

50 GREAT WORKS OF WESTERN LITERATURE:
A SELECTED READING GUIDE FOR CHRISTIAN READERS

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A. EARLY CHRISTIAN AND MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

1. ST. AUGUSTINE, CONFESSIONS (397-398) **BR65.A6 E5 1907**

As the first autobiography ever written and a truthful account of one man's rescue from the cesspool of sin to new life in Christ, *Confessions* stands as one of the most moving redemption stories of all time. In these pages we find not the venerable Bishop of Hippo, arguably the greatest of all Church Fathers, but a wretched youth who steals orchard pears for the sake of stealing and struggles with hypocrisy and lust—a human being like ourselves. Augustine's description of childhood, unique in classical literature, is shockingly frank: "I was a great sinner for so small a boy." You'll appreciate the book too for its rich devotional content; this is an intimate conversation with God that's saturated with Scripture. John Calvin believed that knowledge of God and knowledge of self can't be separated; this is the book that proves the truth of his statement. The title has two meanings: Augustine *confesses* his sins to God with deep repentance; he also *confesses*, without apology, his Christian faith to the world. "You made us for Yourself," the author tells God in the first paragraph, "and our hearts find no peace until they rest in You." The remainder of the book elaborates beautifully on this statement; Augustine celebrates the grace of a Sovereign God, expressed most movingly to him in the relentless intercessory prayers of Monica, the paragon of all Christian mothers.

2. ANONYMOUS, BEOWULF (c. 9th Century) **PR1583.W74 1957**

The northern world of *Beowulf*, that great Anglo-Saxon epic tale of monsters and heroes, is grim, sunless, and as dense as primordial pea soup. Its depths may elude readers who skim through their *Cliff's Notes* in the more carefree days of high school British literature survey. The poem is valuable for its gritty depiction of the life-and-death struggle between good and evil. Evil never sleeps, but men unfortunately do. The hideous monsters of destruction, Grendel and his mother, can't be wished away—if they aren't slain in bloody hand-to-hand combat, men will die. Beowulf faces the evil head on, and in the struggle heroically lays down his life for his brethren. We may see in Beowulf the prototype of William Wallace, the creative inspiration for Tolkien, or perhaps an echo of our great champion Jesus Christ. We can also grasp why terrorism must be fought in the wake of 9/11. It's healthy for us, in our eviscerated age, to learn from a time when men knew the meaning of valor. This epic song of peril, courage, and divine providence unveils the conflict of life at its bare-boned roots. It should remind us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12) and that we are all called upon to awake from our sleep and fight before we may feast in the banqueting halls.

3. DANTE, DIVINE COMEDY (c. 1320) **PQ4315.C4 1937**

Few but the most adventurous readers today will ever immerse themselves in the complicated medieval theological-cosmological scheme of Dante's massive *Divina Commedia*—called a "comedy" because it begins disastrously (in hell) and ends well (in heaven). For those brave souls who take the plunge into the grandest epic poem in European literature, Dante's guided tour of the universe will afford

startling insights. In the *Inferno*, evangelical readers might ponder why medievals foresaw a harsher punishment for the more “invisible” sins of the intellect (hypocrisy, pride) than for the more “visible” sins of fleshly indulgence (lust, gluttony). Another instructive feature of the *Inferno* is the mechanism of divine retribution: by the inexorable law of *contrapasso*, the punishment fits the crime and the eternal consequences sinners suffer turn out to be poetic versions of their sin. Thus, lovers caught in fornication on earth are tossed around forever in a fickle gale of passion in hell, joined to one another without respite. Gluttons who gorged their bodies like swine are doomed to wallow in an eternal rainstorm of filth. Suicides, who violently divorced their souls from their bodies, are blasted trees with skins hanging on their bleeding limbs. As we follow our guide down to lower levels of hell, the weather grows increasingly cold and objects become heavier; in Dante’s *Inferno*, the law of gravity works and hell truly does “freeze over.” The lowest pit is a lake of ice, not fire. This, the point furthest removed from the gracious love of God, represents the heaviness and coldness of the human heart weighed down by sin. It helps to have a knowledge of medieval history when reading Dante: his discussions of theology, politics, and poetry make sense only in historical context; and if we know that he wrote his poem in lifelong exile from his beloved Florence, we will better understand why he relegated some of his contemporary Florentines and even Pontiffs to various circles of hell. Students of church history will be interested to read the *Paradiso*, the third part of the epic’s trilogy, where at the gates of heaven St. Peter is moved to angry tears as he decries the corruption of the medieval church. Two centuries before Luther’s Reformation, Dante anticipated the church’s need for it.

4. ANONYMOUS, EVERYMAN (c. 1495) **PR1260.E9 1959**

Man knows not his time. In the midst of the whirligig of life, Death may unexpectedly summon him to give an account before his Maker. If this sounds like an evangelism drama, it *is*; in the late Middle Ages, the church used allegorical street drama to instruct the illiterate masses in orthodox doctrine. And in a day when plague, fire, famine, and war wiped out entire cities, the message of this play was keenly felt—naked you come and naked you will depart. Faced with his imminent departure from the world, Everyman begs his old friends—companions, family, possessions—to accompany him on his journey, but they all abandon him. What he’s left with is knowledge and good works, and it’s a sign of the urgent need for European Reformation that Everyman is able to plead his account before God on the merit of his good works, not on the blood of Christ shed for his sins. Apart from faulty theology and characterization that seems wooden after Shakespeare, *Everyman* serves as a stark reminder of the brevity of our life, the vanity of our earthly pleasures, and the reality that someday we too will be called to give an account before our Maker.

II. RENAISSANCE LITERATURE (16th AND 17th CENTURY)

5. DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, PRAISE OF FOLLY (1511) **PA8514.E5 1979**

Erasmus, the genial cosmopolitan Dutch humanist, was the superstar intellect of his day. He enjoyed celebrity status in all the courts of Europe; he published the first Greek text of the New Testament. Erasmus’ happiest days were spent in England with his humanist friend Sir Thomas More, to whom he dedicated his *tour de force* of satirical wit, *Praise of Folly*. The book is an extended speech, spoken mockingly by the woman Folly (cf. Prov. 8-9), whose “folly,” held up to the right light, often looks a lot like wisdom. In the disguise of the “wise fool” that Shakespeare would later adopt for his court jesters, Erasmus ridicules—now gently, now acerbically—the manifold vices of church and society. As Folly wisely says, “it is the privilege of fools to speak the truth without giving offense.” But offense

was taken; the Catholic Church soon placed *Praise of Folly* on their growing list of banned books. For Christian readers, the best section comes at the end of Folly's discourse, where she praises the "folly" of Christ and His followers. She quotes Paul's "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" and shows how Christ "calls those who are destined for eternal life his sheep, though there is no animal so stupid." The tone in this section is one of piety, and we sense that we're on holy ground. Thus one of the great scholarly jests of the Renaissance, by its most brilliant humanist, comes to end on a surprising note of humility. It was Erasmus' tragedy that he clearly saw the corruption of the Roman Church but was not willing to cast his lot with the Reformation. Like his friend Thomas More, who was beheaded by Henry VIII a year before Erasmus died, he ultimately came to be trapped between the grinding plates of seismic historical change.

6. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, PLAYS (c. 1590-1610) **PR2754.K5**

Shakespeare, "the swan of Avon," is the greatest author in the English language. His genius is universal in scope: it's said that every type of person who has ever lived can be found pictured in the gigantic portrait gallery of his 37 plays. His psychological insight into human character and motivation—along with his mastery of technical words and slang from every field of human endeavor—is so astonishing that some doubt the glover's son from Stratford could have written all the plays. It's said that A.W. Tozer, the late Chicago preacher, read the works of Shakespeare on his knees, asking God to give him wisdom. So have many Christians over the last four centuries. Shakespeare wrote his plays when modern English was still wet cement; his "King's English" may sound antiquated to readers now, but its beauty of cadence and imagery is unparalleled in English literature. No other poet, after all, is known to us simply as "the bard." Hidden beneath the archaic language lies a great treasure of insight into human nature for those who are patient enough to dig. It's important to remember, when reading Shakespeare, that he intended the plays for lively communal experience in a theater, not for academic dissection on a lifeless page. Amazingly, during his lifetime he seems to have cared nothing about their publication in print.

Shakespeare's plays are divided into histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. My personal favorites are *Henry IV (Part I)* and *Henry V* (histories); *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Twelfth Night* (comedies); *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* (tragedies); and *The Tempest* (romance). The greatest Shakespeare plays, and the most difficult to perform on stage, are the mature tragedies *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. In these masterpieces the bard plumbs depths of human experience that stretch the possibilities of dramatic representation to the breaking point.

7. MIGUEL DE CERVANTES, DON QUIXOTE (I: 1604, II: 1616) **PQ6329.A2 1962**

The chivalrous madman Don Quixote takes his place with Erasmus' Folly and Shakespeare's court jesters in a sizable collection of Renaissance fools. His is an extraordinary madness. Having read a roomful of medieval romance novels, he imagines himself to be a knight and sallies off in quest of adventures that will redress the evils of the world and win him personal glory. Obviously, the modern world that receives this idealistic "knight" thinks his brain has been fried in the hot Spanish sun. His delusions often seem to create more wrongs than they right. But Don Quixote is not so easily categorized: he seems to be the only man in La Mancha who orders his life according to a higher moral code than the normal mercenary opportunism; animated by this code, he alone exhibits real courage where others run away. "For I well know what valor is," he says, after he stands fearlessly before an open cage of lions, and we believe him. His speech often comes across as perfectly sane.

With his simple-ton sidekick Sancho Panza, he exhibits all of the qualities of a natural leader: he causes Sancho to believe in a greater vision and quest than farming, he models courage to the point of suffering personal disaster, and his actions always back up his words. The end is ambiguous, but it's clear that the realist Sancho has become an ardent convert of his master's dream. This sprawling tome of 1,000 pages is generally considered the father of the modern novel and one of its great expressions. Cervantes holds the mirror up to a world teetering unstably between the medieval and the modern, the ideal and the real, the "wise" and the "foolish." The mirrors multiply, and what he leaves us is a baffling self-reflecting world that resembles the postmodern one we live in today.

8. JOHN MILTON, PARADISE LOST (1674) **Oversize PR3560.A1 1900**

Without question, this is the greatest poem written in the English language. Milton considered his 300-page, 12-book epic tale of the fall of angels and mankind, followed by the redemption of mankind in Christ, to be his one great calling in life. Ironically, he was too busy to write it until after he became completely blind (he dictated the entire poem from memory to his daughters). This blind man's visual imagination is stunning: his portrayal of hell as "darkness visible" is a fitting description of his uncanny ability to imagine a teeming world through his blindness. *Paradise Lost* is full of dramatic visual detail; you may think you're watching a movie in which characters deliver long speeches. It's also crammed with obscure classical and Biblical allusions, which combined with the author's grand, latinate verse style can make it a challenging read for newcomers. For those who patiently persist, the poem pays rich rewards. The most exciting passages are Books I-IV, which range majestically between the assembly of the fallen angels in hell, the plan of redemption in heaven, and the journey of Satan through chaos to earth. The monumental scope and design of these passages is unequalled in all of literature. Also, don't miss Milton's vivid, dramatic interpretation of the Gen. 3:1-7 temptation and fall of man in Book IX. This poem was considered so massive that it paralyzed writers for centuries afterward. No other significant English epic poem has been written since. In the last century, C. S. Lewis was a careful student of Milton. His science-fiction novel, *Perelandra*, owes a great conceptual debt to *Paradise Lost*; his short book, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, offers one of the best Christian introductions into the universe of Milton's poem.

9. JOHN BUNYAN, PILGRIM'S PROGRESS (I: 1678, II: 1684) **PR3330.A1 1965a**

Pilgrim's Progress is the greatest allegory of the Christian life ever written; the simple proof is that it has been translated into more languages, and has sold more copies, than any book besides the Bible. Bunyan was a Puritan preacher who was imprisoned for preaching biblical truth during the troubled years after the death of Cromwell and the ousting of Puritans from pulpits across England. The book's timeless vigor is that it was born out of adversity and suffering; Bunyan conceived and wrote it from his prison cell. Those who wished to silence him could imprison his body, but his mind and imagination, rooted in Christ, soared free. The central message of the book is that the road to the Celestial City is long, narrow, and difficult—"through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Many fall away and few end well. As such, this old Puritan allegory of perseverance through suffering is a desperately needed antidote to the lie of cheap grace we package and sell as American evangelicalism today. (It would be interesting to conjecture where Bunyan might have placed Schuller's lavish Crystal Cathedral in the scheme of his novel.) Because the world doesn't change in its essential types (*Vanity Fair* is Hollywood and Madison Avenue today), the book's significance will never go out of style. Since its first publication, *Pilgrim's Progress* has clearly communicated the gospel to readers of every generation. It should be a great model to aspiring Christian writers of how a sanctified literary imagination may be consecrated to the service of truth.

III. ENLIGHTENMENT LITERATURE (18th CENTURY)

10. DANIEL DEFOE, ROBINSON CRUSOE (1719) **PR3403.A1 1903**

This forerunner of the modern novel is much more than an adventure story of a shipwreck. If read only as an adventure, the book could disappoint. Dialogue is nonexistent because the hero spends a quarter of a century in solitude; also, since he is trapped on an island, exploration is limited to a con-scribed radius. The value of this book is actually spiritual and psychological rather than physical—Crusoe must come to terms with himself, his Creator, and his surroundings in his state of isolation. What the castaway learns in what turns out to be a long internal monologue is nothing less than the great mystery of contentment. Reading from his Bible (the most precious object saved from the sinking ship), Cru-soe grows in his reliance on the Sovereignty and Providence of God. He repents and prays frequently. Obviously, these sizable politically-incorrect “religious” parts are neatly chopped out of the harmless survival-tale versions taught in public schools today. Make sure you read the unabridged version; you may be surprised to discover that *Robinson Crusoe* is a great work of Christian fiction. Of course, no one would publish a book like this today: for evangelicals who market LaHaye-Jenkins bestsellers, the language would be considered too difficult; for the rest of the world, too “religiously offensive.”

11. JONATHAN SWIFT, A MODEST PROPOSAL (1729) **PR3724.G8 1981**

In six pages of elegant, deadpan prose, the master of 18th century satire sets forth an ingenious solution to alleviate the Irish famine: poor people should dismember and eat their babies. “A young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee, or a ragout.” Swift’s intention, of course, is to shock his readers out of their moral turpitude: by pushing the ethics of utilitarianism to an absurd but logical extreme, he shows how civilized people may become barbarians when they divorce reason from God’s moral law. In the prism of this masterful satire we can see the ruthless rationale proposed by Nazi leaders for a “Final Solution” to the Jewish problem. We may also gain a better understanding of the long-term implications of our own society’s pragmatic justification for abortion-on-demand and deadly harvesting of human embryos for their “spare parts.” The terrible irony is that in cannibalizing its young to satisfy short-term gratification, a civilization effectively commits suicide. Sadly, today we must acknowledge that Swift was a prophet.

IV. 19th CENTURY LITERATURE

12. JANE AUSTEN, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE (1813) **PZ3.A93 Pr 1945**

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” From the frank opening line to the compelling finale of Austen’s brilliant domestic comedy of early 19th-century manners and morals, the course of true love never does run smooth. Without question, this is the crown jewel of Austen’s novels—the book rides out a slew of miscommunications and emotional turbulence with the stylistic grace and structural symmetry of a Mozart rondo. Austen exhibits an unusual talent for sketching her characters indirectly, mostly through what they unwittingly betray in their speech, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” The book’s sixty short chapters are filled with witty repartee and move at a brisk pace. As with *Sense and Sensibility*, the title is the key to the novel’s theme—focusing on the traits of pride and prejudice in people, Austen shows how peoples’ appearances often belie their true character, how the

first impressions we form of others can often prove disastrously wrong. As the heroine Elizabeth Bennet learns the hard way, this is no where more tricky than in the delicate realm of courtship. Two of the most colorful characters in literature inhabit this novel: the ironic, reclusive Mr. Bennet, who leaves the protection of his library only to be amused by the emotional imbroglios of his weak-minded wife and five daughters; and the insufferable Mr. Collins, who is so full of false humility and pompous speech that he doesn't see he's a buffoon. You'll find great psychological insight into human nature and relationships in this novel. If you like tongue-in-cheek British dialogue, with all of its catty, restrained play of irony and understatement, this one's a treat.

13. MARY SHELLEY, FRANKENSTEIN (1818) **PZ3.S545 Fr 1963a**

People who think they know *Frankenstein* are generally mistaken on two counts. First, they wrongly suppose the book is named after the monster. In fact, it's named after the Swiss doctor who creates the monster, and the book is more about the doctor than the monster. Second, people mistakenly think that this book serves up cheap horror as entertainment—like *Dracula*. Nothing could be further from the truth. Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a disturbingly modern meditation on what happens when man uses science to imitate God's work of creation. What happens, of course, is that he fouls it up. And he doesn't only foul it up for himself—he causes the world around him to groan for his stupidity in playing God. The reason Dr. Frankenstein creates a monster instead of a human is that his creation can only be *in the image of man*, not *in the image of God*. For all his technological genius, man can't reproduce the divine spark—the human soul. Along with Jonathan Swift's short satirical essay, *A Modest Proposal*, this experimental fantasy—written on a whim—may be one the best literary works for understanding the moral implications of genetic engineering, especially as our knowledge of DNA makes stem-cell manipulation and cloning increasingly viable. What happens in this book is that the creature turns against his human creator, who comes to regret bitterly that he has overstepped the boundaries of science.

14. ALEXANDRE DUMAS, THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO (1844)

On the level of sheer plot ingenuity, this sprawling, swashbuckling adventure set in France's revolutionary Napoleonic Age can't be beat. The theme of the novel is calculated revenge, and the moral question Dumas poses is the extent to which God's prerogative in visiting retribution may be carried out by human agents. The young Edmond Dantes, wrongfully sentenced for fifteen years to an impenetrable fortress off the coast of Marseilles, escapes to transform himself into the elegant, mysterious, and fabulously wealthy Count of Monte Cristo. To his friends he appears as the angel of the Lord; to his enemies he is the angel of death. Convinced of his divine mandate to embody God's Providence and meet out justice on his fellow mortals, Monte Cristo orchestrates his revenge with the imperturbable efficiency of a master-conductor—until the end of the novel, that is, when he learns a lesson about the difference between God's vengeance and our own. The novel is more accessible, and doesn't suffer plot damage, if read in an abridged version.

15. CHARLOTTE BRONTE, JANE EYRE (1847) **PR4167.J35 1941**

Like Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Eyre is a simple heroine with a remarkable inner life. The novel chronicles her growth in character from a troubled childhood to—well, you'll have to see, because this is part of the novel's secret. It would be a great mistake for male readers to dismiss Bronte's masterpiece as a “chick book.” Mr. Rochester, Jane's master, is one of the most gnarly, conflicted, and, well, MALE males in the history of literature. He's like a rough WWF wrestler with intelligence and heart. *Jane Eyre* is one of the most poetically written novels you'll ever find; every

sentence is a carefully-polished gem. But it's not only the perfection of style that makes this a great book for Christians to read. Unlike Austen's novel, this is a Bible-saturated book, from the oblique allusions to Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation to passages that recreate the poetry of suffering from the book of Psalms. It would be difficult to understand the novel fully without having grown up in Sunday School; one might even dare to call this novel "more Christian" than many of the bestsellers published as "Christian" today. At the heart of the novel's mystery, Jane Eyre is faced with an ethical test that screws all of her integrity of character to the sticking point. What unfolds is a rare lesson in the value of delayed gratification, and a compelling picture of sacrificial love forged in the furnace of suffering.

16. CHARLES DICKENS, A TALE OF TWO CITIES (1859) **PZ3.D55 Ta 1942**

This is the best novel written by an Englishman about the French Revolution; it's also one of the most compelling parables in literature of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. Dickens wrote the novel in serial installments, and it shows: every chapter is carefully crafted and leaves the reader hungry for more. Symbols and themes are tightly woven in the intricate plot; the suspense is cumulative. In all his novels Dickens is a master of characterization, and here he's at the top of his game: every main character in the novel carries a secret that in some way contributes to the climactic conclusion. The gifted, shadowy Sydney Carton is one of the most intriguing of all Dickens' characters. Dickens takes time to warm up in Book I—he's carefully setting the stage; by Book III, with his imagination plunged into the maniacal cauldron of the Jacobin Reign of Terror, he's really cooking. It's one thing to read the historical facts about the French Revolution in a textbook; it's another to experience the terrific frenzy directly in the imaginative recreation of a master novelist. The last chapter, with its elegiac combination of poetic imagery and prophecy, is unforgettable.

17. LEWIS CARROLL, ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND (1865) **Juvenile PZ8.D666 An**

This book, along with its companion *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), is most often thought of as "children's literature," but though children will find it wildly entertaining (if a bit nightmarish), they won't catch any of the deeper levels of irony and mathematical-philosophical paradoxes Carroll included for his adult readers. Carroll was a mathematics professor at Oxford, and this is what results when the mind of a stodgy bachelor-genius takes a vacation from his math classes. Fall down the rabbit hole with Alice and meet a wild assembly of unlikely characters and situations in a topsy-turvy world that curiously mirrors our own. Comb it for intricate levels of meaning, or simply enjoy it for its glorious freeplay of imagination.

18. FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY, CRIME AND PUNISHMENT (1866) **PG3326.P7 S35 1963**

Dostoevsky is heavy Russian meat not recommended for the faint of heart. You don't read his novels for descriptions of scenery; his "scenery" is the troubled psychological landscape of the human soul. This is the huge story of a Russian college student who, thinking that he can live above the law, commits a terrible crime, and for the rest of the novel pays the punishment for it. This is a grim tale of consequences: "Be sure your sin will find you out." Apart from the Bible, it would be difficult to find a deeper investigation of "the law of God written on man's conscience" (Rom. 2:15). Dostoevsky's characters are grotesque and unlovable; their conversations are high-strung and often ascend to fever pitch. The pace has a nervous energy. Translations of Dostoevsky vary in effectiveness: for perhaps the best preservation of the freshness and pace of the Russian dialogue, buy the Vintage Classics translation done in 1992 by Pevear and Volokhonsky. This is a book that many Christian leaders list as one that has had a great impact on their lives. If you stomach this novel, you might tackle the challenge of

The Brothers Karamazov, his final and perhaps greatest presentation of all the untidy paradoxes of the human condition.

19. LEO TOSTOY, ANNA KARENINA (1875-77) **PZ3.T588 An**

This novel, along with *War and Peace*, is the towering masterpiece of the other great Russian novelist of the late 19th century. Its main plot focuses on the causes and consequences of the title character's sin of adultery. Needless to say, the consequences are *not* good. The large subplot tracks the fortunes of a rural landowner named Konstantine Levin. Tolstoy draws Levin very sympathetically; in contrast to the cultivated hypocrisies of society in the city, we grow to love him and the peasants who work his land. This is one of the great novels of 19th century Russian Realism; read it to travel back in time to an exotic foreign continent. Tolstoy will give you a window of insight into the Russian soul; you'll also see that he thoroughly disliked the modern influence of trains.

20. HENRIK IBSEN, A DOLL'S HOUSE (1879) **PT8851 1928**

Ibsen is considered the father of modern drama because he was the first to take the embarrassing domestic living room squabbles of the Victorian Age and present them on center stage for everyone to see. His plays were the 19th century version of our soap operas and sitcoms. Whether one considers the works to be high art or emotional exhibitionism, it's certain that Ibsen was a masterful propagandist and a shrewd businessman. Though a surly misogynist in life, he made a fortune styling himself as the first great literary liberator of women: his plays usually contain laughably weak or boorishly self-righteous men playing opposite strong, neurotic, repressed women. In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen's most famous play, Nora grows up out of her childish world of make-believe and play-acting to discover her true "self." The problem is that her personal awakening coincides with an unnatural casting-off of her conjugal and maternal responsibility to her husband and three children. What Ibsen seems to propose in this play is hardly a model for successful marital conflict resolution. If anything, ironically, we see the dangerous social disintegration caused by feminism. *A Doll's House* is instructive reading for those who wish to understand the deep social roots of today's domestic tragedies; for Christians, the play will make God's design for marriage appear so much sweeter, by contrast.

21. EDWIN ABBOTT, FLATLAND (1884) **QA699.A13 1992**

This curious little book, subtitled "A Romance of Many Dimensions," is a geometric fantasy—a rare form of late-Victorian science fiction. The main character is a very "normal" two-dimensional square living in his country of Flatland who, when suddenly visited by a sphere, becomes acquainted with a three-dimensional world (Spaceland) he never believed existed. His journey to other dimensions, and his imprisonment as a madman back in Flatland for preaching the heresy of three dimensions--these are the fabulous events chronicled in Part II of this bizarre tale. Obviously, more is at stake here than geometry. By analogy, Abbott shows us a fictitious world that turns out to be our own. Christians, who like the square have been drawn out of their ignorance and called to proclaim a higher "dimension" which is foolishness to the natural man (I Cor. 2:14), will find much to ponder in Abbott's ingenious parable.

22. LEO TOLSTOY, THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH (1886) **PZ3.T588 Wo**

After completing *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy wrote no word of fiction for nine years. The culmination of this crisis was this short novel which examines in excruciating psychological detail the gradual decline and death of a successful middle-aged businessman who, in a freak accident, is stricken with a terminal

illness at a time when he's not prepared to leave this world. Tolstoy may be hearkening back to the medieval typology of Everyman—"Ivan Ilyich" is the Russian equivalent of "John Doe"—but his allegorical protagonist is surprisingly contemporary. Ilyich is the rich merchant of Jesus' parable whose "soul is required of him" at the height of his prosperity (Luke 12:20). This is the most powerful novel I've read for placing the reader right into the anguished skin of a slowly-dying man. The psychological portrait Tolstoy draws is so convincing that it seems he must have had direct knowledge of the experience he describes. This book will help you to understand the mind of the terminally ill.

23. THOMAS HARDY, THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE (1886) **PZ3.H222 Ma 1969**

From the drunken bargain in the first chapter when Michael Henchard sells his wife at a county fair to the dramatic conclusion, this is a novel dominated by one gigantic man and the even more gigantic Fate that overcomes him. The theme of the novel is ambition and its consequences. Here is English tragedy on an epic Shakespearean scale; you couldn't pick a better introduction to the forces of character and environment which dominate all of Hardy's novels. What Hardy calls Fate, though, we know to be the Sovereign judgment of a God who will not be mocked, and causes men to reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7).

24. JEROME K. JEROME, THREE MEN IN A BOAT (1889) **N/A**

Here's one for comic relief. If you like dry British humor, you'll love this quirky book. Three sarcastic upper-middle-class men and a pet dog named Montmerency take a leisurely boat holiday down the Thames River. For those who savor a well-turned phrase like fine wine, this one's priceless.

25. OSCAR WILDE, THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY (1891) **PR5819.A1 1993**

England's literary prodigy and libertine sensualist, Oscar Wilde, lived and died for the philosophy of "art for art's sake." Even though he disclaimed all morality, his one great novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shows with iron inexorability God's law of moral cause and effect, of sin and its consequences on the soul. Dorian Gray abandons himself to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life—and with reckless impunity, because like an alabaster Greek statue or a perfect portrait his body never registers the ill effects of his lifestyle. On the outside, he remains a perfect Adonis—beautiful, young, seemingly incorruptible. But inside, his soul becomes an ugly picture of decay. In this novel, evil wears a fair face, but there are hideous maggots crawling beneath the surface of the mask. Wilde may have been shaping the hypocrisy of his own life into art—if so, his work turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Just four years after *Dorian Gray* shocked the literary world, the celebrated aesthete who authored it was sentenced to the degradation of prison for his homosexual lifestyle. This novel shows that you always reap what you sow, and if you sow to the flesh, from the flesh you'll reap corruption (Gal. 6:7-8). For its fixation on youth and sensual gratification at the expense of "the hidden person of the heart" (1 Pet. 3:4), *Dorian Gray* is a remarkably lifelike portrait of the grinning face and decadent soul of the America we live in today.

These titles to be added soon . . .

26. KATE CHOPIN, THE AWAKENING (1899) N/A

V. 20th CENTURY LITERATURE

27. JOSEPH CONRAD, HEART OF DARKNESS (1902) **PZ3.C764 Ps9**

28. KENNETH GRAHAME, THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS (1908) **Juvenile PZ10.3.G76 Wi**

29. F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, THE GREAT GATSBY (1925) **PS3511.I9 G7 1953**

30. ERICH REMARQUE, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT (1928) **PZ3.R443.A4 1967**

31. ALDOUS HUXLEY, BRAVE NEW WORLD (1932) **PZ3.H981 Br 1969**

32. ALAN PATON, CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY (1945) **PR9369.3.P37 C7 1995**

33. GEORGE ORWELL, ANIMAL FARM (1946) **PZ3.O79 An**

34. GEORGE ORWELL, NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR (1949) **PR6029.R8 N49 1992**

35. ARTHUR MILLER, DEATH OF A SALESMAN (1949) **PS3525.I5156 A19 1957**

36. ERNEST HEMINGWAY, THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA (1952) **PZ3.H3637 O1 1952**

37. RAY BRADBURY, FAHRENHEIT 451 (1953) **PZ3.B72453 Fah 1982**

38. WILLIAM GOLDING, LORD OF THE FLIES (1954) **PZ4.G63 Lo**

39. C. S. LEWIS, THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA (1950s) **PR6023.E926**

40. C. S. LEWIS, TILL WE HAVE FACES (1956) **PR6023.E926 T54 1964**

41. ISAK DINESEN, BABETTE'S FEAST (1958) N/A

42. CHINUA ACHEBE, THINGS FALL APART (1959) N/A

43. HARPER LEE, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD (1960) **PS3562.E353 T6 1982**

44. ROBERT BOLT, A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS (1960) **PR6052.O39 M3 1962**

45. J. R. R. TOLKIEN, THE LORD OF THE RINGS (1965) **PZ3.T576 Lo3**

46. CHAIM POTOK, THE CHOSEN (1967) **PS3566.O69 C54 1967**

47. CHAIM POTOK, MY NAME IS ASHER LEV (1972) **PS3566.O69 My 1991**

48. MICHAEL SHAARA, THE KILLER ANGELS (1974) N/A

49. KAZUO ISHIGURO, THE REMAINS OF THE DAY (1989) N/A