

# AN INTRODUCTION TO A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

## Key events since 1764: a timeline

To be successful as a student of English literature at A level (and, indeed, to be successful at any A level, and to get the most out of life and play a full part in society), you need to have a broad range of knowledge across a wide range of topics, from geography and history through politics and philosophy to science and technology.

This means it is vitally important for you to be reading widely and taking a keen interest in the world around you.

You have an unprecedented amount of unstructured time to do this between now and September. Start reading/researching now!

While it's not something we can teach you, we can make sure you have a basic grounding in some of the key ideas you will need.

Our study of the Gothic for the Comparative and Contextual Study (component 2 of the A level) begins in 1764, so we'll start there.

On the next page is a list of key events/ideas from 1764 onwards.

Task 1: colour code them ie, if it is something you feel confident that you know a lot about, colour it green; if you have heard of it but are hazy on specifics, colour it yellow; if you know absolutely nothing about it, colour it red.

Task 2: try to assign a rough chronological order to the ones you know something about. Can you say when they happened?

Task 3: research the ones you are unsure about. Make some notes.

Task 4: when you have dates and notes on each event, create a timeline, either digitally or on a piece of A3 paper. Plot the events under the line (you can plot key gothic texts as you read them above the line).

- Foundation of the Labour Party
- The Stockton and Darlington railway, the world's first public passenger railway, opened
- American War of Independence
- The first Iron bridge was built in the UK (beginnings of The Industrial Revolution)
- The Invention of the Bessemer Process (key to the Industrial Revolution)
- Abolition of Slavery in Great Britain
- The Battle of Waterloo
- The First World War
- The Russian Revolution
- The Second World War
- Queen Victoria dies
- American Civil War
- Publication of The Lyrical Ballads (Romantic Movement in Poetry)
- public screening of ten of the Lumiere brothers' short films in Paris (birth of cinema)
- Publication of On The Origin Of Species

- Publication of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman
- Publication of The Communist Manifesto
- Margaret Thatcher becomes UK prime minister
- The French Revolution takes place
- Terrorist attack on the World Trade centre kills 2996 people (9/11)
- Sigmund Freud sets up in private practice in Vienna
- Manet's painting Dejeuner Sur L'herbe rejected by the French Academy (beginnings of the Impressionist Movement in Art)
- Women achieve the vote for the first time
- Britain votes to exit the EU
- The Foundation of the Welfare State
- The Education Act was passed (universal education)
- Queen Victoria comes to the throne
- Beveridge report published (foundations of the Welfare State)
- Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood is formed (Pre-Raphaelite Movement in Art)
- Publication of The Wasteland (beginnings of the Modernist movement in literature)

## **Component 2: Comparative and contextual study (The Gothic)**

This booklet provides a short introduction to a topic you are going to learn a lot about if you study A level English. The topic for our Comparative and Contextual Study (Component 2) is the Gothic in literature.

There are 5 tasks you can do as you go through. Try to do as many as you can.

First of all, what does the term 'gothic' mean to you?

This is the dictionary definition of the term gothic:

- Of, pertaining to, or concerned with the Goths or their language.
- Belonging to, or characteristic of, the Middle Ages; mediæval, 'romantic', as opposed to classical. In early use chiefly with reprobation. Belonging to the 'dark ages'.
- A term for the style of architecture prevalent in Western Europe from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, of which the chief characteristic is the pointed arch. Applied also to buildings, architectural details, and ornamentation.
- Barbarous, rude, uncouth, unpolished, in bad taste. Of temper: Savage.

(Oxford English Dictionary)

Look at the painting below, The Nightmare, by Henry Fuseli:



Task 5: What can you see? What feelings does it evoke or arouse? What questions does it raise? In literature, gothic means something quite specific.

Horace Walpole applied the word gothic to his novel *The Castle of Otranto, a Gothic Story* (1764) in the sense that it was 'medieval, not classical'.

From this novel filled with scenes of terror and gloom in a medieval setting descended a literary genre still popular today; from its subtitle descended the name for it.

As well as sharing common features, many of the Gothic texts explore the same underlying concepts. Although some of these are straightforward, others are much more challenging. This bringing together of very lowbrow, popular elements (for example, evil villains, haunted castles and creaking doors) with very highbrow intellectual ideas (for example, ideas about the self and the individual's responsibility to society) is typical of the Gothic genre.

### Gothic Features

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Abbeys/monasteries  | 27. Hyperbolic language              |
| 2. Absent mothers  | 28. Imprisonment                     |
| 3. Ancestral curses  | 29. Incest                           |
| 4. Archaisms (language/beliefs)  | 30. Insanity                         |
| 5. Blood   | 31. Isolation                        |
| 6. Castles   | 32. Justice/failure/abuse of justice |
| 7. Catholic or feudal society  | 33. Labyrinths                       |
| 8. Concealment   | 34. Masks and helmets                |
| 9. Chests  | 35. Mirrors                          |
| 10. Corruption   | 37. Monsters                         |
| 11. Counts/Lords   | 38. Moonlight                        |
| 12. Crypts, cloisters and catacombs  | 39. Mountains                        |
| 13. Death  | 40. Multiple narrative voices        |
| 14. Documents  | 41. Mutilations                      |
| 15. Doppelganger/double/evil familiar  | 42. Mystery                          |
| 16. Dreams   | 43. Obscurity/things hinted at       |
| 17. Dungeons   | 44. Omens                            |
| 18. Embedded narratives (journals/diaries etc), tales within tales and framing devices | 45. Oppression                       |
| 19. Escape/escape denied   | 46. Orphans                          |
| 20. European settings  | 47. Persecution                      |
| 21. Flickering candles   | 48. Poisonings                       |
| 22. Forbidden knowledge  | 49. Portraits                        |
| 23. Forests  | 50. Pursued maidens                  |
| 24. Ghosts   | 51. Pursuit/the chase                |
| 25. Hauntings  | 52. Religion                         |
| 26. Housekeepers   | 53. Revenge                          |
|  | 54. Ruin                             |

55. Secrets
56. Secret panels
57. Sensational or shocking events
58. Sex
59. Silence
60. Storms
61. Threat (anticipated, perceived or real)
62. Torture
63. Trespass
64. Underground passages
65. Vampires
66. Villains
67. Violation
68. Violence
69. Wild/remote landscapes
70. Wills
71. Wind
72. Women – young, vulnerable alone
73. Women – young, curious and independent
74. Women – seductresses and corrupters

## Gothic Concepts

### Horror and Terror

Terror can be defined as fear generated through what is uncertain or obscure, shadowy or insubstantial, a perceived or anticipated threat preying on the imagination. Horror, on the other hand, is fear generated by a physical shock actually seen or experienced.

### The Sublime

A sense of awe, astonishment, of being overwhelmed in the face of something much bigger than ourselves, whether a landscape, a power, a vastness, magnificence, infinity, or an emotion. The Sublime depends on obscurity – we are unable fully to see the landscape or fully comprehend the experience.

### The Uncanny

The strange, eerie or mysterious. In Freudian terms the uncanny (unheimlich) is that which is both foreign or strange yet is at the same time also familiar, producing a peculiarly unsettling experience.

### Taboos

Cultural, moral or religious rules which are put under pressure or violated (for example, incest, murder), challenging limits or norms.

### The Supernatural or Preternatural

What is above nature, mysterious, inexplicable.

### Oppositions

Oppositions associated with the Gothic include: sanity/madness; wild/domesticated; male/female; living/dead; past/present; reason/passion. In the Gothic genre these oppositions are often put under pressure and may be shown to collapse, showing that they are not quite so rigidly different as we might have believed. (See Liminal.)

### Otherness

The 'Other' is anything which is different from ourselves and is therefore perceived in some way as a threat – perhaps because, despite its apparent 'otherness', we recognise ourselves in it. (See Oppositions, Liminal and Doppelganger.)

### Obscurity

Obscurity is a key element of the experience of the sublime. It includes both physical and mental obscurity – darkness, fogginess, confusion and things not seen or understood clearly.

### The Revenant

The revenant is a term used to describe the past, 'what comes back'. This might, for example, be an evil deed from the past for which retribution is now sought (the sins of the father) or a fear which we thought we had banished. The revenant includes ghosts, hauntings and the return of the unwanted, perhaps repressed, elements from the past.

### The Doppelganger

A doppelganger is a double, mirror image or alter ego of a character, perhaps revealing the negative, evil or repressed within the individual. (Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Frankenstein, for example, draw on this motif.)

### The Liminal

The 'liminal' refers to the experience of being on a threshold or a boundary; marginal; the point on the boundary, borderline or threshold of two states – neither one thing nor the other; the point of fluidity or uncertainty, resisting categorisation; the unfixed position between any two oppositional terms. (See Oppositions.)

### Abhuman

Something that is only vestigially human and possibly in the process of becoming something monstrous, such as a vampire or werewolf. Kelly Hurley writes that the 'abhuman subject is a not-quite-a-human-subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not itself, becoming other.' (See also Otherness, Doppelganger and Liminal.)

Task 6: choose two or three of these concepts to research. Think about presenting your findings in an interesting way. How have you seen these concepts being used in texts you have read?

## The 'Early' or 'Core' Gothic

The following pages contain passages from four key 'core' Gothic texts from the first flourishing of the genre between 1764 (publication of *The Castle Of Otranto*) and the end of the century (publication of *The Monk*).

Task 7: read and annotate them. What gothic features can you see? How are they being used? Can you see any other gothic concepts being used for particular effects?

Task 8: get hold of a copy of *The Castle of Otranto* (it's easily available online, and it's short!) Read it. It's not particularly good – in fact it's quite badly written! – but it did set the blueprint for the genre which you will be studying in depth.

Delay might give him time to reflect on the horrid measures he had conceived, or produce some circumstance in her favour, if she could for that night at least avoid his odious purpose. – Yet where conceal herself? how avoid the pursuit he would infallibly make throughout the castle? As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas. Could she reach the altar before she was overtaken, she knew even Manfred's violence would not dare to profane the sacredness of the place; and she determined, if no other means of deliverance offered, to shut herself up for ever among the holy virgins, whose convent was contiguous to the cathedral. In this resolution, she seized a lamp that burned at the foot of the staircase, and hurried towards the secret passage. The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions, except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed, and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness. Every murmur struck her with new terror; – yet more she dreaded to hear the wrathful voice of Manfred urging his domestics to pursue her. She trod as softly as impatience would give her leave, – yet frequently stopped and listened to hear if she was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a sigh. She shuddered, and recoiled a few paces. In a moment she thought she heard the step of some person. Her blood curdled; she concluded it was Manfred. Every suggestion that horror could inspire rushed into her mind. She condemned her rash flight, which had thus exposed her to his rage in a place where her cries were not likely to draw anybody to her assistance. – Yet the sound seemed not to come from behind, – if Manfred knew where she was, he must have followed her: she was still in one of the cloisters, and the steps she had heard and the steps she had heard were too distinct to proceed from the way she had come [...]

Words cannot paint the horror of the princess's situation. Alone in so dismal a place, her mind imprinted with all the terrible events of the day, hopeless of escaping, expecting every moment the arrival of Manfred, and far from tranquil on knowing she was within reach of somebody, she knew not whom, who for some cause seemed concealed thereabouts, – all these thoughts crowded on her distracted mind, and she was ready to sink under her apprehensions.

-- Horace Walpole, *The Castle Of Otranto*, 1764

Adeline retired early to her room, which adjoined on one side to Madame La Motte's, and on the other to the closet formerly mentioned. It was spacious and lofty, and what little furniture it contained was falling to decay; but, perhaps, the present tone of her spirits might contribute more than the circumstances to give that air of melancholy which seemed to reign in it. She was unwilling to go to bed, lest the dreams that had lately pursued her should return; and determined to sit up till she found herself oppressed by sleep, when it was probable her rest would be profound. She placed the light on a small table, and, taking a book, continued to read for above an hour, till her mind refused any longer to abstract itself from its own cares, and she sat for some time leaning pensively on her arm [...]

She stepped forward, and having unclosed it, proceeded with faltering steps along a suite of apartments resembling the first in style and condition, and terminating in one exactly like that where her dream had represented the dying person; the remembrance struck so forcibly upon her imagination that she was in danger of fainting; and looking round the room, almost expected to see the phantom of her dream [...]

As these reflections passed over her mind, a sudden gleam of moonlight fell upon some object without the casement. Being now sufficiently composed to wish to pursue the inquiry, and believing this object might afford her some means of learning the situation of these rooms, she combated her remaining terrors, and, in order to distinguish it more clearly, removed the light to an outer chamber; but before she could return, a heavy cloud was driven over the face of the moon, and all without was perfectly dark: she stood for some moments waiting a returning gleam, but the obscurity continued. As she went softly back for the light, her foot stumbled over something on the floor, and while she stooped to examine it, the moon again shone, so that she could distinguish, through the casement, the eastern towers of the abbey. This discovery confirmed her former conjectures concerning the interior situation of these apartments. The obscurity of the place

prevented her discovering what it was that had impeded her steps, but having brought the light forward, she perceived on the floor an old dagger: with a trembling hand she took it up, and upon a closer view perceived that it was spotted and stained with rust. [...] she heard a small rustling sound, and as she was about to leave the chamber, saw something falling gently among the lumber.

It was a small roll of paper, tied with a string, and covered with dust. Adeline took it up, and on opening it perceived an handwriting. She attempted to read it, but the part of the manuscript she looked at was so much obliterated that she found this difficult, though what few words were legible impressed her with curiosity and terror, and induced her to return immediately to her chamber.

-- Ann Radcliffe, *The Romance of the Forest*, 1791

Emily gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle, which she understood to be Montoni's; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the Gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all who dared to invade its solitary reign. As the twilight deepened, its features became more awful in obscurity, and Emily continued to gaze, till its clustering towers were alone seen, rising over the tops of the woods, beneath whose thick shade the carriages soon after began to ascend.

The extent and darkness of these tall woods awakened terrific images in her mind, and she almost expected to see banditti start up from under the trees. At length, the carriages emerged upon a heathy rock, and, soon after, reached the castle gates, where the deep tone of the portal bell, which was struck upon to give notice of their arrival, increased the fearful emotions that had assailed Emily. While they waited till the servant within should come to open the gates, she anxiously surveyed the edifice: but the gloom that overspread it allowed her to distinguish little more than a part of its outline, with the massy walls of the ramparts, and to know that it was vast, ancient and dreary. From the parts she saw, she judged of the heavy strength and extent of the whole. The gateway before her, leading into the courts, was of gigantic size, and was defended by two round towers, crowned by overhanging turrets, embattled, where instead of banners, now waved long grass and wild plants, that had taken root among the mouldering stones, and which seemed to sigh, as the breeze rolled past, over the desolation around them. The towers were united by a curtain, pierced and embattled also, below which appeared the pointed arch of an huge portcullis, surmounting the gates: from these, the walls of the ramparts extended to other towers, overlooking the precipice, whose shattered outline, appearing on a gleam that lingered in the west, told of the ravages of war. – Beyond these all was lost in the obscurity of evening.

While Emily gazed with awe upon the scene, footsteps were heard within the gates, and the undrawing of the bolts; after which an ancient servant of the castle appeared, forcing back the huge folds of the portal, to admit his lord. As the carriage-wheels rolled heavily under the portcullis, Emily's heart sunk, and she seemed as if she was going into her prison; the gloomy court into which she passed served to confirm the idea, and her imagination, ever awake to circumstance, suggested even more terrors than her reason could justify.

-- Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794

The monk continued to kneel upon her breast, witnessed without mercy the convulsive trembling of her limbs beneath him, and sustained with inhuman firmness the spectacle of her agonies, when soul and body were on the point of separating. Those agonies at length were over. She ceased to struggle for life. The monk took off the pillow, and gazed upon her. Her face was covered with a frightful blackness: her limbs moved no more: the blood was chilled in her veins: her heart had forgotten to beat; and her hands were stiff and frozen. Ambrosio beheld before him that once noble and majestic form, now become a corpse, cold, senseless, and disgusting.

This horrible act was no sooner perpetrated, than the friar beheld the enormity of his crime. A cold dew flowed over his limbs: his eyes closed: he staggered to a chair, and sank into it almost as lifeless as the unfortunate who lay extended at his feet. From this state he was roused by the necessity of flight, and the danger of being found in Antonia's apartment. He had no desire to profit by the execution of his crime. Antonia now appeared to him an object of disgust. A deadly cold had usurped the place of that warmth which glowed in his bosom. No ideas offered themselves to his mind but those of death and guilt, of present shame and future punishment. Agitated by remorse and fear, he prepared for flight: yet his terrors did not so completely master his recollection as to prevent his taking the precautions necessary for his safety. He replaced the pillow upon the bed, gathered up his garments, and, with the fatal talisman in his hand, bent his unsteady steps towards the door. Bewildered by fear, he fancied that his flight was opposed by legions of phantoms.

Wherever he turned, the disfigured corpse seemed to lie in his passage, and it was long before he succeeded in reaching the door. The enchanted myrtle produced its former effect. The door opened, and he hastened down the staircase. He entered the abbey unobserved; and having shut himself into his cell, he abandoned his soul to the tortures of unavailing remorse, and terrors of impending detection.

-- Matthew Lewis, *The Monk*, 1796

### **Romantic, Victorian and 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century Gothic**

The genre wore itself out through its own excesses (*The Monk* is one of the weirdest books you will ever read - give it a go!) but later writers continued to use its concepts and tropes to explore the fears, anxieties, concerns and preoccupations of their age.

The most famous gothic text of the Romantic period is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Give it a read. Or at least watch Kenneth Branagh's film, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. It's a key text and we will keep referring to it.

During the early and mid Victorian period, many famous writers incorporated gothic elements in their texts: for example, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte, *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens.

The end of the 19thc (known as the 'fin-de-siecle') saw a second flourishing of the genre, in texts you know (such as *Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and one of the texts you are going to study for A level, *Dracula*).

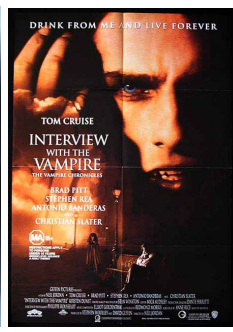
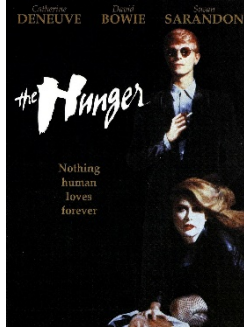
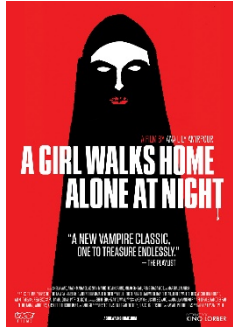
In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, the gothic moved onto the screen.

*Dracula*, which you are going to study, defines the idea of the vampire as we know it in this century.

Task 9: watch *Nosferatu*, the first adaptation of *Dracula* on film.

Watch another 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century vampire film (*The Lost Boys*, *Interview With The Vampire*, *The Hunger*, *Let The Right One In*, *A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night*). How is the vampire figure presented?





Finally, a list of gothic novels to choose from!

- The Castle Of Otranto (1764) Horace Walpole
- Vathek (1786) William Beckford
- The Romance of the Forest (1791) Ann Radcliffe
- The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) Ann Radcliffe
- The Monk (1796) Matthew Lewis
- Northanger Abbey (1817) Jane Austen
- Frankenstein (1818) Mary Shelley
- The Vampyre (1819) John Polidori
- The Fall Of The House Of Usher (1839) Edgar Allen Poe
- Jane Eyre (1847) Charlotte Bronte
- Wuthering Heights (1847) Emily Bronte
- The Woman In White (1859) Wilkie Collins
- Carmilla (1872) Sheridan Le Fanu
- The Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886) RL Stevenson
- The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) Oscar Wilde
- Dracula (1897) Bram Stoker
- The Turn Of The Screw (1898) Henry James
- Rebecca (1938) Daphne Du Maurier
- We Have Always Live In The Castle (1962) Shirley Jackson
- The Bloody Chamber (1979) Angela Carter
- Beloved (1982) Toni Morrison
- The Woman in Black (1983) Susan Hill

### **Component 3: Non-examined assessment**

#### **Classic 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century novels**

For part of your non-examined assessment for English Literature A level, you have the opportunity to choose your own texts from your further and independent reading in texts published post 1900. We will look at a range of texts in class, but you will be in a good position to make an informed choice of texts if you have read widely in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century fiction. Here is a list of classic novels.

Task 10: choose one and get started.



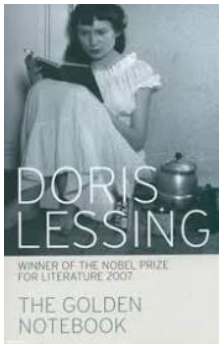
#### **Rebecca, Daphne Du Maurier, 1938**

On a trip to the South of France, the shy heroine of Rebecca falls in love with Maxim de Winter, a handsome widower. Although his proposal comes as a surprise, she happily agrees to marry him. But as they arrive at her husband's home, Manderley, a change comes over Maxim, and the young bride is filled with dread. Friendless in the isolated mansion, she realises that she barely knows him. In every corner of every room is the phantom of his beautiful first wife, Rebecca, and the new Mrs de Winter walks in her shadow.



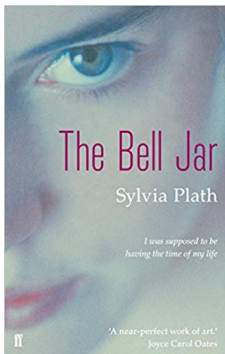
#### **Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston, 1937**

When Janie, at sixteen, is caught kissing shiftless Johnny Taylor, her grandmother swiftly marries her off to an old man with sixty acres. Janie endures two stifling marriages before meeting the man of her dreams, who offers not diamonds, but a packet of flowering seeds.



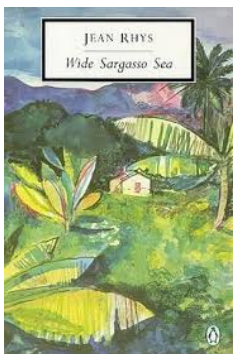
### **The Golden Notebook, Doris Lessing, 1962**

One of the landmark novels of the Sixties – a powerful account of a woman searching for her personal, political and professional identity while facing rejection and betrayal. In 1950s London, novelist Anna Wulf struggles with writer's block. Divorced with a young child, and fearful of going mad, Anna records her experiences in four coloured notebooks: black for her writing life, red for political views, yellow for emotions, blue for everyday events. But it is a fifth notebook – the golden notebook – that finally pulls these wayward strands of her life together. Widely regarded as Doris Lessing's masterpiece and one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century, 'The Golden Notebook' is wry and perceptive, bold and indispensable.



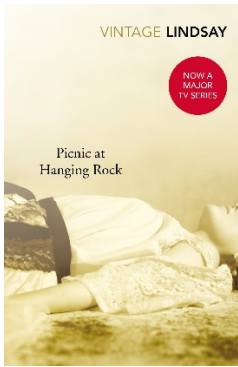
### **The Bell Jar, Sylvia Plath, 1963**

When Esther Greenwood wins an internship on a New York fashion magazine in 1953, she is elated, believing she will finally realise her dream to become a writer. But in between the cocktail parties and piles of manuscripts, Esther's life begins to slide out of control. She finds herself spiralling into serious depression as she grapples with difficult relationships and a society which refuses to take her aspirations seriously



### **Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys, 1966**

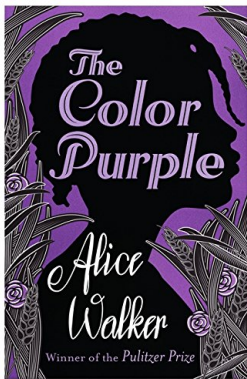
Rhys's grand attempt to tell what she felt was the story of Jane Eyre's 'madwoman in the attic', Bertha Rochester. Born into the oppressive, colonialist society of 1930s Jamaica, white Creole heiress Antoinette Cosway meets a young Englishman who is drawn to her innocent beauty and sensuality. After their marriage, however, disturbing rumours begin to circulate which poison her husband against her. Caught between his demands and her own precarious sense of belonging, Antoinette is inexorably driven towards madness, and her husband into the arms of another novel's heroine. This classic study of betrayal, a seminal work of postcolonial literature, is Jean Rhys's brief, beautiful masterpiece.



### **Picnic at Hanging Rock**, Joan Lindsay, 1967

Everyone at Appleyard College for Young Ladies agreed it was just right for a picnic at Hanging Rock. After lunch, a group of three of the girls climbed into the blaze of the afternoon sun, pressing on through the scrub into the shadows of Hanging Rock. Further, higher, till at last they disappeared.

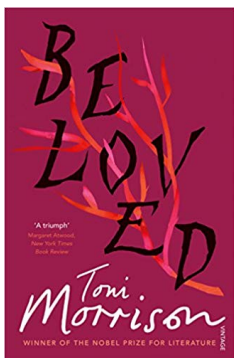
They never returned.



### **The Color Purple**, Alice Walker, 1982

Celie has grown up poor in rural Georgia, despised by the society around her and abused by her own family. She strives to protect her sister, Nettie, from a similar fate, and while Nettie escapes to a new life as a missionary in Africa, Celie is left behind without her best friend and confidante, married off to an older suitor, and sentenced to a life alone with a harsh and brutal husband.

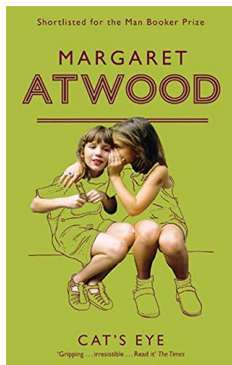
In an attempt to transcend a life that often seems too much to bear, Celie begins writing letters directly to God. The letters, spanning 20 years, record a journey of self-discovery and empowerment guided by the light of a few strong women. She meets Shug Avery, her husband's mistress and a jazz singer with a zest for life, and her stepson's wife, Sophia, who challenges her to fight for independence. And though the many letters from Celie's sister are hidden by her husband, Nettie's unwavering support will prove to be the most breathtaking of all.



### **BeLoved**, Toni Morrison, 1987

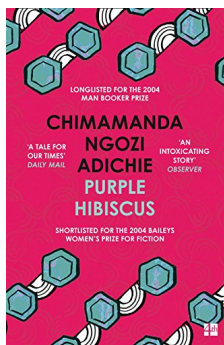
Staring unflinchingly into the abyss of slavery, this spellbinding novel transforms history into a story as powerful as Exodus and as intimate as a lullaby. Sethe, its protagonist, was born a slave and escaped to Ohio, but 18 years later she is still not free. She has too many memories of Sweet Home,

the beautiful farm where so many hideous things happened. And Sethe's new home is haunted by the ghost of her baby, who died nameless and whose tombstone is engraved with a single word: Beloved. Filled with bitter poetry and suspense as taut as a rope, *Beloved* is a towering achievement.



### **Cat's Eye**, Margaret Atwood, 1988

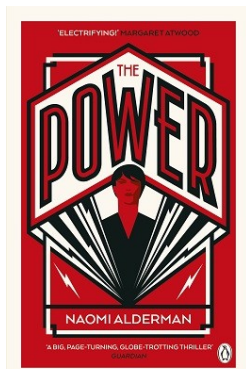
Elaine Risley, a painter, returns to Toronto to find herself overwhelmed by her past. Memories of childhood - unbearable betrayals and cruelties - surface relentlessly, forcing her to confront the spectre of Cordelia, once her best friend and tormentor, who has haunted her for 40 years.



### **Purple Hibiscus**, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2003

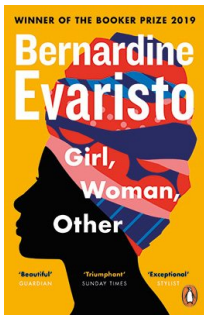
The limits of fifteen-year-old Kambili's world are defined by the high walls of her family estate and the dictates of her fanatically religious father. Her life is regulated by schedules: prayer, sleep, study, prayer.

When Nigeria is shaken by a military coup, Kambili's father, involved mysteriously in the political crisis, sends her to live with her aunt. In this house, noisy and full of laughter, she discovers life and love - and a terrible, bruising secret deep within her family.



### **The Power**, Naomi Alderman, 2017

All over the world women are discovering they have the power. With a flick of the fingers they can inflict terrible pain - even death. Suddenly, every man on the planet finds they've lost control. The Day of the Girls has arrived - but where will it end?



## **Girl, Woman, Other** Bernardine Evaristo, 2019

From Newcastle to Cornwall, from the birth of the twentieth century to the teens of the twenty-first, *Girl Woman Other* follows a cast of twelve characters on their personal journeys through this country and the last hundred years. They're each looking for something - a shared past, an unexpected future, a place to call home, somewhere to fit in, a lover, a missed mother, a lost father, even just a touch of hope . . .