When John Hatchard set out on his bookselling odyssey in 1797 he was at the forefront of publishing, ensuring that the intellectually starved and time-poor public had the access to the latest political essay or humorous pamphlet.

As we approach our 220th anniversary we recognise that the hustle and bustle of modern life leaves many of our customers longing for a chance to escape into the pages of a great masterpiece. As such the Novella stands out as a perfect solution to the vicissitudes of modern living; the ability to read one whilst rattling through the country on a train, hovering over the Atlantic in a plane or curled up on the sofa for a few hours before bed amongst its greatest attributes.

We have selected what we feel is a rather exciting list of the very best Novellas from across the past two centuries; Kingsley Amis, Muriel Spark and John Le Carré are all here like old friends.

As with ‘Our Favourite Novels’ catalogue last year, we’d love you to vote on your favourite and will announce the winner at our annual Christmas evening later in the year.

We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we have and given their brevity hope you’ll treat yourself to more than one.
THE GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN EYES (1835)
Honoré de Balzac translated by Peter Collier
The ‘vast pleasure factory’ of Paris is the setting for this tale of doomed infatuation. Henri, the illegitimate son of Lord Darnley, is entranced by Paquita, the girl of the title. However, too late, a dark secret about the girl is revealed.

A HERO OF OUR TIME (1840)
Mikhail Lermontov translated by Natasha Randall
Praised and reviled in equal measure on its first publication, A Hero of Our Time tells the story of a Russian soldier posted to the Caucasus. Against the backdrop of the region’s spectacular landscape this flawed, heartless hero pursues his quest for entertainment.

‘I would place my life on a card twenty times over - and my honour too ...but my freedom I will not sell.’
MIKHAIL LERMONTOV, A HERO OF OUR TIME

BARTLEBY, THE SCRIVENER: A STORY OF WALL STREET (1853)
Herman Melville
‘I would prefer not to.’ These words become Bartleby’s rule for life as he sinks from being a model scrivener to a man who, quietly but determinedly, does nothing. This is an extraordinary, and extraordinarily moving, story of a man’s withdrawal from the world.

HOME OF THE GENTRY (1859)
Ivan Turgenev translated by Richard Freeborn
Like the hero of this story, many of the Russian gentry flirted with the West and its ideas, only to return home wounded. Of the great Russian writers, Ivan Turgenev is the one who best captures the tragedy of unattainable love and the melancholy beauty of his faraway land.
NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND (1864)
with THE GAMBLER (1866)
Fyodor Dostoyevsky translated by Jane Kentish

Dostoyevsky’s first novella, Notes from the Underground is one of his most thought-provoking works, illustrating the ideas seen in many of his longer novels. This is published with The Gambler, a very different work, which gives the reader both a glimpse inside an addict’s mind and an entertaining look at Russians abroad.

‘It’s precisely in despair that you find the most intense pleasure, especially if you are already powerfully conscious of the hopelessness of your predicament.’
FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY,
NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

DAISY MILLER: A STUDY (1878)
Henry James

Daisy is a dangerously independent young woman, presaging many of Henry James’ later heroines. American high society, in late nineteenth century Europe, was governed by strict social conventions, rules which Daisy ignores to her cost.

‘Certainly she was very charming; but how deucedly sociable!’
HENRY JAMES, DAISY MILLER

FLATLAND: A ROMANCE OF MANY DIMENSIONS (1884)
A. Square (Edwin A. Abbott)

Fantasy worlds abound in fiction, but few are as astonishing as Rev. Abbott’s, where life is limited to length and breadth. A. Square describes his world in fascinating and logical detail, which is shocking or hilarious, according to your point of view. Then a stranger takes him to the Land of Three Dimensions, a world A. Square would not have believed possible.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1886)
R. L. Stevenson

The phrase ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ has entered our language; everyone feels they know this story. Read it and allow Robert Louis Stevenson’s stylish prose to transport you into the murky world of Victorian London and human fallibility.

‘It is one thing to mortify curiosity, another to conquer it.’
R. L. STEVENSON, STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was a huge success; it sold 40,000 copies in six months and was reputedly read by both the Prime Minister and Queen Victoria.

A STUDY IN SCARLET (1887)
Arthur Conan Doyle

From their first meeting, Dr Watson is intrigued by Sherlock Holmes: his erratic knowledge, his powers of detection, and, indeed, his trade. When they take rooms together on Baker Street it is only a matter of time before the doctor is swept into his friend’s world of murder and mystery.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THE YELLOW WALLPAPER (1892)
Charlotte Perkins Gilman

The author suffered similar treatment to the narrator; both women were diagnosed as suffering from 'nerves' and were forbidden any intellectual stimulation 'for their own good'. A fierce indictment of the treatment of women at the time, this brief and moving story charts a woman's appalling and unnecessary decline into madness.

THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU (1896)
H. G. Wells

An 'exercise in youthful blasphemy' was how H. G. Wells described this novella. On a remote island in the Pacific Ocean Dr Moreau attempts to play God. Distorting the laws of nature he manages to create new life, but not the super-breed of humans he envisaged.

MY LIFE (1896)
Anton Chekhov translated by Constance Garnett

Misail, the subject of this life, has many similarities to Anton Chekhov himself. He is young, idealistic and rebellious. Dropping out of the bourgeois society to which he belongs, he becomes a manual labourer hoping to discover a better way of life.

HEART OF DARKNESS (1899)
Joseph Conrad

Ostensibly about a voyage up the Congo, the theme of Heart of Darkness is an exploration of good and evil; in particular, the darkness of both the civilised people of London and the 'savages' of Africa. With a change of location to Vietnam, this was the inspiration for the film Apocalypse Now.

‘I said I had seen him three nights ago in Piccadilly, not quite sober, in company with the class of person to whom one does not refer in polite society.’

E. F. BENSON, THE BLOTTING BOOK

THE BLOTTING BOOK (1908)
E. F. Benson

Here the author of the Mapp and Lucia stories deftly turns his hand to crime. Morris Assheton has a new motor car and a girl whom he intends to marry; slander, blackmail and murder threaten to disrupt his plans. Could the faithful family solicitors really be behind the dastardly deeds?
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY: A NIGHTMARE (1908)
G. K. Chesterton
Secret policeman Gabriel Syme infiltrates a dangerous group of Anarchists. Elected to the committee as Thursday he discovers that the other members, each named after a day of the week, are not what they seem. A madcap chase through London ensues and rather than a nightmare this is probably better described as a splendidly farcical caper.

“Your offer,” he said, “is far too idiotic to be declined.”
G.K. CHESTERTON,
THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY: A NIGHTMARE

A ROOM WITH A VIEW (1908)
E. M. Forster
Lucy arrives in Florence as an innocent young lady, her future mapped out for her and her chaperone in tow. Italy, the unconventional but charming Mr Emerson and his passionate son George undermine her certainties. If you liked the Merchant-Ivory film, you’ll love the book.

ETHAN FROME (1911)
Edith Wharton
Edith Wharton wrote of the setting for Ethan Frome ‘The snowbound villages of Western Massachusetts were still grim places, morally and physically’. The story of Ethan’s life, pieced together by a visitor; makes harsh reading, worsened by the hope Ethan once had.

O PIONEERS! (1913)
Willa Cather
Set in the early 1880’s, O Pioneers! tells the story of Alexandra Bergson, an unusual Victorian heroine. On his deathbed, her father entrusts the family farm into her hands and she assures him ‘We will never lose the land.’ This fiercely determined young woman takes on and conquers the man’s world of the Nebraskan Plains.
**THE 39 STEPS (1915)**  
*John Buchan*

During a period of illness John Buchan exhausted all the ‘dime novels’ and ‘shockers’ he could find and so decided to write his own. Many people first meet this story through one of the many films but, trust us, the book is even better.


‘There is a subtle feeling of menace on the screen all the time.’  
*Review of Alfred Hitchcock’s version: Andre Sennwald, New York Times 1935*

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**CROME YELLOW (1921)**  
*Aldous Huxley*

Garsington Manor, the home of Lady Ottoline Morrell, was the inspiration for Crome. This debut novel follows the poet Denis Stone at a flamboyant party of bright young things. With brilliant parodies of the ideas of the twenties it manages to be romantic and comic whilst also containing the roots of Aldous Huxley’s later ideas.

‘Whenever the choice has had to be made between the man of reason and the madman, the world has unhesitatingly followed the madman.’  
*Aldous Huxley, Crome Yellow*
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THE DIAMOND AS BIG AS THE RITZ (1922)
F. Scott Fitzgerald
Loosely inspired by a summer the author spent as a teenager working on a ranch in Montana, this is the story of John T. Unger, a Southerner staying with a wealthy college friend. The reasons for the family’s wealth are shrouded in secrecy and a sinister plot unfolds as the boy tries to escape the fate which has befallen previous guests.

SIDDHARTHA (1922)
Herman Hesse translated by Hilder Rosner
In Sanskrit the title means ‘he who has attained his goals’. Siddhartha is a Brahmin’s son and it is assumed he will follow in his father’s footsteps. Dissatisfied with this, the boy sets out to discover his own destiny; his journey movingly described in this brief masterpiece.

DREAM STORY (1926)
Arthur Schnitzler translated by J. M. Q. Davies
A family reading together - surely a happy contented idyll? But as the father and mother explore the dark side of Vienna and their desires, a world of flickering gas lamps, debauchery and violence, the hypocrisy of their lives is revealed.

THE HOTEL (1927)
Elizabeth Bowen
Read this when you have time to appreciate the elegant prose of Elizabeth Bowen’s first novel. The setting is an almost grand hotel on the Italian Riviera in the 1920’s, the English residents wintering there, her subjects. This is a perceptive and witty look at their closed world, one that is prosperous, confident and, above all, ‘nice’.

LES ENFANTS TERRIBLES (1929)
Jean Cocteau translated by Rosamond Lehmann
Siblings Paul and Elisabeth share a secret life, The Game, which controls everything they do; each must test the other and attempt to leave the contest with the last word. As they grow up, or rather fail to grow up, The Game becomes ever more important, with devastating consequences for both the victor and the vanquished.
THE EYE (1930)
Vladimir Nabokov translated by Dmitri Nabokov
A Russian émigré in Berlin kills himself after being beaten up by his mistress’ husband. Or does he? In search of the truth, the narrator finds that ideas and reality merge; do we really exist as we see ourselves or are we a patchwork of the views of others?

LE BAL (1930)
Irène Némirovsky translated by Sandra Smith
Many teenagers dream of taking revenge on their parents, few manage it as spectacularly as Antoinette Kampf. When she is told she will not be attending the ball her despised nouveau riche parents are holding, the girl retaliates, viciously.

CAESAR: THE LIFE STORY OF A PANDA LEOPARD (1930)
Patrick O’Brian
Caesar’s father was a giant panda, his mother a snow leopard. Written with the same dry wit as the Aubrey-Maturin series this delightful, if somewhat gory, flight of fantasy is a fascinating glimpse of Patrick O’Brien as a young writer.

‘Of course, Maigret installed himself at the Admiral Hotel, the best in town. It was five in the afternoon and just dark when he stepped into the café, a long, gloomy room with marble tables and sawdust scattered on the dingy floor.’
GEORGES SIMENON,
THE YELLOW DOG

THE YELLOW DOG (1931)
Georges Simenon translated by Linda Asher
Someone seems intent on murdering all the leading citizens of the fishing town of Concarneau on the Brittany coast. Half the town is in fear for its life, the other half under suspicion. In his usual, unconventional manner, Inspector Maigret takes control and solves both the crime and the mystery of the large yellow dog.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

CHEERFUL WEATHER FOR THE WEDDING (1932)
Julia Strachey
Mrs Thatcham is organising a party, her daughter’s wedding. The daughter in question is sitting in her room drinking rum and contemplating the sense of marriage, the servants are hindering rather than helping and the eccentricities of the guests exacerbate the hostess’ problems. ‘I think it is astonishingly good – complete and sharp and individual.’ Virginia Woolf.

‘Change your socks, Robert. Do not take advantage of your mother’s absence to play the cad, Robert.’

JULIA STRACHEY, CHEERFUL WEATHER FOR THE WEDDING

FLUSH: A BIOGRAPHY (1933)
Virginia Woolf
Just after she had completed The Waves, Virginia Woolf read the love letters of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning. Inspired by them she wrote the biography of Flush, Elizabeth’s spaniel. Partly intended as light relief, the book was also a gentle dig at Lytton Strachey’s Eminent Victorians.

‘Whatever Mr. Browning might say, she was going to rescue Flush, even if she went down into the jaws of Whitechapel to fetch him, even if Robert Browning despised her for doing so.’

VIRGINIA WOOLF, FLUSH: A BIOGRAPHY
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THEY SHOOT HORSES, DON’T THEY? (1935)
Horace McCoy
The American marathon dance contests of the twenties and thirties were gruelling affairs; you only took part if you were desperate. Robert and Gloria were desperate and, when their plans didn’t work, he did the decent thing and shot her. We know the outcome from the start; it is how two people reach that point that makes the story.

WIGS ON THE GREEN (1935)
Nancy Mitford
One of Nancy Mitford’s most hilarious and biting satires. Noel and Jasper have worked out that it is better to find a rich wife than an honest job. Eugenia Malmains definitely has the cash, but she is an ardent supporter of Captain Jack and the Union Jackshirts. This was a gentle poke at Diana’s husband, Oswald Moseley, and the book caused a rift in the family that endured for years.

‘Nobody ought to write books before they’re thirty. I hate precocity.’
NANCY MITFORD, WIGS ON THE GREEN

THE LEGEND OF THE HOLY DRINKER (1939)
Joseph Roth translated by Michael Hofmann
Joseph Roth argued that while drink shortened his life in the medium term, in the short term it kept him alive. By 1939 he had nothing to keep him alive and, a month after completing this novella, he died. Surprisingly, this is a joyful tale; the story of an alcoholic tramp who has an astonishing run of good luck.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

MRS MINIVER (1939)
Jan Struther
In 1937 a column began in The Times chronicling the everyday life of Mrs Miniver. Based on Jan Struther’s own life these were a charming but unsentimental view of England. Letters from Mrs Miniver followed when war broke out. Churchill claimed that the book, published in Britain and America, did more for the Allied cause than a flotilla of battleships.

UP AT THE VILLA (1941)
W. Somerset Maugham
The elegant villa stood on a hill overlooking Florence: large rooms, fine old furniture and a garden with box hedges and grassy paths. After eight years of a turbulent marriage Mary Panton had come here to contemplate her life and a marriage proposal she was unsure of. One misplaced act of kindness shattered the tranquillity of the place and faced her with a new set of decisions.

‘You’re a young woman and a pretty one, and I have no doubt you’ll marry again. But don’t marry for love next time; it’s a mistake - marry for position and companionship.’

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM,
UP AT THE VILLA

In the late twenties, W. Somerset Maugham bought the villa La Mauresque, on 9 acres at Cap Ferrat on the French Riviera; it was his home for most of the rest of his life.

A CHESS STORY (1941)
Stefan Zweig translated by Alexander Starritt
Two passengers on board an ocean liner: a grand master, with no other intellectual abilities, and a man driven to insanity by the games he played in his head while imprisoned by the Nazis, every possible move stored within his damaged mind. You don’t need to be a chess master to be gripped by the tension when they finally play.
GIGI (1944)
Colette translated by Roger Senhouse
Written during the Second World War, while France was occupied, this novella describes a time, a place and a way of life that had vanished; the demi-monde of fin de siècle Paris. Gigi is being groomed as a courtesan, destined to entertain rather than marry, but this is a girl for whom love comes before duty.

“Drawers are one thing, decorum is another,” said Madame Alvarez.
“Everything depends on the attitude.”
COLETTE, GIGI

ANIMAL FARM: A FAIRY STORY (1945)
George Orwell illustrated by Joy Batchelor and John Halas
This edition of George Orwell’s well-known dystopian novel includes illustrations by the producers of the 1954 animated film of the story. Napoleon, Snowball, Boxer and Benjamin are brought to hilarious and horrific life.

‘All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others.’
GEORGE ORWELL, ANIMAL FARM: A FAIRY STORY

Animal Farm, illustrated by Joy Batchelor and John Halas, 2015, Penguin Modern Classics.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

PRATER VIOLET (1945)
Christopher Isherwood
Unusually, this story is written in the author’s own person. It is 1934 and Christopher is approached by a demanding, yet engaging, Austrian director to write the script for Prater Violet, a ridiculous tale of love set in nineteenth-century Vienna. The romantic film is in sharp contrast to the real events as Hitler annexes the city.

ONE FINE DAY (1947)
Mollie Panter-Downes
The Second World War has ended and over the course of one summer’s day we follow the Marshall family as they adapt to post-war life. Some indefinable quality of life has gone, but there are hopes for the future. Bohemian and wistful, Laura, wife and mother, floats through the day in an optimistic and completely captivating manner:

‘The cottage gardens were bright pocket handkerchiefs embroidered with rice-paper crinkled poppy, peppery lupin, stout rose, and Canterbury bell.’

MOLLIE PANTER-DOWNES, ONE FINE DAY

THE PEARL (1947)
John Steinbeck
Inspired by a Mexican folk tale, this tells the story of Kino, an impoverished pearl diver and his family. He finds ‘the Pearl of the World’ and assumes it will be the end of the family’s problems. Instead it is just the beginning: greed, corruption, racism and violence fill this brief and moving parable.
THE LOVED ONE: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN TRAGEDY (1948)
Evelyn Waugh

In 1947 MGM expressed interest in adapting Brideshead Revisited. Evelyn Waugh had no intention of allowing them to do so, but he was quite happy to be given a trip to California. He found he hated almost everything about America except the Cemetery of Forest Lawn, the inspiration for this story, transformed into the Happier Hunting Ground (for deceased pets) and the Whispering Glades Memorial Park (for dead humans). Barmy, cynical and hilarious, this is a love story with more than one macabre twist.

‘On my return [from America] I wrote The Loved One which Mr Cyril Connolly, making valuable emendations, published in Horizon. Its publication as a book was delayed by fire. Since its appearance many kindly people have taken the trouble to send me additional, bizarre information about the world of morticians. Let me here assure any future readers that the subject does not obsess me; that it was the consolation of a brief exile and that I do not need further documents.’

‘Her heart was broken perhaps, but it was a small inexpensive organ of local manufacture. In a wider and grander way she felt things had been simplified.’

EVELYN WAUGH, THE LOVED ONE: AN ANGLO-AMERICAN TRAGEDY
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA (1952)
Ernest Hemingway
Ernest Hemingway wrote *The Old Man and the Sea* to prove to critics that he could still write after he had not had a successful book published since *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in 1940. This simple story of an old fisherman proved them wrong, winning the author the Nobel Prize.

THE VIOLINS OF SAINT-JACQUES: A TAPE OF THE ANTILLES (1953)
Patrick Leigh Fermor
The last picture Berthe de Rennes painted in the French West Indies was of a volcanic island: colourful market stalls, pyramids of fruit and bright green sheaves of sugar-cane. This was an island of women with parasols and men in boaters. Years later and thousands of miles away she tells the story behind the picture.

‘Fishermen told me that anyone, crossing the eastern channel between the islands in carnival time, can hear the sound of violins coming up through the water. As though a ball were in full swing at the bottom of the sea.’

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR,
*THE VIOLINS OF SAINT-JACQUES*

A SPY IN THE HOUSE OF LOVE (1954)
Anaïs Nin
Sabina feels she cannot live without her husband but, at the same time, she plays dangerous games. Extravagantly dressed and enjoying sexual licence that had hitherto been the preserve of men, she sweeps through New York in pursuit of the pleasure she craves.

BONJOUR TRISTESSE (1954)
Françoise Sagan *translated by Heather Lloyd*
With a nom de plume from Proust, Françoise Quoirez wrote this when she was just eighteen. A young girl attempts to manipulate her father, his mistress and his intended wife; naive, pleasure-loving and spoiled, Cécile tragically misjudges the situation.
THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES (1954)
Jean Giono, wood engravings by Michael McCurdy
Slowly and quietly Elzéard Bouffier, a shepherd, plants trees. Seeds that he drops in the ground in 1913 become a ‘natural’ forest by 1935. Desolate landscapes become areas of life and hope, with new farms and villages. This is a novel but also serves as a gentle and heartfelt plea for reforestation.

‘Everything was changed. Even the air. Instead of the harsh winds that used to attack me, a gentle breeze was blowing, laden with scents.’

JEAN GIONO
THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES

GIOVANNI’S ROOM (1956)
James Baldwin
James Baldwin wanted to be established as an author; rather than a ‘Negro author’ and, to this end, he wrote Giovanni’s Room, dealing with the then taboo subject of homosexuality and with no black characters. The book serves to make a point, but is also an extremely good story; the entwined lives of David, Hella and Giovanni heading relentlessly towards disaster.

SEIZE THE DAY (1956)
Saul Bellow
Wilhelm’s appearance and routine give him the illusion of being occupied, but both are crumbling. So far, he has failed at most things: college, work, marriage. He is in desperate need of help but the only person offering it is Dr Tamkin, a charming but clearly fraudulent psychiatrist.

‘More than half my life is over. More than half. And now you tell me I’m not even normal’
SAUL BELLOW, SEIZE THE DAY
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THE FALL (1956)
Albert Camus translated by Robin Buss
Jean-Paul Sartre described this as 'perhaps the most beautiful and least understood' of Albert Camus' novels. Over a series of drunken nights a successful and respected lawyer tells a chance acquaintance the story of his life. Increasingly it becomes clear that this life is a hollow sham, thinly veiling an existence of drink, debauchery and turmoil.

SNOW COUNTRY (1956)
Yasunari Kawabata translated by Edward G. Seidensticker
Set in the remote snowy mountains on the west coast of Japan, this is a delicately painted novel, which should be savoured slowly. Shimamura is a wealthy dilettante, a self-appointed expert on Western ballet, Komako the geisha he thinks he loves. Yasunari Kawabata was a leading figure in the Japanese lyrical school of writing and won the 1968 Nobel Prize in Literature.

THE LONELY LONDONERS (1956)
Sam Selvon
This is a London of hope and despair: West Indians arrive at Waterloo aiming for a new and better life. Moses Aloetta has become a pessimistic 'old veteran', but Henry 'Sir Galahad' Oliver is irrepressibly enthusiastic. The creolised voice of the book allows us into the immigrants' world with moments of both tragedy and mirth.

THINGS FALL APART (1958)
Chinua Achebe
The title comes from a W. B. Yeats poem and refers to a man, a village and an entire way of life. Okonkwo is a renowned warrior and a respected man, but is also headstrong and proud. He has been forced into exile when white men occupy his village and on his return he advocates fighting the new government, a battle he cannot win.

BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY’S (1958)
Truman Capote
This is 1940's New York at its most joyous. Holly Golightly is a café society girl in search of a rich husband, the narrator her neighbour in an old brownstone. Many will know her from the Audrey Hepburn film but the real Holly has more depth, and is much wilder, as shown by Truman Capote's preferred choice of Marilyn Monroe for the part.
**THE DARLING BUDS OF MAY (1958)**

**H. E. Bates**

The Larkins are one of the delights of English fiction. One spring evening the family returns from the chippy to find a tax inspector waiting. It appears Pop has paid no tax, but nothing as dull as a tax return is ever completed. Four equally hilarious novellas followed, chronicling the family’s life.

![Images of book covers](image)


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**THE BALLAD OF PECKHAM RYE (1960)**

**Muriel Spark**

Into the impoverished and slightly dull suburb of Peckham Rye sweeps Dougal Douglas, an out-and-out rogue. Employed as the ‘Arts man’ at a local factory he is told ‘It’s up to you, entirely up to you’; he holds down two jobs, writes a book and causes havoc. This is a bawdy and splendidly scurrilous fairy story.

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*‘It is worth remembering that life actually inclines to be this weird and this confusing – and that human beings are, on the whole, extremely odd.’*

**WILLIAM BOYD**
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

CALL FOR THE DEAD (1961)
John Le Carré
This is John le Carré’s first novel and was written in penny notebooks on the train to and from his job at MI5. It introduces us to George Smiley and his shadowy world of spies, intrigue and murder. A world in which no one, except perhaps George himself, can be trusted.

‘It’s the devil you don’t know that gets you.’
JOHN LE CARRÉ, CALL FOR THE DEAD

NO ONE WRITES TO THE COLONEL (1961)
Gabriel García Márquez translated by J. S. Bernstein
The colonel has been waiting for his pension for fifteen years. Every Friday his hopes rise as the postman comes and, just as reliably, they fall. Dignified and heartbreaking, the colonel’s story is a tragedy not of his making. With nothing else to sell, all his hopes are now pinned on his prize rooster; ‘bound’ to win the upcoming fight.

‘Ever since I began writing, Hatchards was where it mattered. When The Spy Who Came in From the Cold started selling seriously, I stood unannounced and unrecognised in a corner of the shop, watching the process that the manager Peter Giddy later explained to me; “They look at it in the window, then they want to feel it, so they pick it up from the round table just inside the door.” Then they read the blurb and sometimes a bit of the first page, and - oh God! - sometimes the very end.’
JOHN LE CARRÉ
THE DAY OF THE OWL (1961)
Leonardo Sciascia translated by Archibald Colquhoun & Arthur Oliver
The victim is an honest Sicilian so, of course, he must be killed on the first page. Captain Bellodi, an outsider, is also an honest man. He can solve the crime but can he bring the perpetrator to justice? A brilliant portrait of the Mafia, written at a time when most writers simply pretended it didn’t exist.

WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE (1962)
Shirley Jackson
The peace that eighteen-year old Merricat strives to preserve is fragile; ever since her sister was accused of murdering the rest of the family the girls have lived like hermits with their uncle. A cousin arrives in search of riches, a fire leaves the house ‘turreted and open to the sky’ and the true horror of the story is revealed.

THE PUMPKIN EATER (1962)
Penelope Mortimer
Mrs Armitage has had four husbands and, as far as her present one is concerned, too many children. The story is based on Penelope Mortimer’s marriage to John and opens shortly after Mrs Armitage has broken down in Harrods. Somehow, this brilliant story of a woman falling apart manages to be devastating but not depressing.

‘Why Jake though? He’ll be a frightful husband.’
PENELOPE MORTIMER, THE PUMPKIN EATER

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH (1962)
(first published in the Soviet Union 1963)
Alexander Solzhenitsyn translated by Ralph Parker
This glimpse of the fate of millions of Russians under Stalin is as shocking now as when it was first published. Alexander Solzhenitsyn spent eight years in labour camps in the Arctic Circle. Harsh and brutal, this is a world where survival can depend on an extra crust of bread or a single match.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

THE ITALIAN GIRL (1964)
Iris Murdoch
After years away Edmund returns home for his mother’s funeral. His dysfunctional family conspire to keep him there, entwining him in their complicated lives. A pair of Russian émigrés living in the summerhouse completes the picture of curious and intriguing misfits, all watched over by Maria Magistretti, the last in the long line of Italian girls.

WIDE SARGASSO SEA (1966)
Jean Rhys
The first Mrs Rochester fascinated Jean Rhys and is the subject of this novella: her early life in the West Indies, her meeting with Mr Rochester and her final incarceration at Thornfield Hall. Much more than simply a prequel, this gives a life to the mad woman in the attic.

THE BOOK OF IMAGINARY BEINGS (1967)
Jorge Luis Borges translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni
Strictly speaking, this is not a novella but as it says in the preface, a book to be dipped into ‘just as one plays with the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope’. The strangest and most wondrous creatures of man’s imagination are here from the A Bao A Qu, which follows people up the spiral stairs of the Tower of Victory, to the Monkey of the Inkpot who, logically, drinks leftover ink.

THE HEART OF A DOG (1968)
Mikhail Bulgakov translated by Michael Glenny
This was written in 1925, but censorship and the NKVD ensured that it was not published in the Soviet Union until 1987. A wealthy Moscow surgeon performs an operation on a stray dog to create a new type of human. The plan is to improve the human race but, like so many scientists before him, the doctor lacks control over his creation.

CHOCKY (1968)
John Wyndham
Many children have imaginary friends but Matthew’s is different, imparting surprising information and insights to the boy. Soon it is clear that Chocky is from a place far, far away. Unusual and benign, this is far removed from sci-fi tales of horror and destruction.
THE NIGHT WATCH (1969)
Patrick Modiano translated by Patricia Wolf, revised by Frank Wynne
The narrator is a double agent in occupied Paris, his varying moods reflecting his shifting loyalties. He is trapped between two sides but, as we learn through his thoughts, he relishes his wealth and power regardless of the consequences. This is the second volume in Patrick Modiano’s enthralling Occupation Trilogy.

FIRST LOVE AND OTHER NOVELLAS (1970)
Samuel Beckett translated by Samuel Beckett
The novellas in this collection are noteworthy for being among the first of Samuel Beckett’s works to be written in French. His unusual use of the first person narrative makes the stories moving and unsettling, emphasising the vulnerability of the narrators.

REUNION (1971)
Fred Uhlman
The outcome of this story is not hard to predict; the friendship between a Jew and a German in 1930’s Württemberg could never endure. Read this for an evocation of both the happiness a friendship can bring and the cruelty which the world can inflict on the innocent.

INVISIBLE CITIES (1972)
Italo Calvino translated by William Weaver
In this book Marco Polo describes to Kublai Khan the fantastic cities he has visited; silver domes, spiral staircases, coloured banners fluttering in the wind and delicate filigree palaces. It seems as if he has travelled the length and breadth of the world but all these visions come from one city, Marco Polo’s home town of Venice.

‘Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.’
ITALO CALVINO, INVISIBLE CITIES
‘He went and poured a good, a very good, half-tumbler of Dr Macdonald’s, a proprietary mixture of Scotch whisky and British wine, and drank with a will. The taste he found rather unpleasant, but if he had found it pleasant he might be drinking more of the stuff and becoming incapable earlier in the day. It was cheap too.’

KINGSLEY AMIS, ENDING UP

ENDING UP (1974)
Kingsley Amis

Tuppenny-hapenny Cottage had two advantages – it was habitable and cheap. For the five septuagenarians in this tale that was really all that mattered. Not for them a final golden age, but rather an ending up together because they have nowhere else to go. Veering between tragedy and farce, Kingsley Amis’ uncompromising tale of old age will have you worrying about your future while laughing out loud.

‘If you can’t annoy somebody with what you write, I think there’s little point in writing.’

KINGSLEY AMIS

‘Before he embarked on writing Ending Up, on 29 January 1973, Amis compiled eight pages of notes, kicking off with a list of 45 ‘ways of being annoying’, each of which pops up in the novel.’

CRAIG BROWN, GUARDIAN 2015
AUNTS AREN’T GENTLEMEN (1974)
P.G. Wodehouse
On his doctor’s orders Bertie heads off to the depths of the country for a rest cure. Unfortunately, these particular depths contain both Aunt Dahlia and an aunt of Jeeves’, not to mention a racehorse that needs nobbling, a bossy fiancé, an old enemy and a very important cat. Bertie would have had more rest attending London’s wildest parties.

CURTAIN: POIROT’S LAST CASE (1975)
Agatha Christie
It was at Styles that Hercule Poirot and Captain Hastings first met and it is in the same house that the Belgian detective solves his final crime. M. Poirot is crippled with arthritis and propels himself in a ‘wheeled chair’, but none of this has any effect on his little grey cells. They are as sharp as ever:

“I will not look through keyholes,” I interrupted hotly. Poirot closed his eyes.
“Very well, then. You will not look through keyholes. You will remain the English gentleman and someone will be killed.”

AGATHA CHRISTIE, CURTAIN: POIROT’S LAST CASE

THE YEAR OF THE HARE (1975)
Arto Paasilinna translated by Herbert Lomas
When the car he is in hits a hare, Kaarlo Vanaten leaps out to rescue the animal. He is disillusioned with his job and his life and this brief act is all it takes for him to abandon both. Travelling through Finland with the hare, his story is quirky and delightful.

HOUR OF THE STAR (1977)
Clarice Lispector translated by Benjamin Moser
This is the story of Macabéa; ugly, unloved, living in the slums of Rio and working as a lowly typist. She longs to be like Marilyn Monroe, a star for even an hour. Narrated by a male, middle-class writer this haunting story describes both hope and innocence in the face of overwhelming poverty.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY (1980)
J. L. Carr
After surviving the horrors of the First World War, Tom Birkin goes to spend the summer in the tranquil village of Oxgodby, where he is to uncover a medieval wall painting in the church. In this exquisite book the peace and calm of the countryside renew Tom’s faith in life; he discovers the importance of happiness and begins to look forward rather than back.

DOCTOR FISCHER OF GENEVA OR THE BOMB PARTY (1980)
Graham Greene
Doctor Fischer is a wealthy and unpleasant man; the dinner parties he hosts are famous for the humiliations to which he subjects his guests. The final party he plans has an added danger – crackers containing either a cheque or a bomb. The narrator however, has little to lose and challenges the doctor’s control of the situation.

‘He mocks others, but no one mocks him. He has a monopoly in mockery.’
Graham Greene, Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party

‘Doctor Fischer of Geneva or the Bomb Party is hardly a novel at all but rather a cautionary tale - almost an allegory - dealing in the most schematic fashion with the deadly sins of greed, pride, and despair.’

Photograph: AP/Worldwide Photos
**HOUSEKEEPING (1980)**
Marilynne Robinson

Fingerbone is a desolate town in northwest America, dominated by the railroad and the lake. Ruth and Lucille grow up there, cared for by a succession of relatives. The town is both a place of sanctuary and somewhere to escape from, the housekeeping of the title both the practicalities and creation of a home.

**THE COMFORT OF STRANGERS (1981)**
Ian McEwan

A couple on holiday seems an innocent premise for a book. But this is Ian McEwan and characters and stories are rarely innocent. The strangers the couple meet offer a bizarre comfort but by then Colin and Mary are lost in more ways than one. A gripping and sinister story playing on every traveller’s need for companionship.

**THE WALL JUMPER (1982)**
Peter Schneider translated by Leigh Hafrey

In 1982 Berlin was a divided city; the wall separated families, lovers and friends as well as politicians. Physically and mentally, many were wall jumpers. Almost more reportage than story this book is a wry account of what it was like to live in the city at that time.

**HOTEL DU LAC (1984)**
Anita Brookner

Edith Hope is one of Anita Brookner’s most appealing and interesting characters. She has, in the eyes of her friends and family, behaved unforgivably. They hope that a time away will encourage her to see sense. The hotel on the lake is eminently respectable, but Edith will not be crushed so easily.

**THE LOVER (1984)**
Marguerite Duras translated by Barbara Bray

Marguerite Duras’ autobiographical novel deservedly won the prestigious Prix Goncourt. 1930’s French Indochina is the setting for this disturbing and masterly story of a turbulent and impossible love affair.
NIGHTS AT THE ALEXANDRA (1987)
William Trevor
The world is at war and the Messingers come to the little Irish town in search of peace; she is young, English and unwell, he much older and German. Harry is still at school when he first meets them and is captivated, a seduction that lasts his life.

‘We can live without anything but love, Harry. Always remember that.’
WILLIAM TREVOR, NIGHTS AT THE ALEXANDRA

UTZ (1988)
Bruce Chatwin
Two things hold Kaspar Utz to Prague: the authorities and his collection of Meissen figures. Each year he leaves Czechoslovakia, and each year he considers defecting but the pull of his porcelain prevents him. Like Bruce Chatwin’s travel writings, this story is short, unusual and exquisitely written.

THE FIFTH CHILD (1988)
Doris Lessing
Harriet and David know what they want: lots of children and a welcoming home, surrounded by loving family and friends. They achieve their dream, but then Ben is born. Sickly, violent and uncontrollable he brings an alien force into their previously happy world.

AN AWFULLY BIG ADVENTURE (1989)
Beryl Bainbridge
Beryl Bainbridge’s own experiences when she worked at the Liverpool playhouse informed this portrayal of the bitchiness of 1950’s rep. Backstage there is intrigue, hilarity, infatuation and drama, quite rivalling the troupe’s production of Peter Pan.

THE BOOKSHOP (1989)
Penelope Fitzgerald
Why would anyone oppose the opening of a bookshop? When Florence Green invests her inheritance in just such a venture she encounters inexplicable hostility, which increases as the business appears successful. Other shopkeepers, a local woman with wealth and influence and even the Old House’s ghost seem intent on her downfall. Penelope Fitzgerald’s seaside town of Hardborough is as far removed from a cosy Miss Read as you can imagine.
'She had a kind heart, though that is not of much use when it comes to matters of self-preservation.'

PENELOPE FITZGERALD, THE BOOKSHOP

‘In 1957, ‘quite suddenly’, the Fitzgeralds did a flit from Hampstead for a former oyster warehouse in Southwold, the basis for the fictional damp bookshop . . . Penelope got a part-time job at the local bookshop, which she would transmute to The Bookshop, Southwold becoming Hardborough.’

JENNY TURNER, LONDON REVIEW OF BOOKS

THE TRICK OF IT (1989)
Michael Frayn

The story is told in a series of witty letters. The writer is an academic who has spent his life studying the woman he is about to meet. He knows her novels better than she does, has taught classes on her and written about her work. Even so, he is woefully unprepared for the woman he encounters.

THE STORY OF MR SOMMER (1991)
Patrick Süskind translated by Michael Hofmann, illustrated by Sempé

Stories of childhood are rarely written for adults. This is such a book, capturing the excitement and troubles of a boy’s life, all the while pondering the mystery of Mr Sommer: The story alone would have made it into this selection, but with Sempé’s illustrations it has become one of our favourites.
OUR FAVOURITE NOVELLAS

SILK (1997)
Alessandro Baricco translated by Ann Goldstein
Hervé Joncour travels to Japan as a smuggler but returns smitten with a girl he cannot even meet. The finest fabric in the world, an intrepid traveller journeying to the end of the earth and a forbidden love are brought together in Alessandro Baricco’s masterly story.

Dai Sijie translated by Ina Rilke
During the Chinese Cultural Revolution two boys, the sons of wicked doctors, are sent to be ‘re-educated’. Their true re-education begins when they meet the son of a poet who has a secret stash of Western classics and The Little Seamstress of the title.

TRAIN DREAMS (2002)
Denis Johnson
Ordinary people are often caught up in extraordinary times. Shifting between past and present, the train of this novella sweeps through the wild and majestic landscape of the American West. Robert Grainer is a labourer building the railroad and through him we see the clash of myth and modernism.

THE UNCOMMON READER (2006)
Alan Bennett
Following one of her corgis into a mobile library, The Queen discovers the joys of books. She becomes an avid reader, devouring everything from Thomas Hardy to Samuel Beckett. Chaos ensues as she attempts to discuss Jean Genet with the French president and smuggles a book to read on her way to the State Opening of Parliament.

‘She’d got quite good at reading and waving, the trick being to keep the book below the level of the window and to keep focused on it and not on the crowds.’

ALAN BENNETT, THE UNCOMMON READER
THE SENSE OF AN ENDING (2011)
Julian Barnes
Tony looks back to when Adrian first entered his life. Part of the gang, yet always slightly apart, Adrian was the clever one, the one who should do well. Piecing their stories together, Tony tries to make sense of their lives, from the tragedy of Adrian’s to his own seemingly simple existence.

A MEAL IN WINTER (2012)
Hubert Mingarelli translated by Sam Taylor
These German soldiers stationed in Poland have two choices: to shoot or to hunt, their prey the Jews hiding in the freezing countryside. Such men are normally regarded simply as ‘the enemy’, but as the day wears on we come to realise that these particular soldiers have families, feelings and, crucially, consciences.

HOME (2012)
Toni Morrison
The soldiers came home after the Korean War; but for Frank there was little to come back to since he had joined the army to escape his home in Georgia. His little sister tried to escape as well, but colour and gender were against her. Together they return to the very place they sought to leave.

THE TESTAMENT OF MARY (2012)
Colm Tóibín
This is a story we all know but in Colm Tóibín’s deft telling it gains a new and powerful meaning. Mary has lost her son and is living in exile. Against a backdrop of fear and sorrow she tries to piece together her memories of the events that led to his brutal death.

BLACK SHEEP (2013)
Susan Hill
Growing up in a mining village the outside world, though largely unknown, acts like a beacon for Ted and Rose; they both dream of escape. For Rose it is love, for Ted a job away from the pit, but neither truly manages to break free. A bleak story but, as one would expect from Susan Hill, beautifully written.
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