# Anna Karenina

Peter Anderson from Wikipedia (en.wikipedia.org)

### The book

***Anna Karenina*** (Russian: «Анна Каренина»; Russian pronunciation: [□an□ə k□□r□en□□nə]) is a novel by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, published in serial installments from 1873 to 1877 in the periodical *The Russian Messenger.* Tolstoy clashed with editor Mikhail Katkov over political issues that arose in the final installment (Tolstoy's unpopular views of volunteers going to Serbia); therefore, the novel's first complete appearance was in book form.

The film is based on the book *Anna Karenina* (1877) which tells parallel stories of an adulterous woman trapped by the conventions and falsities of society and of a philosophical landowner (much like Tolstoy), who works alongside the peasants in the fields and seeks to reform their lives. Tolstoy not only drew from his own life experiences but also created characters in his own image, such as Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Andrei in *War and Peace*, and in this book he is Levin and to some extent, Prince Nekhlyudov in *Resurrection*.

### Style

Tolstoy's style in *Anna Karenina* is considered by many critics to be transitional, forming a bridge between the realist and modernist novel. The novel is narrated from a third-person-omniscient perspective, shifting the narrator's attention to several major characters, though most frequently focusing on the opposing lifestyles and attitudes of its central protagonists of Anna and Levin. As such, each of the novel's eight sections contains internal variations in tone: it assumes a relaxed voice when following Stepan Oblonsky's thoughts and actions and a much more tense voice when describing Levin's social encounters. Much of the novel's seventh section depicts Anna's thoughts fluidly, following each one of her ruminations and free associations with its immediate successor. This groundbreaking use of stream-of-consciousness would be utilised by such later authors as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and William Faulkner.

Also of significance is Tolstoy's use of real events in his narrative, to lend greater verisimilitude to the fictional events of his narrative. Characters debate significant sociopolitical issues affecting Russia in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as the place and role of the Russian peasant in society, education reform, and women's rights. Tolstoy's depiction of the characters in these debates, and of their arguments, allows him to communicate his own political beliefs. Characters often attend similar social functions to those which Tolstoy attended, and he includes in these passages his own observations of the ideologies, behaviors, and ideas running through contemporary Russia through the thoughts of Levin. The broad array of situations and ideas depicted in *Anna Karenina* allows Tolstoy to present a treatise on his era's Russia, and, by virtue of its very breadth and depth, all of human society. This stylistic technique, as well as the novel's use of perspective, greatly contributes to the thematic structure of *Anna Karenina*.

### Major themes

*Anna Karenina* is commonly thought to explore the themes of hypocrisy, jealousy, faith, fidelity, family, marriage, society, progress, carnal desire and passion, and the agrarian connection to land in contrast to the lifestyles of the city. Translator Rosemary Edmonds wrote that Tolstoy does not explicitly moralise in the book, but instead allows his themes to emerge naturally from the "vast panorama of Russian life." She also says one of the novel's key messages is that "no one may build their happiness on another's pain."

Levin is often considered a semi-autobiographical portrayal of Tolstoy's own beliefs, struggles, and life events. Tolstoy's first name is "Lev," and the Russian surname "Levin" means "of Lev." According to footnotes in the Pevear/Volokhonsky translation, the viewpoints Levin supports throughout the novel in his arguments match Tolstoy's outspoken views on the same issues. Moreover, according to W. Gareth Jones, Levin proposed to Kitty in the same way as Tolstoy to Sophia Behrs. Additionally, Levin's request that his fiancée read his diary as a way of disclosing his faults and previous sexual encounters parallels Tolstoy's own requests to his fiancée Sophia Behrs.

### Historical context

The events in the novel take place against the backdrop of rapid transformations as a result of the liberal reforms initiated by Emperor Alexander II of Russia, principal among these the Emancipation reform of 1861, followed by legal reform, including jury trials; military reform, the introduction of elected local government (Zemstvo), the fast development of railroads, banks, industry, telegraph, the rise of new business elites and the decline of the old landed aristocracy, a freer press, the awakening of public opinion, the Pan-Slavism movement, the woman question, etc. These contemporary developments are hotly debated by the characters in the novel.

Widely regarded as a pinnacle in realist fiction, Tolstoy considered *Anna Karenina* his first true novel, when he came to consider *War and Peace* to be more than a novel.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky declared it to be "flawless as a work of art". His opinion was shared by Vladimir Nabokov, who especially admired "the flawless magic of Tolstoy's style", and by William Faulkner, who described the novel as "the best ever written". The novel is currently enjoying popularity, as demonstrated by a recent poll of 125 contemporary authors by J. Peder Zane, published in 2007 in "The Top Ten" in *Time*, which declared that *Anna Karenina* is the "greatest novel ever written". (See pages 5 to 7 in this presentation about this).

**His other great novel: War and Peace**

*War and Peace* is generally thought to be one of the greatest novels ever written, remarkable for its dramatic breadth and unity. Its vast canvas includes 580 characters, many historical with others fictional. The story moves from family life to the headquarters of Napoleon, from the court of Alexander I of Russia to the battlefields of Austerlitz and Borodino. Tolstoy's original idea for the novel was to investigate the causes of the Decembrist revolt, to which it refers only in the last chapters, from which can be deduced that Andrei Bolkonski's son will become one of the Decembrists. The novel explores Tolstoy's theory of history, and in particular the insignificance of individuals such as Napoleon and Alexander. Somewhat surprisingly, Tolstoy did not consider *War and Peace* to be a novel (nor did he consider many of the great Russian fictions written at that time to be novels). This view becomes less surprising if one considers that Tolstoy was a novelist of the realist school who considered the novel to be a framework for the examination of social and political issues in nineteenth-century life. *War and Peace* (which is to Tolstoy really an epic in prose) therefore did not qualify. Tolstoy thought that *Anna Karenina* was his first true novel.

**The Author**

Tolstoy (1828-1910) was born in Yasnaya Polyana, the family estate in the Tula region of Russia. The Tolstoys were a well-known family of old Russian nobility. He was the fourth of five children of Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy, a veteran of the Patriotic War of 1812, and Countess Mariya Tolstaya (Volkonskaya). Tolstoy's parents died when he was young, so he and his siblings were brought up by relatives. In 1844, he began studying law and oriental languages at Kazan University. His teachers described him as "both unable and unwilling to learn." Tolstoy left university in the middle of his studies, returned to Yasnaya Polyana and then spent much of his time in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. In 1851, after running up heavy gambling debts, he went with his older brother to the Caucasus and joined the army. It was about this time that he started writing.

His conversion from a dissolute and privileged society author to the non-violent and spiritual anarchist of his latter days was brought about by his experience in the army as well as two trips around Europe in 1857 and 1860–61. Others who followed the same path were Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. During his 1857 visit, Tolstoy witnessed a public execution in Paris, a traumatic experience that would mark the rest of his life. Writing in a letter to his friend Vasily Botkin: "The truth is that the State is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit, but above all to corrupt its citizens ... Henceforth, I shall never serve any government anywhere."

His European trip in 1860–61 shaped both his political and literary development when he met Victor Hugo, whose literary talents Tolstoy praised after reading Hugo's newly finished *Les Misérables*. The similar evocation of battle scenes in Hugo's novel and Tolstoy's *War and Peace* indicates this influence. Tolstoy's political philosophy was also influenced by a March 1861 visit to French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, then living in exile under an assumed name in Brussels. Apart from reviewing Proudhon's forthcoming publication, *La Guerre et la Paix* (*War and Peace* in French), whose title Tolstoy would borrow for his masterpiece, the two men discussed education, as Tolstoy wrote in his educational notebooks: "If I recount this conversation with Proudhon, it is to show that, in my personal experience, he was the only man who understood the significance of education and of the printing press in our time."

Fired by enthusiasm, Tolstoy returned to Yasnaya Polyana and founded thirteen schools for his serfs' children, based on the principles Tolstoy described in his 1862 essay "The School at Yasnaya Polyana". Tolstoy's educational experiments were short-lived, partly due to harassment by the Tsarist secret police. However, as a direct forerunner to A. S. Neill's Summerhill School, the school at Yasnaya Polyana can justifiably be claimed the first example of a coherent theory of democratic education.

In 1908, Tolstoy wrote *A Letter to a Hindoo* outlining his belief in non-violence as a means for India to gain independence from British colonial rule. In 1909, a copy of the letter fell into the hands of Mohandas Gandhi who was working as a lawyer in South Africa at the time and in the beginnings of becoming an activist. Tolstoy's letter was significant for Gandhi who wrote to the famous writer seeking proof that he was the real author, leading to further correspondence between them. Reading Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* also convinced Gandhi to avoid violence and espouse nonviolent resistance, a debt Gandhi acknowledged in his autobiography, calling Tolstoy "the greatest apostle of non-violence that the present age has produced". The correspondence between Tolstoy and Gandhi would only last a year, from October 1909 until Tolstoy's death in November 1910, but led Gandhi to give the name, the Tolstoy Colony, to

his second ashram in South Africa. Besides non-violent resistance, the two men shared a common belief in the merits of vegetarianism, the subject of several of Tolstoy's essays.

Tolstoy also became a major supporter of the Esperanto movement. Tolstoy was impressed by the pacifist beliefs of the Doukhobors and brought their persecution to the attention of the international community, after they burned their weapons in peaceful protest in 1895. He aided the Doukhobors in migrating to Canada. In 1904, during the Russo-Japanese War, Tolstoy condemned the war and wrote to the Japanese Buddhist priest Soyen Shaku in a failed attempt to make a joint pacifist statement.

**The Film**

***Anna Karenina*** is a 2012 British epic romantic drama film directed by Joe Wright. Adapted by Tom Stoppard from Leo Tolstoy's 1877 novel of the same name, the film depicts the tragedy of Russian aristocrat and socialite Anna Karenina, wife of senior statesman Alexei Karenin, and her affair with the affluent officer Count Vronsky which leads to her ultimate demise. Keira Knightley stars in the lead role as Karenina, marking her third collaboration with Wright following both *Pride & Prejudice* (2005) and *Atonement* (2007), while Jude Law and Aaron Taylor-Johnson appear as Karenin and Vronsky, respectively. Matthew Macfadyen, Kelly Macdonald, Domhnall Gleeson and Alicia Vikander appear in key supporting roles.

**Critical reception**

Upon its release, the film received positive reviews from critics, with some praising the cast – particularly Knightley – and the production design but criticising the script and Wright's apparent preference for style over substance. The film received an average review score of 61 percent according to review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes. Metacritic reported an average score of 63 out of 100, based on 41 reviews and classified the film as "generally favourable".

Oliver Lyttleton of *The Playlist* awarded the film a B+ and called the picture a "bold reimagining" of the classic novel, comparing Wright's vision to the films of Powell and Pressburger. He noted how Knightley "continues to go from strength to strength" and also praised Law as "excellent". Even though he speculated that "the film is going to divide people enormously", he concluded it was one to "cherish despite its flaws". Ian Freer of *Empire* awarded the film four stars out of five and was effervescent in his praise for Wright and the final result: he said "*Anna Karenina* militantly doesn't want to be just another costume drama; it attacks the heavyweight concerns of Russian literature (hypocrisy, jealousy, faith, fidelity, the pastoral vs the urban, huge moustaches) with wit and verve; most exciting of all, it is filmmaking of the highest order, channeling every other art form from painting to ballet to puppetry while remaining completely cinematic". He lauded the entire cast for their work yet concluded that "this is really its director's movie".

In *The Observer* Jason Solomons also called Knightley "superb", and declared that the film "works beautifully... [it is] elegant and exciting [and] ...incredibly cinematic". Leslie Felperin of *Variety* was more reserved in her praise for the film, observing that although Wright "knows how to get the best from Knightley" and noting that the film was technically "glorious", it was also "unmistakably chilly" in the storytelling. The *Daily Mirror* singled out Knightley as "excellent" and lauded Wright for "offer[ing] a fresh vision of the Tolstoy classic", concluding the picture to be "with its beautiful cinematography and costumes... a real success".

Others were less impressed with the film and Wright's take on such a classic text. The *Hertfordshire Mercury* conceded that "costumes and art direction are ravishing, and Seamus McGarvey's cinematography shimmers with rich colour", but ultimately found there to be "no obvious method behind this production design madness". Stella Papamichael of *Digital Spy* also awarded the picture only two stars out of five, commenting that "the third time isn't such a charm for director Joe Wright and muse Keira Knightley". Although she found the actress "luminous in the role" she criticised Wright for "outshining" his star and affecting the narrative momentum by "favouring a glossy look over probing insights into a complicated character". Neil Smith of *Total Film* also awarded the film two out of five stars, lamenting the fact that Wright's elaborate stage design "pull[s] the attention away from where it should be... [and] keeps [us] at arm's length, forever highlighting the smoke, mirrors and meticulous stage management that have been pressed into service to make his big idea a reality". He also dismissed Knightley's performance as "less involving" than her "similar" turn in *The Duchess*. Richard Brody of *The New Yorker* criticised Wright for diverging from Tolstoy, without adding anything beyond superficialities in return: "Wright, with flat and flavorless images of an utterly impersonal banality, takes Tolstoy's plot and translates it into a cinematic language that's the equivalent of, say, Danielle Steel, simultaneously simplistic and overdone."

**Rotten Tomatoes**

**Rotten Tomatoes** is a website devoted to reviews, information, and news of films, widely known as a film review aggregator. Its name derives from the cliché of audiences throwing rotten tomatoes or vegetables at a poor stage

performance. The company has been owned by Flixster, a Warner Bros. company, since May 2011, and was created by Senh Duong.

**History**

Rotten Tomatoes was launched on August 12, 1998, as a spare time project by Senh Duong. His goal in creating Rotten Tomatoes was "to create a site where people can get access to reviews from a variety of critics in the US". His inspiration came when, as a fan of Jackie Chan, Duong started collecting all the reviews of Chan's movies as they were coming out in the United States. The first movie reviewed on Rotten Tomatoes was *Your Friends & Neighbors*. The website was an immediate success, receiving mentions by Yahoo!, Netscape, and *USA Today* within the first week of its launch; it attracted "600 – 1000 daily unique visitors" as a result.

Duong teamed up with University of California, Berkeley classmates Patrick Y. Lee and Stephen Wang, his former partners at the Berkeley, California-based web design firm Design Reactor, to pursue Rotten Tomatoes on a full-time basis, officially launching on April 1, 2000.

In June 2004, IGN Entertainment acquired Rottentomatoes.com for an undisclosed sum. In September 2005, IGN was bought by News Corp's Fox Interactive Media. In January 2010, IGN sold the website to Flixster, which produces the most popular movie ratings app for the iPad and other mobile devices. The combined reach of both companies is 30 million unique visitors a month across all different platforms, according to the companies. In May 2011, Flixster was acquired by Warner Bros.

Rotten Tomatoes users can create and join groups that allow them to discuss different aspects of film, and one group – "The Golden Oyster Awards" – has its members vote for their winners of different awards, much like the Oscars or Golden Globes. However, when Flixster bought Rotten Tomatoes, they disbanded the groups, saying: "The Groups area has been discontinued to pave the way for new community features coming soon. In the meantime, please use the Forums to continue your conversations about your favorite movie topics."

As of February 2011, new community features have shown up and others have been removed. For example, users are no longer able to sort out fresh ratings from rotten ratings, and vice versa. On September 17, 2013, a section devoted to scripted television series called TV Zone was created as a subsection of the website.

**Description**

Rotten Tomatoes staff first collect online reviews from authors that are certified members of various writing guilds or film critic associations. To become a critic at the site, a critic's original reviews must garner (raccogliere, mettere insieme) a specific amount of "likes". Top Critics are generally ones that write for a notable newspaper. The staff then determine for each review whether it is positive ("fresh", marked by a small icon of a red tomato) or negative ("rotten", marked by a small icon of a green splattered – spiaccicato – tomato). At the end of the year one film will receive the "Golden Tomato", meaning it is the highest rated film that year.

The website keeps track of all of the reviews counted (which can approach 300 for major, recently released films – currently the record is held by *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) with 304 reviews counted) and the percentage of positive reviews is tabulated. If the positive reviews make up 60% or more, the film is considered "fresh" in that a supermajority of the reviewers approve of the film. If the positive reviews are less than 60%, then the film is considered "rotten". In addition, major film reviewers like those at Roger Ebert.com, Desson Thomson, Stephen Hunter, Owen Gleiberman, Lisa Schwarzbaum, Peter Travers and Michael Philips are listed in a sub-listing called "Top Critics", which tabulates their reviews separately, while still including their opinions in the general rating. When there are sufficient reviews to form a conclusion, a consensus statement is posted which is intended to articulate the general reasons for the collective opinion of the film.

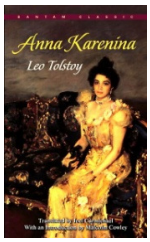
This rating in turn is marked with an equivalent icon when the film is listed, giving the reader a one glance look at the general critical opinion about the work. Movies with a "Tomatometer" of 75% or better and at least 40 reviews from Tomatometer Critics (including 5 Top Critics) receive the "Certified Fresh" seal. Furthermore, films earning this status will keep it unless the critical percentage drops below 70%. As a result of the requirements for quantity of ratings, there may be films with 100% positive ratings which don't have the certificate due to insufficient reviews to be sure of the "freshness".

In addition to reviews, Rotten Tomatoes hosts message forums, where thousands of participants take part in the discussion of movies, video games, music and other topics. In addition, users are able to rate and review films themselves. Every movie also features a "user average" that calculates the percentage of users that have rated the film positively in a manner similar to how the critics' reviews are calculated. However, this score is more specific as the users

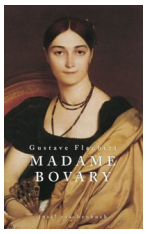
are able to rate the movie on a scale of 0–10 (compared to critic reviews, which usually use 4-star ratings and are often simply qualitative). A user score of 7 (equivalent to 3.5 stars on a 5-star scale) or higher is considered positive. In January 2010, on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the New York Film Critics Circle, Armond White, its chairman, cited Rotten Tomatoes in particular and film review aggregators in general, as examples of how "the Internet takes revenge on individual expression" by "dumping reviewers onto one website and assigning spurious percentage-enthusiasm points to the discrete reviews"; according to White, such websites "offer consensus as a substitute for assessment".

## Top Ten Books of All Time (http://www.toptenbooks.net/top-ten-books-all-time)

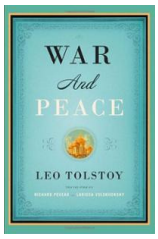
*This list reflects the rankings of all 152 lists published as of March 12, 2013. It reflects a few minor changes from the original All-Time Top Ten List - Gatsby is up, Huck is down, Proust has been harpooned by Melville. Go to the bottom to see that list.*



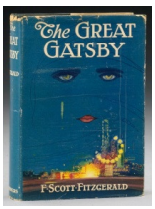

1. Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy (1877). Anna's adulterous love affair with Count Vronsky - which follows an inevitable, devastating road from their dizzyingly erotic first encounter at a ball to Anna's exile from society and her famous, fearful end - is a masterwork of tragic love. What makes the novel so deeply satisfying, though, is how Tolstoy balances the story of Anna's passion with a second semiautobiographical story of Levin's spirituality and domesticity. Levin commits his life to simple human values: his marriage to Kitty, his faith in God, and his farming. Tolstoy enchants us with Anna's sin, then proceeds to educate us with Levin's virtue.



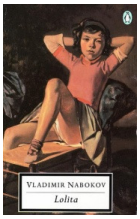

2. Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert (1857). Of the many nineteenth-century novels about adulteresses, only Madame Bovary features a heroine frankly detested by her author. Flaubert battled for five years to complete his meticulous portrait of extramarital romance in the French provinces, and he complained endlessly in letters about his love-starved main character — so inferior, he felt, to himself. In the end, however, he came to peace with her, famously saying, "Madame Bovary: c'est moi." A model of gorgeous style and perfect characterization, the novel is a testament to how yearning for a higher life both elevates and destroys us.



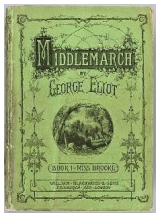

3. War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy (1869). Mark Twain supposedly said of this masterpiece, "Tolstoy carelessly neglects to include a boat race." Everything else is included in this epic novel that revolves around Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812. Tolstoy is as adept at drawing panoramic battle scenes as he is at describing individual feeling in hundreds of characters from all strata of society, but it is his depiction of Prince Andrey, Natasha, and Pierre — who struggle with love and with finding the right way to live — that makes this book beloved.



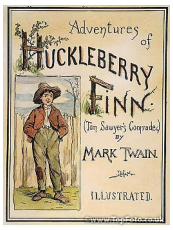

4. The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925). Perhaps the most searching fable of the American Dream ever written, this glittering novel of the Jazz Age paints an unforgettable portrait of its day — the flappers, the bootleg gin, the careless, giddy wealth. Self-made millionaire Jay Gatsby, determined to win back the heart of the girl he loved and lost, emerges as an emblem for romantic yearning, and the novel's narrator, Nick Carroway, brilliantly illuminates the post–World War I end to American innocence.



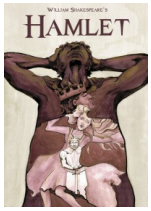

5. Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov (1955). "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul." So begins the Russian master's infamous novel about Humbert Humbert, a middle-aged man who falls madly, obsessively in love with a twelve-year-old "nymphet," Dolores Haze. So he marries the girl's mother. When she dies he becomes Lolita's father. As Humbert describes their car trip — a twisted mockery of the American road novel — Nabokov depicts love, power, and obsession in audacious, shockingly funny language.



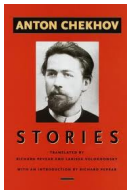

6. Middlemarch by George Eliot (1871–72). Dorothea Brooke is a pretty young idealist whose desire to improve the world leads her to marry the crusty pedant Casaubon. This mistake takes her down a circuitous and painful path in search of happiness. The novel, which explores society's brakes on women and deteriorating rural life, is as much a chronicle of the English town of Middlemarch as it is the portrait of a lady. Eliot excels at parsing moments of moral crisis so that we feel a character's anguish and resolve. Her intelligent sympathy for even the most unlikable people redirects our own moral compass toward charity rather than enmity.



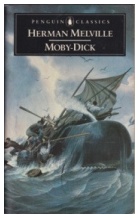

7. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1884). Hemingway proclaimed, "All modern American literature comes from . . . 'Huckleberry Finn.' " But one can read it simply as a straightforward adventure story in which two comrades of convenience, the parentally abused rascal Huck and fugitive slave Jim, escape the laws and conventions of society on a raft trip down the Mississippi. Alternatively, it's a subversive satire in which Twain uses the only superficially naïve Huck to comment bitingly on the evils of racial bigotry, religious hypocrisy, and capitalist greed he observes in a host of other largely unsympathetic characters. Huck's climactic decision to "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" rather than submit to the starched standards of "civilization" reflects a uniquely American strain of individualism and nonconformity stretching from Daniel Boone to Easy Rider.




8. Hamlet by William Shakespeare (1600). The most famous play ever written, Hamlet tells the story of a melancholic prince charged with avenging the murder of his father at the hands of his uncle, who then married his mother and, becoming King of Denmark, robbed Hamlet of the throne. Told the circumstances of this murder and usurpation by his father's ghost, Hamlet is plunged deep into brilliant and profound reflection on the problems of existence, which meditations delay his revenge at the cost of innocent lives. When he finally acts decisively, Hamlet takes with him every remaining major character in a crescendo of violence unmatched in Shakespearean theatre.




9. The Stories of Anton Chekhov (1860–1904). The son of a freed Russian serf, Anton Chekhov became a doctor who, between the patients he often treated without charge, invented the modern short story. The form had been over-decorated with trick endings and swags of atmosphere. Chekhov freed it to reflect the earnest urgencies of ordinary lives in crises through prose that blended a deeply compassionate imagination with precise description. "He remains a great teacher-healer-sage," Allan Gurganus observed of Chekhov's stories, which "continue to haunt, inspire, and baffle."




10. Moby-Dick by Herman Melville (1851). This sweeping saga of obsession, vanity, and vengeance at sea can be read as a harrowing parable, a gripping adventure story, or a semi-scientific chronicle of the whaling industry. No matter, the book rewards patient readers with some of fiction's most memorable characters, from mad Captain Ahab to the titular white whale that crippled him, from the honourable pagan Queequeg to our insightful narrator/surrogate ("Call me") Ishmael, to that hell-bent vessel itself, the Pequod.

**First All-Time Top Ten List**

1. Anna Karenina by Leo Tolstoy (1877).
2. Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert (1857).
3. War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy (1869).
4. Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov (1955).
5. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1884).
6. Hamlet by William Shakespeare (1600).
7. The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925).
8. In Search of Lost Time by Marcel Proust (1913–27).
9. The Stories of Anton Chekhov (1860–1904).
10. Middlemarch by George Eliot (1871–72).