

100 Best Last Lines from Novels

1. ...you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on. –Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (1953; trans. Samuel Beckett)

2. Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you? –Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952)

3. So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past. –F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

4. ...I was a Flower of the mountain yes when I put the rose in my hair like the Andalusian girls used or shall I wear a red yes and how he kissed me under the Moorish wall and I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will Yes. –James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)

5. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before. –Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885)

6. “Yes,” I said. “Isn't it pretty to think so?” –Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926)

7. He loved Big Brother. –George Orwell, *1984* (1949)

8. ‘It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.’ –Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

9. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. –Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902)

10. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision. –Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (1927)

11. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead. –James Joyce, “The Dead” in *Dubliners* (1914)

12. I am thinking of aurochs and angels, the secret of durable pigments, prophetic sonnets, the refuge of art. And this is the only immortality you and I may share, my Lolita. –Vladimir Nabokov, *Lolita* (1955)

13. And you say, “Just a moment, I've almost finished *If on a winter's night a traveler* by Italo Calvino.” –Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler* (1979; trans. William Weaver)

14. Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! –Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener* (1853)

15. Before reaching the final line, however, he had already understood that he would never leave that room, for it was foreseen that the city of mirrors (or mirages) would be wiped out by the wind and exiled from the memory of men at the precise moment when Aureliano Babilonia would finish deciphering the parchments, and that everything written on them was unrepeatable since time immemorial and forever more, because races condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth. –Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967; trans. Gregory Rabassa)

16. Then I went back into the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining. –Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* (1951, trans. Patrick Bowles)

17. So in America when the sun goes down and I sit on the old broken-down river pier watching the long, long skies over New Jersey and sense all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast, and all that road going, all the people dreaming in the immensity of it, and in Iowa I know by now the children must be crying in the land where they let the children cry, and tonight the stars'll be out, and don't you know that God is Pooh Bear? the evening star must be drooping and shedding her sparkler dims on the prairie, which is just before the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in, and nobody, nobody knows what's going to happen to anybody besides the forlorn rags of growing old, I think of Dean Moriarty, I even think of Old Dean Moriarty the father we never found, I think of Dean Moriarty. –Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957)

18. *I don't hate it* he thought, panting in the cold air, the iron New England dark; *I don't. I don't! I don't hate it! I don't hate it!* –William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936)

19. L--d! said my mother, what is all this story about?— —
A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick— —And one of the best of its kind I ever heard.
–Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767)

20. ‘I shall feel proud and satisfied to have been the first author to enjoy the full fruit of his writings, as I desired, because my only desire has been to make men hate those false, absurd histories in books of chivalry, which thanks to the exploits of my real Don Quixote are even now tottering, and without any doubt will soon tumble to the ground. Farewell.’ –Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615; trans. John Rutherford)

21. If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who. –Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (1963)

22. **YOU HAVE FALLEN INTO ART—RETURN TO LIFE** –William H. Gass, *Willie Masters' Lonesome Wife* (1968)

23. In your rocking-chair, by your window dreaming, shall you long, alone. In your rocking-chair, by your window, shall you dream such happiness as you may never feel. –Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900)

24. *Go, my book, and help destroy the world as it is.* –Russell Banks, *Continental Drift* (1985)

25. It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan. –Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851)

26. The knife came down, missing him by inches, and he took off. –Joseph Heller, *Catch-22* (1961)

27. Is it possible for anyone in Germany, nowadays, to raise his right hand, for whatever the reason, and not be flooded by the memory of a dream to end all dreams? –Walter Abish, *How German Is It?* (1980)

28. Lastly, she pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would, in the after-time, be herself a grown woman; and how she would keep, through all her riper years, the simple and loving heart of her childhood; and how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago; and how she would feel with all their simple sorrows, and find a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own child-life, and the happy summer days. –Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)

29. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. –George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871–72)

30. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance. –Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

31. Now everybody — –Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973)

32. But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. –Jane Austen, *Emma* (1816)

33. It was the nightmare of real things, the fallen wonder of the world. –Don DeLillo, *The Names* (1982)

34. He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city. –Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947; trans. Stuart Gilbert)

35. This is not the scene I dreamed of. Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere. –J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980)

36. “Like a dog!” he said, it was as if the shame of it must outlive him. –Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1925; trans. Willa and Edwin Muir)

37. P.S.
Sorry I forgot to give you the mayonnaise.
–Richard Brautigan, *Trout Fishing in America* (1967)

38. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate. –Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942; trans. Matthew Ward)

39. Yes, they will trample me underfoot, the numbers marching one two three, four hundred million five hundred six, reducing me to specks of voiceless dust, just as, in all good time, they will trample my son who is not my son, and his son who will not be his, and his who will not be his, until the thousand and first generation, until a thousand and one midnights have bestowed their terrible gifts and a thousand and one children have died, because it is the privilege and the curse of midnight's children to be both masters and victims of their times, to forsake privacy and be sucked into the annihilating whirlpool of the multitudes, and to be unable to live or die in peace. –Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981)

40. Oedipa settled back, to await the crying of lot 49. –Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965)

41. I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth. –Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

42. A way a lone a last a loved a long the –James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (1939)

43. Columbus too thought he was a flop, probably, when they sent him back in chains. Which didn't prove there was no America. –Saul Bellow, *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953)

44. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead. –Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (1985)

45. Are there any questions? –Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986)