

S

sarcasm

“mean satire”; contempt expressed by deriding humor.

“expert --- anyone who can fool the rest of us into believing he actually knows something.”

That bit of sarcasm is my own coinage (though I doubt it is particularly original), with the style deliberately reflecting that of Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce. Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* offers a compendium of sarcastic definitions similar to the above. A young Englishman of my acquaintance described the American Bierce's *Dictionary* as “required reading for a young smart-aleck.” Sarcasm differs from satire in tone, as the speaker declares him/herself inherently superior to the ridiculed idea or the person offering the idea. The declaration that another's taste for Dickens, traditionally plotted novels, or biography is “middle-brow” is often a claim that the speaker is of “higher” intellect, and above such things. While some incisive writers (Twain) have wielded a sarcastic pen effectively, sarcasm is more generally found to be the favored linguistic device of either the pompous ass or the sophomoric fool.

satire

a form of humor that acts to deflate serious ideas by exaggerating (or even just pointing out) their absurd elements.

Flannery O'Connor's “A Good Man is Hard to Find” satirizes the post-WWII “family automobile excursion,” then a new and supposedly delightful family leisure activity. Centering on a ‘refined’ grandmother, the story features bratty kids who eat the ‘picnic lunch’ before 10:00 am, a visit to a 50's era ‘roadside attraction’ for a bad lunch and a worse social interaction, a misdirected attempt at sight-seeing, and a culminating encounter with a mad murderer. The image of the ‘head of the household,’ Bailey, wearing his ‘relaxed’ Hawaiian shirt even as he stares intently at the highway and clutches the steering wheel with both hands highlights the internal contradictions of this attempt at middle class pleasure-seeking.

In the eighteenth century, Henry Fielding launched his career in fiction by satirizing the “edifying” elements of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* with his *Shamela* and *Joseph Andrews*, as Fielding did not share the notion that ‘ex-rakes make the best husbands.’ Victorian poet Alfred Lord Tennyson's “The Higher Pantheism,” a somewhat muddled defense of traditional Christianity, prompted A.C. Swinburne's scathing “The Higher Pantheism in a Nutshell.” Lord Byron deflated the reviewers who dared criticize his own and John Keats's poetry with “English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,” a descent into ad hominem that was more effective than the barrage of name-calling that constituted the original reviews.

sentimental

literature which plays on human emotions; literature which is more interested in evoking emotional empathy than communicating either images or ideas.

Bret Harte's western tales ("The Luck of Roaring Camp"; "The Outcasts of Poker Flat") exemplify the genre. Charles Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which descends into deep pathos, is appropriately criticized for its sentimentality. Oscar Wilde said of its overblown emotionalism, "One would have to have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without dissolving into ... laughter." Stephen Foster's songs, which attempted to evoke sympathy for the 'old plantation' world of the antebellum South ("Sewanee River"; "Old Kentucky Home"), demonstrate the use of maudlin sentimentality to produce sympathy for foul ideas.

setting

where and when a piece of writing takes place as fully described in the piece of literature; a work as a whole may have a general or specific setting; each scene of a work would have a specific setting.

The setting of Allen Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra" is not just "San Francisco in 1956"; the setting is "a dumpsite near the banana docks on San Francisco Bay, along the railroad tracks and in the shade of a (junked?) locomotive, with the late afternoon sun red behind the 'ticky-tack' [my description from the Jean Ritchie song] houses on the hilltop of Daley City."

The setting for H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* is England in the early twentieth Century, with specific referents to the London area.

The setting of many of Thomas Hardy's novels and short stories is nineteenth century Wessex, a then-archaic term for that area of rural England, with his imaginary cities, towns and villages corresponding precisely to the real communities of the region (see **local color**). William Faulkner likewise created his own Mississippi Delta county, in appropriate geographical proximity to Memphis, Tennessee.

Seven Deadly Sins

this traditional classification of sins is still referred to today; it would have been familiar to all medieval and early modern readers; the classification dates from about the 6th. Century (*Encyclopædia Britannica* attributes the original list to St. Gregory the Great). Christopher Marlowe has Lucifer introduce each of the seven personified sins to Faustus in his *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, but we can find each taking a central role in one or another piece of literature.

- **Pride** (see *hubris*): "The Gods make proud those who they would destroy." From Creon (Sophocles's *Antigone*) to Ahab (Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*), pride is the sin of choice for the writer of tragedy.
- **Covetousness**: Covetousness or greed is the sin of Geoffrey Chaucer's Pardoner and likewise of the characters the Pardoner speaks of in "The Pardoner's Tale."
- **Lust**: Lust is, somehow, more often the fodder of farce than tragedy. In Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" we laugh at the unpleasant 'rewards' apportioned to all participants.
- **Envy**: It is envy that causes the wicked queen to cast her evil spell on Snow White. Envy likewise sparks 'Pap' Finn's hatred of learning, as he lashes out at all who dare to be 'better' than he.
- **Gluttony**: "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you will perish." If you eat and drink too much, you will perish all the sooner, just as two of the

central figures of “The Pardoner’s Tale” die from the effects of poisoned wine.

- **Anger (wrath):** In Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle,” Rip’s shrewish wife dies when she bursts a blood vessel while railing at a peddler. Wrathsome males, with their flailing swords, typically are hacked down before demonstrating much moral edification. Such is certainly the case with Tybalt, the Capulet slayer of Mercutio in Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet.”
- **Sloth:** Harry’s great sin in Ernest Hemingway’s “The Snows of Kilimanjaro” is sloth. Sloth is traditionally represented by the leopard; thus a frozen leopard lies near the mountain summit in Hemingway’s story.

short story

a work of prose fiction, usually under 6,000 words, which usually has some tight point of focus (plot, character, or setting).

Thomas Hardy’s “On the Western Circuit” is a tightly plotted story whose action takes place over an extended period of time; Katherine Ann Porter’s “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall” is unified in that the action takes place within the dying woman’s head over a very brief period of time; Ernest Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” places all the action in a single conversation.

simile

a statement of association between two items established by the use of ‘as’ or ‘like’:

Jam is *like* honey in that it is sweet. A mouse is *like* an elephant in that both are made up of cells, though one need not worry about being trampled to death by an enraged mouse. That dog is *as* big *as* a Shetland pony.

slave narrative

the term is loosely used to refer to any account of the life of a slave in the Antebellum South. By the loose definition, some two hundred such accounts, true or fictionalized, were written in the years prior to and after the Civil War. Close attention is given to such autobiographical accounts as Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

Douglass’s narrative follows the standard pattern, as he offers a chronological account of his childhood, his growing awareness of his status, incidents which enhanced his self-awareness, his coming to a resolution to escape, and failed and successful escape attempts. This first of Douglass’s three autobiographies was penned well before the Civil War and offered a strident abolitionist message. The narrative offers few details of his successful escape, as the escapee would, obviously, not wish to reveal details which could prove highly detrimental to others.

Social Darwinism

the belief that humans are perpetually engaged in an almost Hobbsian war-of-all-against-all, the results of which promote the ‘survival of the fittest’ and thereby the betterment of the species. The theory is a pseudo-scientific sociological concoction in which a misunderstood version of Darwin’s suggestion of “survival

of the fittest” is applied to individual human interaction. Its leading proponent was Herbert Spencer, to whom that misleading phrase “survival of the fittest” is ascribed. Social Darwinism is, as a scientific theory, invalid because 1) it attempts to apply a teleological concept to a scientific premise (that is, it imagines a notion of ‘purpose’ in nature; purpose as applied to nature is a metaphysical concept, not empirically demonstrable); 2) it confounds genetics with learned or social behavior; and 3) it is at odds with observed group behavior (family, herd, clan, community) and the consequences of group behavior; a Darwinist should note the importance of social cooperation and symbiotic relationships to both individual and group survival.

Spencer wrote in the latter half of the nineteenth century and his notions influenced the literature of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as influencing sociology and American public policy. Definite elements of Social Darwinism may be found in some of the naturalistic writing of the early twentieth century (Samuel Butler and such depressing minor British writers as Richard Jefferies, Hubert Crackanthorpe, and John Gray stand as examples). Adherents of the notion would claim that there were no remedies for human misery, and excuse their own contributions to human misery by pointing to ‘science.’ Contemporary economic notions extolling the virtues of greed are little other than a modern recasting of this self-destructive and scientifically erroneous principle.

social protest verse

the voice of rebellion; verse written overtly to call attention to some social inequity or social grievance.

Protest verse is generally considered a mid- to late-twentieth century genre, with Lorna Dee Cervantes' "To Virginia Chavez" a clear example. The folksongs of Woody Guthrie (“Plane Wreck at Los Gados”), Jean Ritchie, (“Little Boxes”) and the early Bob Dylan (“The Times, They Are a Changin’”) stand as popular versions. Lawrence Ferlinghetti’s “Assassination Raga,” written following Robert Kennedy’s murder, intertwines the elements of an elegy with an outpouring of indignation. Muriel Rukeyser’s series of poems on the building of the Gauley Bridge, West Virginia, tunnel in the 1930’s calls attention to a forgotten horror. That the genre is far older is demonstrated by Philip Freneau's "To Sir Toby," a vigorous attack on slavery written in the late eighteenth century. While the Romanticist aversion to didactic verse seems to have kept Shelley from overtly offering his politics, William Blake’s *Songs of Experience* question both society and the deity. In nineteenth century America, John Greenleaf Whittier wrote abolitionist poems of quite reasonable quality; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow made a few less-successful excursions into the genre. Wilfred Owen’s poems from the World War I trenches provide a vivid condemnation of the human habit of waging war. General anti-war poems easily range from Thomas Hardy’s “The Man He Killed” through W.H. Auden’s “The Shield of Achilles,” soundly predating the quantitative (but not qualitative) flowering of protest verse in the 1960s.

soliloquy

a passage or monologue of a stage play delivered directly to the audience but offered as though the character is addressing himself.

Hamlet's contemplation of suicide, "To be or not to be ..." is probably the most famous of all Shakespearean soliloquies as the character argues with himself over the efficacy of suicide.

solipsism

the philosophical notion that one is the only entity in the universe; the universe is one's own dream. Elements of egocentrism may be seen as tending toward this perspective, particularly in the paranoid personality.

J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield (*Catcher in the Rye*) suffers from something of this solipsistic egocentrism. It is quite apparent in Sylvia Plath's poetry, as she interprets her father's death as a deliberate act designed to torment her ("Daddy" and others). One may ask if all **confessional poetry** does not suggest a solipsistic element, as the narrator insists on the primacy of his/her own voice. The insistence is based, not on superior intellect or perception or uniqueness of perception, but as a claim of personal 'truth.' Why should, for example, Robert Lowell's 'personal truth' (as manifest in his poetically mediocre *Notebook* poems) be more interesting than that of a reality TV contestant? Why should either, in a piece lacking creative insight or structural sophistication, provoke actual interest? Conversely however, how can one not appreciate the rich imagery of Sylvia Plath's "Blackberrying" as she offers a deep portrait of her mental state? Earlier elements of hedonistic solipsism can be found in Edward FitzGerald's "Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam," with its assertion that the individual is the measure of all things including heaven and hell. FitzGerald's rendering of the words of Omar the Tentmaker are in keeping with some of the ideas of the English **Decadents** of the late nineteenth century.

sonnet

Sonnets are generally of two types: the Italian and the Elizabethan, sometimes referred to as English or Shakespearean. William Shakespeare was one of the later practitioners of the Elizabethan sonnet, with Sir Phillip Sydney as particularly prominent among earlier writers. The **Italian**, or **Petrarchan**, sonnet, named after Italian poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), may have been introduced into English poetry in the early 16th century by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542). Its fourteen lines break into an **octave** (or octet), which usually rhymes *abbaabba*, but which may sometimes be *abbacddc* or even (rarely) *abababab*; and a **sextet**, which may rhyme *cdecde* or *cdcdcd*, or any of the multiple variations possible using only two or three rhyme-sounds.

The development of the **Elizabethan** sonnet has been attributed to Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547). The Elizabethan consists of three **quatrains** and a **couplet** or an **octet**, a **quatrain**, and a **couplet**. The rhyme scheme, like many of Shakespeare's, might be *abab cdcd efef gg*. Other variations would be *abababab cdcd ee* or *abab baba cdcd ee* (we see both of these schemes in Sydney). Importantly, the 8/6 variation is replaced by an 8/4/2 or a 4/4/4/2. The final couplet normally provides a moment of action or 'twist' (resolution or irony) for the piece. This final couplet, lacking in the Italian sonnet, provides structure in

which a sharp content point may be offered. Tone or content shifts in the Italian sonnet are offered, instead, by shifts in the sextet. Shakespeare's sonnet series and Sir Phillip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* series include the best-known English sonnets. John Keats produced what are probably the best-known English-language Italian sonnets. Robert Lowell played with the 14 line form in his *Notebook*, producing unrhymed pieces consisting of two seven line stanzas. Edgar Allen Poe produced 15 line pieces he called sonnets. Sonnets, by tradition, are written or assembled in 'cycles,' or thematically linked sets. Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet cycle, *Astrophil and Stella*, indicates its theme by the title. A cycle in which each poem offers an episode of unrequited romance, the poems were written by Sidney for the entertainment of the real beloved he was unable to marry and her husband – friends who mutually acknowledged that Elizabethan marriage was about position and power, rather than romantic love. Shakespeare's cycle is subject to considerably more speculation, as he may have written the cycle by contract – the poems commercially conceived as a gift by a father to a son. Most involve the theme of aging, or at least of words to a beloved young person by a 'voice of experience.' Some suggest intimate love; some offer suggestions of passion or obsession. It is not known whether the order of the sonnets was that compiled by Shakespeare, by the owner of the cycle (identity not fully established) who had them printed, or the printer. Some critics have created a narrative of an elaborate triangulated love affair as framework for the cycle. Other critics are less certain, and more inclined to note that the cycle encompassed standard sonnet themes: Sonnet 18 ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day") plays with the permanency of the writer's verse, a theme dating at least from Samuel Daniel's *Delia* sonnets. The pervasive interest in the passing of time and the brevity of life is the stuff of poetry throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean era.

source, primary

an original document or the text of an original document; in history, a primary source would be a document (*The U.S. Constitution*) or a description as written or recounted by an eyewitness (the account of the Great Fire of London offered in *Samuel Pepys's Diary*). In literature a primary source would be the text of any play, poem, or piece of prose writing (William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is the primary source for a paper on *The Tempest*).

source, secondary

any explanation or description of a historical event, literary piece, or the like written from outside the perspective of a participant. Historical accounts, works of literary criticism, and analyses of events all constitute secondary materials. Historical accounts such as Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* are secondary sources in regard to the events that befell Rome (though Gibbon's book can be studied in the field of literature as a piece of primary material, that is, as a work of literature); J.R.R. Tolkien's article on *Beowulf* is a secondary source, that is, it exists as a work of criticism which can be used to augment the reader's understanding of *Beowulf*. Any critical materials used in the production of a literature paper are secondary materials.

spectral evidence

a person's claim that another person appeared in the form of a spectre (spirit, ghost or demon) or an animal (familiar) and inflicted physical harm or a curse on the aggrieved person. Cotton Mather defined the concept's particular values and their importance in his *Memorable Providences, Relating to Witchcrafts and Possessions* (1689). Mather defended the use of spectral evidence in the Salem Witch Trials in his *Wonders of the Invisible World*. Mather insisted, as did the legal authorities of the day, that such testimony was always credible and true. Modern authorities would summarily dismiss such testimony as hearsay, refusing to dignify such claims as even unsubstantiated eyewitness testimony. As the Salem witch hysteria spilled over New England in the seventeenth century, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather's father, belatedly released a statement calling spectral evidence into question. Cotton Mather held to his beliefs in spectral evidence and in the propriety of the Witch Trials long after most thinking persons concluded the trials were a grave error and after Samuel Sewall offered his public apology for his role in the trials.

spondee

a poetic foot consisting of two heavy stresses.

sprung rhythm

a rhythm created by Gerard Manley Hopkins, it offers a natural flow created by the interjection of additional syllables into a poem's metered structure.

His "Pied Beauty" and "The Windhover" stand as examples.

stanza

a unit of lines in a poem, structurally corresponding to a paragraph in prose writing. In many types of verse, the stanzas follow preset structures.

statistic

a numerical or mathematical compilation of facts.

- "There are over 7 billion people in the world" - statistic compiled by counting (censuses).
- "Over thirty percent of Americans believe in the literal accuracy of the Biblical creation account" - statistic compiled from a survey.
- "Three out of five doctors smoke Winstons" - false statistic concocted by a 1950's era advertiser.

Statistics created by compiling or counting all instances are the most reliable, but an investigator still must carefully examine the criteria and procedures of the compiler. In a survey, a sample is measured as representative of the whole. A properly executed survey will produce accurate results, with the margin of error dependent on the sample size and procedures.

Statistics produced by scientific experiments gain their credibility from the procedures used in the experiments (controlled conditions; sufficient repetition, etc.).

The use of numbers without basis, as well as surveying, compiling, or experimenting using improper techniques, produces invalid statistics and is a tool of deception rather than knowledge. "Numbers don't lie, but liars concoct numbers."

stereotype

an image or figure that challenges no preconceptions, that appears as one of a 'type' or class rather than as an individual.

A favorite **stock character** in contemporary media is the big, rough mannered male with the 'heart of gold.' Bret Harte's "Outcasts of Poker Flat" includes a pair of stereotypical 'good-hearted' prostitutes. Sentimental literature and bad literature are the usual homes of stereotypical characters, though stock figures may appear on the periphery of any work, good or bad.

stock character

a minor figure in a literary work who fulfills a basic or requisite role rather than adding individual depth to the production.

The guards in the red shirts in the original *Star Trek* are stock figures and exist for no other reason than to give the antagonist someone not a series regular to kill.

The town barber (delightfully satirized by John Ford in "My Darling Clementine"), just like the bartender, plays a requisite role in traditional movie westerns. Snyder, the crooked detective, fills a stock role in the movie "The Sting," providing an essential function without himself changing or developing over the course of the film.

stream-of-consciousness

writing in which the flow of language duplicates the human thought process rather than reflecting the conscious selection process that normally marks our linguistic (speaking and writing) efforts; this is not to suggest that the writer simply writes whatever occurs to him/her, but rather that the writer works to create a mirror of the thought process or the working mind.

The term was coined in 1890 by William James, with the idea that "every definite image of the mind is seeped ... in the free water that surrounds it." Thus, the term indicates that our every thought is not just resting in a background, but is permeated by a background, and not necessarily a structured background or even a background composed of structured elements.

James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* is the most famous piece of stream-of-consciousness writing, offering a day's journey through Dublin from inside the heads of Leopold Bloom, Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus. The novel includes puns and made-up words, bounces from theme to theme, and includes curious interjections appearing amid unrelated content.

Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is believed to be a stream-of-unconsciousness piece, reflecting its narrator's night of dreams. If that is indeed the case (many critics think so; Joyce, to my knowledge, never directly said), then one might say that the novel attempts to reflect the bubbling cauldron of the background, unimpeded by the deliberate structure of the self-conscious mind.

Other works that flit about the mind often do so with rather different goals. John Ashbery's discursive poem, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," appears to reconstruct the conscious thinking or analytic process rather than the whole blooming, buzzing confusion that is the brain at work and is presumably reflected in true stream-of-consciousness writing. Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Assassination Raga" reflects the surface impulsiveness of rage rather than the deep elements of the fiery mourner's mind.

Arthur Miller incorporates stream-of-consciousness elements, but not stream-of-consciousness dialogue, into *The Death of a Salesman*, as the past, present, and fantasy all mingle in a drama taking place “Inside Willy’s Head” (the play’s original title).

sublime

The notion of the sublime involves the incorporation of two concepts that seem, at first, a very unlikely pairing -- **fear and beauty**. Studies of human psychology indicate that there is indeed something very alike about fear and beauty -- we respond to both by raising our level of attention; both can make our hearts beat faster, our eyes open wider, and our breathing rates increase. However, the one is normally considered a negative emotion while the other is a positive one.

That “however,” as one may be aware, is not quite accurate. Normal people crave danger and enjoy the feeling of fear, so long as the danger is controlled and fear remains below any level of real terror. People find taking on challenges exhilarating and enjoy the experience of stretching themselves to overcome obstacles. Thus people climb mountains. People also watch scary movies (experiencing mock or vicarious fright) and ride roller coasters (real fright, but with confidence in the ultimate safety of the ride). People do not lock themselves in cages with Komodo dragons nor do they venture into the wrong neighborhoods of large cities at two a.m. Uncontrolled and uncontrollable experiences are not exhilarating -- real terror is not fun.

To this notion of desirable fear we may add the Romantic's conception of beauty. Beauty is not in the precisely measured and calculated; beauty is in the natural, where measure and structure are coupled with randomness and spontaneity. There is beauty in the English garden and the meandering stream, both reflecting a tame and controlled sort of Nature.

Is there beauty also in the raging river? In the ocean at the height of a storm? In mountains where granite cliffs hang surrounded by thick woods? The Romantic says yes. Likewise, the Romantic acknowledges the sense of power and fearfulness invoked by these natural wonders. The sublime is the experience of “aweful splendour”; the sublime is the point where genuine (albeit controlled) fear and natural beauty meet.

While the fascination with the sublime is generally linked to Romanticism, it should be noted that Edmund Burke wrote on the sublime in the eighteenth century and Thomas Jefferson’s “Natural Bridge” (*Notes on Virginia*) makes strong reference to the sublime.

surrealism

while the term has specific reference in the visual arts, it can more generally be used to describe pieces of writing which possess a dreamlike quality and feature such deviations from reality as we associate with and expect to find in dreams. The dream with which Katherine Anne Porter opens "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" is very like a surrealist painting as well as a symbolic summary of the story. The geography of Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" is likewise surrealist and like nothing found in the waking world. Browning also sends the villain, Guido, to a surrealistically hellish land at the end of *The Ring*

and the Book, creating a modern desert of emotional and physical emptiness rather than invoking the medieval hell with its physical torments.

syllogism

a standard form employed in deductive logic:

bb is an A;
all A have attribute X;
therefore bb possesses attribute X.

If the premises are correct and the form is correct, the conclusion is always true.

The standard example:

“Socrates is a man;
All men are mortal;
Therefore Socrates is mortal.”

symbol

a thing which stands for something else, usually a concrete object or event representing a concept.

The trip to the woods in Hawthorne's “Young Goodman Brown” symbolizes temptation. Brown's wife, Faith, by her name, symbolizes his religious faith, but also is a metaphor for his faith in humanity. The United States flag is a symbol for the country, occupying a position similar to that of the monarch of Great Britain (who holds a symbolic, ceremonial office). Symbols are generally expected to have some level of obviousness (Faith=faitH) or universality (flag=country) beyond that necessary to establish metaphoric meanings.

synchronicity (from C. G. Jung)

an apparently meaningful connection of two events, outside any rationally determinable causal chain. Coincidences and events people regard as omens alike may be defined by synchronicity. If I hear an owl hoot by daylight, traditionally viewed as an omen of death, and a close relative's death immediately follows, that is synchronicity. Jung's favorite example, from his psychological practice, was listening to a patient speak of dreaming of a scarab beetle – then seeing one on his window while she was still speaking.

Synchronicity is often deliberately imposed in literature, as coincidental meetings and relationships bring order and metaphoric depth to what might otherwise be a ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ of reality. In Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, coincidental elements of Pip's relationship to Miss Haversham with acts of his unknown benefactor propel the plot, leading Pip on his path to ruin.

Authors often point to instances of synchronicity as inspiration for literary pieces, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's discovery of the old parcel containing the scarlet letter that inspired *The Scarlet Letter*, discussed in his “The Custom House.”

synonym

a word that has the same meaning as another word. While childhood studies of the language include, regularly, instruction in synonyms, it is important that a sophisticated user of the language understand that there are no exact synonyms. Each word differs from each other word, at least slightly, in connotation, tone, and even the physical effort of stating the term. Thus one ‘perambulating’ around the block appears to be engaging in a strange, formal exercise quite unlike the straight-forward effort of one ‘walking’ around the block.

Few acts of writing are quite as silly as the inappropriate substitution of one thesaurus 'synonym' for another. Many a young writer has embarrassed himself by substituting the simple word 'lad,' a term with very strong connotations such as its automatic association with A.E. Houseman's "A Shropshire Lad," for 'boy,' a straight-forward descriptive term with few necessary connotations.

T

teleological

possessing a purpose, as in an aim, end, or desired goal (Aristotle's fourth cause or final cause). A medieval Christian might say the purpose of the universe is "to glorify God." A student of Henri Bergson might declare life "the universe's attempt to understand itself." These claims give purpose or reason for being to, respectively, the universe and living things. Progressive theories of time carry an implicit teleological message, as life, knowledge, or society progresses toward some end, something that is more desirable than the present or past state. Pure science rejects teleological explanations (purpose is deemed either irrelevant or non-existent), as purpose is not an empirically determinable or measurable quality.

theory

a prediction or claim based on inductive reasoning. A theory can never absolutely be proven, because a) the future hasn't happened yet; and b) all possibilities in the universe haven't yet been considered (nor can they ever be). However, according to Karl Popper, a theory can be potentially falsified: a properly conceived theory is one which can potentially be experimentally disproved if it is indeed erroneous. A scientific theory normally refers to a claim based on completed experimentation and demonstrated valid. An untested claim or a claim for which there exists only limited or incomplete evidence is referred to as a **hypothesis**, rather than a theory. Common language often confounds the two terms.

Sir Isaac Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation theorizes that all bodies will be attracted to each other; on earth this theory holds that all objects will fall toward the center of the earth unless and until acted upon by another force or object (I've yet to see this one not work).

Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection includes the suggestion that evolution occurs through the random successes of organisms best suited to their environment. Darwin's claim is theory, based on the empirically determined evidence (facts) that organisms mutate and that organisms have evolved over time, coupled with the evidence that no non-random pattern in mutations has been scientifically observed (again, the theory is potentially falsifiable and never demonstrated false; the facts have been physically observed).

thesis

the central idea of a piece of writing; the single idea (one sentence to one very brief paragraph in length) that both fully and precisely encompasses the writer's central theme.

All good writing has a thesis, in that all writing has a purpose as a piece of communication. Students are taught to compose a working thesis early in the

process of writing an essay, and are taught that the thesis can be included, usually as a single sentence at the end of the introductory paragraph (**thesis statement**), in an essay. A piece of writing may include such an explicit thesis statement or may revolve around an implied thesis.

*As students learn to write by composing works using explicit thesis statements, the confusion of the thesis statement with a thesis is common. Therefore, it is more than important to be aware that: a professional piece of writing *always* has a thesis but *almost never* includes a three-part explicit thesis statement. A thesis is *not* a list of three items or a three-part statement. A thesis *is* a statement that fully encompasses the central idea of a piece of writing.*

John Donne's "No Man is an Island" meditation and Walt Whitman's poem "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" share the general thesis that each of us is spiritually as well as physically connected to every other person in the world. Their means of development, as well as the precise beliefs they offer, differ significantly, with Donne's specific thesis "humanity is a community of interdependent individuals" differing from Whitman's pantheistic "all humans are part of the Divine whole."

thesis statement

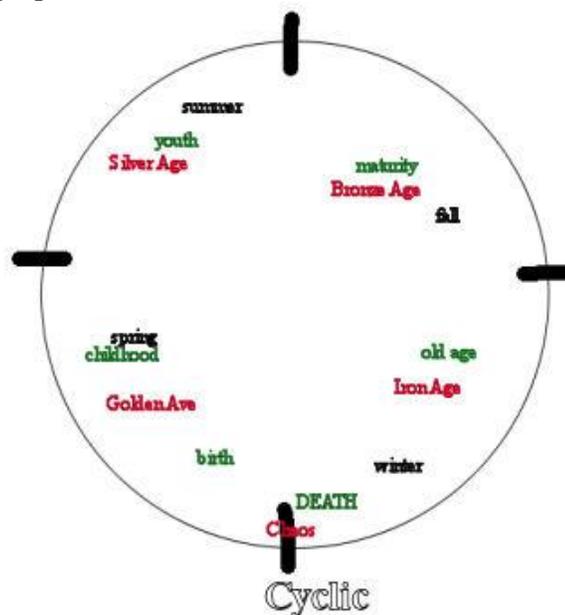
a sentence which explicitly and directly offers the central idea and purpose of a piece of writing. If a writer employs an explicit thesis statement, s/he is likely to place it at the end of the introductory paragraph, immediately preceding the body of the work. While all good writing has a thesis, not all good writing employs an explicit thesis statement.

time, views of

The concept of progress is not universal among humanity: the idea dates from the European Enlightenment (approximately 18th century forward). Goethe believed in Progress; Alexander Pope ("Essay on Man") assumed it was part of the Divine scheme. However, neither ancient Greeks nor medieval Christians believed in the great god Progress. For the Greeks, the earth was in decline; the medieval Christian likely believed time was merely plodding forward on an unchanging earth while the spiritually aware prepared themselves for heaven. The three views of time, speaking generally, are:

cyclic

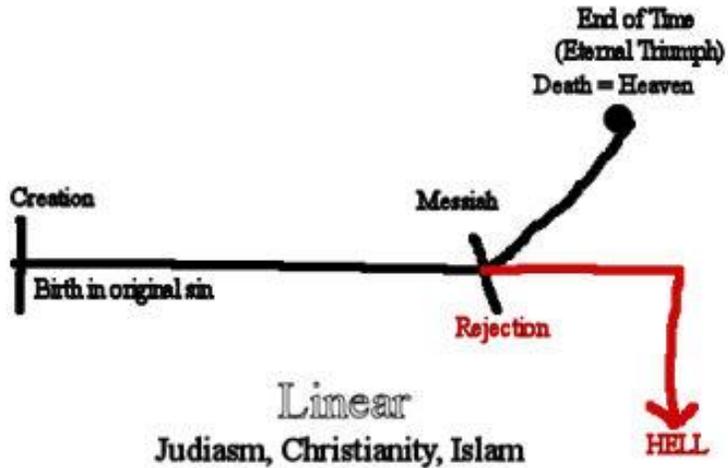
Most humans outside the influence of the three Middle Eastern monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) have cyclic or vaguely cyclic notions of the pattern of history. Just as spring brings growth to foliage, summer maturity, fall decline, and winter sleep or death; an animal's or a human's life has its springtime for growth, its summer for maturity, and



eventually its winter and its death. The village has its golden period and has its decline (as the fertility of new-plowed soil declines). The Greeks believed the earth followed a similar pattern, as the initial Golden Age declined through silver and bronze (the Age of Heroes) to the lowly Iron Age in which mortals lived their ugly lives. The Iron Age would be followed by a descent into Chaos, from which a new world, with a new Golden Age would emerge – and the cycle would repeat.

linear

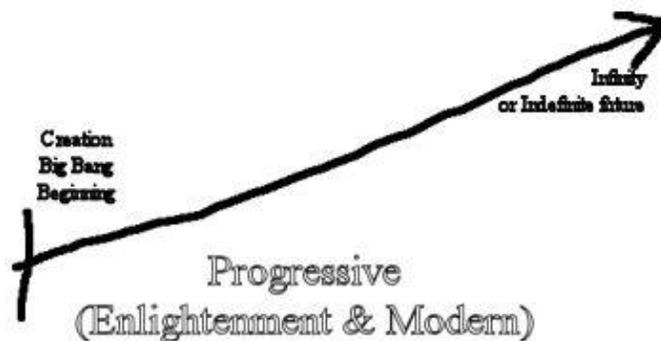
Christianity, a teleological religion, offers a linear view of history, as does the Judaism which provides its basis and the related Islamic religion. There is one beginning, creation of the world by a deity; one fall from grace and opportunity for redemption (the Garden of Eden story



and the appearance of the Messiah); and one end of this world with heaven to follow – heaven for the redeemed in Christianity and Islam and heaven as the Kingdom of God after the flawed earth has passed away. Meanwhile, history is a simple line of time. A medieval or early modern figure might likely assume that for whatever number of generations before all humans had simply lived like him or her, tending the same crops, facing the same seasons, living beneath the same kind of earthly government, and sharing the same spiritual concerns. However, one day in the future, all will change. That change, the only change to be expected, is the one produced by the arrival of the outside agent, the deity who will bring about the end of evil and create a perfect, timeless, Kingdom of God.

progressive

The belief in Progress begins, historically, with that linear sense of time. There is one beginning, and one line of time (think of such phrases as “the arrow of time”). However, the thinkers of the Enlightenment, perceiving themselves as growing in knowledge, understanding,



and abilities, conceived the notion that all people were – or at least were capable of – growing wiser, stronger, and better. The society in which they lived could be improved, and improved indefinitely. Government could be made more just. All

manner of inventions could be used to make life easier. People could learn new things, and use their knowledge to make life easier and more fulfilling. Condorcet was one of the great proponents of Progress, his theory of history suggesting the continuing and inevitable improvement of humankind.

tone

the general emotional atmosphere of a work; tone is potentially measurable through examination of the connotations of the words in a work, the effect of sounds, and the effects of sentence structures. Normally the reader perceives tone subconsciously and perhaps subjectively, thus influencing his/her reaction to the work.

The emotionally 'cool' tone of Emily Dickinson's "I could not stop for Death" is created by several instances of calculated irony. This tone leads the perceptive reader to question what at first appears a reference to heavenly bliss at the end of the poem. The chill and distant tone and imagery of Dickinson's "There's a certain slant of light" and Wallace Stevens's "The Snow Man" appear similar, though the conclusion of the former is near to despairing while the latter produces a Zen-like sense of reconciliation.

tragedy

Classical tragedy

- Began with choral celebrations as part of a feast dedicated to **Dionysus, God of Wine** [in later philosophy, particularly in Nietzsche, Dionysus is related to impulse, ecstasy and instinct; intoxicated and frenzied celebrations of Dionysus figure in some Euripides plays].
- The plays were developed in the context of a competition, as playwrights would submit three tragedies (one trilogy) and a satyr play (farce) for performance at the festival; the winning playwright's pieces would be performed.
- Plays were performed at large **amphitheaters** before all the citizens of the community; this indicates that audiences numbered several thousand, and were likely exclusively male (as females were not accorded such other citizenship rights as the vote or the right to attend the Olympics, it is unlikely they were allowed to attend the plays).
- The actors were all males, and wore **masks** to indicate their mood, their sex, and which character they were portraying (the same actor might have several roles in a piece).
- The playwrights we now consider most important were
 - **Aeschylus** (526-456 BCE) - seven surviving plays
 - **Sophocles** (ca.496-406 BCE) - seven surviving plays
 - **Euripides** (ca.484-406 BCE) - nineteen surviving plays.
- The action involved one **high character** (king or noble) who forgot his place and imagined himself greater than he was (*hubris*), challenging propriety and/or the will of the gods. He was then **destroyed by the consequences of his actions** or by the **intervention of the gods** (see *deus ex machina*).

Elizabethan Tragedy

- Plays were performed for **paying audiences** including both males and females and representatives of the full range of social and economic classes of England. The classes were separated by the type of seating they could afford, with the

- rabble standing, the better off sitting, and some well-off who desired to be 'in on the action' even accorded the privilege of sitting on the state.
- The **stage was elaborate**, with multiple levels allowing the actors to physically move from scene to scene. Theatres like The Globe would include balconies (evidently thought great for love scenes) and trapdoors (allowing ghosts and demons to ascend into the action).
 - The **actors were all male**, with adolescent boys generally taking the women's roles (perhaps accounting for the paucity of intimate love scenes in Elizabethan theatre).
 - Interesting conventions included the aside or soliloquy, in which the character speaks his thoughts directly to the audience.
 - The tragic convention of **one on high being brought low by pride or ambition** was followed, but not uniformly. Christopher Marlowe's Faustus is something of a social climber; William Shakespeare's Hamlet's tragic flaw may be indecision.
 - In Shakespeare's tragedies, the **noble and serious figures spoke blank verse**. Members of the lower classes were abundantly represented, as **clown scenes** were liberally included in tragedies, histories, romances, and comedies alike. The lower class figures spoke prose.

The Dramatic Unities (Eighteenth Century Criticism)

- Critics of the eighteenth century were very much taken by Aristotle's notions of criticism; they attempted to offer a number of "rules" for tragedy, rules which often had little relation to the actual effectiveness of a play. Those critics emphasized Aristotle's notion of *Catharsis*, that foul or violent emotions would be purged from the person viewing them on stage.
 - The critics emphasized the unities of time, place, and action, some thereby asserting that Shakespeare's tragedies were not dramatically effective(!!!).
 - The critics also asserted that comic scenes should not be a part of tragedy.
- Samuel Johnson, in his assessment of Shakespeare, offered a coherent refutation of these judgments.

Modern Tragedy (especially Arthur Miller)

We live in a time without kings and nobles. Despite our tendencies to fawn over various celebrities, we do not believe that any persons are intrinsically "higher" than others. We may watch a modern rise to the top and then fall, but the cycle is more nature ("what goes up must come down") than tragic (picture an eagle being brought to earth). So, is genuine Tragedy possible in a modern setting or from a modern viewpoint? Some would say no. We are all ordinary, and the ordinary cannot experience a tragic fall.

Arthur Miller answers the question differently in his *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman is not just ordinary, he is lowly. He is a salesman, not a high-prestige job, though he imagines (falsely) that it carries more status than manual labor. He is a rather marginal salesman, a habitual liar and something of a fraud. By both example

and tutelage, he offers his sons all the wrong values: appearance over substance; convenience over honesty; popularity over respect. He is, bluntly, a miserable person.

Can such a figure possibly be a tragic hero? In the play, **Miller says yes:**

- **Loman suffers hubris** (false pride) both in terms of his sincere belief in the greatness of his rather marginal occupation and in the self-deception by which he convinces himself that his own lies are the truth; he convinces himself that he used to be a great salesman. Thus we have a link to the Classical definition.
- **Miller identifies this tragic flaw different – Willy Loman fights to maintain his own sense of dignity.** According to Miller, the ‘tragic flaw’ need not be a flaw, but rather reflects the desire of the protagonist to retain his dignity in the face of fate, nature, or the injustice of the world.
- Regardless of any notions regarding "the great" and "the ordinary," Willy Loman is a human being. That there are no nobles and no "higher men" does not mean that no one has intrinsic worth. Indeed, it indicates the opposite. **Everyone has worth, even the lowest of men.** Even Willy Loman can discover failure, can learn that he has failed at life, and can fall. Such a fall is as tragic for Willy Loman as the parallel fall is for Oedipus, for King Lear, or for Dr. Faustus.

Other writers of modern tragic pieces, like Eugene O’Neill (*The Hairy Ape*), tended to connect tragedy to ambition, and to the attempt of a lower class person to reach beyond ‘his place’ in a world ruled by the rich.

tragic hero

Classical definition: a man of high station who, through pride (hubris) engages in battle with the gods; the tragic hero loses and is brought low. Being brought low may include the hero’s death; it always includes a moment of tragic realization and a final penalty that is beyond the anticipated consequences or endurance of the tragic hero. He will see that which he values most destroyed.

In the Greek conception, the tragic fall is destined. Oedipus is destined to kill his father and marry his mother in the Sophocles play *Oedipus Rex* and his best efforts do not allow him to avoid his destiny. In the modern conception, an impossible battle against society and reality may replace the Greek conception of destiny.

Oedipus, Creon (*Antigone*), and the protagonists of William Shakespeare’s tragedies all share at least some of the characteristics of the Classical tragic hero, as does Herman Melville’s Captain Ahab (*Moby Dick*). Arthur Miller’s Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman*) fits the modern conception. If the protagonist of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape* is indeed a tragic figure, it is in the modern sense.

Transcendentalists

A nineteenth century American religious and literary movement, likely the most influential American-grown literary movement of the century. The Transcendentalist movement grew out of a reaction to the Unitarian Church, with many of its leaders trained as clergy. Transcendentalists generally held a doctrine that knowledge could be gained by study, experience, and self-examination, with the resultant new ‘truth’ superior to the ‘truth’ available to those of an earlier time. The doctrines thus melded religious intuition with progressive science.

Henry David Thoreau is capable of sounding almost simultaneously mystical and empirical.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (essays “The American Scholar,” “Nature,” “Self-Reliance,” “The Harvard Divinity School Address”) was the movement’s most influential literary light and attracted a circle of friends to his Cambridge, Massachusetts home. Transcendentalist writers include Henry David Thoreau (*Walden; Civil Disobedience*) and Margaret Fuller (*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*). Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The Scarlet Letter; Mosses from an Old Manse*) was a fellow-traveler with the Transcendentalist circles. Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson reported themselves significantly influenced by Emerson’s words. Other Transcendentalist figures include clergyman and utopian visionary George Ripley, educator and utopian Bronson Alcott (father of Louisa May Alcott), a host of social reformers, and such minor literary figures as poet Ellery Channing the younger.

trickster

a figure, usually a minor deity or demi-god, whose interactions with the world appear to exhibit either a lack of moral judgment or a curious or convoluted sense of values. Freudians often link the trickster to the id, the spirit of unrestrained impulse. Freudian interpretations of the actions of Coyote, the Native American trickster deity, generally follow this line.

More sophisticated readers note how the trickster either

- produces good results through his seeming impulsive actions (the demi-god Prometheus brings fire to humankind through his theft from Zeus);
- serves a necessary function in the unfolding of the cosmos (Loki, in Norse mythology, creates the seasons by causing Baldur’s death);
- or teaches moral or practical lessons (Orr, in Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22*, is a sophisticated human trickster who offers Yosarian the key to survival).

Many modern writers use the trickster for the third function, as the trickster often appears in Bernard Malamud’s fiction as something of a flawed angel, working to allow the protagonist self-realization. Pinye Salzman, the matchmaker who allows Leo Finkle to develop self-knowledge in “The Magic Barrel” is an excellent example.

Tricksters hold integral roles in many of Shakespeare’s plays, the most obvious being the mischievous Puck in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, who, having had his fun, sets everything right at the end. Ariel, though under the control of Prospero in *The Tempest*, likewise is a trickster by nature, as are the elves, fairies, and assorted ‘little people’ and ‘otherlanders’ found in folklore, gothic tales, and even such contemporary novels as Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*.

Trinitarian

any of the many Christian denominations featuring a tri-part view of the single deity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). The New England Trinitarian / **Unitarian** split is of literary interest because the **Transcendentalists** were descendents of the Unitarians. Most contemporary Christian denominations are Trinitarian.

trochee

a poetic foot consisting of a heavy stress followed by a light stress.

truth, standards of

an individual's acceptance that an idea, concept, or claim is valid or 'true' will normally be based on one or more of the following standards:

- empirical evidence – evidence which can be examined by the senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, or taste);
- reasoning – the evidence offered by one's inductive, deductive, and other rational mental processes;
- authority – acceptance of the word of another (an expert or authority figure) as to truth;
- intuition – that which is 'felt'; that which a person claims to know or to perceive from senses outside the empirically accepted ones;
- innate knowledge – instinct, "hardwiring," and/or what previous centuries would have termed "divinely imbued ideas";
- divine revelation – the truth which the individual believes is communicated directly by his/her deity or deities.