

Tragedy suggested starter texts –

This is, at best, a starting point in a truly massive corpus of works. I don't pretend to have read them all (though I have read quite a few!), but they are held up critically as 'key' or otherwise notable examples of the genre we are setting out to explore. The more you've seen, and the broader range from which you've sampled, the richer your understanding and appreciation of the examined texts and their wider literary histories. The following are a small selection of Tragedies from Ancient Greek to modern. Choose, dabble, delve and enjoy.

The set texts:

We will study these in detail together, exploring the degrees to which they correspond to the archetypes and structures of the Tragedy genre. They are worth becoming familiar with before commencing study, if only for plot, but you might want to read around the genre and the theory of the genre first so you know what to look for and how to look for it.

John Keats – Selected poetry ('Lamia', 'Isabella or The Pot of Basil', 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', 'The Eve of St. Agnes')

Arthur Miller – *The Death of a Salesman*

William Shakespeare – *Othello* (preferably Arden Shakespeare: Third Series)

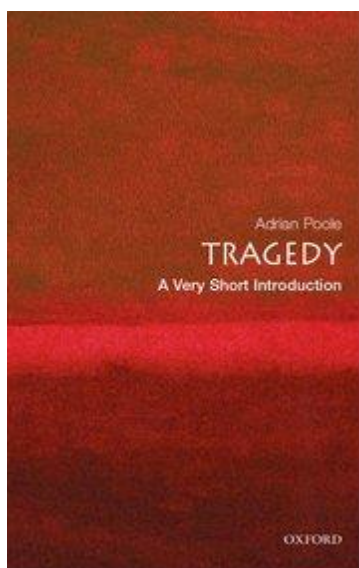
A general overview and critical theory

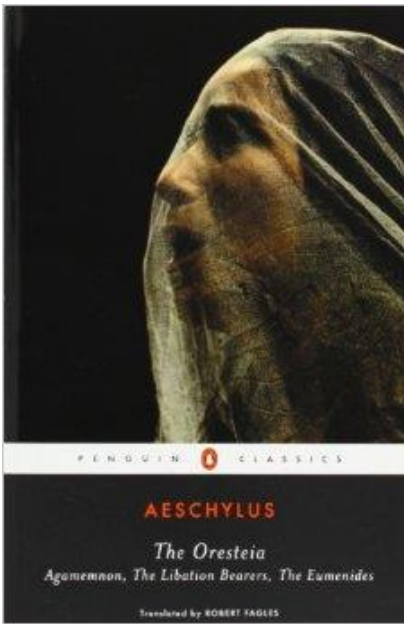
A.C. Bradley – *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth* (New Penguin Shakespeare Library)

Sean McEvoy – *Tragedy: A Student Handbook* (EMC Advanced Literature Series)

Adrian Poole – *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions)

Some good texts to get you started are listed overleaf



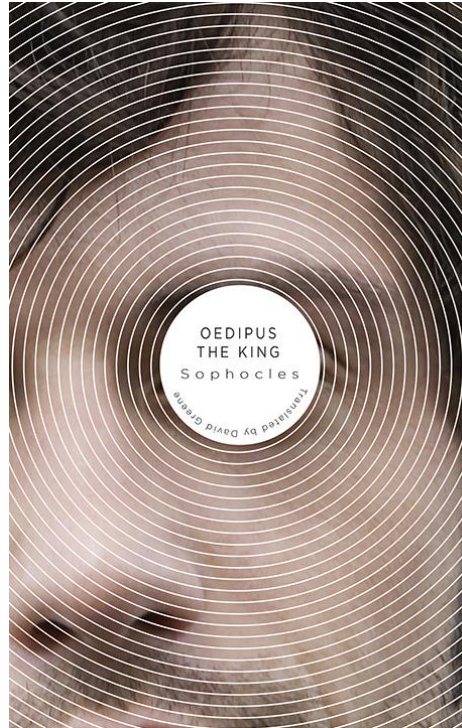


The Ancient Greeks – where it all started

In the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus addressed the bloody chain of murder and revenge within the royal family of Argos. As they move from darkness to light, from rage to self-governance, from primitive ritual to civilized institution, their spirit of struggle and regeneration becomes an everlasting song of celebration. In *Agamemnon*, a king's decision to sacrifice his daughter and turn the tide of war inflicts lasting damage on his family, culminating in a terrible act of retribution; *The Libation Bearers* deals with the aftermath of Clytemnestra's regicide, as her son Orestes sets out to avenge his father's death; and in *The Eumenides*, Orestes is tormented by supernatural powers that can never be appeased. Forming an elegant and subtle discourse on the emergence of Athenian democracy out of a period of chaos and destruction, *The Oresteia* is a compelling tragedy of the tensions between our obligations to our families and the laws that bind us together as a society.

"...what man wins more happiness than just its ruin when that shape collapses?"

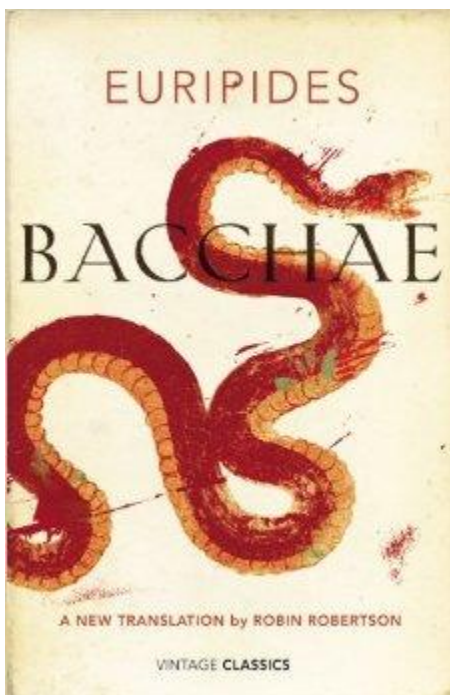
Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (or *Oedipus the King*) surpassed for the raw and terrible power with struggles to answer the eternal question, "Who am I?" The play, a story of a king who acting entirely in ignorance and marries his mother, unfolds with shattering helplessly carried along with Oedipus towards the truth.



families and the together as a

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has never been which its hero I?" The play, a kills his father power; we are final, horrific

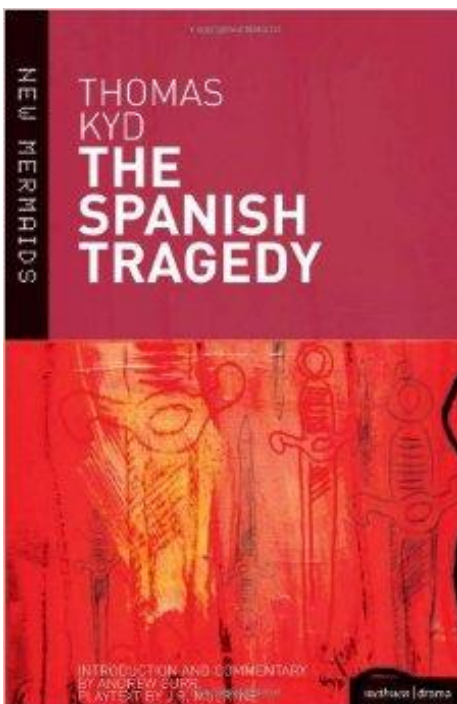
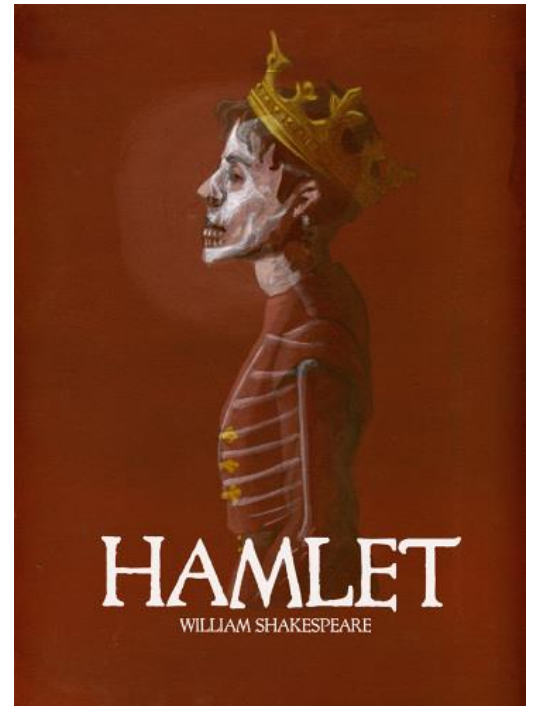


Euripides' *The Bacchae* - the last extant Greek tragedy - relates the classic myth of the god Dionysus wrecking vengeance on Thebes, the city of his birth and site of his mortal mother Semele's horrible death. Dionysus brings an army of women into the mountains surrounding the city and casts a spell over the city's own female population, leading them to abandon their husbands, sons, and fathers and to follow the god into the countryside and engage in his forbidden revels. Pentheus, king of Thebes, leads an army against the god, only to be defeated in battle and, as he secretly watches the revels, to be torn limb from limb by the frenzied Bacchae.

The Renaissance & Jacobean stage – where the English language made it its own

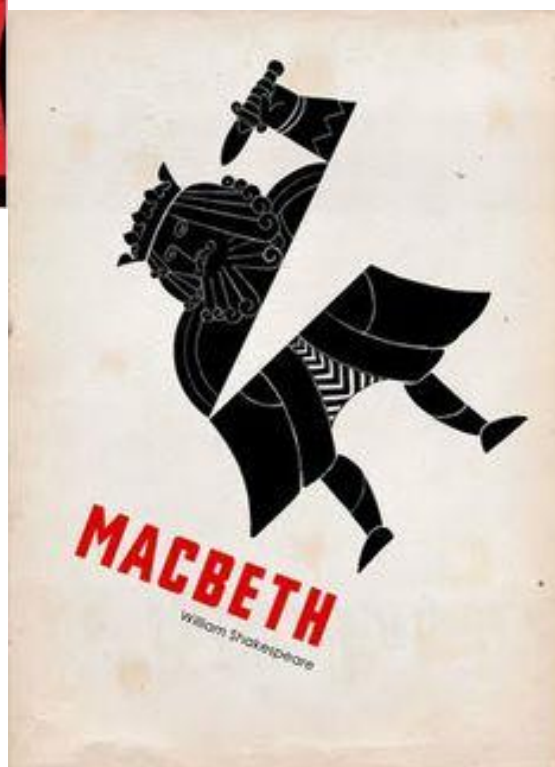
Hamlet is not only one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, but also the most fascinatingly problematical tragedy in world literature. First performed around 1600, this a gripping and exuberant drama of revenge, rich in contrasts and conflicts. Its violence alternates with introspection, its melancholy with humour, and its subtlety with spectacle. The Prince, Hamlet himself, is depicted as a complex, divided, introspective character. His reflections on death, morality and the very status of human beings make him 'the first modern man'.

Countless stage productions and numerous adaptations for the cinema and television have demonstrated the continuing cultural relevance of this vivid, enigmatic, profound and engrossing drama.

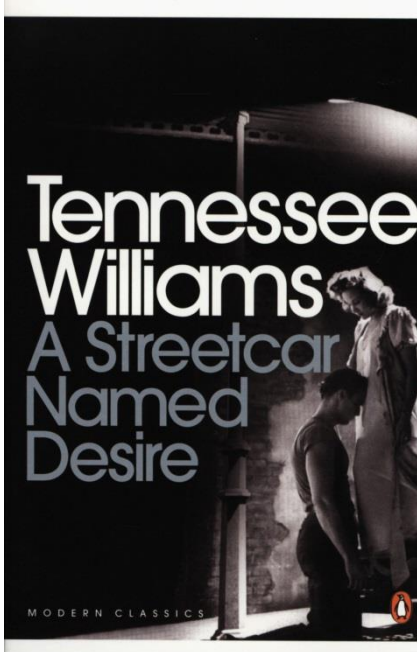


The Spanish Tragedy is an Elizabethan tragedy written by Thomas Kyd between 1582 and 1592. Highly popular and influential in its time, *The Spanish Tragedy* established a new genre in English theatre, the revenge play or revenge tragedy. Its plot contains several violent murders and includes as one of its characters a personification of Revenge. *The Spanish Tragedy* was often referred to (or parodied) in works written by other Elizabethan playwrights, including William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Christopher Marlowe.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is one tragic dramas the world has himself, a brave warrior, is fatally supernatural forces, by his proud burgeoning ambition. As he murderous course to gain and Scotland, we see the appalling psychological effects on both himself. The cruel ironies of their conveyed in poetry of In the theatre, this tragedy engrossing.



of the greatest known. *Macbeth* impelled by wife, and by his own embarks on his retain the crown of emotional and Lady *Macbeth* and destiny are unsurpassed power. remains perennially



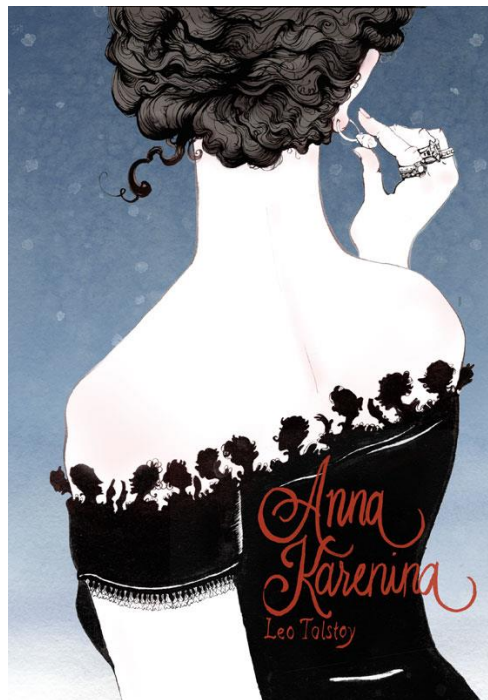
Modern – ancient echoes and new forms

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* is the tale of a catastrophic confrontation between fantasy and reality, embodied in the characters of Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski.

Fading southern belle Blanche DuBois is adrift in the modern world. When she arrives to stay with her sister Stella in a crowded, boisterous corner of New Orleans, her delusions of grandeur bring her into conflict with Stella's crude, brutish husband Stanley Kowalski. Eventually their violent collision course causes Blanche's fragile sense of identity to crumble, threatening to destroy her sanity and her one chance of happiness.

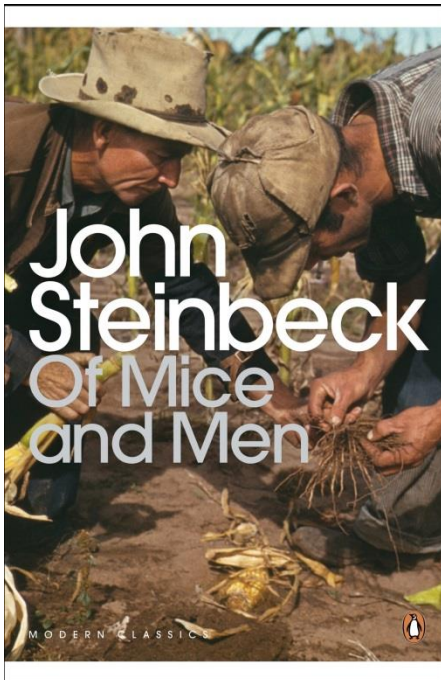
Anna Karenina is one of the most loved and heroines of literature. Her overwhelming charm novel of unparalleled richness and density.

Tolstoy considered this book to be his first real novel form, and it addresses the very nature of levels, - of destiny, death, human relationships irreconcilable contradictions of existence. It tragically, and there is much that evokes set beside this is an abounding joy in life's ephemeral pleasures, and a profusion of comic



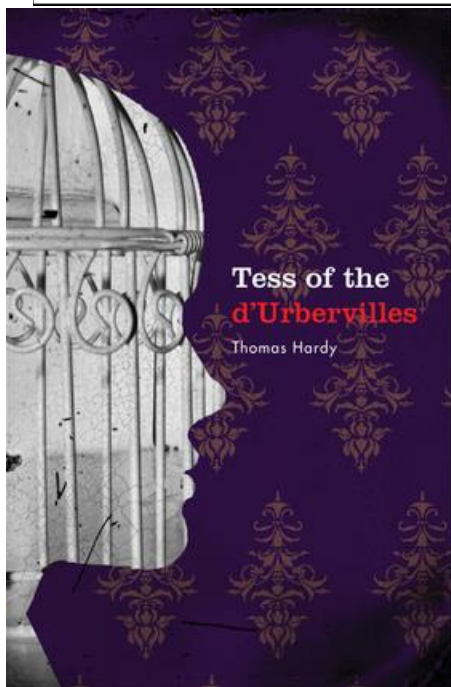
memorable dominates a

attempt at a society at all and the ends despair, yet many relief.



Of Mice and Men

Streetwise George and his big, childlike friend Lennie are drifters, searching for work in the fields and valleys of California. They have nothing except the clothes on their back, and a hope that one day they'll find a place of their own and live the American dream. But dreams come at a price. Gentle giant Lennie doesn't know his own strength, and when they find work at a ranch he gets into trouble with the boss's daughter-in-law. Trouble so bad that even his protector George may not be able to save him ...



Set in Hardy's Wessex, **Tess of the d'Urbervilles** is a moving novel of hypocrisy and double standards. Its challenging sub-title, *A Pure Woman*, infuriated critics when the book was first published in 1891, and it was condemned as immoral and pessimistic.

It tells of Tess Durbeyfield, the daughter of a poor and dissipated villager, who learns that she may be descended from the ancient family of d'Urbeville. In her search for respectability her fortunes fluctuate wildly, and the story assumes the proportions of a Greek tragedy. It explores Tess's relationships with two very different men, her struggle against the social mores of the rural Victorian world which she inhabits and the hypocrisy of the age.

In addressing the double standards of the time, Hardy's masterly evocation of a world which we have lost, provides one of the most compelling stories in the canon of English literature, whose appeal today defies the judgement of Hardy's contemporary

critics.

Described by Brecht as 'a gangster play that certain events familiar to us all', **Arturo Ui** is a savage satire of the rise of Hitler - recast by small-time Chicago gangster's takeover of the greengrocery trade. Using a wide range of pastiche - from Al Capone to Shakespeare's Goethe's Faust - Brecht's compelling parable have relevance wherever totalitarianism. Written during the Second World War in 1941, one of the Berliner Ensemble's most box-office successes in 1959, and has attract a succession of major actors, including Rossiter, Christopher Plummer, Antony Sher



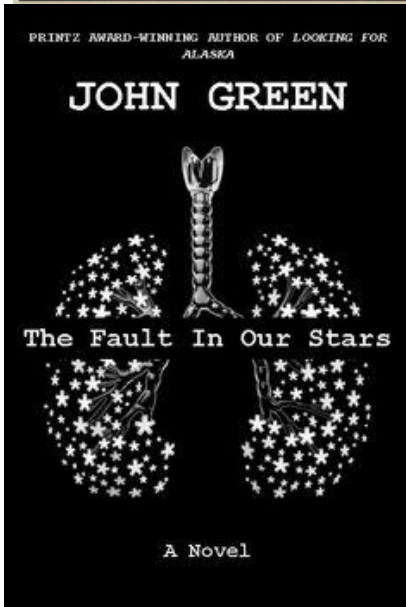
the judgement contemporary

would recall witty and Brecht into a city's parody and Richard III and continues to appears today. the play was outstanding continued to Leonard and Al Pacino.



Arthur Miller's depiction of innocent men and women destroyed by malicious rumour, **The Crucible** is a powerful indictment of McCarthyism and the 'frontier mentality' of Cold War America, published in Penguin Modern Classics.

Arthur Miller's classic parable of mass hysteria draws a chilling parallel between the Salem witch-hunt of 1692 - 'one of the strangest and most awful chapters in human history' - and the American anti-communist purges led by Senator McCarthy in the 1950s. The story of how the small community of Salem is stirred into madness by superstition, paranoia and malice, culminating in a violent climax, is a savage attack on the evils of mindless persecution and the terrifying power of false accusations.

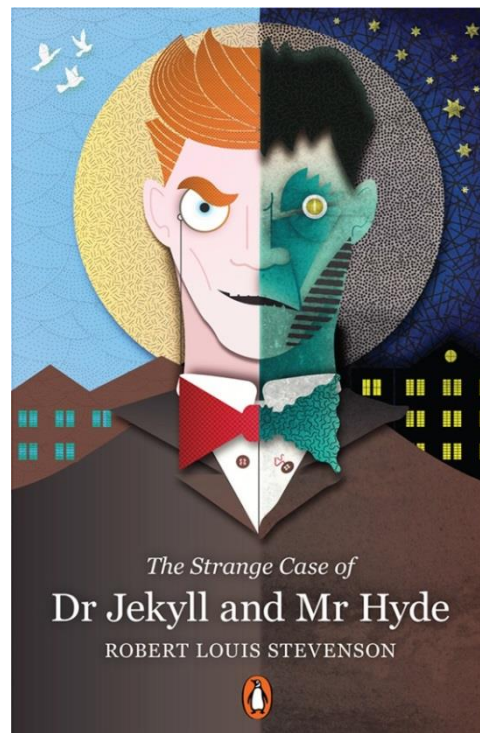


"I fell in love the way you fall asleep: slowly, then all at once."

Despite the tumour-shrinking medical miracle that has bought her a few years, Hazel has never been anything but terminal, her final chapter inscribed upon diagnosis. But when a gorgeous plot twist named Augustus Waters suddenly appears at Cancer Kid Support Group, Hazel's story is about to be completely rewritten.

Insightful, bold, irreverent, and raw, **The Fault in Our Stars** is award-winning author John Green's most ambitious and heart-breaking work yet, brilliantly exploring the funny, thrilling, and tragic business of being alive and in love.

In seeking to discover his inner self, the Jekyll discovers a monster. First published acclaim in 1886, this mesmerising thriller, **Mr Hyde**, is a terrifying study of the duality nature, and it is the book which established reputation as a writer.



brilliant Dr to critical **Dr Jekyll and** of man's Stevenson's

the virgin suicides



Jeffery Eugenides

The Woman in Black

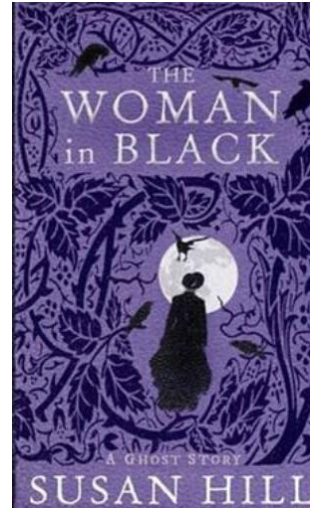
Arthur Kipps, a junior solicitor, is summoned to attend the Mrs Alice Drablow, the house's sole inhabitant of Eel House, unaware of the tragic secrets which lie hidden shuttered windows. The house stands at the end of a wreathed in fog and mystery, but it is not until he glimpses young woman, dressed all in black, at the funeral, that a sense of unease begins to take hold, a feeling deepened reluctance of the locals to talk of the woman in black - and purpose. One to read once you know the doors are locked.

The Virgin Suicides

This is the story of the five Lisbon sisters – beautiful, eccentric, and obsessively watched by the entire neighbourhood.

The boys that once loved them from afar are now grown men, determined to understand a tragedy that has always defied explanation. For still, the question remains – why did all five of the Lisbon girls take their own lives?

This hypnotic and unforgettable novel treats adolescent love and death with haunting sensitivity humour, and creates a age story unlike any of our



and dark coming-of-time.

funeral Marsh behind the causeway, a wasted creeping by the her terrible