

Selection list English Senia, season 2020-2021



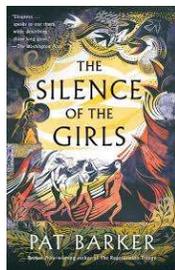
Note: this sign (📖) refers to the level of difficulty in reading. We use 3 levels.

On page 1-5 you will find the new titles with brief descriptions of 2020-2021. Reader's Guides of these books will be published mid 2020. On page 5-15 you will find titles and brief descriptions, of which Reader's Guides were published previously.

New Titles

Pat Barker - *The Silence of the Girls*

E20-01, 2018, 291 p. 📖📖



This book comprises a retelling of the Trojan War, this time from the point of view of a young woman. A Greek army led by Achilles attacks a small city, killing the men and abducting the women, including Briseis, the childless wife of the king. When the women are given to the leaders, Briseis is awarded to the nearly-invincible Achilles. Serving unveiled at Achilles' table, Briseis eventually realises why he wants her to be seen by his comrades.

The following events - Achilles' refusal to join the fighting and the deaths of Patroclus, Hector and, finally, Achilles himself - lead to the fall of Troy and are told from the perspective of a woman's experience of war and its lack of glamour.

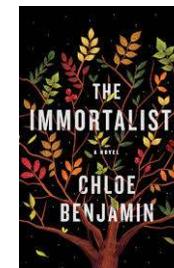
This memorable book presents a different view on the way stories about the brutality of the war are usually told, both in the past and in the present. In 'The Iliad', Briseis plays a minor role, but in this book she tells her own story.

Chloe Benjamin - *The Immortalists*

E20-02, 2018, 352 p. 📖

The book is set in New York in 1969, when four siblings in the Jewish Gold family are given a fortune teller's predictions of their dates of death. The next forty years of each of the children's lives are consecutively followed as "the day" comes nearer. They all lead

full lives: Simon escapes, searching for love, to the West Coast, while Klara becomes a Las Vegas magician, Daniel seeks security as an army doctor, and Varya dedicates herself to science. Do the predictions come true for one or all of them? How did the predictions work out? Did the fortune teller have a special gift? Was it just coincidence? Or were the outcomes caused by the children themselves?



'The Immortalists' is a very entertaining, well-written family novel, occasionally mysterious and occasionally thrilling. It is about the bonds between siblings, but also about religion and science, destiny and free choice, and reality and illusion. A very good read.

Jonathan Coe - *Middle England*

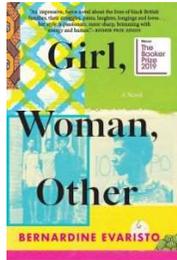
E20-03, 2018, 432 p. 📖📖

In this State of the Nation novel we meet characters from Coe's earlier books *The Rotters' Club* and *The Closed Circle*. Working around main character Benjamin Trotter Coe presents the reader with a sometimes harsh, sometimes kind description of people from various classes during the period in which the British had to cope with the outcome of the referendum on leaving, or staying in the EU, causing deep rifts between all kinds of Britons, also between families. Nostalgic memories of what England once was and will never be again, along with downright racism, opportunism and ruthless politicians rushing forward to a break from Europe of which no one really understands the political and especially the economical impact.



Coe is a sublime creator of "Brex-Lit". While exposing the various bewildering situations around Brexit and people's feelings and reactions he maintains a benign attitude towards the "Middle Englishers".

Bernardine Evaristo - *Girl, Woman, Other*
E20-04, 2019, 452 p. 



It is the opening night of *The Last Amazon of Dahomey*, a play written by Amma, a black woman in her fifties, who is a free spirit, a lesbian and a feminist. In the audience is Shirley, Amma's oldest friend, a school teacher who has become disappointed in a school system that no longer takes children's fluctuating needs into account. Shirley is surprised to see Carole again, one of her former pupils, who is now an investment banker and whose mother, Bummi, feels that her daughter has rejected her Nigerian culture by marrying a white English man. Meanwhile, Morgan, who used to be Megan, is there to review the play for the one million followers on her Twitter account, which was initially set up to describe her journey to a gender-free identity.

Evaristo, winner of the Man Booker Prize 2019, describes the lives of twelve very different (black) women, who are all trying to become their true selves in spite of society's gender- and race-based expectations.

Emma Healey - *Elizabeth is missing*
E20-05, 2014, 275 p. 

Maud, in her eighties and the narrator of this novel, suffers from dementia. She asks the same questions over and over again and no longer likes reading because she can never remember where she left off. Sometimes she doesn't even recognize her daughter and granddaughter. All over her house are bits of paper telling her what she should or shouldn't do. One of these notes says that her friend

Elizabeth is missing. Maud is determined to find out what happened to her. Maud's search triggers memories about the time Sukey, her older sister, disappeared, just after the Second World War, and was never found.



Being constantly inside Maud's mind gives us a clear picture of what aging feels like. Despite the descriptions of the frustration and anger that dementia causes, the tone of the novel is warm and funny rather than sombre.

William Melvin Kelley - *A Different Drummer*
E20-06, 1962, 294 p. 

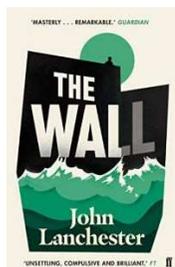


One day in the late nineteen-fifties, a young African-American farmer Tucker Caliban throws salt on his field, shoots his horse and cow and burns his house to the ground. He leaves the fictional town of Sutton, in the south of the US, taking his wife and baby with him. Black inhabitants of Sutton followed suit. When asked where they are going the answer is: 'North'. White people discuss Tucker's possible motive but cannot come to a satisfying conclusion. The story unfolds in eleven chapters told from the perspective of different white people, among them Tucker's employer.

The governor's statement on the black exodus is: 'We never needed them, never wanted them, and we'll get along fine without them.' But there is a lot more to the story. Fifty-six years after its first publication a literary jewel is rediscovered.

John Lanchester - *The Wall*

E20-07, 2019, 276 p. 



After a climatic development called “the Change”, an island very similar to Great Britain has built the Wall - a massive defence structure around its entire coastline. Joseph Kavanagh, the story’s narrator, has to serve two years on the Wall as a Defender, staring out to sea, keeping watch and making sure the Others don’t get in. For every Other who makes it across the Wall, a Defender will be banished from

the country and is put out to sea on a boat. Just as Joseph is growing closer to Hifa, one of the other defenders, something happens that changes everything.

John Lanchester presents us with a disturbing vision of the possibly not-too-distant future, based on present trends such as climate change, anti-refugee sentiment and post-Brexit shortages. The result is a story that grips the reader’s attention from the start, with an ominous sense of danger pervading the entire novel.

Valeria Luiselli - *Lost Children Archive*

E20-08, 2019, 350 p. 



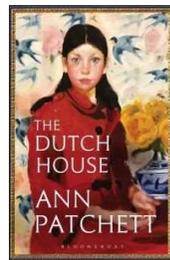
A woman and her husband, both audio documentary makers, are driving from New York to Arizona with her five-year-old daughter and his ten-year-old son. The man is interested in the Apache leaders who were the last to surrender and wants to make “an inventory of echoes”, while the woman is planning to work on an audio project about the many refugee children who go missing when trying to enter

America. During the road trip, presented through the eyes of the woman and the boy, it becomes clear the family is slowly drifting apart. The two children then decide to run away in the hope of making things better for them all because “If we too were lost children, we would have to be found again.”

To the main story line, the author has added another layer addressing the various ways of telling a story. The use of references and quotes from a variety of books, documents, films and poems results in a clever and interesting novel.

Ann Patchett - *The Dutch House*

E20-09, 2019, 336 p. 

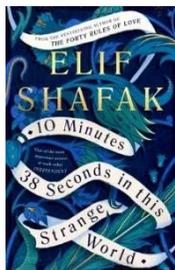


In this novel a mansion provides the basis for the Conroys. It’s called The Dutch House by locals because the first owners were of Dutch origin: the Van Hoebeek dynasty. Self-made property magnate, Cyril Conroy buys the mansion from the bank including the furnishings and personal belongings from the former owners. Cyril’s wife Elna doesn’t feel comfortable in the house and leaves her husband and their two children, Maeve and Danny. Cyril then marries Andrea, a young widow with two daughters. When Cyril dies Andrea disinherits Maeve and Danny. It’s touching to read about the unconditional love between brother and sister; how they park their car in front of the mansion time and again and talk about the life they had together in the Dutch House.

Ann Patchett shows herself to be a master in portraying characters. The reader gets to know them all well and understands why they make certain decisions whether they are wise or not.

Elif Shafak - 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World

E20-10, 2019, 312 p. 

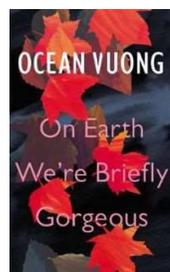


After Tequila Leila's death her mind continues working: for 10 minutes and 38 seconds to be precise, during which time she remembers the important events in her life that shaped her into the woman she became. In these memories, the reader is introduced, in turn, to Leila's five best friends, all of whom are desperately trying to find her.

This is a unique novel, which tells not only the story of Leila's life, but also that of her friends. It is about being different in an unforgiving world, while also providing interesting insight into civil turmoil in 1970's Istanbul and growing up in a mostly Muslim environment.

Ocean Vuong - On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous

E20-11, 2019, 242 p. 



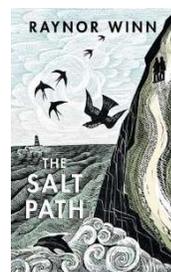
This novel tells the story of Little Dog, the son of Vietnamese immigrant parents in the US. This is done in the form of a letter addressed to his illiterate mother. 'Dear Ma, I am writing to reach you – even if each word I put down is one word further from where you are.' The writing is a mix of a shared past with his traumatised mother and a schizophrenic grandmother as well as his own thoughts and feelings. He is lonely and discriminated against

because of the colour of his skin. He finds a friend in Trevor and growing up they discover their teenage sexual love for each other. The letter to his mother is at the same time a search for his own identity.

This debut novel contains autobiographical elements and is written in a precise, poetic style about the strong will power of a man who has to overcome many difficulties.

Raynor Winn - The Salt Path

E20-12, 2018, 288 p. 



The Salt Path is the story of author Raynor Winn's remarkable journey walking the South-West Coast Path with her husband Moth. Just as their home and livelihood are taken away from them, the couple find out that Moth is suffering from an incurable illness. Against all advice, and with all their belongings in their backpacks, they start their journey from Somerset to Cornwall, trying to survive with barely any money.

Even though this book is non-fiction, it is written in a way that reads like a novel. Knowing that these are real-life events makes the story intriguing and heartbreaking, and at the same time inspirational and empowering. It gives a beautiful insight into the way every person deals differently with hardships they encounter.

Jeanette Winterson - Frankissstein: A Love Story

E20-13, 2019, 346 p. 



Frankissstein consists of two stories, told alternately. One is set in present-day Britain and America and tells the story of the young transgender doctor Ry and his lover, Victor Stein. Stein is a professor with great ambitions in the field of artificial intelligence. The other part is set during the life of the author Mary Shelley and tells the story of what led her to write her novel *Frankenstein* and her life after its publication. What will happen when *homo sapiens* is no longer the most intelligent being on the planet?

In this book Winterson creates a background to and future perspective of the classic Frankenstein. Filled with humour, this book examines not only artificial intelligence, but also modern sexual relationships and even bringing people back to life. A unique approach to both 'Frankenstein' and artificial intelligence.

Readers' Guides 2011 – 2019

Ayòbámi Adébáyò - *Stay With Me*

E19-01, 2017, 298 p. 

Yejide and her husband Akin met and fell in love at university. After a few years of marriage, the couple have not yet been able to conceive the child they want so much. Although both of them are opposed to polygamy, Akin feels forced by the absence of a baby to consider another wife. And while Yejide decides to try everything in her power to get pregnant and not to lose her husband, the drastic risks she's willing to take may prove too high a cost.

Margaret Atwood - *The Heart Goes Last*

E17-01, 2015, 416 p. 

In this contemporary dystopian novel we see what might happen if the economy and, with it, civilisation were to break down. Stan and Charmaine, a destitute young couple, sign up for a Project promising them a happy life. The catch is that once you have signed up, there is no way out. At first they enjoy their new life, but then cracks start appearing and they both start breaking the rules. Life in the Project is so intensely monitored, however, that they are both found out, with far-reaching consequences. In a farcical, fast-paced ending the scene changes to Las Vegas, where all the protagonists get their just deserts.

Pat Barker - *Regeneration*

E12-01, 1992, 252 p. 

Craiglockart War Hospital, Scotland, 1917: Army psychiatrist William Rivers is treating shell-shocked soldiers and officers to make them fit enough to return to the trenches in France. Through the eyes of Rivers the reader discovers about the horrors the men had to suffer during the Great War. All kinds of psychological traumas are disclosed in the sessions. Every patient reacts

differently on the atrocities they have experienced. One of them is Siegfried Sassoon, a published poet and an officer, who wrote a protest against the unnecessary prolongation of the war. In the hospital Sassoon meets with Wilfred Owen, a young poet.

Julian Barnes - *The Only Story*

E18-02, 2018, 213 p. 

This is a novel about a complicated love story. It is narrated by Paul, who is looking back at his life. Paul was 19 when he first met Susan, a woman more than twice his age. They met at a tennis club and fell in love. The setting is in the London suburbs in the 1960s. The novel is divided into three parts, written in three different narrative voices: the first, second and third person. With each change, Paul moves on to a new phase in their affair, describing the demands that are placed on him by the lifelong consequences of his first love.

Julian Barnes - *The Noise of Time*

E16-01, 2016, 180 p.  

In this fictional biography of Dmitri Shostakovich, Julian Barnes describes the inner struggles of an artist during Stalin's reign of terror and the compromises he was required to make under a totalitarian regime, to stay alive. The reader meets the Russian composer at three critical moments in his life, firstly as a young man standing by a lift expecting to be taken away by the powers that be. The next encounter is after the Second World War, on a propaganda tour in the USA. In the third part, the older Shostakovich has become embittered by the relentless demands of the party, even although Stalin is dead. Barnes succeeds in giving the reader remarkable insight into the composer's relationships with family, wives and friends.

Sebastian Barry - *The Temporary Gentleman*

E16-02, 2014, 320 p. 

Holed up in a relatively humble dwelling in Ghana, the middle-aged Irishman Jack McNulty sits down to write his life story. His commission as an engineer in the army during World War II saw him stationed in Africa. Now, however, it is 1957 and the war is over, but he is reluctant to return to Sligo in his native Ireland. Jack's eventful past produces both nostalgia and yearning, as well as fear and loathing, as he reconstructs his troubled marriage with the beautiful and enigmatic Mai Kirwan. Jack shares a turbulent life with her, from the blossoming stages of carefree youth in the 1920s to the disarming conflict of losing one another. *The Temporary Gentleman* is the story of a lost soul retracing his steps so as to be able to go forward.

Alan Bennett - *The Uncommon Reader*

E18-03, 2007, 121 p. 

The Uncommon Reader is a novella about the reading habits of Queen Elisabeth II of England. While walking her corgis, the Queen visits a travelling library parked in the courtyard of Buckingham Palace. It turns out that the mobile library comes to the courtyard every Wednesday. The librarian introduces the Queen to reading novels and this marks a change in her life. Having never had a 'normal' life, she now begins to live in books. Her advisors, however, are not so pleased with her new hobby. The Queen continues to read and to ask questions. She also begins to write, and her insights convey a sense of humour. She then starts discussing novels with other people, with several other books and writers being mentioned in this novella. The Queen becomes so enthusiastic about reading that her work suffers from it. The end of the story is surprising.

Amy Bloom - *Lucky Us*

E15-02, 2014, 256 p. 

Disappointed by their families, two half-sisters travel through 1940s America in search of fame and fortune. Iris, aged 16, wants to become a film star, and her ambitions take them from Ohio to Hollywood and the jazz clubs of Long Island, looking for a place they can call home. They make friends in high and low places and meet memorable people in a series of surprising events. Eva, who is 4 years younger than Iris, is the principal narrator, but other characters also have their say, sometimes in the form of letters. Each chapter is given the title of a jazz song "as the author's gift to the reader".

Alain de Botton - *The Course of Love*

E17-03, 2016, 240 p.  

The long-awaited follow-on from Alain de Botton's first novel "On Love" finds the Lebanese-German Rabih Khan grown into a young man of thirty-one. In his capacity as an architect, he meets a client Kirsten McClelland and they fall deeply in love. What follows is a captivating description of the relationship over a period of thirteen years where marriage and the birth of a son and daughter set the back-drop for an in-depth examination of the emotions and behaviours that draw the couple together and nearly drive them apart. Ideals are put to the test by the pressures of an average existence with humdrum routines.

Geraldine Brooks - *Caleb's Crossing*

E17-04, 2011, 311 p. 

In this novel the author takes her readers to a fledgling community of English Puritan settlers on America's North East coast in the 1660s. What features is that these early settlers seek peaceful cohabitation with the local tribes. Main character Bethia Mayfield's future is determined by the orthodox views of her father, brother and grandfather. But she possesses a free roaming mind and finds a kindred spirit in Caleb,

son of the chieftain of the local Wampanoag. They are brave openhearted characters in search of knowledge at a time of superstition and ignorance. What follows is Bethia's struggle to maintain a position between the strict rules of Puritan society and the ways of the native Americans. Her endeavours culminate in two Wampanoag students being allowed to enter Harvard University.

J.L. Carr - *A Month in the Country*

E15-03, 1980, 111 p. 

Tom Birkin, a war veteran, looks back on a summer spent in a small village just after the First World War. In summer 1920 he had arrived by train in rainy Oxgodby, a village in the quiet northern English countryside. Although his initial encounter with some villagers was somewhat stand-offish, this quickly changed for the better. His reason for travelling to the village was to uncover and restore a huge medieval wall painting hidden beneath whitewash on the wall of the village church.

Tom was still visibly shaken by his wartime experiences and the painful break-up of his marriage. While in Oxgodby he befriended another veteran, Charles Moon, who was searching for a lost grave. Their shared past helped them to come to terms with the horrors of war, while the hospitality and warmth shown to Tom by some of the villagers left their mark on the rest of his life.

Emma Cline - *The Girls*

E17-06, 2016, 355 p. 

Evie Boyd is a typical fourteen-year-old girl: she is insecure about her looks, does not know how to behave around boys and is embarrassed by her mother's behaviour after her parents' divorce. One day she meets Suzanne, who is a few years older and lives on a ranch in a kind of commune led by the charismatic Russell. Evie finally feels she has found a place where she belongs and where she is accepted for what she is. As she is drawn in, however, Evie starts to lose touch with the real world and does things she had never previously dreamt of doing.

Anthony Doerr - *All the Light We Cannot See*

E16-03, 2014, 530 p. 

This novel tells the story of Marie-Laure (French) and Werner (German), both of whom are stuck in a war that is not theirs. When the Second World War breaks out, the blind Marie-Laure and her father flee to the coastal city of St Malo, carrying a big and dangerous secret with them. Meanwhile, the orphaned Werner has an important choice to make as the only way for him to attain a better life than his parents is to join the German army. Both children are forced to grow up in a world that is being devastated and where all they are trying to do is survive.

Margaret Drabble - *The Dark Flood Rises*

E17-07, 2016, 326 p. 

Margaret Drabble invites us in this novel to look through her eyes at how sad, how funny and how absurd aging is. The main character Francesca Stubbs in her seventies, still active, racing around England writing reports on sheltered housing for the elderly and caring for her dying ex-husband has recently become somewhat obsessed with mortality. The novel follows Fran, her family and friends over a period of two months, jumping from character to character and from England to the Canary Islands. Each characters' story adds to a beautifully written contemplation on what it is like to grow old.

Aminatta Forna - *Happiness*

E19-02, 2018, 320 p. 

Distracted by a fox, two pedestrians collide on Waterloo Bridge. These are the main characters in Forna's latest novel: Attila, a Ghanaian psychiatrist specialising in trauma, and Jean, an American wildlife biologist studying the habits of urban foxes. Attila is in London to deliver a keynote speech and to contact his immigrant niece, who has not called home for a while. Eventually it turns out that Tano, his niece's young son, is missing. When Attila and Jean meet again by chance, she uses her network of volunteer

fox spotters to help with the search. As the quest continues, an unusual friendship between Attila and Jean develops.

Esther Freud - *Mr Mac and Me*

E18-04, 2014, 296 p. 

In this novel Esther Freud paints a vivid portrait of a coastal village in Suffolk during the First World War, but also of an artist, the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh. The story, seen through the eyes of young Thomas Maggs, the son of the local tavern keeper, tells us about the unlikely friendship between Thomas and Mackintosh, or Mac, a stranger to the Suffolk region. Just as their friendship begins to blossom, war with Germany is declared. All the summer guests flee the village and are replaced by soldiers on their way to war. As the townspeople increasingly feel the brutality of war, they become more and more suspicious of Mac and his eccentric behaviour.

Jane Gardam - *Old Filth*

E18-06, 2006, 289 p.  

Sir Edward Feathers, also called Old Filth (FILTH is an acronym for "Failed in London, Try Hong Kong) finds himself bereft of his beloved Betty in a beautiful house in Dorset at the age of 82. His next door neighbour is a widower as well and a former colleague. There was no love lost between them. But compelled by need they get in touch again and this seems the beginning of an 'opening of shutters on the past that he (Edward) had kept clamped down.' He was a Raj orphan brought up by foster parents in Wales. This period in particular left scars on his soul and had a huge impact on the rest of his life.

Sara Hall - *The Wolf Border*

E16-05, 2015, 432 p.  

Rachel Caine, the fiercely independent main character, has been working as a wolf expert in Idaho, USA, for ten years, when she is offered a highly prestigious job on the estate of the immensely rich Earl of Annerdale. The latter wants to reintroduce the wolf on his vast estate in Cumbria, in the North of England, where Rachel was

born. After first rejecting his offer, she accepts when she finds out she is pregnant. As the wolf project gets under way, she re-establishes contact with her brother, comes to terms with her troubled childhood and finds herself capable of forging ties with the people around her.

Lisa Halliday - *Asymmetry*

E19-03, 2018, 277 p.  

In part one of this debut novel, junior editor Alice has an affair with Ezra Blazer, a famous, much older author. Their romance takes place in New York in the early years of the Iraq War. Part two abruptly switches setting and moves to the Immigration Office at Heathrow on the last day of 2008. Doctorate student Amar, an Iraqi-American, is detained on his way to see his brother in Kurdistan. He tells about growing up in the US in an immigrant family and wrestles with questions of memory and identity. The third part of the novel contains the transcript of a short radio interview with Ezra Blazer talking about his musical preferences. Although the three parts seem at first sight to be unconnected, they are tied together in a very subtle way.

Moshin Hamid - *Exit West*

E18-07, 2017, 240 p. 

This is a novel about refugees and migration. The protagonists of the book, Nadia and Saeed, become lovers. They are living in a besieged, unnamed city. The horrors of the civil war are described vividly. As the situation deteriorates and becomes unbearable, they are forced to flee through 'magical doors', which transport individuals from one country to another. First they reach a refugee camp on the island of Mykonos. Then they move to London in an upscale mansion that has been taken over by other refugees. Finally they live in a shanty town in Marin, California. They are migrants among many other migrants, all trying to build a new life in those different places.

Gail Honeyman - *Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine*

E18-08, 2017, 327 p. 

Eleanor Oliphant's life is built around routine and she does not live up to social expectations. She works as a finance clerk and keeps mostly to herself. When she coincidentally gets involved with Raymond, an IT guy at the office, she gradually discovers friendship and compassion.

The book is divided into three parts: Good Days, Bad Days and Better Days. The first part depicts Eleanor's weekly routine, providing an overview of who she is. Later on, it is revealed how things from the past have shaped her.

Kazuo Ishiguro - *Never Let Me Go*

E18-09, 2006, 276 p.  

Never Let Me Go is the story of Kathy and Tommy and Ruth, and of the love-triangle they begin at the seemingly idyllic Hailsham School. Ruth is the controlling one, Tommy is the one who used to find it hard to keep his temper, and Kathy is a carer by nature as well as profession. They have heard that love - or art, or both - will get you a deferral.

Kathy, now 31, is the narrator of the story, in which she tries to come to terms with her childhood, and with the fate that has always awaited her and her closest friends.

Ishiguro, winner of the Nobel prize in literature 2017, was praised by the Swedish Academy for novels which were driven by 'great emotional force'.

Lindsey Lee Johnson - *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth*

E18-10, 2017, 268 p. 

In *The Most Dangerous Place on Earth* we get to know a group of high school students in Mill Valley, California. Their rich parents are so wrapped up in their own lives that they haven't got a clue what their children are up to. Abigail has an affair with one of her teachers. Dave knows his parents want him to go to Berkeley, but also realises he won't be able to achieve the necessary SAT score on his own. Nick is good at making money, whether he is selling

lunches, papers on the internet or pills. Although everyone admires the beautiful Elisabeth, she doesn't have any real friends. And then there's Molly Nicoll, who recently graduated and has become their new English teacher, and really wants to connect with her students.

Rachel Kushner - *The Mars Room*

E19-04, 2018, 338 p. 

The Mars Room is the strip club where Romy Hall used to work as a lap dancer. She is now in Stanville Women's Correctional Facility in California, serving two consecutive life sentences plus six years. Her seven-year-old son Jackson is staying with her mother. The events leading up to her incarceration are described in a series of flashbacks. Through Romy's eyes the reader learns about the rules of life inside and gets to know a wide range of characters: Conan, a woman who looks and behaves like a man; Betty LaFrance, who is on death row; Button Sanchez, who gives birth in prison; Doc, a dirty cop, and Gordon Hauser, who is hired to teach the prisoners literature.

Jhumpa Lahiri - *The Namesake*

E12-04, 2004, 304 p.  

This novel, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, tells the story of an Indian couple that left India to start a new life in America. Their children, born in America, grow up in between the Indian culture of their parents and the American society they live in. While their parents feel closely connected to the family and culture they left behind in India, their children do not feel part of this world. The oldest son is named after his father favourite Russian author Gogol. Not feeling any connection to this name, that is neither American nor Indian, he changes his name when he turns eighteen.

Harper Lee - *To Kill a Mockingbird/Go Set a Watchman*

E16-07, 1960/2015, 324/278 p. 

Lee's debut novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) is the story of Scout. Through her eyes we watch how things come to a climax in the climate of racism and prejudice that had been simmering for a long time in the 'tired old town' of Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930s. The events of that summer, in which her father, Atticus Finch, plays a significant role as the lawyer of the young black man accused of raping a white girl, eventually lead to the battering and injuring of her brother Jem and teach Scout much about life and the true nature of some of the inhabitants of Maycomb.

In 2015 the sequel to this still intriguing and surprisingly contemporary book was published. '*Go Set a Watchman*' continues the story 20 years after Scout left Maycomb. Again it is a time of political and racial tension, which seems to be of all times.

Penelope Lively - *Moon Tiger*

E19-05, 1987, 208 p. 

Claudia Hampton, historian and author, lies in a hospital bed, recalling a life full of adventure and relationships, while making a last attempt at writing a world history as seen through her eyes and connected to events that have happened in her life. Focusing especially on the Second World War, when she was stationed in Egypt as a newspaper correspondent, she tells the story of the tragic romance that has influenced her life ever since.

Bernard MacLaverty - *Midwinter Break*

E18-11, 2017, 243 p. 

Gerry and Stella, a retired Irish couple in their late sixties, set out for a holiday weekend in Amsterdam. They have an adult son living in Canada and one grandchild. The Troubles in Ireland were the reason they moved to Glasgow. Gerry used to be an architect and Stella was a school teacher. Initially we meet a couple whose relationship seems safe, easy and familiar. Soon though the reader learns about their secret thoughts and behaviour; about their traumatic experience of a bomb attack in Belfast and the impact it

has had on their lives up to the present day. Gerry makes fun of her being a devout catholic. Stella knows that he drinks too much whisky. The couple are experts in avoiding talking about subjects that really bother them until it is bound to explode.

Ian McEwan - *The Children Act*

E15-10, 2014, 242 p. 

Fiona Maye, a respected High Court judge in the Family Division, is 59 and has no children of her own. To her surprise, her husband Jack expresses discontent with their sex life and decides to have an affair. While her private life is in crisis, Fiona has to make daily decisions on other people's lives in her work, sometimes even on questions of life or death. One of these cases involves a 17-year-old Jehovah's Witness with leukaemia. He and his parents are refusing treatment because of their religious beliefs. That case and the judge's ruling on it make for very gripping reading.

Ian McEwan - *Nutshell*

E17-08, 2016, 197 p. 

A wonderful tale from an extraordinary author. Trudy betrays her husband John, publisher of poems, with his brother, Claude, a grasping property developer. The two of them plan to get rid of John, but there is a witness. The entire story is told from the point of view of this witness, an almost fully grown foetus. And this is no ordinary foetus as he has been listening to podcasts and already knows a great deal about the world he has not yet entered. Can the tiny narrator prevent this murder or find a way to avenge his father's death?

David Mitchell - *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*

E13-06, 2010, 470 p.   

This historical novel is almost entirely set at the Dutch trading post Dejima, Japan's only small window with a view on the outside world, in the late 18th century. A young Dutchman, Jacob de Zoet, wants to make his fortune there and takes up the job of a clerk. While his fellow Dutchmen give him the cold shoulder, he becomes friends with a local interpreter and the Dutch doctor, Marinus, who teaches medicine to a few students. Jacob falls hopelessly in love with midwife Orito Aibagawa. When her father dies, Orito is secluded in a remote temple, where women are kept for dubious purposes. The story takes another turn, when Dejima is threatened by a British warship. In the last part of the book the reader finds a wiser Jacob de Zoet, who has learnt to deal with corruption and betrayal, the hard way.

Alice Munro - *Dear Life*

E14-09, 2012, 319 p.   

A collection of fourteen short stories by Alice Munro, the winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature. The majority of her stories are set in small Canadian towns in Munro's home territory of South Ontario, a Protestant region. She focuses on one moment in a person's life that is altered for ever by a chance encounter, an action not taken or a simple twist of fate.

The last four stories are, in Munro's words, "autobiographical in feeling, though not, sometimes, entirely so in fact". All these timeless stories are breathtaking and make you go back time and time again to discover their magic.

Celeste Ng - *Little Fires Everywhere*

E19-06, 2017, 338 p.   

Shaker Heights is a model town with beautiful houses, wide lawns shorn to perfection and inhabited by perfect families. The perfect family featuring the story are the Richardsons, father and mother with successful careers and 4 teenage children getting fantastic

grades in High School. Only Izzy, the youngest, is rather out of tune with the rest of the family.

The appearance on this idyllic scene of a shabby looking family means quite a change in the orderly lives of the Richardsons. Mia is an artist/photographer. She has decided it is time for her and her 15-year old daughter Pearl to settle somewhere after their hitherto itinerant lives and hopes to achieve this by renting a cheap "half a house" from Mrs Richardson. Lots of unexpected developments occur. In the end we find the Richardsons on their now not so perfect lawn, watching the fire brigade trying to extinguish the last flames of their burnt down house.

Edna O'Brien - *The Little Red Chairs*

E17-09, 2016, 299 p.   

This story is set in an Irish village, where one day a mysterious foreigner walks into town and opens an alternative healing clinic. He manipulates the local women by providing hot stone massages and poetry. The beautiful Fidelma, who is unhappy about being childless, falls under his spell and becomes pregnant. When his true identity as a Balkan war criminal is revealed, shocking and harrowing events follow. To come to terms with the past Fidelma moves to London, where she lives among the homeless and hears stories told by refugees and victims of horrors. After attending the war criminal's trial in The Hague, Fidelma finds a way to give her life a new direction.

Michael Ondaatje - *Warlight*

E19-07, 2018, 304 p.   

In 1945, fourteen-year-old Nathaniel and his older sister Rachel are unexpectedly abandoned by their parents, who are moving from London to Singapore for a year. Nathaniel and Rachel are left in the care of two strangers, an enigmatic figure called the Moth, and Pimlico Darter, a former boxer and dog-racing fixer. Shortly after their parents leave, the children find out that their mother has left her trunk of clothes in the basement. So something mysterious must have happened.

The novel, set in post-Second World War London, is Nathaniel's

reconstruction of what happened in the past and also a quest to find his parents. It contains a number of layers, including Nathaniel's coming of age and the work of the secret services after the end of the war.

Ambrose Parry - *The Way of all Flesh*

E19-08, 2018, 416 p. 

A historical crime novel set in 19th-century Victorian Edinburgh. The protagonist, Will Raven, is a medical student and an apprentice to the brilliant and renowned gynaecologist Dr Simpson. After several young women are found dead in the Old Town, all having suffered gruesome deaths, Will and Sara, a clever young housemaid he meets in Dr Simpson's house, try to solve the murders. The story also focuses on medical history and evolution in this pre-caesarean period, especially the newly discovered science of anaesthetics.

Sarah Perry - *The Essex Serpent*

E18-12, 2016, 418 p.  

Against the background of an ever growing interest in scientific approach to discoveries, which lead people to gradually understand what happened to the planet during all the eras preceding ours, 19th century England still harbours rural communities in which superstitious beliefs in ghosts, ogres and monsters remain close to the surface. This is the world in which newly widowed Cora Seagrave and devout reverend William Ransome find themselves to be contestants about the persistent tale of a monster lurking in the Blackwater estuary of Essex. She wants to find the truth. He wants to protect his parishioners from pagan rites.

Sally Rooney - *Normal People*

E19-09, 2018, 266 p. 

This novel follows the lives of Marianne and Connell, who grow up in a small town in Ireland. Marianne lives with her mother and brother in a large mansion, where Connell's single mother works as a cleaner. Marianne is a social outcast, while Connell is popular at school. They begin a secret relationship that stops during their final

year at high school when Connell treats her badly. A year later, they are both studying at Trinity College in Dublin and now it is the other way around: Marianne feels comfortable at university, and Connell doesn't seem to fit in. Over the following years, they repeatedly find themselves drawn to each other, on and off.

Nicholas Searle - *The Good Liar*

E17-10, 2016, 360 p. 

Roy Courtney is in his eighties and cons people for a living. For his final grand scam he has his eye on Betty, a wealthy widow whom he met through an online dating site. Flashbacks show us the stunts Roy has had to pull in the past in order to save his own skin, but this time things end very differently from what he – and the reader – expects. It turns out that Betty is not the dithering scatterbrain that she seems and that she has her own reasons for getting involved with this swindler.

Kamila Shamsie - *Home Fire*

E18-13, 2017, 260 p. 

The story is told by the five main characters, all of whom are from a British-Pakistani Muslim background. Isma who, after the death of their mother, took care of her younger twin siblings and is now finally able to pursue an academic career in Massachusetts; Aneeka, the beautiful younger sister, who stays behind in London; Parvaiz, Aneeka's twin brother, whose decision to follow in the footsteps of a father he has never known and join the Caliphate turns all their lives upside down; Eamonn, the son of the Home Secretary, who becomes involved with Aneeka, and Karamat Lone, Eamonn's father, who has a point to prove.

Graeme Simsion - *The Rosie Project*

E14-12, 2013, 327 p. 

Don Tillman, a professor in genetics, does not understand jokes and takes everything literally. He is also very organised. Aged 39, he has decided it is time to marry. Unfortunately Don is not very good at dating. He therefore designs a questionnaire consisting of sixteen double-sided pages to help him find the perfect wife. Rosie Jarman is clearly totally unsuitable, but while Don is waiting for someone who does fit the criteria of the Wife Project, he agrees to help Rosie find her biological father. As Don and Rosie use rather unconventional methods to collect DNA samples from the various candidates, they frequently end up in awkward, but extremely funny situations. At the end of the novel Don realises that decisions made instinctively are just as sound as those based on logic.

Ali Smith - *Girl Meets Boy*

E19-10, 2007, 161 p. 

This novella tells the story of two sisters, Anthea and Imogen, living in Inverness. Anthea dislikes her job at a local PR firm. Imogen ('Midge') is pursuing her ambitions at the same firm, which is trying to market bottled water. The story kicks off when a protester, known by the alias 'Iphis07', vandalises the firm's property. Anthea falls in love with the boyish girl Robin (the protester) and has to figure out what she wants from life. Imogen, on the other hand, learns about the dark side of global business. In this way, both sisters have to cope with big changes in their lives.

Elizabeth Strout - *Olive Kitteridge*

E16-11, 2008, 270 p. 

Olive Kitteridge, the Pulitzer prize-winning 'novel in stories' by Elizabeth Strout, describes a small coastal community in Maine. We read about a young man contemplating suicide, a girl who is dumped on her wedding day, an elderly couple who have stayed together despite the husband's infidelity and a girl who has to cope with the fact that her mother ran away to become an actress. All of these people know Olive Kitteridge, a retired maths teacher, who is

very outspoken in her opinions and who is the link running through the thirteen stories. Sometimes she is mentioned only briefly, but several stories centre on her and describe her rather complicated relationship with her only son and her life with her quiet and gentle husband.

Graham Swift - *Mothering Sunday*

E17-11, 2016, 177 p. 

The novella follows Jane Fairchild, a maidservant at Beechwood House, during one day in March 1924. The day was Mothering Sunday, when servants were traditionally given the day off to visit their mother. Jane, being an orphan, spends the morning with Paul, her secret lover, who is the sole remaining son and heir of the neighboring estate. After he leaves her for a lunch date with the girl he is to marry in two weeks' time, Jane wanders through the house trying to memorize everything. As the narrative moves back and forth from 1924 to the end of the century, going back and forth between tragedy and romance, we learn more about Jane's life and how this special day influenced the rest of her life.

Madeleine Thien - *Do Not Say We Have Nothing*

E17-12, 2016, 463 p.  

Madeleine Thien's epic novel spans seven decades and three generations. The story begins in the present day with Marie, a Chinese-Canadian mathematician trying to unravel the secrets around her father's suicide in 1989 and the unexplained arrival of a young woman from China and her subsequent disappearance. The story takes the reader back in time through the generations and traces the lives of families and friends forced by members of the communist regime to renounce their past lives and identities, endure hardship and deny their love for Western music and the arts. There is no trust and anybody can be a traitor, even friends and family members.

Rose Tremain - *The Gustav Sonata*

E18-14, 2016, 256 p. 

This book tells the story of Gustav and Anton. Gustav grows up in the small village of Matzlingen in Switzerland during the Second World War. Gustav's father died while his son was still very young. Anton meanwhile is from a wealthy Jewish family. Gustav and Anton become friends at kindergarten. Gustav protects Anton and is invited by the family to join them on trips. The boys differ in many ways. Although Anton is pushed by his mother to play the piano and his mother expects him to become a soloist, he will not be able to make a career as a pianist. Gustav grows up with his mother, who has to work hard for a living. He has questions about the death of his father, and about things that happened to his mother. For some time, Anton and Gustav lose sight of each other, but the loose ends ultimately come together.

Anne Tyler - *A Spool of Blue Thread*

E16-13, 2015, 358 p. 

This novel covers several generations of the Whitshank family. The mother Abby, a social worker, is at the heart of the story. She is married to Red, who works in construction. Red and Abby have two daughters and two sons. They are generally a happy family, although the older boy, Denny, never really seems to fit in. Now in her 70s, Abby is getting forgetful, while Red is going deaf, and there are concerns about whether they can continue to live independently. The family house in Baltimore is a character in itself. It was built by Red's father, Junior, for his wife, Linnie Mae. It is through the house that the reader learns about Abby's youth and the house's early days.

Willy Vlautin - *Don't Skip Out on Me*

E19-11, 2018, 304 p. 

Horace Hopper has lived and worked on a ranch in Nevada since he was a teenager. His parents don't care about him. Mr Reese, the ranch owner, wants Horace to take over the ranch as he and his wife are childless and Horace is good with horses and cattle.

Although they love Horace as if he were their own child, Horace dreams of a career as a boxer. His ambition is to become world champion to impress his parents. He therefore leaves the Reese family and meets a coach who trains him and organizes boxing matches. But then slowly but surely it becomes clear that Horace's dream is a delusion. Mr and Mrs Reese worry about him and try to keep in touch with him. Finally Mr Reese finds him and takes him home. But things are not what they seem. The novel is about the loneliness of Horace and how he comes back to Mr and Mrs Reese.

Brad Watson - *Miss Jane*

E19-12, 2016, 279 p. 

The story begins with the birth of Jane Chisolm in rural Mississippi in 1915. It is immediately clear that she has a rare genital deformity that will have an enormous impact on her entire life as it is doubtful whether she will ever be able to become a proper wife and mother. There is very little love left between her harsh mother, who is still grieving for the death of her favourite son, and her father, who drowns his sorrows in his home-brewed whiskey. Nevertheless, Jane is happy roaming the woods and the fields surrounding their farm. Fortunately she has a true friend and confidante in Dr Thompson who takes a personal and professional interest in her and admires her for the way she handles whatever life throws at her.

The selection list explained

The selection is compiled by the Senia's Department of English Literature. The members of the group are Cees van den Akker, Henny de Boer, Christa de Jager, Elise Kleuskens, Leo Stolk, Hans van der Weijden and Els de Wit. The readers' guides on this list are written by members of the group, volunteers and students studying English.

Availability

The selection list is determined at the beginning of the year in which reading groups make their choice for the next season, thus allowing enough time for the production of the readers' guides. It means that books published between February and August do not yet appear on the list but on next year's.

The books on the selection list are available at the time of presentation (March 2020). We cannot guarantee that the availability remains the same for next season.

Other selection lists

All the selection lists from the other working groups are to be found on the Senia website. In particular the selection list of Dutch and Translated Literature may be of interest to English Literature Groups as books from the English selection list may be found from time to time in Dutch translation.

The Senia Books Notice Board

We stimulate exchanging books through the notice board on the website www.senia.nl. If you have any questions or comments on the readers' guides, please send a mail to engels@senia.nl.

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