

English 12 Choice Novels (*Choose ONE to read, in addition to Pride and Prejudice + The Screwtape Letters*)

Recommended Publishers: Penguin Classics, Signet Classics, Wordsworth Classics, Dover Thrift.

See also Ignatius Press Critical Editions (for *Pride and Prejudice*, *A Tale of Two Cities*)

19th Century Options

***Mary Barton* (Elizabeth Gaskell):**

A dramatic tale of the lives of working-class folk involving crises of conscience, rumors and gossip, a murder mystery, and a love triangle. Through a series of struggles, the independent and confident title character, Mary Barton, wrestles with the true value of beauty, duty to family, honesty, and sacrifice. If you like books with strong female characters, and enjoy a good mystery with an edge-of-your-seat court scene, this could be the book for you.

***A Tale of Two Cities* (Charles Dickens)**

Follow the lives of a group of cleverly intertwined characters caught up in the wake of the French Revolution and Reign of Terror. If you enjoyed *Les Misérables*, if you enjoy rich symbolism in your books, and if you want to read the rest of the novel that begins with the famous line - "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times" - this could be the book for you.

***Hard Times* (Charles Dickens)**

Set in a mill town in Northern England, this novel follows the principles of Utilitarianism to their logical conclusion. Dickens said of this novel: "My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else." If you enjoy humor and satire, if you're curious about the critique of industrialization, and/or if you want to choose the shortest 19th century novel on the list, this could be the book for you.

20th Century Options

***Brideshead Revisited* (Evelyn Waugh)**

In this reflective novel that starts in the middle of war and then jumps back in time, Waugh explores the changing culture and landscape of England from the "golden days" before the war up through war-time. More character-driven than plot-driven. If you enjoy quirky characters and/or British period dramas, liked *The Great Gatsby*, and wonder what Oxford used to be like, this could be the book for you.

***The Children of Húrin* (J.R.R. Tolkien)**

Arranged into a unified narrative by Christopher Tolkien, this Great Tale of Middle Earth relates the doom laid on the family of Húrin Thalion, focusing on his son Túrin and daughter Niënor. Featuring outlaws, elves, dragons, vengeance, curses, death, destruction, drama, and struggles against seemingly-insurmountable odds, the tale maintains a pervasive atmosphere of melancholy, as The Professor taps into the elegiac mood of the Northern epics he so admired. If you like *The Lord of the Rings*, compelling battle scenes, and/or reflections on fate versus free will and the problem of pain, this could be the book for you.

***The Power and the Glory* (Graham Greene)**

In Greene's own words: "The aim of the book was to oppose the power of the sacraments and the indestructibility of the Church on the one hand with, on the other, the merely temporal power of an essentially Communist state." Set in 1930s Mexico, this darker, grittier novel follows a protagonist, the "whisky priest," who is hunted relentlessly by ruthless authorities. Full disclosure: The Vatican considered adding this book to the Index back in the day, but prelates such as the future Pope Paul VI argued in favor of the book's literary merit and valuable, redeeming portrayal of a sinful world. If you like spy novels, dislike sentimental novels, and hate Communism, this could be the book for you.