

The 20th Century's Greatest Hits: 100 English Language Books of Fiction

by Larry McCaffery

1. **Pale Fire**, [Vladimir Nabokov](#), 1962. The most audaciously conceived novel of the century-and the most perfectly executed-this is also the book whose existence could have been the most difficult to anticipate in the year 1900.
2. **Ulysses**, [James Joyce](#), 1922. Not so much the beginning of anything as the culmination of the great 19th century symbolic realist tradition.
3. **Gravity's Rainbow**, [Thomas Pynchon](#), 1973. Like Ulysses, Pynchon's masterpiece has cast an enormous, intimidating shadow across the entire literary landscape.
4. **The Public Burning**, [Robert Coover](#), 1977. A book controversial enough that its publisher almost immediately took it out of print (where it stayed for over 15 years), this novel featured a surprisingly sympathetic Richard Nixon as its principle narrator and used the Rosenberg case as a means of examining just about everything worth examining about America during the McCarthy era; excessive and encyclopedic, dazzling in its range of styles, bitterly angry and biting humor, this is the most brilliant and original "political novel" ever published in America.
5. **The Sound and the Fury**, [William Faulkner](#), 1929. Along with raising Southern gothic to an art form, this book ranks with Pale Fire in terms of its audacious treatment of point of view and created in Jason Compson perhaps the most memorable villain of the century.
6. **Trilogy (Molloy [1953], Malone Dies [1956], The Unnamable [1957])**, [Samuel Beckett](#). Beckett took self-consciousness, solipsism, ultimacy, and minimalism to the brink of silence-where he, thankfully, retreated just in time.
7. **The Making of Americans**, [Gertrude Stein](#), 1925. Stein's prose is Stein's prose is Stein's prose. This sprawling novel is still one of the most perceptive examinations of American life and values. Like her other mature work, this book is rich with puns, rhythmic phrases, and word repetitions; it is also a vibrant, breathtaking expression of Stein's lifelong love affair with individual words and a demonstration that the music, rhythm, and repetitive power of words matters just as much as their representational qualities. As with Burroughs's experiments a half-century later, Stein's methods were so truly radical that it would take several generations before authors got around to figuring out how they might be applied to their own writing.

8. **Nova Trilogy** (*The Soft Machine* [1962], *Nova Express* [1964], *The Ticket that Exploded*, [1967]), [William S. Burroughs](#). Space odysseys, Uranium Willy, and the Heavy Metal Kid, image banks and silence viruses, protopunk "wild boys" engaged in an apocalyptic guerrilla-warfare, body and mind invasion, the Nova Mob matching wits with the Nova police (hampered by the corrupt Biologic Courts) for control of The Reality Studio-these hallucinatory SF elements interact with shards of poetry by Rimbaud, Shakespeare, and Eliot (and much, much more) to fuel Burroughs's atomic powered strap-on, which probes the asshole of society with more glee and wicked humor than anyone since Swift.
9. **Lolita**, [Vladimir Nabokov](#), 1955. A richly humorous, satiric look at American life in the late 40s, a profound (and profoundly disturbing) commentary about the ability of the creative mind to transform the monstrous into breathtaking art, Lolita is above all this century's most passionate and most memorable love story.
10. **Finnegans Wake**, [James Joyce](#), 1941. The greatest unreadable novel ever written.
11. **Take It or Leave It**, [Raymond Federman](#), 1975. The first-and still the definitive-poststructuralist novel written in English, Federman's crazed journey to chaos and erasure ranks, along with Kerouac's *The Open Road* and Wright's *Going Native*, as the greatest of all American road novels.
12. **Beloved**, [Toni Morrison](#), 1986. A poetically rendered cry of pain and a plea for forgiveness and understanding, this book won for Morrison a Nobel Prize (though not a place in the Modern Library List).
13. **Going Native**, [Stephen Wright](#), 1994. Robert Coover's blurb says it all: "A sensational, prime-time novel. Imagine a pornographic twilight zone of beebee-eyed serial killers, drug-stunned pants-dropping road warriors and marauding armies of mental vampires, a nightmarish country of unparalleled savagery, where there is no longer any membrane between screen and life and the monster image feed in inexhaustible and the good guys are the scariest ones of all."
14. **Under the Volcano**, [Malcolm Lowery](#), 1949. The hell of alcoholism and the self has never been rendered more passionately or convincingly.
15. **To the Lighthouse**, [Virginia Woolf](#), 1927. The most extreme and poetic of Woolf's treatments of the stream of consciousness motif.
16. **In the Heart of the Heart of the Country**, [William H. Gass](#), 1968. Gass is arguably America's greatest living prose writer, and this collection includes two stories: "The Pederson Kid" and

"In the Heart of the Heart of the Country" which rank among the finest achievements in the short story form.

17. **JR**, [William Gaddis](#), 1975. Gaddis's humor, his ear for the music of American idioms, his brilliant orchestration of materials, and his sure-handed treatment of the ways capitalism controls every aspect of our lives insures that JR will be one of the most discussed novels during the 21st century.
18. **Invisible Man**, [Ralph Ellison](#), 1952. Ellison's blues-drenched, symbol-and-idiom rich depiction of the development of youth into maturity, disillusionment, and self-realization not only sums up the ways that black people have been preyed on by whites throughout American history but illuminates the process that transforms us all into invisible people.
19. **Underworld**, [Don DeLillo](#), 1997. The best novel by the author who has produced the most significant body of work of all post-WWII American writers, Underworld is at once a brilliant analysis of the fate of America's hopes and dreams as it approaches the millennium and a haunting, lovingly presented lament for the lost lives and words the 50s.
20. **The Sun Also Rises**, [Ernest Hemingway](#), 1926. Employing a startlingly innovative method of rendering the lives and attitudes of a "lost generation" of Americans seeking some sort of substitute for the values and meanings had been destroyed by WWI, this novel would also have a decisive impact on Raymond Carver and other American "minimalists" later in the century.
21. **A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man**, [James Joyce](#), 1916. Probably the most taught novel of them all, still one of the great initiation novels, and also one of the most expressive descriptions of what all great writers must leave behind in order to follow the muse, Portrait's early experimentations with stream-of-consciousness helped lay the groundwork for Joyce's far grander forays into human consciousness in Ulysses.
22. **The Great Gatsby**, [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#), 1925. A novel whose gorgeous flights of lyricism is matched only by its ability to tease out what is most debased about the American Dream-and what is most enduring as well.
23. **The Ambassadors**, [Henry James](#), 1903. The style found in the late James novels was as intricate, psychologically nuanced, and attuned to the inner workings of the mind as those developed somewhat later in the stream-of-consciousness techniques employed by Joyce, Faulkner and others.

24. **Women in Love**, [D.H. Lawrence](#), 1921. The book where Lawrence finally achieved his goal of finding a means of rendering the non-verbal operations determining the interactions of men and women.
25. **60 Stories**, [Donald Barthelme](#), 1981. Barthelme's surrealist, avant-pop treatments of life in a media-drenched Manhattan are still unrivaled in their ability to suggest how an aesthetics of trash could effectively conjure up a convincing vision of American life generally.
26. **The Rifles**, [William T. Vollmann](#), 1993. Vollmann leads readers into a labyrinthine, nightmarish descent into madness, cannibalism, death, and self-confrontation-all depicted by in excruciatingly vivid and emotionally honest detail; we also become witness to one man's ability to test what is best about himself, to confront the personal weaknesses most people deny, and the ways that even what is best in ourselves-our desire to seek the truth about ourselves and the world, to know and help others-can frequently lead to unmitigated disaster for everyone concerned.
27. **The Recognitions**, [William Gaddis](#), 1955. Gaddis's grand encyclopedic portrait of the (counterfeiting) artist quest-narrative managed to incorporate just about all the major 20th century motifs, while also evoking (among other things) every major era of history, as well as the history of literature, painting, and music; little read when it appeared, *The Recognitions* was a major influence on the young Thomas Pynchon and thus on postmodern fiction generally.
28. **Heart of Darkness**, [Joseph Conrad](#), 1902. This short, prismatically told odyssey transcends its colonial context to become one of the century's most compelling studies of the permeable membrane separating the bestial from the noble.
29. **Catch 22**, [Joseph Heller](#), 1961. More than any other book, this novel's arrival signaled that a new generation of innovative American authors had arrived; things were never quite the same afterwards.
30. **1984**, [George Orwell](#), 1949. Orwell's prophecies concerning life under Big Brother didn't come true by 1984, but stay tuned.
31. **Their Eyes Were Watching God**, [Zora Neal Hurston](#), 1937. For all those readers who were moved by the passion, brutality, and intimacy of Alice Walker's widely hailed *The Color Purple*, Hurston's novel should be required reading.
32. **Absalom, Absalom!**, [William Faulkner](#), 1936. Faulkner combines Quentin Compson's search for himself with a reconstruction of the myth of the Southern past, and in the process confronts the racial hierarchy and abuse that shapes both the actual and imagined historical South.

Among other things, this novel has been convincingly cited by critic Brian McHale as marking the dividing line between modernism and postmodernism.

33. **Dhalgren**, [Samuel R. Delany](#), 1975. This massive (nearly 900 pages), ambitious, unclassifiable novel transfers the exoticism of other worlds to a surreal, nightmarish urban landscape, a twisted, disrupted vision of Harlem and America's other decaying inner cities; part myth, part dream, part verbal labyrinth, Dhalgren's central character is an artist whose doomed efforts to make sense of the chaos surrounding him become an emblem of all our similar attempts.
34. **The Grapes of Wrath**, [John Steinbeck](#), 1939. Steinbeck's famous novel about the migration of the Joad family from the Dust Bowl to broken dreams, misery, and a stubborn endurance in California; what may surprise readers today are the many innovative features Steinbeck employs to render this odyssey.
35. **The Four Elements Tetralogy** (earth: **The Stain** [1984], fire: **Entering Fire** [1986], water: **The Fountains of Neptune** [1992], and air: **The Jade Cabinet** [1993]), [Rikki Ducornet](#). Using each of the four primal elements as central controlling metaphors, this ambitious tetralogy are many different things: vivid and often hilarious portraits of malice, depravity and evil in the tradition of Bosch or Brueghel; ecological and political parables about the 20th century's predilection for war and mass extinction; allegories about mankind's fear of transmutation, chaos, and death and the devastation and misery these fears engender; deeply moving meditations about the mysteries of sex, time, and consciousness; metafictional investigations about the perils and attractions of fabulating, creating, and remembering.
36. **Cyberspace Trilogy** (**Neuromancer** [1984], **Count Zero** [1986], **Mona Lisa Overdrive** [1988]), [William Gibson](#). Neuromancer was the novel that not only launched a thousand cyberpunk literary ships but which first found a means of metaphorizing a means of successfully navigating through the "space" of data.
37. **Tropic of Cancer**, [Henry Miller](#), 1934. Miller's blend of autobiography and fiction, his refusal to indulge in interpretations or in creating full portraits of his "characters," his receptivity and openness to experience generally-not to mention his unabashed, exuberant exploration of sexuality-all helped open up the form and content of novelistic experimentation for postmodernist writers in the second half of this century.
38. **On the Road**, [Jack Kerouac](#), 1957. Kerouac's classic saga of youth adrift in the gray-flannel-suited America, traveling the highways, exploring the midnight negro streets of the cities, passionately searching the vast expanse of America in search of themselves; the novel was literally mind-expanding and helped turn on the generation of youths who would be out on the streets creating the counter-culture revolution of the 60s.

39. **Lookout Cartridge**, [Joseph McElroy](#), 1974. McElroy is most important of all "unknown" postmodernist American authors; vaguely analogous to Antonioni's *Blow Up*, *Cartridge* is a fascinating, gigantic mystery novel that demonstrates the cross fertilization that has been recently occurring between film and prose fiction.
40. **Crash**, [J.G. Ballard](#), 1973. The colonization and seduction of our subconscious by the mediascape, the erotic thrill of violence, the secret satisfactions of watching machines go haywire, and the numbing power of mass-produced imagery have never been presented more convincingly.
41. **Midnight's Children**, [Salman Rushdie](#), 1981. A grand romp across the history of that populous and multicultural Mother India, *Children* draws from sources ranging from myth, to *Tristram Shandy*, to Bombay's rich film industry.
42. **The Sot-Weed Factor**, [John Barth](#), 1960. The greatest of all 18th century novels written in the 20th century, Barth's monumental farce is also a brilliant commentary about the slippery nature of identity.
43. **Genoa**, [Paul Metcalf](#), 1965. Metcalf invents a narrative structure-part mosaic, part history, part genealogy, part invention-which appropriates generous selections of materials drawn from the Christopher Columbus myth, *Moby Dick*, a myriad other sources to develop a narrative that reveals a whole host of connections between the greed and blood-lust of our founding fathers and contemporary Americans.
44. **Brave New World**, [Aldous Huxley](#), 1932. In this greatest of all 20th century dystopian novels, Huxley develops a chillingly accurate forecast about a civilization which willingly gives itself over not to preestablished human goals but to the self-augmenting, self-perpetuating needs of new technologies which, in his words, "tend always to obey the laws of its own logic."
45. **A Passage to India**, [E.M. Forster](#), 1924. In his last and best-known novel, Forster takes the relationships between the English and Indians in India in the early 1920s as a background against which to erect his most searching and complex exploration of the possibilities and limitations, the promises and pitfalls, of human relationships.
46. **Double or Nothing**, [Raymond Federman](#), 1972. This obsessive, hilarious, sad, unreadable, wildly inventive metafictional novel-in-the-form-of-200+ concrete-poems (i.e., every page has a different typographical design) is also the most original Holocaust novel yet published.
47. **At Swim-Two-Birds**, [Flann O'Brien](#), 1951. This is a book about a book about a man writing a book about characters who write a book about him; not even Borges or Nabokov ever matched

the richness, preposterousness, humor, and linguistic bravado of O'Brien's treatment of the Chinese boxes narrative structure.

48. **Blood Meridian**, [Cormac McCarthy](#), 1965. Rendered in a blood-stained prose style that is as unique and instantly recognizable as that of Hemmingway's or Faulkner's, McCarthy's unrelentingly horrific Sam Peckinpah-meets-Hieronymus Bosch novel deconstructs not only the familiar Western archetypes of cowboys and Indians but also the revisionist versions that transform white men into villains and red men into good-guy victims.
49. **The Cannibal**, [John Hawkes](#), 1949. Nowhere has the nightmare of human terror and the deracinated sensibility been more concisely analyzed than in this groundbreaking novel (Hawkes's first), which helped usher in the postmodern era of literary experimentalism.
50. **Native Son**, [Richard Wright](#), 1940. No other black author of this century took greater risks than Wright in this harrowing novel, where he creates a protagonist (Bigger Thomas) who murders a white woman-and then demands that we understand and even empathize with this act.
51. **The Day of the Locust**, [Nathaniel West](#), 1939. This remains the Hollywood novel, as well as one of the finest apocalyptic/millennial works of the 20th century.
52. **Nightwood**, [Djuna Barnes](#), 1936. In this haunting, dream-like novel, Barnes uses homosexuality as a metaphor for the condition of the human soul.
53. **Housekeeping**, [Marilynn Robinson](#), 1981. In this haunting, lyrical ode to loss, the eruption of the past into the present and the illusory nature of any attempt at permanence helped shape the personality of one of contemporary fiction's most memorable narrators.
54. **Slaughterhouse-Five**, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., 1969. Vonnegut here reinvents his own experiences, both as witness to and novelistic chronicler of the greatest massacre in human history (the fire-bombing of Dresden). So it goes. As much as any other novel from the 60s, Slaughterhouse-Five established metafiction as the postmodernist literary form capable of offering writers an escape from the stifling fantasies of traditional "realism."
55. **Libra**, [Don DeLillo](#), 1986. This novel depicts the ambiguous personalities and events that culminated in the central mythological event that lies at the heart of the mystery of postmodern America: the assassination of Kennedy by Lee Harvey Oswald.
56. **Wise Blood**, [Flannery O'Connor](#), 1952. O'Connor explores the twisted longings, violence, religious fervor, and derangements of life in America's rural South in a manner that reminds one of Kafka, Carver, and (inevitably) Faulkner.

57. **Always Coming Home**, [Ursula K. LeGuin](#), 1985. Part initiation story, part political allegory, part philosophical mediation, this book introduces a rich variety of cultural artifacts of an imaginary culture, including recipes, music (some editions included an audiocassette), drama, folktales, descriptions of native flora and fauna, and drawings.
58. **USA Trilogy** (**The 42nd Parallel** [1930], **1919** [1932], and **The Big Money** [1936]), [John Dos Passos](#). These "collective novels" depict the vast panorama of post WWI American life by describing the destinies of the masses of men and women rather than individuals; Dos Passos relied on an array of innovative formal devices influenced by the rise of mass media: Camera eyes, newsreels, quick flash techniques, capsule biographies and other mixtures of news stories, bits of song lyrics, and newspaper headlines.
59. **The Golden Notebook**, [Doris Lessing](#), 1962. Metafictional impulses are evident in many of this century's great novels, and Lessing is one example which demonstrates that writing-about-writing need not preclude psychological investigation or an active engagement in politics.
60. **The Catcher in the Rye**, [J.D. Salinger](#), 1951. Still holding the record for the book responsible for the most firings of American high school teachers, Salinger's memorable and poignant initiation novel evoked the emptiness and phoniness of post-WWII American life with conviction and humanity; it also captured the poetry of American teenage lingo better than any book since Huckleberry Finn.
61. **Red Harvest**, [Dashiell Hammett](#), 1929. The Maltese Falcon is the best known of Hammett's work, partly due to the great film version, but it was Red Harvest which almost single-handedly shaped the premises of hard-boiled fiction that would be endlessly reworked by authors throughout the rest of the century.
62. **What We Talk About When We Talk About Love**, [Raymond Carver](#), 1981. Carver writes about troubled people on the outs-out of work, out of love, out of touch-whose confusions, turmoils, and poignancy are conveyed through an interplay of surface detail; here he pushed this elliptical, spare style to its most extreme form-and created a collection that would have a decisive impact on the short story form during the last quarter of this century.
63. **Dubliners**, [James Joyce](#), 1915. These intricately intertwined stories are not only vividly drawn, meticulously accurate sketches of turn-of-the-century Dublin, but collectively allowed Joyce to come directly to terms with the life he had rejected and the ways this rejection might be figured in art; like his later, more ambitious books, Dubliners is also a book that transcends its immediate focus to become microcosms, small-scale models of all human life, of all history, and geography.

64. **Cane**, [Jean Toomer](#), 1925. Blending poetry, theater, and fiction, this landmark experimental novel of the 20s movingly portrayed the rootlessness of black life in white America and made Toomer a leading figure of the Harlem Literary Renaissance.
65. **The House of Mirth**, [Edith Wharton](#), 1905. While Wharton raises questions about American capitalism, class structure, and gender relations that would endure throughout the century, it is her artistry-her eloquence and control as a stylist, her nuanced employment of the comedy of manners mode that only James rivals-that makes this book, in its own time and ours, such a broad and major accomplishment.
66. **Ridley Walker**, [Russell Hoban](#), 1982. Set in a nightmarish post-nuclear British landscape and presented in one of the most memorable and original voices conceived in this century, this novel is also, along with Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, the closest contemporary counterpart to Twain's *Huck Finn*.
67. **Checkerboard Trilogy** (**Go in Beauty** [1955], **The Bronc People** [1958], **Portrait of the Artist with 26 Horses** [1962]), [William Eastlake](#). Back in the late 50s and early 60s, William Eastlake was single-handedly changing the scope, poetic range, thematic assumptions, and treatment of character-especially that of Native Americans-of the Western genre. His surreal, humorous trilogy was a decisive influence on later novelists such as Larry McMurtry and Tom McGuane.
68. **The Franchiser**, [Stanley Elkin](#), 1976. This novel perfectly embodies Elkin's greatest literary accomplishment: the creation of wonderfully rich and excessive language which serves to unmask the beauty and wonder that is normally locked within the vulgar, disheartening, and ordinary aspects of contemporary life.
69. **New York Trilogy** (**City of Glass** [1985], **Ghosts** [1986], **The Locked Room** [1986]), [Paul Auster](#). Auster's Trilogy introduced a new literary figure (described by Dennis Drabbelle as the "post-existential private-eye") and a form of storytelling emphasizing the formal peculiarities and epistemological quandaries of the genre while simultaneously presenting a haunting evocation of the noisy, bewildering and crowded anonymity of New York City-the only constant character in the Trilogy.
70. **Skinny Legs and All**, [Tom Robbins](#), 1986. Robbins uses the Dance of the Seven Veils as a kind of elaborate framing device to examine many of the most basic issues that define our existence: what is the nature of sexuality, and what is the relationship between the male and female aspects we all share? how can people break free of the systems (political, spiritual, social) that repress our natural passions and sense of play, that rigidify belief into dogma, that encourage us to stop personal exploration?

71. **Infinite Jest**, [David Foster Wallace](#), 1995. This unwieldy but very highly engaging novel ambitiously explores themes encompassing politics, philosophy, gender roles, and personal identity. These themes are presented through a range of unusual and poetic voices and narrative structures designed to model the difficulties involved in distinguishing pop-cultural appearance from reality or establishing meaningful connections between media-generated images and their referents.
72. **The Age of Wire and String**, [Ben Marcus](#), 1996. The first full replenishment of the language since the works of Burroughs and Gass in the 1960s and the most completely original work of fiction to appear in the 90s.
73. **Tlooth**, [Harry Mathews](#), 1966. Along with Frank Norris's *McTeague*, this is the greatest of all "dentist novels." Like his French counterpart, Georges Perec, Mathews has been heavily influenced by his involvement in the Oulipo group of radical European avant-gardists; and as with Perec, there is a great deal more going on here than the brilliance of his elegant language, word play, and intricate formal design.
74. **Pricksongs and Descants**, [Robert Coover](#), 1969. The most exuberant display of innovation using the short story form of any collection of fictions from the first wave of postmodernism-this collection ultimately had an even greater impact on writers in the 70s and 80s than *Lost in the Funhouse* or Barthelme's *Unspeakable Practices*.
75. **The Man in the High Castle**, [Phillip K. Dick](#), 1962. Working as he did on the treadmill of genre SF, Dick never wrote a single work which can be termed a "masterpiece," although this alternate world novel-with its many surprising twists and equally surprisingly (and surprisingly subtle) treatment of Asian themes-comes close.
76. **American Psycho**, [Brett Easton Ellis](#), 1988. The most notorious and widely denounced American novel of the 80s, *American Psycho* is also a brilliantly inventive, wickedly funny novel whose monumentally excessive depiction of media imagery becomes a devastating critique of the horror and banality that characterizes an American life dominated by the cultural logic of hyperconsumer capitalism.
77. **The French Lieutenant's Woman**, [John Fowles](#), 1969. At once a meticulously rendered Victorian novel and a metafictional deconstruction of such novels, this work also used its 19th century materials as a means of exploring gender, class, and existential dilemmas that were as common in the 60s as they were when Charles Dickens was writing.
78. **The Book of the New Sun Tetrology** (**The Shadow of the Torturer** [1980], **The Claw of the Conciliator** [1981], **The Sword of Lictor** [1982], **The Citadel of the Autarch** [1982]), [Gene Wolfe](#). In this sprawling series of interrelated novels set in some distant future, Wolfe conjures

up an epic adventure that unfolds as a series of sensuously rendered, fabulous micro-quests and mock summaries of cultural artifacts reminiscent of Borges or Calvino.

79. **A Clockwork Orange**, [Anthony Burgess](#), 1962. Burgess invents a marvelously appropriate language to depict a nightmarish, dystopian version of an England populated by the same sort of angry, nihilist "ultra-violent," figures that Johnny Rotten and the Sex Pistols would later celerate during punk's mid-70s heyday.
80. **Albany Trilogy (Legs [1976], Billy Phelan's Greatest Game [1978], Ironweed [1983])**, [William Kennedy](#). Kennedy's Trilogy is a remarkable fusion of a real landscape-of loud, swinging speakeasies, all-night diners, and hobo jungles-with the landscape of his imagiantion, where the dead walk side by side with the living, and a bowling alley or pool hall can become a scene of truly epic propostions; like the Dublin of Joyce's imagination, Kennedy's Albany is recreated with meticulous attention to detail but is also imbued with a unviersality that allows us to recongize something of our own fears, guilt, passions, and ambitions.
81. **The Tunnel**, [William H. Gass](#), 1995. As this monumental novel's narrator digs into his own past, his own loves and hatred, and that of Nazi Germany, he creates a hole driven into both language and the book's central theme: the fascism of the heart.
82. **Omensetter's Luck**, [William H. Gass](#), 1966. From page one until its conclusion, Gass delights and amazes by reeling off one sensuous, lovingly constructed sentence after another.
83. **The Sheltering Sky**, [Paul Bowles](#), 1948. Bowles plunges his readers into a desert landscape whose awe inspiring beauty and indifference to humanity has never been rendered so lovingly-or so harrowingly.
84. **Darconville's Cat**, [Alexander Theroux](#), 1981. Theroux uses love the way Melville used his white whale-as a metaphor to be exhausted, improvised, played with, and otherwise endlessly explored until it eventually reveals the utter inexhaustibility and mystery of life itself.
85. **Up**, [Ronald Sukenick](#), 1968. This wildly inventive comic novel unfolds as collages of desperate elements: surreal depictions of alienation in the manner of Kafka and Orwell; didactic commentaries about politics, metaphysics, culture, and (of course) literature; flights of fantasy that included numerous outrageous sexual episodes; and reflexive metafictional asides about the book we're reading and the status of the novel generally in the era of "post realism." Up's wit and intelligence, its formal extremity-and the appropriateness of its experiments for allowing Sukenick to investigate his own life and the larger context of the disruptions occuring

in America during the 60s-made this book among the most daring books of the first wave of pomo innovation.

86. **Yellow Back Radio Broke Down**, [Ishamel Reed](#), 1969. Reed's brash, hoodoo-meets-horse-opera approach to the Wild West signaled the arrival of the first major Black voice in postmodernism.
87. **Winesburg, Ohio**, [Sherwood Anderson](#), 1919. One of the first books to convincingly employ Freudian psychology to revealing the inner workings of ordinary characters, this collection used a small-town setting as a means of examining the neuroses and obsessions of American life in a manner that has only been rivaled by Flannery O'Conner for sheer intensity and insight.
88. **You Bright and Risen Angels**, [William T. Vollmann](#), 1987. In the most ambitious and original debuts since Pynchon's *V.*, Vollmann develops a dense, sprawling novelistic "cartoon" in which bugs and electricity become motifs used to explore the revolutionary impulses that have arisen in response to the evils of industrialism. Moving across vast areas of history and geography, filled with arcane information and surrealist literalizations of sexual longings and violence, and blending together autobiography and fictive invention in a typically pomo manner, this book's wild flights of improvisational prose and intensity of vision signaled the arrival America's most gifted novelist of the century's last 25 years.
89. **The Naked and the Dead**, [Norman Mailer](#), 1948. As is well known, Mailer departed for WWII convinced that his experiences would provide him with the ingredients for writing the great novel about this century's greatest conflagration. This novel proved him to be right.
90. **The Universal Baseball Association, J. Henry Waugh, Prop.**, [Robert Coover](#), 1968. The greatest "sports novel" of the century (only Don DeLillo's *End Zone* is even in the same "ballpark"), The UBA used baseball as an elaborate framing device that allows Coover to explore American culture, history, and politics from various fascinating angles; along the way, he also develops an elaborate and brilliantly conceived metaphor of the relationship of man to God and the fictional systems man has created (myth, literature, philosophy, religion) to make sense of the world.
91. **Creamy and Delicious**, [Steve Katz](#), 1971. The most extreme and perfectly executed fictional work to emerge from the Pop Art scene of the late 60s, this collection also includes one of the great undiscovered treasures of the postmodern short story form, the Raymond Roussel-influenced gem, "3 Satisfying Stories"; also notable for Katz's success in creating pomo's first successful literary analogue to "the Big Crunch"-see page 43.

92. **Waiting for the Barbarians**, [J.M. Coetzee](#), 1980. Narrated by a middle-aged magistrate of an unspecified colonial outpost, this hallucinatory allegory of imperialism poetically chronicles the interconnections existing between power-wielders and their victims.
93. **More than Human**, [Theodore Sturgeon](#), 1951. Anyone who isn't aware that SF has produced some great prose writers need only go to page one of this Sturgeon classic evocation of "homo gestalt" to educate themselves.
94. **Mulligan Stew**, [Gilbert Sorrentino](#), 1979. Sorrentino's epic, obsessive, metafictional "tour de farce" includes bits of detective fiction, a masque, letters (including a generous selection of the dozens of rejection letters the book piled up), poetry, porn, and a great deal else; in the end, the book becomes a fascinating, humorous meditation on the comic possibilities of the modern literary imagination-as well as an angry denunciation of the ways these possibilities are subverted in today's publishing industry.
95. **Look Homeward, Angel**, [Thomas Wolfe](#), 1929. In an age of hard-boiled realism, this enormous, rough-edged beast of novel was a lyrical, uncontrolled, Whitmanesque cry of yearning that remains of the most important statements of American's sense of hope, alienation, memory, and (above all) voracious appetite for new experiences.
96. **An American Tragedy**, [Theodore Dreiser](#), 1925. This novel's significance lies partly in Dreiser's ability to use Clyde Griffith's soul-hunger and eventual destruction to describe a uniquely American form of tragedy while also suggesting something about the more universal plight of individuals caught up in vast socio-economic forces of which they are only dimly aware.
97. **Easy Travels to Other Planets**, [Ted Mooney](#), 1981. Blending mainstream's emphasis on psychological depth with an eerie ambience of SF (an impending war in the Antarctic, information sickness), this haunting, lyrical novel perfectly exemplifies the blend of the postmodern mainstream and SF to be found in the other two novels (i.e., DeLillo's *White Noise* and Gibson's *Neuromancer*) which best captured the vast, media-driven transformations at work in American life during the 80s.
98. **Tours of the Black Clock**, [Steve Erickson](#), 1989. This novel combined Faulkner's mesmerizing ability to explode time and space with Marquez's magical realist ability to magically exaggerate aspects of the familiar until they can be seen clearly once again; the result is a haunting and grotesque evocation of the shattered nature of 20th century life and its ongoing love affair with fascism and violence.
99. **In Memoriam to Identity**, [Kathy Acker](#), 1990. By the time this-her most moving and effective novel-appeared, Acker had already published nearly a dozen books whose punk-influenced,

demolition-derby approach to writing fiction had already had the greatest impact on writing by women of anyone of her generation.

100. **Hogg**, [Samuel R. Delany](#), 1996. The most shocking novel published in the 20th century.