

M

magical thinking

usually refers to attributing physical efficacy to words. The belief that one can influence physical events by casting a spell is an example of magical thinking, likewise the belief that one can compel a demon to appear by offering the proper magickal incantation.

Magical thinking was standard in pre-Enlightenment Europe. Historian Ronald Hutton explains: “One of the most remarkable shifts in world history was that which occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the majority of Europe’s social, political, and intellectual elites moved from believing that humans could do damage by uncanny, non-physical means to believing they could not” [*The Triumph of the Moon* 132].

Examples of magical thinking abound in medieval literature: When Geoffrey Chaucer’s Pardoner reviles against the cursing done by his three miscreants in “The Pardoner’s Tale,” he is attributing those curses ‘by God’s bones’ with the power to rend and tear the bones and flesh of Jesus Christ. The curses, by the thought process of the time, bring actual physical pain to the deity. Natural events occur because one has offended one’s deity or is being offered a lesson by the deity (Margery Kemp’s beer will not ferment because she is being rebuked for her avarice and disobedience to God in the *Book of Margery Kemp*; the problems of mold or dead yeast are likewise, assumed the doing of the deity). At its extreme, the world works by the caprice of some deity and opposing demons rather than through logic; words and intentions are just as efficacious as physical causes as direct actions are. In the magical world, humans are fully at the mercy of unseen Powers.

malapropism

a misused word, normally in the context of a saying; the effect may be funny, ironic, or accurate in a different fashion from the original. The effect is named for a fictional character, Mrs. Malaprop, from Richard Sheridan’s Restoration comedy, “The Rivals.”

For example, “Each of us has our ox to grind” is a curious confounding of two folk sayings: “he has his axe to grind” (reference to an axe needing sharpening, meaning an already present grievance) is merged with “that depends on whose ox is gored” (referring to who may believe himself aggrieved by a situation). The end result suggests an outsized grievance, one whose resolution would produce far too much blood, gore, and hamburger.

The contemporary newspaper comic “Frank & Ernest” sometimes includes a version of Ernie as ‘Malaprop Man,’ a super-hero who chooses the wrong word at least once in every sentence he speaks, the result standing as a series of puns and wry allusions. Ernie recently (7/1/2012) announced his intention to compete in the “Twenty-six Mile Telethon.”

Marxist criticism (based or purportedly based on the philosophy of Karl Marx)

criticism based on a notion of economic determinism; the characters are what they are and develop as they must because great forces (primarily economic forces) set their place in the cosmos.

A reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* based on economic influences would bring out Ellison's imagery of the power of money, such as the image of the poor kids fighting over the electrified coins on the rug in the initial chapter; a Marxist reading would not only emphasize the initial influence of the money, but would suggest that the narrator does not and cannot escape from the economic forces that create that initial picture.

Such a reading would be incomplete, as Ellison, consciously an existentialist, appears to claim that his narrator does escape -- and emphasizes the cost of the escape. The initial "Battle Royal" chapter is open to the economic reading, with the narrator's view of his existentialist choice found only in the undercurrents but essential to understanding the book.

Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, however, can be accurately read in the framework of a Marxist critique. The characters are overwhelmed by circumstances, their destiny set by the machinery of the meat-packing industry. Further, the action is beyond the control of any individual. In the Marxist worldview, capitalism is evil because it is invariably based on the exploitation of the labor of the many by the few; the few do not choose to be evil, but inherit or earn their place in the social order and behave in keeping with their own best interests. As for the many, they have no choice: in the supposed 'free market' system, they may work or may starve.

By Marxist ideas, change, be it reform or revolution, will only come when the system can no longer bear the weight of its inequity. The system (and all economic systems) works by a dialectic logic: the *thesis* (the pervasive structural element of the age – feudalism, mercantilism, capitalism) generates unsustainable inequities termed the *antithesis* (starvation, mass revolts) which eventually breaks the old order, generating a new way, a *synthesis*. The synthesis becomes the thesis of the new age and the process repeats. The concept of dialectical logic was taken by Marx from German idealist philosopher G.F.W. Hegel.

mass man

from Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses*; the mass man is the one who fully accepts the values of the crowd, considers himself one of the crowd, and takes 'fitting in' as his highest value. From the date of publication (1930), it is evident that Ortega's mass man is the blind follower of any of the rising fascistic movements (Spanish Nationalism, Italian fascism, German Nazism, and less successful movements elsewhere in the West).

The Nazi emphasis on loyalty to 'the fatherland' and the Reich functioned to bring out the mob elements of their mass of followers. In Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust* (1939, written by an American Jew when Hitler was at the apex of his power in Germany), a Southern California mob ends the book by enacting a riot that appears very like protagonist Tod Hackett's "Burning of Los Angeles" painting, a painting depicting the victory of West's version of the mass man, those who had "come to California to die."

Later writers, such as Loren Eiseley, tie the mass man to Marxist societies, where the value of the individual is to be obliterated in the name of the value of the group. The China of Mao's Cultural Revolution reflects a fruition of the cult of conformity at least as complete as that displayed by fascist movements. The American political landscape reflects many moments of ascendancy of the 'mass man,' the emotional, easily manipulated voter who has become fixated on some personality or issue. The Andrew Jackson and (especially!) the William Henry Harrison presidential campaigns were early examples of the political use of the mob in America. Caricatures of English Parliamentary campaigns (see the political campaign in Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* as well as George Eliot's more serious focus on political manipulation in *Felix Holt, the Radical*) suggest that the British were well-versed in the arts of mob manipulation well before Americans learned the techniques. Political movements such as Know-Nothingism, the Free Silver movement, and the Greenback movement, as well as social movements like the Second Great Awakening with its apocalyptic focus, have found fertile soil in the American landscape. Robert Penn Warren's Willie Stark (*All the King's Men*) carried the mantle of Huey Long, mass manipulator from the 1930's. Ortega's mass man is also the self-satisfied man, perhaps the man who imagines himself the 'higher man' by virtue of some intrinsic characteristics. Ortega's anti-Nietzschian stance is that the 'higher man' can manifest himself only by constant striving and self-sacrifice; anyone who imagines himself worthy of privilege is precisely the wrong person to be allowed power, standing as a danger to civilization and its ends. Denny Crane, the powerful lawyer and social philistine of television's "Boston Legal," reduced to a buffoon in his advancing age, applies the worst elements of the "I've earned it" mentality to himself and to the country (America) he loves, extolling ignorance, sexism, and his own "good" name. Contemporary media reflects the ascendancy, and the manipulability, of the mass man, as the substantive political argument found in such eighteenth century documents as *The Federalist Papers* has been replaced by demagogic sound bites, images, and reporting that cannot differentiate between an election and a horse race. Both George Orwell's dystopic *1984* and Aldous Huxley's dystopic *Brave New World* have at their center the manipulation of the masses. Orwell's manipulative 'Big Brother' works rather crudely through fear and pain, reinforcing his message by overt lies. Huxley's Controllers work more subtly, manipulating society by offering shallow pleasure and rendering humans indifferent to truth, reality, or deeper concerns.

materialism (philosophical)

philosophical materialism is a doctrine that holds that only empirically discernible, physical objects or elements exist. Ideas (God, the gods, $E=MC^2$, Plato's 'perfect' triangle) exist only in so far as they describe or mis-describe the physical world. Reality is what can be physically discerned and nothing more. Versions of philosophical materialism range from the sophisticated explanations of reality offered by modern logical positivists to naïve realism of the sort demonstrated by Samuel Johnson when he claimed to refute Bishop Berkeley's concept of reality as idea by kicking a rock.

The structure of many existentialist and post-existentialist writings are based on philosophical materialism, including those of such absurdist writers as Samuel Beckett, whose *Malone* trilogy immerses the reader in ponderous, ugly triviality – since ‘value’ is not real, the trivial and the ugly are more real than ‘the good’ and ‘the beautiful.’ The existential despair of Jean Paul Sartre exists because no meaning can be found in a purely material world. The materialist underpinnings of George Orwell’s 1984 allow him to create a society where the destruction of words, words being mere descriptive elements, results in the destruction of concepts and ideas (which have no intrinsic reality).

metaphor

a thing, concept, or idea that represents another through some perceived similarity. The metaphor is the key to analytic thinking and may be held as central to literature. A piece of literature functions not by producing closed answers, like a science experiment, but by opening the reader to connections, possibilities, and the new. Literature challenges assumptions by offering new connections and new perspectives. Metaphors in their various forms produce those new connections. In the Nathaniel Hawthorne story, “Young Goodman Brown,” Faith, by her name, stands as a **symbol** for Goodman Brown's religious faith and also a metaphor for his faith in humanity. When, at the end, he “turns from her bosom” at midnight, the metaphor both suggests a turning from religious faith and suggests a husband rejecting his wife’s affection following the sex act, two different elements of Brown’s loss after his “journey to the woods.”

The fog scene which opens Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* suggests the fog of confusion under which the characters must act, suggests the poisonous atmosphere that emanates from Chancery, carries other metaphoric function, and gives us an honest and literal picture of nineteenth century London. In the same book, old Smallweed’s “Friend in the City” is his own **euphemism** (metaphor) for the devil to whom he has given his soul.

metaphysical poets

(not to be mistaken for students of the branch of philosophy) a grouping of seventeenth century poets notable for their rich and elaborate sense of metaphor and inclination to develop intellectually sophisticated themes.

John Donne’s “Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” may be the finest example of a metaphysical poem. Andrew Marvell, Thomas Crowley, and George Herbert are among those included in the grouping.

meter

the number of feet in a poetic line.

- A line of trimeter contains three metric feet.
- A line of tetrameter contains four metric feet.
- A line of pentameter contains five metric feet.
- A line of hexameter contains six metric feet.
- A line of octameter contains eight metric feet.

Yes, there are names for lines of one, two, seven, and presumably nine and more feet. Tetrameter and pentameter are probably the most common in English verse.

motif

a recognizable pattern of development in a literary composition; the motif can be seen as the expected pattern of development of a standard, common, or archetypal theme. It is the story without the individual elements that account for the literary richness of the particular piece. The archetypal hero's journey (Joseph Campbell) in the epic can be seen as a literary motif. The structural pattern of the clichéd love story (boy falls in love; boy loses girl; boy and girl are reconciled) is another one. Versions of the 'coming of age' story outside Campbell's epic structure carry their own pattern of conflict and realization, John Updike's "A&P" providing a clear, bare-bones example (action → consequences → realization and the pain of adult knowledge) as Sammy is left without a job, in a world that is going to be 'very hard' through, presumably, all the days to come.

myth

a narrative offered as an explanation or account of a religious or natural phenomena and incorporated into a group's belief system for that purpose; the myth normally includes supernatural elements or refers to the supernatural. The word 'divine' may be substituted for 'supernatural' in many applications of that definition. It is to be noted that use of the word 'myth' does not denote truth or falsehood, but does suggest that the explanation may be metaphoric and is outside the standards of empirical verification.

Folklorists offer a narrower definition than my literary one, defining myth as "a sacred narrative, originating in oral tradition, that focuses on the interaction of the human and divine worlds" (Betsy Bowden in *The Encyclopedia of Folklore and Literature*). In literary studies, a broader definition is necessary: the 'sacred narrative' may have taken the form of a written text and been reshaped by the writing (Milton's version of The Fall in *Paradise Lost*); the 'sacred' nature of the narrative may be uncertain, as in the comic Coyote tales; the explanatory aspects of the myth may be given particular attention in describing the 'interaction.' The word myth may refer to elements of the narratives ("According to Greek myth, lightning is the weapon of Zeus"); to the narratives ("Ovid's *Metamorphoses* includes the myth of the Minotaur"); or to elements of the pattern of beliefs ("the Greek mythic system included a large number of anthropomorphized gods and goddesses").

[Dictionaries prior to the mid-twentieth Century (for example the definition in the 2nd edition of the *O.E.D.*) often included the word 'false' in their definition of myth. This is a highly improper cultural-centric mode of definition, as the religious validity of a Christian biblical myth, a Hindu myth, or even a Norse myth is not subject to empirical proof or disproof. Contemporary dictionaries, such as the current *O.E.D.*, offer properly culturally neutral definitions of the term. Other definitions, referring to the popular use of the term, are irrelevant to literary, folkloric, or religious studies.]

Mythos (term from anthropology)

the structure, fabric, and content of a group's belief system, including basic assumptions and folk beliefs as well as formal dogma.

"Old Scratch" tales are part of the Christian mythos and owe more to the Medieval morality plays and *Faustian* legends than to Christian scripture, as

Satan receives few mentions in the Bible outside the book of Revelations. Most images of hell can be traced to the medieval Catholic mythos, and not to the official Christian sacred text. Significant elements of the modern Protestant mythos are more properly traced to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* than to scripture – the fall of Lucifer is not found in Biblical text and the snake is not specifically identified with Satan in the Genesis Garden of Eden account.

N

narrative (poem)

a piece that tells a story.

Robert Frost's "Mending Wall" is a narrative poem, in that it offers a story of the farmer interacting with his neighbor. *Beowulf* is a narrative poem, offering a three part quest. Allen Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California" is a narrative poem, offering an imaginative event that unfolds over time. Walt Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is not a narrative poem, as it offers no chronological progression of action.

narrator

the voice of a literary piece; the voice that is telling the story or offering the description.

Huck Finn is the narrator of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (first person narrator of novel written by Mark Twain). A **persona** of the author, Neil Gaiman, narrates *American Gods* (third person omniscient narration). Thus Gaiman can offer authorial commentary (his commentary on John Donne's "No man is an island ...") in the course of the text. Nineteenth century novelist George Eliot, using the third person omniscient, can address her audience with "dear reader ..." commentary.

Other narrators may be restrained by the work's **point of view**. The narrator of Edgar Allen Poe's "Ligeia" (first person) sees only with the protagonist's drug-ravaged eyes, just as the narrator of John Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums" (third person limited) is confined to the perspective of his Elisa Allen.

Contemporary writers often play fast-and-loose with narrative point-of-view, as Steinbeck's third-person omniscient *East of Eden* carries direct references to the narrator's family, implying the existence of a physical narrator whose vision is inherently limited, though his knowledge of the Trask family extends beyond what any mortal could know.

Naturalism

nineteenth and twentieth century school of writing that emphasized fealty to the natural order. Naturalism can be seen as one step beyond **Realism**, in that internal dialogue is dismissed in favor of description of action; coincidence is dismissed from plotting in the name of adherence to the workings of the 'real world,' and plot resolution follows the 'laws of nature.' Naturalist writers tended to see a nature 'red in tooth and claw,' as their writings emphasized social inequities and injustice and the brutishness of life as experienced by the poor.

In his Realistic novel *New Grub Street*, George Gissing has a fictional writer, Harold Biffin, create a perfect naturalistic novel. Biffin writes the life story of *Mr.*

Bailey, Grocer, a character to whom nothing noteworthy or important happens through the duration of the novel, thus producing the perfect picture of the ordinary life.

One may assume that Gissing's fictional author was insufficiently influenced by Social Darwinism, as actual Naturalist fiction tended to have quite a bit of action. Ugly, horrible things happen to the ordinary, the poor, and the socially exploited portion of humanity, and naturalistic writing was often intent on exposing life's horrors to the world. Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* provides an excellent example of naturalistic writing used to offer a social message. French writer Emile Zola's naturalistic fiction offered a scathing indictment of French working conditions. Theodore Dreiser's pictures of American slums (*Sister Carrie*) and Nelson Algren's Depression era fiction (*A Walk on the Wild Side*; *The Man with the Golden Arm*, *Somebody in Boots*) seem more concerned with accurate sociological description than moral indignation, but carry their full load of stomach-churning moral horror. Social reformer Jack London's writings work through images of 'nature red in tooth and claw,' with his heroic(?) *White Fang* a vicious, powerful animal.

Nature

Refers to either all the constituent parts of the world taken in sum, or to all things which are "not artificial," that is, not man-made.

Attempting to offer a definition of Nature or even explaining what one group of thinkers meant by the term is a very difficult task -- probably harder than offering a definition of Romanticism. Notions or concepts of Nature are likely to be varied and even contradictory. Use of the term rests on what the user believes is "natural," and there is more than a little tendency toward circular definitions of the term among even sophisticated thinkers.

One may begin with the definition "that which occurs 'naturally' or is 'naturally' found in the universe." The problem with this definition, as applied: "Is human life part of nature or excluded?" A twentieth century astronomer answered that question with a joking, "I've always imagined a couple little green whatever's circling Earth in their flying saucer, looking down at our cities and watching our satellites whiz by, and saying, 'Gee, what creatures! Isn't nature wonderful!'" By his definition we, our cities, our machines and inventions, and our society are all part of nature -- a perfectly natural part of the universe. Our visitors from planet Zorg would regard us as we regard a beehive, a delightful manifestation of the natural world.

However, the poets of the Romantic era tended to have a very different sense of Nature. Nature was a place where things followed their own course, unbent by effects of culture or society. The 'natural' man [using 'man' in the convention of the time, referring to both males and females] was a creature who had not been exposed to the artificial effects of culture and society, rather like William Wordsworth's "The Solitary Reaper." Thomas Hobbes, in the seventeenth century, had suggested that the 'natural' human life was brutish and short, and we had to have civilization to keep us from exterminating ourselves in a "war of all against all." John Locke, in the eighteenth century, suggested that we were not the evil creatures Hobbes thought we were, but were born neutral -- in fact blank -- in

terms of both morals and knowledge, and that our lives were shaped for both good and evil by our environment. Locke's obvious implication is that civilization can either enlighten us or enslave us.

Many of the Romantics would have accepted the separation of Nature from culture, and some would have reversed Hobbes's claim. The Romantic claim might be that "man is by nature good, and it is society that makes him evil." Rousseau's suggestion was such; nineteenth century American Henry David Thoreau suggested that if a man freed himself from the trappings of convention and the complications of society he might find the Truth that resides in his own heart and conscience. Wordsworth's poems (note both "Lines Composed Above Tintern Abbey" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality") suggest that the child is an innocent, capable of seeing deeply into the richness, beauty, and ultimate purpose of Nature, and that the child loses this innocence and this ability to appreciate Nature and life through the effects of negative experience. The beauty fades, living on in memory. One steps into nature in the attempt to remember that beauty and innocence (though not to again fully experience it; by Wordsworth's conception it is gone; innocence can only be recollected, not regained).

Regarding the second definition, the natural world, our visitors from Zorg (above) would declare us part of the natural world, as would our twentieth century scientist. However, most of the writers of the Romantic era would draw a sharp distinction between that which occurs 'naturally' and that which humans create or build. With some notable exceptions, earlier generations of Europeans were shy of the natural world. In nature, the structure humans depend on to survive was absent. Instead, nature offered great storms, carnivorous beasts, hunger, and even the Devil himself. The dominant desire was to subdue nature: to 'have dominion' by domesticating animals, plowing the earth, building shelters, storing food, and generally working to keep the forces of flood, disease, and famine at bay. The gardens at Versailles represent this desire for order, as the plants are arranged and pruned into close geometric patterns.

By the end of the eighteenth century, it seems, Nature began to look more inviting than man's cities. Urban squalor and unbreatheable air predated the Industrial Revolution; however, smoky mills and factories compounded urban ugliness. Plus, the human sense of freedom (Locke, etc.) was hardly enhanced by viewing rows of regimented shrubbery. That sense of freedom was enhanced by viewing Wild Nature, as frightening as it might be (Thomas Jefferson's "Natural Bridge" offers his admiration of the *sublime*).

The English garden, with winding paths and irregularly spaced plants offered a pseudo-natural alternative to the regimentation of Versailles. A trek through the English countryside, where generations of hunters, herdsmen, and farmers had driven off any dangerous beasts and had left winding paths through the woods and meadows, offered the opportunity to reconnect with Nature -- a gentler Nature than the wild woods of the American continent, and a gentler environment than the teeming, squalid cities. The Wordsworths and Coleridge were regular hikers. The contrast was apparent: in the cities, the armies, and the factories one found brutish, selfish and diseased humans; in rural England one found yeoman farmers, industrious and healthy. In the cities one found foul air, smoke, human waste, and

all manner of ugliness; in rural England one breathed fresh air and watched the reapers working serenely under the warm sun.

That picture, I believe, influenced the Romantic conception of Nature; I believe that picture does much to explain the perspective of poets from Wordsworth (or even Gray) on through William Morris and the Victorian Romantics.

near rhyme, eye rhyme, etc.

use of words that nearly rhyme, or words that have the same end spelling but different pronunciation, rather than exactly rhyming words as part of a rhyme scheme.

“Eye” does not rhyme with “symmetry” in William Blake's “The Tyger.” There is enough similarity in the word endings to provide the reader a sense of rhyme.

negative capability (phrase coined by John Keats)

the ability or willingness of an author to include scenes he or she may find repugnant or undesirable should the action of the piece demand it; ability to create flawed heroes or to allow bad things to happen to favored characters

Alice Walker demonstrates the limits of her own “negative capability” in *The Color Purple* as she twists fate to make certain her Celie arrives at happiness as the story winds down. Resolution, for all the characters in the novel, includes at least a measure of self-understanding and psychological peace. Ernest

Hemingway demonstrates high negative capability in his willingness to create his own distasteful alter ego in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” to set that alter ego to play in Hemingway’s real memories, and to leave that character, Harry, to meet his deserved fate (whatever that fate is).

Neo-classical literature

the dominant British literary style of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Neo-classical writing tended to be intellectually sophisticated, measured rather than emotional, and to work heavily with abstractions.

Topics of Neo-classical poems might include political allegories (John Dryden’s “The Hind and the Panther”), philosophical or critical expositions (Alexander Pope’s “Essay on Man” and “Essay on Criticism”) and other abstract themes. The conceit was a literary device heavily used in the period (Phillis Wheatley’s “On Imagination”). Pope also produced such satires and mock-heroic pieces as “The Rape of the Lock.”

New Critics

the generation of southern American critics highly influenced by T.S. Eliot, the New Critics included such writers as Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, and Alan Tate; their critical claim was that the literary value of a work should be studied in terms of its structural and technical elements.

Phrases such as “intentional fallacy” are part of the New Critical lexicon, as are categorizations of the types of irony.

nihilism

the belief in ‘nothing’: a doctrine of some fashion among students in nineteenth century Russia, it centered on the notions that God, purpose, and meaning did not exist. Life was a worthless thing, the occasion for despair or for ‘pure’ selfishness. Raskolnikov of Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* is under the influence of nihilism, as is the protagonist of Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons*. Raskolnikov tries

to demonstrate himself a ‘higher’ man, one who has overcome the crude superstitions of theism, by committing murder. He finds his villainous act as hollow of value as his empty life, then finds redemption in the form of traditional belief – the forgiveness offered by the Orthodox Russian Church and the bible given him by his girlfriend, the prostitute Sonya. The villainous Stavrogin and the frustrated Kirillov of Dostoyevsky’s *The Possessed* are likewise nihilists.

nostalgic

a piece which emphasizes the beauties (either real or imaginary) of the past; a piece which turns the past into myth or sentimentality.

Phillip Freneau's “Indian Burying Ground” contains nostalgic elements, as he points to idyllic qualities (some evidently the product of his own imagination) in the departed Indians' lifestyle. The “Little House on the Prairie” television show, based on Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House ...* books, offers a past world that was virtuous, loving, and meaningful -- more meaningful and more balanced than the contemporary world. The original books, while also nostalgic, were more genuine as they reflected a woman’s love for the family from which she had become estranged.

novel

The novel is a “new” form of writing, or so it was judged with the first books to bear that name. Prior to the advent of the novel, book length prose fiction pieces, called ‘romances,’ existed. Prose fiction works meeting the definition of the novel date from Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* in 1605; English language novels date from Defoe’s writing about a hundred years later:

- The standard definition is **a book-length (usually 30,000 words +) piece of prose fiction normally with either a continuous plot or a character or group of characters on whom the action is centered.**
- The **first recognized novel is Miguel De Cervantes’s *Don Quixote***, a Spanish picaresque novel centering on the adventures of an aging man who loses his sanity, decides to go forth as a knight, recruits a peasant (Sancho Panzo) as his squire, mounts his plow horse (with his squire astride a donkey), and goes forth to fight evil and further justice and mercy. Don Quixote attacks a herd of sheep, attempts to joust with a windmill he mistakes for a giant, and blunders through a series of similar adventures, all while the sensible but not-particularly-bright Sancho Panzo attempts to keep him from harm.
- Many early novels were, like Don Quixote, **picaresque novels** – that is they centered on the protagonist and had little or no central plot beyond depicting the protagonist’s bold (and sometimes disreputable) adventures.
- **Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)**, which did have a plot, being the story of a man marooned on a desert island and loosely based on the real experience of pirate Alexander Selkirk, is generally recognized as **the first English novel.**
- Other eighteenth century British novelists included **Tobias Smollett** (*Roderick Random*), a master of picaresque adventure; **Henry Fielding** (*Tom Jones*), a master of picaresque satire; Anne Radcliffe and Monk Lewis who wrote early gothic or horror novels; all before the Romantic

period's **Sir Walter Scott** wrote his more tightly plotted adventure novels like *Ivanhoe*).

- The British golden age of the novel would be the nineteenth century, the century of **Jane Austen** (*Sense and Sensibility*; *Pride and Prejudice*); Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*); **Charles Dickens** (*David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, etc.; in my estimation the greatest novelist of all time); **George Eliot** (real name Mary Ann Evans, writer of *Middlemarch*); and a host of others.
- The first half of the twentieth century could be deemed the American golden age, as it featured the flowering of **William Faulkner** (*Light in August*; the Snopes trilogy {*The Hamlet*, *The Town*, *The Mansion*}, *The Sound and the Fury*); **F. Scott Fitzgerald** (*The Great Gatsby*); **John Steinbeck** (*East of Eden*; *The Grapes of Wrath*); **Ernest Hemingway** (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*); and many others.
- The transition from the picaresque style to more tightly plotted works can be probably be measured from Austen (plotted 'drawing room' novels) and Scott (plotted adventures), though inclinations to not just center on, but title novels based on, the protagonist reflects the continuing picaresque influence in the novel.
- Contemporary literary novels often move away from attention to either plot or the continuing protagonist, as seen in the experimental "post-modernist" form of **Thomas Pynchon's** *Gravity's Rainbow*.
- Popular contemporary novels which follow a more traditional structure (including those we might label 'quality' works) tend to be **genre pieces**. **Stephen King's** mass market horror includes some quality writing; **J.R.R. Tolkien** is credited with beginning the fantasy genre with his (highly readable!) *Lord of the Rings* saga. **Dystopian fiction** is a genre particularly approached by serious twentieth century novelists, from Orwell and Huxley to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

O

occasional verse

poetry written to mark significant occasions (holidays, important events, important men's birthdays, etc.)

Several of Phillis Wheatley's occasional poems ("To His Excellency General Washington," "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield") are included in standard collections of her work. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a good deal of occasional verse. Major Neo-Classical poets, such as John Dryden, accepted the composition of occasional verse as part of a poet's craft. Many British Romantic poets (including such heirs to Romanticism as Victorian Robert Browning) looked upon the composition of occasional verse with disdain, as Browning wrote a poem ("To Our Lost Leader") expressing sorrow that William Wordsworth had

stooped so low as to accept the position of Poet Laureate of England with its implicit obligation to compose suitable verse on auspicious occasions.

ode

a variable stanzaic form; odes are often lyric or contemplative pieces, written “to” or “on” some object, rather than as narrative pieces.

Percy Shelley's “Ode to the West Wind” and John Keats's “Ode on a Grecian Urn” are two particularly delightful examples. Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” is a lyric piece, but hardly contemplative, as his words take on the style of a window-rattling windstorm. Keats offers measured serenity in “... Grecian Urn,” as his narrator raises the urn to a place in the Realm of Ideas.

onomatopoeia

use of words that sound like the thing they describe.

the “buzz” of a bee; the “tinkle” of a wind chime; the animal that speaks its name (“wolf”).

open form poetry

poetry which does not utilize traditional patterns (including prose poems).

Carolyn Forché’s “The General,” written in paragraph form, is termed a prose poem by its creator and by critics. Some visual poetry, such as e.e. cummings’s “[A leaf falls ...],” would be categorized as open form.

opinion

an individual belief or judgment, an opinion may or may not be based on evidence or logic; the value of an opinion may be judged based on the evidence or logic supporting it and sometimes the reputation or credentials of the speaker.

In my opinion, *Bleak House* is a great novel. In support of my opinion I can cite other critics, I can point to the book's structure, I can discuss original elements, I can point to memorable characters. I can also point to my credentials to offer such a judgment.

In my opinion, asparagus tastes much better than french fries. This is a matter of personal taste, and I can offer no corroborating evidence for my claim nor can I claim culinary expertise. While both statements reflect my opinions, the former has a significant measure of authoritative status while the latter is nothing more than a statement of my own likes and dislikes.

I can also offer opinions on items with which I have some familiarity but no expertise (“there exist many universes, both like and unlike our own”). While such opinions may or may not have real-world validity, they should not ever be mistaken for the judgment of an expert. Beware the self-declared expert! On the subject of evolution, for example, an opinion offered by Charles Darwin or Alfred Russell Wallace should carry great weight. One offered by Herbert Spencer, who had little experience as a collector and observer, would fit the third category and might as easily be drivel as science.

In my example, I am either acting as a reporter (some cosmologists hold this idea) or I am offering my unsubstantiated opinion, as I lack the knowledge to reach the conclusion myself. The validity of a reporter’s opinion is contingent on his/her ability to discern appropriate sources and utilize them honestly and appropriately. Thus Al Gore’s *Earth in the Balance* has high credibility among genuine experts in the field, not because of his expertise (very limited) but because the book is

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carefully based on the conclusions of working scientists. If he were to step outside that framework, the credibility would be sharply reduced. [*Earth in the Balance* was deemed 'objective' by a British court based on those criteria.]

oxymoron

a figure of speech employing paradoxical or contradictory elements

The 'blanket' of snow, implying warmth, in the early lines of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" offers elements of an oxymoron. The 'sweet poison' drunk by a tragic suicide reflects a more direct use of the form.