

The Hundred Best Books of The Twentieth Century

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Attempts to determine excellence in human endeavor range from the Olympic Games in ancient Greece to the Miss Universe contests of today. In the literary world, one of the largest book dealers of the United Kingdom, the Waterstone Company, in connection with British Television Channel 4, has attempted to identify the twentieth century's best books. In doing so it has published a list of the one hundred favorites identified in a public opinion poll in which each of 25,000 readers nominated five titles. This sounding of public taste gives an indication of what people in the United Kingdom are reading, not necessarily what journalists and academics believe they should be reading. Apart from stimulating considerable broad-range thinking, the poll constitutes a guide to the major literary themes, genres and ideas prevalent in the century as well as a register of one hundred distinguished books in which they appear. Several important titles may be missing from each category, but every book included is one of the most representative.

It is doubtful that many people would agree that the title receiving the largest number of votes, *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. R. Tolkien, is the best book of the century, not because it lacks talent or artistry, but because of the genre to which the book belongs, that of fantasy fiction. Tolkien's other book on the list, *The Hobbit*, which inhabits the same wonderland as *The Lord of the Rings*, is acknowledged juvenilia. These works have, nevertheless, won favor with adult countercultural groups primarily because they challenge and subvert power and authority. Tolkien's pseudo-invented language has even been studied by some medievalists, philologists, and seekers of allegories.

That the list contains no poetry is hardly a surprise since serious poets after the Victorian Age have not addressed the general public. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* came close to making the list, finishing as number 101. It is somewhat of an anomaly, however, that no dramatist garnered enough votes for inclusion, not even Ibsen or Shaw, since the stage still engages considerable public attention, perhaps now more than ever since the advent and perfection of movies and television. Most titles on the list, including the top ten, belong to works of fiction.

Less than one third of the books were published before the mid-century, indicating both the effect of time on producing a consensus and the appeal of the contemporary. Nearly all the older books appear at the top of the list, evidence of the operation of canonization. These pre-1950 books, which are with one exception works of fiction, may have been chosen primarily for their familiarity. Joyce comes fourth; Kafka twenty-second and Proust thirty-third. Besides the latter two, the only works in translation are Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* at 74, Camus's *The Outsider* at 20, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* at 26. The only other works not from the United Kingdom are American: Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (9) and *Of Mice and Men* (35), Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (12), Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (23), and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (57). Orwell, who occupies both second and third places, is recognized for three books, along with D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster. The only author in the pre-1950 group to have received a Nobel Prize is Steinbeck.

The largest category of books selected consists of novels generally classified as conventional or classic. Not experimental in style, they combine one or more universal themes, characters conforming to their environment or period, and a story-line typical of real-life situations. Characters are believable, plot complications plausible, and narrative develops in a linear fashion. The most familiar authors belong to this group: Graham Greene (2 titles), F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Golding, Camus, D. H. Lawrence (3 titles), Joseph Conrad, E. M. Forster (3 titles), Daphne du Maurier, Evelyn Waugh, Boris Pasternak, Virginia Woolf and Laurence Durrell.

Several books in the present decade carry on this classic, linear tradition, including *Possession: A Romance* (37) by A. S. Byatt. Although the subtitle suggests light reading of a sentimental nature, the work, in words from the narrative itself, actually portrays "the whole terror and endeavour of twentieth-century literary scholarship." The two principal characters are linked by sexual attraction, but the plot concerns a number of academic hangers-on attempting to uncover manuscripts and mementos of a nineteenth-century poet, modeled loosely on Tennyson. The novel has a great deal in common with *The Aspern Papers* by Henry James, who does not appear on the list.

Although not emerging until the last decade, *Possession* has almost no features associated with postmodernism. The same is true of the most recent book on the list, Nicholas Evans's *The Horse Whisperer* (100), which appeared in 1995 and has been made into a motion picture. In this conventional American novel, the daughter of a wealthy East-Coast couple loses her leg in a riding accident in which her horse is also injured. Her mother becomes sexually involved with a sympathetic horse trainer, who, at the end, driven by a sense of guilt, commits suicide.

The Remains of the Day (45) by Kazuo Ishiguro, an ethnic Japanese reared and educated in England, also conforms to the conventional model of the well-made novel. By means of impeccable verisimilitude in style and vocabulary, the first-person narrator, a butler employed in an English country house who seems on first impression to resemble P. G. Wodehouse's semi-satirical Jeeves, reveals himself as a troubled personality unaware of his own weaknesses.

John Fowles, who makes a point of varying styles from one book to the next, is selected for two studies of character: in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (65) the female protagonist defiantly allows her community to assume erroneously that she has been sexually abused and abandoned, and in *The Magus* (60) a powerful man manipulates events on a small Greek island in order to test the integrity

of a younger man unknowingly brought there for his trial.

Presumably all of the fiction on the list with the exception of juvenilia should combine serious themes with stylistic distinction. Those which excel in both qualities, which could indeed be candidates for the Nobel Prize and seem likely to be ensconced in the canon one hundred years from now, are not necessarily, however, those most widely read. A character in one of the least pretentious novels on the list who describes himself as "not the brightest bloke in the world, but certainly not the dimmest" makes a revealing comment about two of the books likely to survive another century: "I have read books like *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* and *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and understood them, I think (they were about girls, right), but I don't like them very much." These two novels are indeed about girls, but much else. They are also translations from languages other than English, that of Kundera from Czech and that of Garcia Marquez from Spanish. "Lightness" in Kundera's title refers to the sense of inconsequence or indifference in life as the opposite of "heaviness," which implies gravity or importance. History or chronological time is considered as "light" because it can never be repeated; there is no such thing as the eternal return. Another work on the list, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (24), maintains exactly the opposite. Kundera uses girls to illustrate his theme that the attainment of happiness in company with pleasure is a goal almost impossible to attain. A kindred theme is moral and political, bearing on the post-war occupation of Czechoslovakia by Russian communists. The dilemma the protagonist faces concerns the communists of his own country—did they know about the horrors perpetrated by the communist regime on the Russian people and, if they were ignorant, could they be considered guilty of the treatment accorded to their own countrymen? Using the Oedipus theme as an allegory, he decides that no excuse is ever valid to exculpate an evil deed.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (43) surveys the culture of a century in the process of chronicling the multitudinous love affairs of a man determined to wait a lifetime until he is free to marry a woman who had rejected him as a youth. The narrative has none of the tricks of magic realism except a doll that grows in size and the unerring olfactory sense of the principal female character that enables her to detect smells not perceptible by anyone else, a theme later developed by Patrick Suskind in *Perfume*. The devices of magic realism come into full play, however, in Garcia Marquez's earlier *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (8), a family novel covering six generations in which the real and the fantastic join in portraying major themes in Latin American society. Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (42) also transforms historical materials into a modern genre, using a medieval setting as background for a mystery thriller.

Utopias, it seems, have temporarily gone out of fashion; the latest to achieve any degree of popular acceptance was James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, 1933, which is not on the list. But the three great dystopias of the century, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2) and *Animal Farm* (3) together with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (15), are there, indeed at the very top. A vague dystopia, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (58), which is sometimes classified as a feminist novel, is the only work by a Canadian author included. It has as its main targets religious fundamentalism and autocratic government. Because of a major decline in population in the United States, the religious right enforces a policy based upon the Old Testament requiring unmarried females of child-bearing age to be enlisted in a military-type corps and farmed out at appropriate periods to barren couples to serve as surrogate wives. The accompanying puritanical values of society as a whole make daily life dreary and desolate.

Vikram Seth's easy-to-read family novel about contemporary India, *A Suitable Boy* (50), resembles John Galsworthy's *Forsythe Saga*, which did not make the list. Replete with genealogy, the novel exceeds in length Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (23). Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (25), a similar family saga, also has many characteristics of the historical novel in its constant reference to background events in the political-religious split between India and Pakistan. His more famous and equally brilliant *Satanic Verses* is not on the list, possibly because of the religious controversy with which it is associated. More conventional novels based upon historical events are Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (23) and Robert Graves's *I, Claudius* (99).

Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (74) portrays the tragedy and fruitlessness of war. The American Joseph Heller in *Catch-22* (5) uses satirical techniques to expose the corruption and inefficiency of military life in World War II. Gunter Grass in *The Tin Drum* (88) extends the satirical process to comprise the veniality and viciousness of the entire German nation in submitting to Nazi ideology. More recently an English author, Louis de Bernieres, blends satire with humor in describing the German-Italian occupation of Greece in World War II in a novel with the unlikely title *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (66). Affirming that war is a wonderful thing only in books and the movies, he subjects Italian Fascism to the same withering disdain that Gunter Grass applies to Nazi Germany, using a similar musical symbol in his title.

The Diary of Anne Frank (26) records the thoughts of a young Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis in occupied Holland. Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* (54) records a poet's reaction to the military horrors of World War I and the social displacements of its aftermath. Life in a post-war Soviet labor camp is detailed in a deliberately unsensational manner in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (89), by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, one of the few Nobel Prize winners on the list. His indictment of the cruelty and corruption of the Stalinist regime rests entirely on his unemotional, factual statement, devoid of artificial rhetoric. Shortages in food, firewood, shelter and sleep keep the prisoners in a state of perpetual apathy. *If This is a Man* (30) by an Italian Jew, Primo Levi, resembles Solzhenitsyn's matter-of-fact style as it demonstrates that the routine of incessant labor, lack of food and sleep, and deprivation of freedom suffered by political prisoners are greater tortures than deliberate brutality. The carefully planned purpose of Auschwitz, where he was an inmate, was to annihilate the masculinity of its victims before killing them. The title raises the question whether humanity itself has been demolished.

Brian Keenan in *An Evil Cradling* (84) concentrates on the mind of single individuals who are incarcerated in tiny cells without light or other forms of stimulation. A native of Belfast, Ireland, Keenan was kidnapped by the Arab Jihad while teaching at the American University of Beirut. His reminiscences of various hide-outs where he witnessed extreme brutality and torture combine lessons learned from books with those from his own suffering and hallucinations. His work reveals the psychological effects of political terrorism as it analyzes both Arab and Irish minds.

Kurt Vonnegut's fictional *Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade*(67) differs radically in style and structure from the matter-of-fact recitals of Solzhenitzen, Levi and Keenan. Based largely on the fire-bombing of Dresden in World War II, it shifts constantly through time, and its style is colloquial and sardonic. The message, however, is forthright and serious—that warfare of all kinds is evil. The subtitle refers to the crusades of the Middle Ages as an example of the hollow pretensions of virtue when used to mask unmitigated bigotry and suffering. Despite this subtitle, only about half of the book is devoted to war; the other half deals with American middle-class culture and outer space. Time has no limits, the protagonist has the power of living in both the past and the future, and he travels in a flying saucer to a planet millions of miles away from the earth. Although written long after World War II, Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* (47) goes back to the year 1916 to expose the degradation, horror and futility of war, concentrating on life and death in tunnels and trenches. In revealing the influence of the harrowing experiences of his protagonist upon later generations, Faulks expounds a secular theme that love is more important than marriage.

John Irving's *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (52) resists classification because it combines religion and mysticism with a realistic portrayal of social life in New Hampshire and Toronto. It ranks, nevertheless, as an anti-war novel because of its denunciations of Nixon and the American involvement in Vietnam that brings about the protagonist's removal to Canada.

Children's books on the list almost outnumber classic or conventional fiction. A perennial favorite, A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* at 17 trails Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* at 16. A newcomer Roald Dahl has four titles, more than any other author, including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (34). He also runs second among authors with most titles voted for (33), exceeded only by another children's author, Enid Blyton (44), who did not make the final list. The prominence of juvenilia indicates one of the weaknesses of the survey as a measure of literary significance. Another unusual entry in a class by itself is a cookbook, Delia Smith's *Complete Cookery Course* (83), which presumably highlights English cuisine, not in itself a notable recommendation. Of the top ten books by British authors, two are by Tolkien and three others are recognized juvenilia, those by C. S. Lewis, A. A. Milne, and Kenneth Grahame.

Tolkien's books based upon a private mythology or fantasy land appealing primarily to adults resemble a genre cultivated early in the century by an American author, James Branch Cabell, who wrote a series of pseudo-erudite narratives located in a mythical land of Poictesme. In the most famous of these, *Jurgen*, 1919, the hero has erotic adventures with a hamadryad, marries a vampire, adopts the identity of Pope John, and ascends into his grandmother's heaven. Cabell based his romances on the theory that allegory gives a more faithful portrayal of actual human experience than does realism. C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*(21) despite its subtitle *A Story for Children*, delights many adults. Richard Adams's *Watership Down* (40) is a long story about rabbits, with human names and personalities. Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast Trilogy* (55) not only has a wonderland setting, but also an invented vocabulary and roster of personal names in the manner of Tolkien. The setting is a castle, the period seems to be medieval, but there are no realistic clues to tie the narrative to any historical location or time. Apart from some verse, resembling that in *Alice in Wonderland*, the work resembles a horror story taking place in a Disney-like cartoon.

Frank Herbert's *Dune* (57), which is more adult in theme, but similar in exotic surroundings can be described as science fiction with a metaphysical twist. Political relationships are on an interplanetary level, and the major figures penetrate the feelings of one or several other characters as well as some already deceased. Government and religion are united, and moral strength is pitted against physical. While Herbert suggests complete faith in the union of technology and moral values, Douglas Adams gives a contrary perspective in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (24), a satire of futurology and the space age. With obvious resemblances to Voltaire's *Micromegas* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, his narrative points out blemishes in contemporary government, politics and religion. His ridicule extends even to the critical jargon used in overblown estimates of poetry. In the narrative, a futuristic species joins with an earth-man in a space vehicle after the earth has been destroyed in order to make space travel faster. One of the arguments advanced suggests that the removing of barriers to communication between races and cultures will actually increase the number of interspatial wars.

Several books attempt seriously to make the difficult areas of science and technology understandable to the ordinary person, of which the best-known is *2001—A Space Odyssey* (87) by Arthur C. Clarke, probably because of its motion-picture version. The book stresses the theme that every stage of human progress has been due to the development of tools, ranging from bone knives in the remote past, to computers at present and a space station in the future. Another book adopted by Hollywood has a serious message somewhat contrary to Clarke's. Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* (92) is classified sometimes as a "science thriller" because its plot concerns the genetic resurrection of dinosaurs and other pre-historic forms of life, involving the risk of completely annihilating humanity. The work, nevertheless, attempts to alert public opinion to the evils, actual and potential, of biotechnology through the commercialization of genetic engineering. Richard Dawkins covers some of the same material in his exploration of ethology in *The Selfish Gene* (42). In simple language he explains the role of genes in bringing about generational variations in species, a process based upon the survival of the fittest, as theorized by Darwin a century previously. A similar exposition of theoretical physics, Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (79), has sold, according to its publisher, 5½ million copies in various translations, roughly one for every thousand persons in the world.

A Norwegian author Justein Gaarder has in like manner attempted to popularize the great problems of philosophy in *Sophie's World: A Novel about the History of Philosophy* (41). The major systems are summarized in a series of letters to a young girl, Sophie, who turns out to be an illustration of the problem of identity. The reader assumes that she is a real person, but at the end of the book she turns out to be an invented character who, nevertheless, has the capacity to realize that her existence is fictional.

Robert M. Pirsig in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*(68) also attempts to purvey philosophical truth in the guise of light reading. Because of the appearance of the book in the 1970s and the word "motorcycle" in its title, it has been associated with hippies and the beat generation, but the culture it promotes is that of Eastern Buddhism, including reincarnation. Although inculcating a high regard for theoretical science, Pirsig advocates a culture based on what is best rather than on what is new. He rejects material success, but does not, like the hippies, propose degeneracy, but rather dedication to spiritual ends, which for him lead to Buddha, the Godhead. This is his way of coping with technology.

The list does include a representative of the American Beat movement, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (14), which occupies a relatively high position slightly above the only work stemming from French Existentialism, Camus's *The Outsider* (20). Kerouac's novel has in common with Sartre the view that man defines himself through his actions. Kerouac also compares his first-person narrative style to that of Proust—except that his ambiance is different, "written on the run instead of afterwards in a sickbed." Kerouac's material consists of sex, drink and drugs, but serious themes do emerge, for example, Americanism as represented by the transcendentalists and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, number twelve on the list. Kerouac depicts characters "whose minds work in infinite clockwork," preceding Anthony Burgess in doing so. And he links his title *On the Road* to Lao Tse's *Tao-teh-ching* of ancient China.

Sex, drink, and drugs are carried to extremes in two later novels, completely devoid of any redeeming philosophical meaning. Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (78) portrays the drug culture from within, using street language to vindicate cheating, stealing, and violence while providing a pharmacology of every common hallucinatory substance. The same glorification of drugs appears in Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (77), but the ambiance is that of big money and Wall Street. Vocabulary overflows with references to ultra-expensive designer clothes, hi-fi equipment, and chic restaurants. The narrator, a psychopathic murderer, finds pleasure in torturing and killing attractive sex partners and strangers from the street. The British equivalent in bad taste to *American Psycho* is Ian Banks's *The Wasp Factory* (32), the interior monologue of an emotionally disturbed youth, who believes that at an early age he had been castrated by a dog's bite, but who is actually a girl reared by her father on male hormones. The narrator and his/her older brother derive their greatest pleasure from torturing and killing animals and insects.

Books on moral reform deal primarily with injustices to blacks and the working class. *Cry, the Beloved Country, A Story of Comfort in Desolation* (94) by Alan Paton treats race relations in South Africa in the 1940s from a humanitarian point of view while presenting arguments pro and con for segregation, education, and political equality. In this third-person novel, the son of a black Anglican priest turns bad, steals, murders a benevolent white man, impregnates a young girl, and is eventually hanged. His father visits him in prison, learns all the shocking details, but despite everything retains his Christian faith. The author's enlightened Anglicanism envisions an eventual solution through the cooperation of the races. Nelson Mandela, the contemporary black leader, looks back in *Long Walk to Freedom* (90) on South Africa's victorious struggle for political equality. A white American woman, Harper Lee, gives a sugar-coated portrayal of racism similar to Paton's in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (7), which won a Pulitzer Prize. Using the narrative voice of a nine-year-old white girl, she depicts a virtuous Southern lawyer defending a black man unjustly accused of raping a white woman. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (18) describes American black culture in a realistic style with colloquial language concerning sexual relationships, including incest and lesbianism. The tone, however, is highly optimistic, suggesting that women with a will to do so may conquer all obstacles. Toni Morrison in *Beloved* (36) portrays a black woman in the wake of the Civil War fleeing the deep South to Ohio. In a somewhat contrived style of psychological analysis, Morrison concentrates equally on the blessings of female bonding and the evils of racial discrimination.

John Steinbeck's portrayal of the ordeal of the rural poor during the great American depression in *The Grapes of Wrath* (9) is a classic of social realism. A British proletarian novel from an earlier age, Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (62), originally published in 1914, has recently had a notable revival. The "ragged trousered philanthropists" are the workers who slave at starvation wages for the financial benefit of their employers. The novel chronicles the privations of the working poor, who constantly worry that each day at their miserable underpaid jobs will be their last. The same period is portrayed in Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* (56), but from a completely opposite perspective. Presumably based upon the author's reminiscences of his boyhood in an English country village, the book describes cheerful people and comfortable surroundings.

Both Tressell and Lee portray the working class as noble and virtuous, but fiction later in the century presents a somewhat different picture. Even the angry young men of the post World War II generation represented by Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (70) are angels compared to the hooligans in *A Clockwork Orange* (27) by Anthony Burgess. The title derives from the "application of mechanistic morality to a living organism varying with juice and sweetness." The protagonist, 15 years old at the outset, 18 at the end, violates a young virgin to the sound of Beethoven's Ninth symphony, murders an old woman, and is sent to jail where his evil tendencies are made even worse by the extreme brutality he encounters. As part of a brain-washing treatment, he is forced over long periods to watch movies of slaughter and pornography. The story is told in what is presumably Cockney slang, but is closer to the linguistic deviations found in Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. Far more substantial is Burgess's *Earthly Powers* (98), the saga of a homosexual literatus, whose personal links with a prelate who eventually becomes Pope take him to many of the major cities in Europe, America, and Africa. The complicated plot involves the coexistence of good and evil in the upper levels of society.

Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity* (95) portrays the language and attitudes of fervent aficionados of "pop" music of the last thirty years. Concerned primarily with the love affairs and problems of average young Englishmen, the narrative seriously reflects on death and grief. Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* (75) uses middle-class slang to narrate a small Irish boy's reminiscences. Although recipient of a Booker prize in 1993, the work has no central theme except class and adolescence, the latter portrayed primarily through naive sexual references. If William Golding's portrayal of boyhood in *Lord of the Flies* (13) is high tragedy, Doyle's is burlesque. The same author's *The Van* (96), which appears further down the list, treats the middle-aged generation of the same economic status and culture. Scottish lower class slang represents the main attraction of *Trainspotting* (10) by Irvine Welsh, the characters of which are merely ten or twelve years older than Doyle's. Its position as tenth on the list is as anomalous as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as first, the latter an example of preciousness and the former of vulgarity. J. D. Salinger's realistic and sympathetic portrayal of the problems of adolescence, *The Catcher in the Rye*, attained eighth place, corresponding to its classic status in the United States.

Modern works of satire seldom reach the heights of the masterpieces of Cervantes, Moliere, Swift, or even Dickens, and thus rarely become popular favorites, but three are represented on the Waterstone list, two of which have already become classics, *Lolita* (31) by Vladimir Nabokov and *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller. The third, *The Master and Margarita* (63) by Michail Bulgakov was written during the height of Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union, but not published until the anti-Stalinist reaction of the 1960s. Primarily a burlesque of the

Faust theme, the work contains a serious interior novel about Pontius Pilate and Judas. The master is the novelist writing about Pilate and the crucifixion of Christ and Margarita is his mistress, but they are simultaneously the Devil and Marguerite of Goethe's drama. Weird characters and impossible situations such as people appearing at the same time in different places combined with resemblances to the Faust theme provide a high degree of humor that extends as well to comments on the drab existence in contemporary Moscow.

Some of the diabolical characters resemble the fiendish creatures of Stephen King's horror-inspiring *It* (70) and *The Stand* (73). In defense of the latter choices, it could be noted that a considerable amount of King's appeal derives not from the shocking subject matter, but from his realistic, occasionally humorous, descriptions of everyday life and familiar surroundings. While King combines terror with realism, Patrick Suskind in *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (53) joins horror with fantasy. In this shocker translated from the German, the protagonist, a deformed bastard in eighteenth-century France, has as his only asset an acute sense of smell, allowing him to learn the art of perfumery. He becomes enamored of the scent of a pre-pubescent girl in Grasse, the center of the perfume industry, and murders her and twenty-four other virgins. He then escapes to Paris, but in Kafkaesque fashion is eaten alive by a mob he thinks is worshipping him.

Although the genres of biography and autobiography are extremely popular in light-reading and television, they are remarkably scarce in the list. Considered most significant is Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* (11), which depicts the mutual support of three generations of women. A grandmother, sold in her girlhood as a concubine by her father, arranges a conventional marriage for her daughter, who in turn helps her own daughter (the author) to escape from communist China. All three characters are presented as victors over male domination. Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (59) and George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (86) from the first half of the century also offer the ingredients of personal narrative as do Kerouac and Pirsig from the second half.

Apart from juvenilia, no category exists for books notable for nothing but amusement, but Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* (64) fits this description in its collection of single chapter vignettes, chiefly dialogues, that offer a glimpse of middle-class life in San Francisco of the 1970s.

A list similar to Waterstone's but preceding it by a few months appeared in the United States, compiled, however, by a group of professional librarians rather than based on a public opinion poll. Under the title *The New York Public Library's Books of the Century* the work commemorates the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the library in 1895. Instead of mirroring public taste or popular culture, it was designed as a historical survey of the major areas of intellectual endeavor, as selection rather than election. The list of 159 titles is half again as long as Waterstone's, divided into eleven categories, including Economics and Technology; War, Holocaust, Totalitarianism; Optimism; Popular Culture; and Landmarks of Modern Literature. The list does not rank titles according to numbers of votes, but the introduction indicates that the two works receiving the largest number of individual recommendations were Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The various choices, according to the introduction, "though certainly diverse, represent a perspective that is urban, American, and profoundly concerned with issues of social justice and freedom of expression." The introduction draws no hard and fast distinctions between the perception of the common reader and that of the professional or pundit, but makes the valid point that standards for either are ambiguous. Quoting one person's objection that "the choices are arbitrary and no criteria are given for them," the introduction suggests that one cannot "define an objective, quantifiable set of tests that only great books could pass." Even if one could do so, individual taste based on personal experience and cultural prejudice would still play a major role.

The category "Landmarks of Modern Literature" is obviously of primary interest. Out of the twenty-seven authors that appear in both the Waterstone and the New York Public lists, only eight appear in the landmarker category of the latter list: Proust, Kafka, Joyce, Fitzgerald, Woolf, Nabokov, Kerouac, and Garcia Marquez. The other nineteen include dramatic works by Chekhov, Pirandello, Shaw and Beckett and poetry by Milay, Yeats, Eliot and Lorca. Among the other authors in this category, the only one generally considered to be on a level with Proust and Nabokov is Thomas Mann for his *The Magic Mountain*. Two English authors of considerable reputation not in Waterstone are listed in other categories, Winston Churchill in that of history for *The Gathering Storm* and Beatrix Potter for the juvenile classic *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

The selection is more representative of New York City than of America as a whole, probably one of the reasons that there is no Hong Kingston, Amy Tan or Armistead Maupin, but instead a provincial novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith. The Afro-American poet and dramatist Langston Hughes is represented not by his verse, but by extracts from his column in a Harlem newspaper. Surprisingly Kundera is missing, perhaps because of his ridicule of American kitsch in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. There is, on the other hand, a book on sport, Jim Bouton's *Ball Four*, about major-league baseball. The editors note that some of the titles do not even seem to be "books" at all, for example, the *United Nations Charter* or *The Whole Internet Users' Guide*. They do not cite as an anachronistic selection, The Holy Bible, presumably justifying its inclusion on the circumstance that the edition indicated is the Revised Standard Version. They vindicate the presence of some books of influence even though poorly written and others having an almost evil influence, giving as illustrations Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Mao Zedon's *Quotations from Chairman Mao*. The latter is the only Chinese book on the list, and there is none from Japan. The areas of American cuisine and good manners are represented by a cookbook *The Joy of Cooking* by Irma S. Rombauer and *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home* by Emily Post. Both are presented in the category "Optimism, Joy, Gentility" along with some well-known British writers, not in Waterstone: P. G. Wodehouse, G. K. Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw.

Eleven books appear under the category "Women Rise," with only Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* duplicated in Waterstone. Early works in the century by Carrie Chapman Catt and Margaret Sanger, *Woman Suffrage and Politics* and *My Fight for Birth Control* respectively, are followed by those of more recent feminists, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*. "Colonialism" is represented by Gandhi's *Non-Violent Resistance*, but Edward Said's *Orientalism* is missing.

My citing of works in the New York list absent from Waterstone's is not intended as criticism of the latter. The library's list is considerably

longer. Also the two were compiled in different ways, one by popular vote, the other by the suggestions of professional librarians. Their objectives are consequently different, those of one to register popularity, of the other to indicate historical significance. Some books on the New York list may not even have enjoyed high circulation, but have made outstanding contributions to knowledge or culture. The primary goal of the Waterstone project was to survey what is being read now; that of the library to indicate historical value. Both reveal the lapse of time. Works already accepted as classic or traditional dominate the earlier period, but experimental and innovative works flourish in the later. Those of the first half of the century in both lists could well be summarized as "Landmarks" and those of the second half as "Trends." Despite the efforts of some literary critics to manufacture and exploit criteria of difference in the last two decades, the only substantial innovation has been the uniting of philosophy and fiction by such writers as Kundera, Garcia Marquez and John Irving. It is too soon, however, to decide which books of the second half of the century will evolve into the classics of the twenty-first.

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The 100 Books of the Century (French: Les cent livres du siècle) is a list of the one hundred best books of the 20th century, according to a poll conducted in the spring of 1999 by the French retailer Fnac and the Paris newspaper Le Monde. Starting from a preliminary list of 200 titles created by bookshops and journalists, 17,000 French voters responded to the question, "Which books have remained in your memory?" (Quels livres sont restés dans votre mémoire ?). So we decided to compile our own catalogue of the best books written in English and, later translated into English, during the 20th Century. We spent weeks whittling it down to roughly 100 titles for each. These became reading lists for like-minded CounterPunchers and proved two of the most popular pieces we've ever run on the website, even pricking the interest of many librarians who were forced to confront the gaps in their own collections. Over the decade, those pages were up on the site they attracted well-over two million unique visitors.Â Harry Braverman Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degredation of Work in the Twentieth Century. David Brower: For the Earth's Sake. Norman O. Brown: Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History. 6. One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez The original novel of Magical Realism, this has sponsored generations of imitators. Sign up for Bookmarks: discover new books in our weekly email.Â 7. The Good Soldier by Ford Madox Ford The haunting masterpiece of Edwardian England.Â Top 10 US/English books of the last century. 1. Sword of Honour Trilogy by Evelyn Waugh 2. On the Road by Jack Kerouac 3. USA by John Dos Passos 4. The Code of the Woosters by PG Wodehouse 5. Stories by Ernest Hemingway 6. All The King's Men by Robert Penn Warren 7. The End of the Affair by Graham Greene 8. Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie 9. New.

A sermon of the twentieth century. XXII. Estella and I. These conditions have come about in less than a century; most of them in a quarter of a century. Multiply them by the years of another century, and who shall say that the events I depict are impossible? There is an acceleration of movement in human affairs even as there is in the operations of gravity. The dead missile out of space at last blazes, and the very air takes fire. [This book is a series of letters, from Gabriel Weltstein, in New York, to his brother, Heinrich Weltstein, in the State of Uganda, Africa.] NEW YORK, Sept. 10, 1988. The 20th Century was a period of rapid change, and the variety of the books which were written during this time is a testament to that. These books were not necessarily financially successful at the time of their release, but critics and book lovers have voted them the best books of the 20th Century. To have two books among those considered to be the best of the 20th century is quite an achievement. If like me you were forced to read this in high school and therefore hated it, I urge you to read it again. One Hundred Years of Solitude, is not only considered to be the greatest of all Latin American novels, but one of the best books of the 20th century. This book is the magic and multi-layered epic of the Buendia family and the story of their jungle settlement, Macondo. The 100 Books of the Century (French: Les cent livres du siècle) is a list of the one hundred best books of the 20th century, according to a poll conducted in the spring of 1999 by the French retailer Fnac and the Paris newspaper Le Monde. Starting from a preliminary list of 200 titles created by bookshops and journalists, 17,000 French voters responded to the question, "Which books have remained in your memory?" (Quels livres sont restés dans votre mémoire ?).