who has lived by lies and subterfuge for so long, he's forgotten

how to tell the truth.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Even if John le Carre's book isn't authentic, nobody except another certified spy can be sure”

—TIME Magazine, Jan. 17, 1964 ([Read This Review](#))

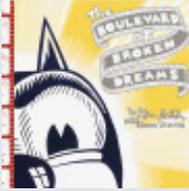
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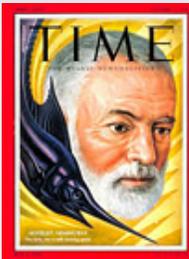
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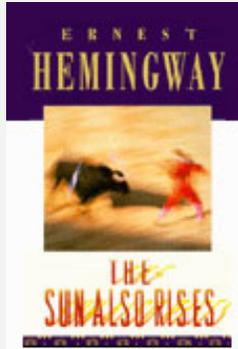
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The Sun Also Rises (1926)

Author: Ernest Hemingway

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Meet Jake Barnes: working journalist, expatriate, tough talker, tragic hero.

Jake was horribly wounded in the

war—in fact, he was effectively

gelded—so he spends his time in Paris

getting drunk in cafes, nursing his

ennui, bantering with his hard-boiled friends, and mooning over

his unconsummable love for a beautiful, aristocratic

Englishwoman named Bret Ashley who dines on men three meals

a day. This doomed pair, plus a lively cast of romantically reckless

expatriates, head to Pamplona for the annual fiesta, where they

drink vast amounts of wine, hook up, betray one another, and try

to forget the caverns of loss and emptiness that gape inside them.

The Sun Also Rises popularized the idea of the "Lost

Generation"—but the anomie and disappointment at its heart

seem to come around for every generation, sooner or later.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ While Hemingway's writing has acquired only a few affectations, his interests appear to have grown soggy with much sitting around sloppy cafe tables in the so-called Latin quarter of

Paris ”

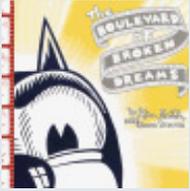
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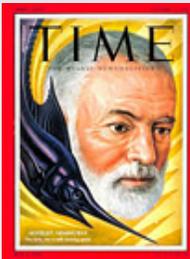
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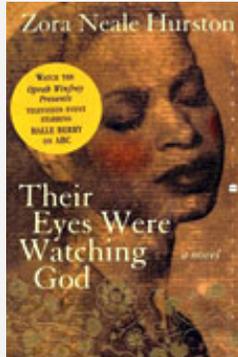
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Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937)

Author: Zora Neale Hurston

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"There is no agony," Hurston once wrote, "like bearing an untold story inside you." Janie Crawford, forty-ish, with her "firm buttocks like she had grapefruits in her hip pockets," her "pugnacious breasts," and her imperial self-possession, has survived the most tempestuous years of her life, buried three husbands, and returned home to tell the story. Or at least to tell it to her best friend Pheoby, who Janie knows will relay it to the curious but envious town folk in the African-American enclave of Eatonville, in the Florida Everglades. (Hurston's actual hometown.) Quite a tale it is, of three men in succession who married and hurt her in different ways. The last of them she outlived only because she outshot him. This is the great tale of black female survival in a world beset by bad weather and bad men. Her succulent book has its stretches of overripe prose, but that's the price of taking the chances she takes with language, chances you have to take to arrive at the witchy places she gets to. (Sizing up her third husband, Tea Cake, she notices "his lashes curling sharply like drawn scimitars.") It's a short book, but

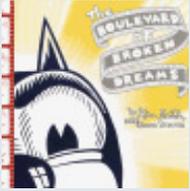
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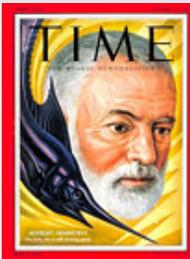
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you savor it. And after New Orleans, the climactic scene of

hurricane and flood is more powerful than ever.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“To Northerners the Negro is not a social problem but a minor,
hardly noticeable industrial phenomenon”

—TIME Magazine, Sep. 20, 1937 ([Read This Review](#))

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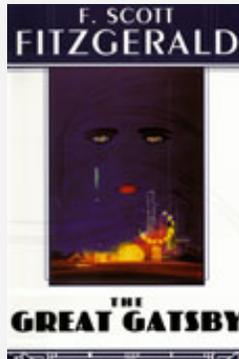
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The Great Gatsby (1925)

Author: F. Scott Fitzgerald

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with stripes and scrolls and plaids in

coral and apple green and lavender and faint orange with

monograms of Indian blue"—can and do reduce women to tears.

But who is he? Where does he come from, where did he make his

megabucks, and why—his sober, straight-arrow neighbor (and narrator) Nick wonders—does he stand on his dock at night and

stretch out his arms to a green light shining across the bay from

his magnificent mansion? *The Great Gatsby* lays bare the empty,

tragic heart of the self-made man. It's not only a page-turner and

a heartbreaker, it's one of the most quintessentially American

novels ever written.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Still the brightest boy in the class, Scott Fitzgerald holds up his hand”

—TIME Magazine, May. 11, 1925 ([Read This Review](#))

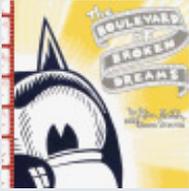
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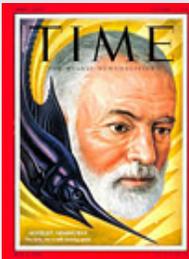
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- 4: A Death in the Family
- 5: Ubik

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A Handful of Dust (1934)

Author: Evelyn Waugh

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Devoted to his wife, Brenda, his son, John Andrew, and to Hetton, his very ugly neo-Gothic homestead, Tony Last will lose all three. As his name is always announcing, Last lives at the end of a dying age, the brittle, exhausted 1930s, when England, at least Waugh's England, is a place where Brenda can throw herself at the feet of a childish lover and where Last can discard his life on an absurd caprice. Waugh's own marriage was disintegrating when he wrote this, and his unhappiness led him into wider realms of feeling—pathos, rage—than any you find in his earlier triumphs of nasty wit, *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*. Sound dreary? Not even slightly. If this is Waugh at his bleakest it's also Waugh at his deepest, most poisonously funny.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“As up-to-date as this week's London smartchatter, *A Handful of Dust* is no tragicomedy but a melofarce”

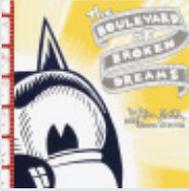
—TIME Magazine, Sep. 24, 1934 ([Read This Review](#))

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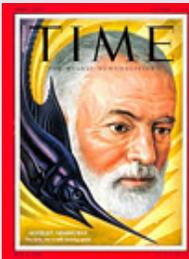
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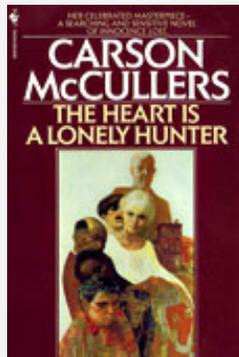
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The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter (1940)

Author: Carson McCullers

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When Carson McCullers was a

teenager, she came to New York City to

study piano at Juilliard. She never

matriculated; she lost the purse with her

tuition money in it. Such small,

unredressed tragedies as these are at

the silent, solitary heart of McCullers' first novel, which centers on

a deaf-mute and a teenage tomboy living in a small Georgia town

in the 1930s. McCullers' characters reach out to one another for

sympathy and understanding, but not all of them can complete the

connection, and their isolated thoughts form a choir of amazing,

transcendent poignance—music only the reader can hear. —L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“As a writer of words, McCullers is never distinguished, never
in one glint verbally original”

—TIME Magazine, Jun. 10, 1940 ([Read This Review](#))

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The Heart of the Matter (1948)

Author: Graham Greene

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He felt the loyalty we all feel to

unhappiness—the sense that there is

where we really belong. Nobody could

do abjection like Greene. And no one

could parse moral dilemmas with quite

his eye for the subtle ways that Satan

persuades the righteous. Henry Scobie is one of his supreme

creations, a British colonial police officer stationed during World

War II in a damp, vulture-ridden West African town. A Roman

Catholic mindful of his duties to God, Scobie thinks of himself as

incorruptible, but he has not counted on the power of his own

excesses of pity to beguile him. To deliver his wife from

unhappiness he is led into complicity with smugglers; to save a

young woman from despair—but no less to save himself—he is

drawn into adultery; to rescue them both from his misjudgments

he is led to betray his God. A man for whom humility becomes a

kind of perverse pride arrives at a place where he wills his own

damnation as the one means to escape his earthly

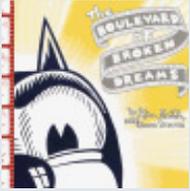
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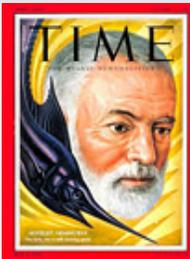
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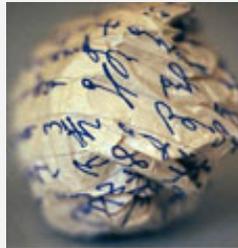
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Herzog (1964)

Author: Saul Bellow

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Like Binx Bolling in Percy's *The Moviegoer*, but at a much higher pitch of talkative despair, Chaim Herzog is a man on a philosophical quest. "Much of my life has been spent in the effort to live by more coherent ideas," he tells

us. "I even know which ones." But unlike Bolling he is in the grip of a crisis that's not merely existential. His wife has left him for somebody he thought was a good friend, taking with her his beloved daughter. This plunges him into a tormented appraisal not only of himself and the people around him, but of nearly everything that has transpired since the Age of Reason got under way. You get to watch him shake his head, and sometimes his fist, at the world, all the while asking it, unbreak my heart.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Individual episodes in *Herzog* are brilliant; Bellow can wring a rare pathos out of the most unlikely, unlovely material”

—TIME Magazine, Sept. 25, 1964 ([Read This Review](#))

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Reader's Choice

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- 3: *A Passage to India*
- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

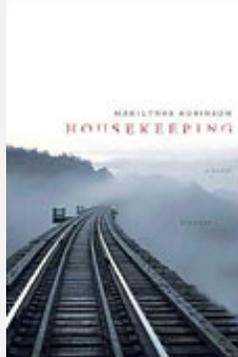
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Housekeeping (1981)

Author: Marilynne Robinson

• [PRINT](#)

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Fingerbone is a fictional town in the Pacific Northwest. It rests along a lake that has the distinction of once having claimed an entire train that slid from a bridge into its dark waters one night, taking almost all on board to their deaths. Time swallows people in the same way in this sly book. The narrator is Ruth, a teenaged girl. She and her sister are raised, affectionately but haphazardly, by various generations of the women in her all-too-eccentric family. This is a book about women, making homes and leaving them. Even when the girls stay home, the days and nights pass and the plot goes nowhere in particular, Robinson arrives again and again in resounding places.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“This first novel does much more than show promise; it brilliantly portrays the impermanence of all things, especially beauty and happiness”

—TIME Magazine, Feb. 2, 1981 ([Read This Review](#))

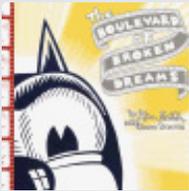
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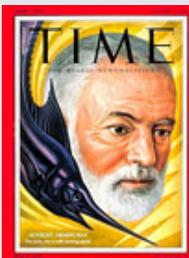
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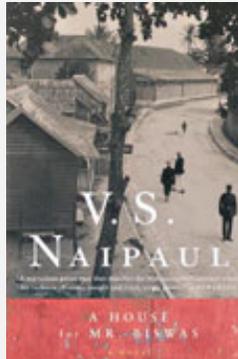
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A House for Mr. Biswas (1962)

Author: V.S. Naipaul

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When Mohun Biswas married his wife, Shama, he effectively married her entire family, the daunting, smothering Tulsis. Set in the Hindu community in postcolonial Trinidad—where Naipaul was born—*A House for Mr. Biswas* is

the life story of a man who wanted only a home, but who was a magnet for misfortune, oppression and humiliation, "a wanderer with no place he could call his own, with no family except that which he was to attempt to create out of the engulfing world of the Tulsis." Mohun's survival is a triumph of resilience and persistence and humor, an epic of dignity and self-respect doggedly clung to.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Naipaul's *House*, though built of excellent exotic materials, sags badly; 'economy, style, and a less elastic blueprint would have done wonders”

—TIME Magazine, Jun. 22, 1962 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: [I, Claudius](#) »

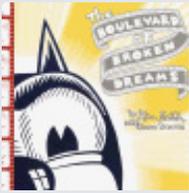
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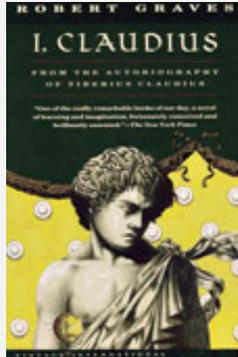
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I, Claudius (1934)

Author: Robert Graves

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Though he briefly became emperor, Claudius, the limping, stuttering grandson of Caesar Augustus, is not your usual Roman on a pedestal. Sly, even bitchy, an appalled observer of his treacherous times—in his voice you hear the worldliness of classical literature with none of its marble officialdom. A member of a ruthless and murderous imperial family, he survives because he seems to all around him the least consequential twig of the family tree. But Claudius bears enduring witness to a moment when the virtues of the Roman republic, which has already been disposed of by the time he begins his tale, are being lost to the bloodlusts and hubris of the Roman empire.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“Readers for whom the life of ancient Rome has been mummified by academic historians, museums and Latin grammar will give Author Graves a rising vote of thanks”

—TIME Magazine, Jun. 18, 1934 ([Read This Review](#))

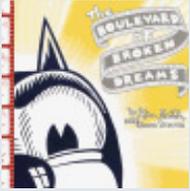
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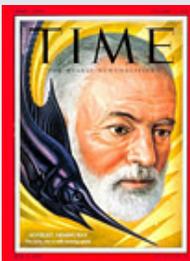
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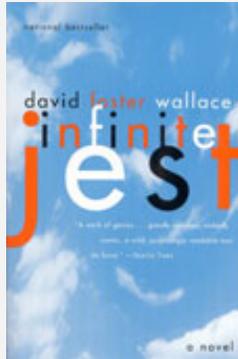
- 1:
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Infinite Jest (1996)

Author: David Foster Wallace

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The title is a sly wink at the book's massive girth—it's 1,000-plus pages in most editions—but the reference to *Hamlet* is well-earned; moreover, it's a damn funny book. The action takes place in Boston at two separate but curiously similar venues—an elite tennis academy and a drug rehabilitation facility—in a near future in which calendar years are available for corporate sponsorship (the Year of the Trial Size Dove Bar, the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, and so on). The plot of *Infinite Jest*—which revolves around, among other things, a lost, unwatchably beautiful art film and a conspiracy among wheelchair-bound Quebecois secessionists—is decidedly secondary to the painfully funny dialogue and Wallace's endlessly rich ruminations and speculations on addiction, entertainment, art, life and, of course, tennis.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“David Foster Wallace's marathon send-up of humanism at the end of its tether is worth the effort”

—TIME Magazine, Feb. 19, 1996 ([Read This Review](#))

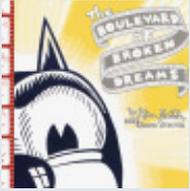
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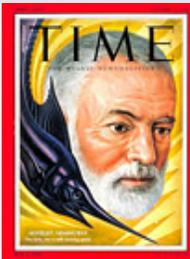
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Things Fall Apart (1959)

Author: Chinua Achebe

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A novel of great power that turns the world upside down. The Nigerian novelist Achebe reached back to the early days of his people's encounter with colonialism, the 1890's, though the white man and his religion make an impression upon the story only in its later stages. Instead of being treated as onlookers to the arrival of the colonial power, either passive or menacing, here the Africans are center stage, capable all the while of nobility but also cruelty, wisdom and bewilderment. Okonkwo is an ambitious man within the Umuofia clan of the Igbo tribe. Determined to be a lord, he observes its rules, even the harshest of them, though that observance will eventually drive away his own son. Achebe guides us through the intricacies of Igbo culture, its profound sense of justice, its sometimes murderous rules, its noble and harmful machismo. By the time the British colonial administrator arrives towards the end of the book to dismiss the natives as savages, we know how profoundly mistaken that word is.— R.L.

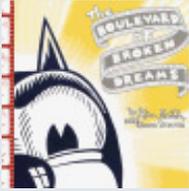
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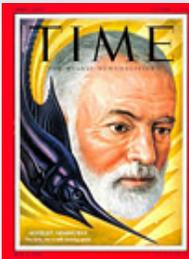
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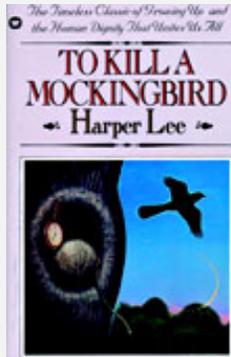
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To Kill a Mockingbird (1960)

Author: Harper Lee

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It would have been very easy to write a novel about a rape trial involving a black man and a white woman, set in the deep, deeply racist South and seen through the eyes of a young girl, that wallowed in too-simple choices and made-for-TV-movie sentiment. Thankfully that novel is not *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The young girl is the curious, clear-eyed Scout, and her father, who defends the accused, is the immortal Atticus Finch, a pillar of weary small-town righteousness. What follows is neither simple nor sentimental, but is instead a classic of moral complexity and an endlessly renewable fund of wisdom about the nature of human decency.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“Lee, 34, an Alabaman, has written her first novel with all of the tactile brilliance and none of the preciousity generally supposed to be standard swamp-warfare issue for Southern writers”

—TIME Magazine, Aug. 1, 1960 ([Read This Review](#))

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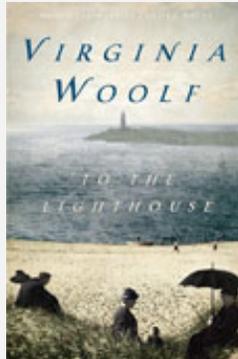
- 1:
- 2: *Lolita*
- 3: *A Passage to India*
- 4: *A Death in the Family*
- 5: *Ubik*

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To the Lighthouse (1927)

Author: Virginia Woolf

- [PRINT](#)
- [« Previous | Next »](#)



After Woolf published her breakthrough novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, she raised the stakes and broadened her focus. *To the Lighthouse* is a stately dance of time, hope and art, as performed by the Ramsay family and their immediate

friends as they vacation at a house in the Hebrides. Mrs. Ramsay is a housewife and hostess; her husband is a cold, analytical philosopher; drawn in their wake are, among others, a struggling young painter named Lily Briscoe and their little son James, whose dearest wish is to take a boat ride to a nearby lighthouse. The novel begins as a poignant portrait of family dynamics, but Woolf sets the second half of the book a decade after the first, and that allows her to turn *To the Lighthouse* into a study of the damage that time and history inflict on the Ramsays' hopes and dreams, and a celebration of what endures.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ The Significance of Author Woolf's last novel was that her "stream of consciousness" method was not only startlingly original but startlingly successful as well ”

—TIME Magazine, May. 30, 1927 ([Read This Review](#))

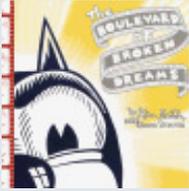
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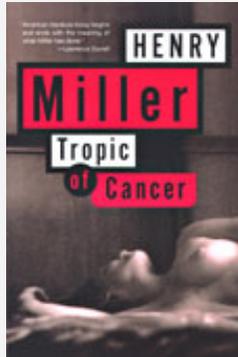
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Tropic of Cancer (1934)

Author: Henry Miller

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"This is not a book, in the ordinary sense of the word. No, this is a prolonged insult, a gob of spit in the face of Art, a kick in the pants to God, Man, Destiny, Time, Love, Beauty..."

That was Miller. In other words, it's a bum's manifesto, the greatest imaginable. Miller discourses on his life and lowlife in Paris, fashioning his experiences, reflections, orgasms and philosophizing into a shambling narrative. It's impossible to outdo George Orwell's wonderfully overstated appraisal of Miller in 1940—"the only imaginative prose writer of the slightest value who has appeared among the English-speaking races in some time"—but it's hard not to agree. He's the thinking man's slacker, but his prose is a force multiplier—lucid, honest and unhampered by neurotic self-loathing. *Tropic of Cancer* was not published in the U.S. until 1961, where it set off an obscenity trial that is still one of the great episodes in the history of free speech. Before Kerouac, before Burroughs, Miller disputed all the imperatives of capitalism. He stood before the temple of money and raised the flag of happiness. You have a problem with that?— R.L.

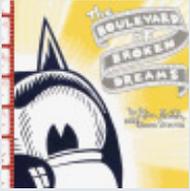
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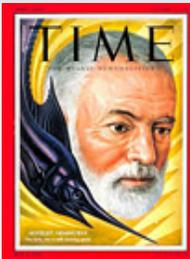
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From the TIME Archive:

“This strange book is the work of a 47-year-old expatriate who
was born in New York, worked as a tailor, personnel manager,
ranchman in California, newspaperman, six-day bicycle racer,
concert pianist and who settled in Paris 'to study vice.'”

—TIME Magazine, Nov. 21, 1938 ([Read This Review](#))

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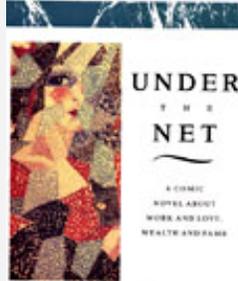
Under the Net (1954)

Author: Iris Murdoch

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IRIS
MURDOCH



Murdoch, a philosophy don at Oxford,

was that rarity, a philosophical novelist

who could create real characters, not

premises with names attached. Born in

Ireland, she revered Wittgenstein, who

fostered her contempt for abstractions.

(Her title refers to the "net" he believed language cast over truth.)

She also wrote the first English-language elucidation of Sartre,

whose existentialism was behind her sharp appreciation of the

human potential for leaps into the void. But it was as a novelist

that she will be remembered. Until she began sinking into

Alzheimer's in the mid-1990's, she maintained a ferocious output.

This was the first of her 26 novels, about a circle of bewildered

and lovesick friends and acquaintances in London, with

excursions into aesthetics and left-wing politics. Right out of the

gate she displayed all her sinuous gifts—her questing mind, her

comic skepticism, her wildly entangled plots.— R.L.

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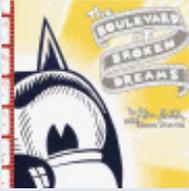
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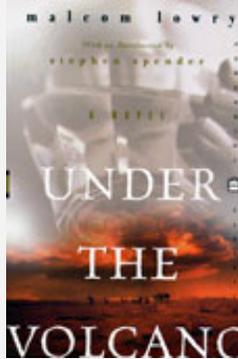
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Under the Volcano (1947)

Author: Malcolm Lowry

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To describe his perennial theme, Lowry once borrowed the words of the critic Edmund Wilson: "the forces in man which cause him to be terrified of himself." You see exactly what he means in this coruscating novel, which

traces the last 24 hours in the life of Geoffrey Firmin, once the British consul in a hellish Mexican town, now a dedicated but utterly cogent alcoholic in that same town, on a day when his ex-wife has returned in a futile attempt to reach out to him. Shadowed by the hoodlums of the corrupt local officialdom, beset by his own furies, Firmin hurtles himself, annotating his fall all the while, into a pit of suffering. A vertiginous picture of self-destruction, seen through the eyes of a man still lucid enough to report to us all the harrowing particulars.—R.L.

From the TIME Archive:

“*Under the Volcano* makes the average novel look small and timid”

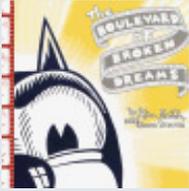
—TIME Magazine, Feb. 24, 1947 ([Read This Review](#))

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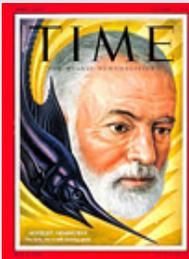
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Watchmen (1986)

Author: Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons

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Watchmen is a graphic novel—a book-length comic book with ambitions above its station—starring a ragbag of bizarre, damaged, retired superheroes: the paunchy, melancholic Nite Owl; the raving doomsayer Rorschach; the blue, glowing, near-omnipotent, no-longer-human Doctor Manhattan. Though their heyday is past, these former crime-fighters are drawn back into action by the murder of a former teammate, The Comedian, which turns out to be the leading edge of a much wider, more disturbing conspiracy. Told with ruthless psychological realism, in fugal, overlapping plotlines and gorgeous, cinematic panels rich with repeating motifs, *Watchmen* is a heart-pounding, heartbreaking read and a watershed in the evolution of a young medium.—L.G.

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White Noise (1985)

Author: Don DeLillo

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Affable Jack Gladney is professor of Hitler studies at a small midwestern college whose life is upended when a deadly chemical spill near his home creates what the authorities delicately term an Airborne Toxic Event. Gladney succumbs to anger and paranoia, and his wife, Babette, starts taking an experimental drug designed to do away with the fear of death. Though it's pitched at a level of absurdity slightly above that of real life, *White Noise* captures the quality of daily existence in media-saturated, hyper-capitalistic postmodern America so precisely, you don't know whether to laugh or whimper. —L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“DeLillo's gifts are lavish, but his vision is a bit facile”
—TIME Magazine, Jan. 21, 1985 ([Read This Review](#))

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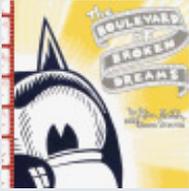
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Reader's Choice

1:

2: Lolita

3: A Passage to India

4: A Death in the Family

5: Ubik

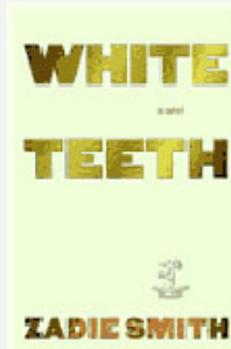
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White Teeth (2000)

Author: Zadie Smith

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This may be the first novel ever written that truly feels at home in our borderless, globalized, intermarried, post-colonial age, populated by "children with first and last names on a direct collision course." Published when Smith was just 24, *White Teeth* follows the friendship of two Londoners, a pub-going working-class bloke named Archie and a Muslim from Bangladesh named Samad. Archie marries a Jamaican; Samad has twin sons, one of whom becomes a religious militant, the other a rabid Anglophile. The overlapping fates of Smith's characters seem to trace the new structures of 21st-century life and test their sturdiness as framework for peace and happiness. Both deeply Dickensian and playfully post-modern, *White Teeth* doesn't quail before the rampantly ramifying novelistic complexities of a multicultural world. It revels in them.—L.G.

From the TIME Archive:

“ You don't know her yet, but British novelist Zadie Smith, 24, is such a phenomenon on that side of the Atlantic that she has even reviewed herself ”

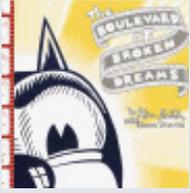
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—TIME Magazine, May. 8, 2000 (Read This Review)

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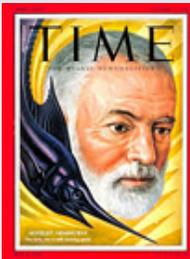
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1:

2: *Lolita*3: *A Passage to India*4: *A Death in the Family*5: *Ubik*[See the full list »](#)**Invisible Man (1952)**

Author: Ralph Ellison

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Invisible
Man

A nameless young black man wends a tortuous path from a southern town—where a local white men's club mockingly awards him a scholarship to a black college—to the streets of New York City, where everybody, black and

white, left and right, man and woman, seems to have their own ideas about who he is and what purpose he can serve.

Evenhandedly exposing the hypocrisies and stereotypes of all comers, *Invisible Man* is far more than a race novel, or even a bildungsroman. It's the quintessential American picaresque of the 20th century. —L.G.

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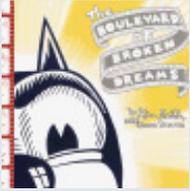
“*Invisible Man* is a remarkable first novel that gives 38-year-old Ralph Ellison a claim to being the best of U.S. Negro writers”

—TIME Magazine, Apr. 14, 1952 ([Read This Review](#))

Next: *Light in August* »**More From the Archive:****Current Issue**[Table of Contents](#)

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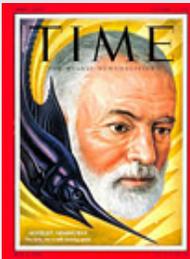
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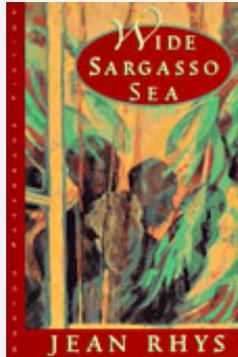
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Wide Sargasso Sea (1966)

Author: Jean Rhys

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In Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Bertha is the madwoman locked in the attic by her husband Rochester, the simmering Englishman whose children Jane has been hired to tutor. In Bronte's novel we learn little about Bertha other than that

she's a monster who must be bound with rope, a white woman from the Caribbean whom Rochester was long ago pressured into marrying for her money. But Rhys, who grew up in the French Caribbean colony of Dominica, presses on the silences in Bronte to give Bertha her own story. Caliban does not become Ariel here, but Rhys turns a menacing cipher into a grieving, plausible young woman, and one whose story says whole worlds about global mixtures, about the misunderstandings between the colonized, the colonizers and the people who can't easily say which they are.—R.L.

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