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**A GUIDE TO
ENGLISH LITERARY
GENRES AND
LITERARY PERIODS**

for BA Students Majoring
in English language and
Literature

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A GUIDE TO ENGLISH LITERARY GENRES AND GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS

FOR BA STUDENTS MAJORING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND
LITERATURE

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This booklet is a guide to English literary genres and literary periods for BA students majoring in English language and literature. It is recommended for 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students.

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LITERARY GENRES

WHAT IS A GENRE? DEFINITION, EXAMPLES OF GENRES IN LITERATURE

Genre is the organization and classification of writing. What is genre is literature? What does genre mean? Genre is the organization of literature into categories based on the type of writing the piece exemplifies through its content, form, or style.

TYPES OF LITERARY GENRES

There are a few different types of genres in literature. Let us examine a few of them.

POETRY

Poetry is a major literary genre that can take many forms. Some common characteristics that poetry shares are that it is written in lines that have meter and rhythm. These lines are put together to form stanza in contrast to other writings that utilize sentences that are divided into paragraphs. Poetry often relies heavily on figurative language such as metaphors and similes in order to convey meanings and create images for the reader.

- *“Sonnet 18” is a poem by William Shakespeare that falls within this category of literature. It is a structured poem that consists of 14 lines that follow a meter (iambic pentameter) and a rhyme scheme that is consist with Shakespearean Sonnets.*

DRAMA

This literary genre is often also referred to as a play and is performed in front of an audience. Dramas are written through dialogue and include stage directions for the actors to follow.

- *“The Importance of Being Earnest” by Oscar Wilde would be considered a drama because it is written through dialogue in the form of a script that includes stage directions to aid the actors in the performance of the play.*

PROSE

Prose is a type of writing that is written through the use of sentences. These sentences are combined to form paragraphs. This type of writing is broad and includes both fiction and non-fiction.

- *“To Kill a Mockingbird” by Harper Lee is an example of fictional prose. It is written in complete sentences and divided through paragraphs.*

FICTION

Fiction is a type of prose that is not real. Authors have the freedom to create a story based on characters or events that are products of their imaginations. While fiction can be based on true events, the stories they tell are imaginative in nature.

Like poetry, this genre also uses figurative language; however, it is more structural in nature and more closely follows grammatical conventions. Fiction often follows Freytag’s plot pyramid that includes an exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and dénouement.

- *The novel “Slaughterhouse Five” by Kurt Vonnegut is an example of a fictional story about the main character’s experience with his self-acclaimed ability to time travel.*

NONFICTION

Nonfiction is another type of prose that is factual rather than imaginative in nature. Because it is more factual and less imaginative, it may use less figurative language. Nonfiction varies however from piece to piece. It may tell a story through a memoir or it could be strictly factual in nature like a history textbook.

- *The memoir “Night” by Elie Wiesel is a memoir telling the story of Wiesel’s experience as a young Jewish boy during the Holocaust.*

THE FUNCTION OF GENRE

Genre is important in order to be able to organize writings based on their form, content, and style. For example, this allows readers to discern whether or not the events being written about in a piece are factual or imaginative. Genre also distinguishes the purpose of the piece and the way in which it is to be delivered. In other words, plays are meant to be performed and speeches are meant to be delivered orally whereas novels and memoirs are meant to be read.

SUMMARY: WHAT ARE LITERARY GENRES?

Define genre in literature: Genre is the classification and organization of literary works into the following categories: poetry, drama, prose, fiction, and nonfiction. The works are divided based on their form, content, and style. While there are subcategories to each of these genres, these are the main categories in which literature is divided.

Final Example:

The short story “The Cask of Amontillado” by Edgar Allan Poe is a fictional short story that is written in prose. It fits under the prose category because it is written using complete sentences that follow conventional grammar rules that are then formed into paragraphs. The story is also identified as fictional because it is an imagined story that follows the plot structure.

TYPES OF POETRY

WHAT IS POETRY?

Poetry emerges from the interplay between the meaning of words and their arrangement on paper; or as the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it – ‘poetry is the best words in their best order.’

Although poems come in all shapes and sizes, they share certain characteristics. Imagery, metaphors and symbols make poetry dense with meaning. Sound features, such as rhyme, rhythm and repetition, give the language a special musical quality. The standard rules of grammar and syntax are often ignored, so that the language may be used in a striking or original way.

Poetry, like all literature, is a writer’s attempt to communicate to others his emotional and intellectual response to his own experiences and to the world that surrounds him. The poet puts words together to make the reader feel what he has felt and experience what he has experienced.

When studying poetry, it is useful to consider the theme and the overall development of the theme in the poem. Obviously, the sort of development that takes place depends considerably on the type of poem one is dealing with. It is useful to keep two general distinctions in mind: **lyric poetry** and **narrative poetry**.

LYRIC POETRY

A lyric poem is a comparatively short, non-narrative poem in which a single speaker presents a state of mind or an emotional state. Lyric poetry retains some of the elements of a song which is said to be its origin: for Greek writers, the lyric was a song accompanied by the lyre.

Subcategories of the lyric are, for example, **elegy**, **ode**, **sonnet**, **dramatic monologue** and most **occasional poetry**.

ELEGY

Until the 17th century, the term 'elegy' was used to refer to any poem whose theme was solemn meditation. Since then, it has been applied to poems in which the speaker laments the death of a particular person (e.g. Tennyson's 'In Memoriam A.H.H.')

or the loss of something he valued. More broadly defined, the term elegy is also used for solemn meditations, often on questions of death, such as Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'.

EXAMPLE OF AN ELEGY

One famous example of an elegy is Walt Whitman's "O Captain, My Captain," which Whitman wrote following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln:

*O Captain! My Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head;
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.
My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.*

ODE

An ode is a long lyric poem with a serious subject written in an elevated style. Odes address a specific person, thing, or event. The ode is believed to have been invented by the ancient Greeks, who would sing their odes. The first odes were written by the Greek poet Pindar in the 5th century BC. A version of the ode which imitated the Pindaric ode in style and matter but simplified the stanza pattern became very popular in 17th

century England. Modern odes follow an irregular pattern and are not required to rhyme. Famous examples are Wordsworth's Hymn to Duty or Keats' Ode to a Grecian Urn. By the middle of the Victorian period, however, it was considered old-fashioned and had fallen out of use.

EXAMPLE OF AN ODE

"Ode to the West Wind" by Percy Bysshe Shelley
Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth
the trumpet of a prophecy! O wind,
if winter comes, can spring be far behind?

SONNET

The term sonnet comes from the Italian word 'sonetto', which means 'little song or sound'. The sonnet was originally a love poem which dealt with the lover's sufferings and hopes. It originated in Italy and became popular in England in the Renaissance, when Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey translated and imitated the sonnets written by Petrarch (Petrarchan sonnet). From the seventeenth century onwards the sonnet was also used for other topics than love, for instance for religious experience (by Donne and Milton), reflections on art (by Keats or Shelley) or even the war experience (by Brooke or Owen). The sonnet uses a single stanza of (usually) fourteen lines and an intricate rhyme pattern. Many poets wrote a series of sonnets linked by the same theme, so-called sonnet cycles (for instance Petrarch, Spenser, Shakespeare, Drayton, Barret-Browning, Meredith) which depict the various stages of a love relationship.

Sonnets are practically synonymous with Shakespeare, but there are actually two different kinds of this famous poetic form. Having originated in 13th century Italy, the sonnet usually deals with love and has two common forms: the Petrarchan (named for its famous practitioner, the poet Petrarch) and the Shakespearean (also known as the English sonnet). Each type contains 14 lines but comes with its own set of rules. Sonnets are often about love—lost love, married love, forgotten love, the longing for love, etc. They are written in iambic pentameter.

PETRARCHAN SONNET

Characteristics and Rules:

- 2 stanzas
- Presents an argument, observation, or question in the first 8 lines (octave)
- Turn (or “volta”) between 8th and 9th lines
- Second stanza (6 lines – the sestet) answers the question or issue posed in the first
- Rhyme Scheme: ABBA, ABBA, CDE CDE

SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

Characteristics and Rules:

- 3 quatrains (4 lines each) and a couplet (2 lines)
- Couplet usually forms a conclusion
- Rhyme scheme: ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG

EXAMPLE OF A SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

Shakespeare's sonnet 130

*My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
coral is far more red than her lips' red;
if snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
if hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
but no such roses see i in her cheeks;
and in some perfumes is there more delight
than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well i know
that music hath a far more pleasing sound;
i grant i never saw a goddess go;
my mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:
and yet, by heaven, i think my love as rare
as any she belied with false compare.*

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

In a dramatic monologue a speaker, who is explicitly someone other than the author, makes a speech to a silent auditor in a specific situation and

at a critical moment. Without intending to do so, the speaker reveals aspects of his temperament and character. In Browning's *My Last Duchess* for instance, the Duke shows the picture of his last wife to the emissary from his prospective new wife and reveals his excessive pride in his position and his jealous temperament.

EXAMPLE OF A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning

Ferrara

*That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat."*

OCCASIONAL POETRY

Occasional poetry is written for a specific occasion: a wedding (then it is called an epithalamion, for instance Spenser's *Epithalamion*), the return of a king from exile (for instance Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*) or a death (for example Milton's *Lycidas*), etc.

EXAMPLE OF AN EPITHALAMION

'Epithalamion' by Edmund Spenser

*Ye learned sisters which have oftentimes
Beene to me ayding, others to adorne:
Whom ye thought worthy of your gracefull rymes,
That even the greatest did not greatly scorne
To heare their names sung in your simple layes,
But joyed in their prayse.
And when ye list your owne mishaps to mourne,
Which death, or love, or fortunes wreck did rayse,
Your string could soone to sadder tenor turne,
And teach the woods and waters to lament
Your dolefull dreriment.
Now lay those sorrowfull complaints aside,
And having all your heads with girland crownd,
Helpe me mine owne loves prayses to resound,
Ne let the same of any be envie:
So Orpheus did for his owne bride,
So I unto my selfe alone will sing,
The woods shall to me answer and my Eccho ring.*

NARRATIVE POETRY

Narrative poetry gives a verbal representation, in verse, of a sequence of connected events, it propels characters through a plot. It is always told by a narrator. Narrative poems might tell of a love story (like Tennyson's *Maud*), the story of a father and son (like Wordsworth's *Michael*) or the deeds of a hero or heroine (like Walter Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*).

Sub-categories of narrative poetry: **epic**, **mock-epic**, **ballad**, **romance**.

EPIC

The epic is one of the earliest literary forms. It consists of a long narrative in elevated style that deals with a great and serious subject. Epics usually operate on a large scale, both in length and topic, such as the founding of

a nation (Virgil's *Aeneid*) or the beginning of world history (Milton's *Paradise Lost*), they tend to use an elevated style of language and supernatural beings take part in the action. The works of Homer and Virgil provide the prototypes in classical literature, while Beowulf and Milton's *Paradise Lost* are examples in English literature. Epics generally have the following features:

- the hero is a figure of great importance;
- the setting of the poem is ample in scale;
- the action involves superhuman deeds in battle or a long and arduous journey;
- the gods or supernatural beings take an interest or active part in the action;
- there are catalogues of some of the principal characters, introduced in formal detail;
- the narrator begins by stating his theme and invoking a muse;
- the narrative starts in *medias res*, that is 'in the middle of things', when the action is at a critical point.

EXAMPLE OF AN EPIC

'Paradise Lost': Book 1 (1674 version) by John Milton

*OF Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
And chiefly Thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer*

*Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the wayes of God to men.*

MOCK-EPIC

The mock-epic makes use of epic conventions (invocations of the Gods, descriptions of armour, battles, extended similes, etc.), like the elevated style and the assumption that the topic is of great importance, to deal with completely insignificant occurrences. A famous example is Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, which tells the story of a young beauty whose suitor secretly cuts off a lock of her hair. The mock heroic has been widely used to satirise social vices such as pretentiousness, hypocrisy, superficiality, etc. The inappropriateness of grandiose epic style highlights the trivial and senseless nature of the writer's target.

EXAMPLE OF A MOCK-EPIC

'Rape of the Lock' by Alexander Pope (Canto 3)

*But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
A two-edg'd weapon from her shining case;
So ladies in romance assist their knight
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.
He takes the gift with rev'rence, and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair,
And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in her ear,*

*Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the foe drew near.
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;
As on the nosegay in her breast reclin'd,
He watch'd th' ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art,
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.
Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd.*

BALLAD

A ballad is a song, originally transmitted orally, which tells a story. It is an important form of folk poetry which was adapted for literary uses from the sixteenth century onwards. The ballad stanza is usually a four-line stanza, alternating tetrameter and trimeter. Rhyme scheme: ABAB or ABCB.

The oldest recorded ballad in the English language, called *Judas*, was written down in a late 13th century manuscript. The Celts and Anglo-Saxon undoubtedly composed ballads but there is no record of these early works.

Ballads were very popular throughout the Middle Ages. many first appeared in written form with the introduction of the printing press (1476). They were printed on sheets of paper about the size of a banknote. Pedlars sold the ballads in the streets singing the songs so that anyone who did not know the melody could learn it.

Ballads are usually grouped into five main categories on the basis of the subject matter:

- the supernatural; stories of ghosts and demons and people who return from the dead to haunt the living;
- romantic tragedies; the separation of lovers through misunderstanding or the opposition of family is perhaps the most common ballad story;
- crime and its punishment; one particular variety of crime ballads is called the 'last goodnight'. These ballads tell the stories of convicted criminals who are about to be executed and repent for their sins on the execution scaffold;

- outlaws and badmen; these include over forty ballads about the great English folk hero Robin Hood and his band of outlaws. Robin Hood was probably a real historical character who lived in the English north midlands in the 12th century. In the ballads he is praised for his adventurous spirit, his sense of humour, his disregard for the law and his concern for the poor;
- historical events which included battles between the English and the Scots (The Border Ballads) and natural disasters such as shipwrecks and plagues.

EXAMPLE OF A BALLAD

“Annabel Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe (first two stanzas):

*It was many and many a year ago,
in a kingdom by the sea,
that a maiden there lived whom you may know
by the name of Annabel Lee;
and this maiden she lived with no other thought
than to love and be loved by me.
I was a child and she was a child,
in this kingdom by the sea,
but we loved with a love that was more than love—
I and my Annabel Lee—
with a love that the wingèd seraphs of heaven
coveted her and me.*

ROMANCE

A form of narrative poetry which developed in 12th century France. The word 'romance' refers to the French language which evolved from a dialect of the Roman language, Latin. The plot of these poems usually centres around a single knight who fights at tournaments, slays dragons and undergoes a series of adventures in order to win the heart of his heroine. Romances introduced the idea of courtly love according to which the lover idealises and idolises his beloved, who is usually another man's wife (marriage among the medieval nobility was usually for economic or political reasons). The lover suffers agonies for his heroine but remains devoted to her and shows his love

by adhering to a rigorous code of behaviour both in battles and in his courtly conduct.

DESCRIPTIVE AND DIDACTIC POETRY

Both lyric and narrative poetry can contain lengthy and detailed descriptions (**descriptive poetry**) or scenes in direct speech (**dramatic poetry**).

The purpose of a didactic poem is primarily to teach something. This can take the form of very specific instructions, such as how to catch a fish, as in James Thomson's *The Seasons (Spring 379-442)* or how to write good poetry as in Alexander Pope's *Essay on Criticism*. But it can also be meant as instructive in a general way. Until the twentieth century all literature was expected to have a didactic purpose in a general sense, that is, to impart moral, theoretical or even practical knowledge; Horace famously demanded that poetry should combine *prodesse* (learning) and *delectare* (pleasure). The twentieth century was more reluctant to proclaim literature openly as a teaching tool.

OTHER TYPES OF POEMS

EPIGRAM

An epigram (from the Greek for 'inscription') is a very short poem which is condensed in content and polished in style. Epigrams often have surprising or witty endings.

EXAMPLE OF AN EPIGRAM

An example of this wit is provided by Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

*Sir, I admit your general rule,
That every poet is a fool,
But you yourself may serve to show it,
That every fool is not a poet.*

Epigrams are not exclusive to poetry. They are also commonly used as literary devices and in speeches. John F. Kennedy's famous quote, "Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind" is one such example.

HAIKU

Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry. It consists of a seventeen-syllable verse made up of three unrhymed lines of five, seven, and five syllables. Traditional haikus contain very brief descriptions of nature that convey some insight or capture the essence of the moment. Haiku became popular in England and America at the beginning of the 20th century and influenced poets of the Imagist movement.

EXAMPLE OF A HAIKU

"An Old Silent Pond" by Matsuo Bashō

An old silent pond...

A frog jumps into the pond,

splash! Silence again.

LIMERICK

A limerick is a short humorous often nonsensical poem usually of five lines. The metre is predominantly anapestic and lines one, two and five are three feet lines three and four are two feet. The rhyme scheme is AABBA. You are probably familiar with the limerick form, even if you do not know the details of it, because its sound is so distinctive: two longer lines, two short ones, and a closing longer line that makes a joke, often a ribald one.

EXAMPLE OF A LIMERICK

Dixon Lanier Merritt

A wonderful bird is the pelican,

His bill can hold more than his beli-can.

He can take in his beak

Food enough for a week

But I'm damned if I see how the heli-can.

PASTORAL

Pastoral poetry is an ancient literary form which deals with the lives of shepherds, and the idyllic aspects of rural life in general, and typically draws a contrast between the innocence of a simple life and the corruption of city especially court life. Pastorals were first written by the Greek poet Theocritus in the third century BC. Edmund Spenser's *Shepherdes Calender* (1579) introduced the pastoral into English literature and throughout the Renaissance it was a very popular poetic style. In later centuries there was a reaction against the artificiality of the genre and it fell out of favour. Critics now use the term 'pastoral' to refer to any work in which the main character withdraws from ordinary life to a place close to nature where he can gain a new perspective on life.

TYPES OF DRAMA IN LITERATURE

WHAT IS DRAMA?

When you hear the word drama, you probably think of your favourite dramatic television show or movie. But literary drama has less to do with a serious storyline and more to do with stage performances. Keep reading to learn more about the different types of drama in literature, and what they look like on the stage.

The word ‘drama’ refers to any work that is intended for performance by actors on stage. It is a type of writing or genre that is very different from poetry or fiction because the written text, what we call the play, is only one component of the work. Other elements are needed to bring a dramatic text to life:

- the actors, the people who interpret the parts of the play;
- the director, the person who decides how the play should be performed;
- the audience, the people who watch the play.

When reading a play, we should always try to imagine how it could be presented on stage. It always helps to see as many live or filmed versions of the play as possible.

A play takes place on a stage. On the stage, a set representing the place where the action takes place is built. The set usually includes props, stage furniture, objects, coloured backcloths, etc. The set will immediately give us information about the play, for example, which historical period it is set in. It will also create expectations about what we are about to see. There are, of course, a great variety of set designs from complex multi-storey sets to simple bare stages. A set is described as naturalistic, when it represents real life, or symbolic, when it tries to convey ideas or meaning.

Lighting plays an important role in conveying the meaning of a play. Its primary function is to illuminate the actors and the stage but it can also focus attention on a particular area of the stage while the rest is

in darkness or semi-darkness. Lighting is used to show the time of day when the action takes place. It also creates atmosphere. Filters are used to produce coloured light which may create warm, cold or eerie atmospheres. Today it is possible to incorporate spectacular lighting effects into a performance by using strobe lighting, ultraviolet light, underfloor lighting and other special techniques.

Like lighting, sound effects may also play an important part in theatrical productions. Sounds that come from the stage or sounds made offstage can make the production more realistic and credible. Music is often used to create atmosphere or to underline particularly significant moments in the play.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF LITERARY DRAMA

Drama in literature refers to the performance of written dialogue and stage action. It is a literary genre that allows actors to act out a writer's words directly to an audience. But there is more than one type of literary genre. Here are some explanations and examples of different types of drama in literature.

COMEDY

In comedy the characters amuse and entertain us. This form of theatre has its roots in ancient Greece where many of the rituals in honour of the gods involved becoming drunk, singing obscene songs and making rude comments. The Greek word for these proceedings was 'komos' from which the word 'comedy' derives.

Humour is the main ingredient of a comedy. It can be divided into three broad categories:

- verbal humour, when what the characters say is funny;
- behavioural humour, when what the characters do is funny;
- situational humour, when the situation the characters find themselves in is funny.

In the case of most comedy the humour is a mixture of all three categories.

The comic plot is usually based on a series of mistaken identities, misunderstandings and improbable situations. The plot develops and tension grows until it comes to a head and the underlying comic

complications are revealed. At this point the characters are reconciled and order is restored.

Comedies are usually humorous plays. But being funny is not the only way to define a comedy. The elements of a comedy include:

- Light-hearted tone
- Clever wordplay or turns of phrase
- Serious topics addressed in a humorous way
- Comical misunderstandings
- Happy ending
- Silly, offbeat characters
- Often ends with a wedding, especially in romantic comedies

One of the most famous examples of a comedy is William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. Beatrice and Benedick transition from foes to lovers with clever banter and more than a few silly misunderstandings. And, like all proper Shakespearean comedies, it ends with a wedding!

COMEDY OF MANNERS

The Comedy of Manners deals with the relations and intrigues of society gentlemen and ladies. The comic effect is achieved primarily through the wit and sparkle of a dialogue which is often in the form of *repartee*, a kind of verbal fencing match of witty comments and replies. The plot usually revolves around the gallant and the fop. The gallant is usually the hero of the play. He is witty, elegant, sophisticated yet cynical lover. The fop is a figure of fun, ridiculed for his stupidity and pompous pretentiousness. The leading female characters generally have no feelings or morals. Their only interests are fashion and breaking their marital vows. Early examples of the Comedy of Manners are Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. The Restoration period 1660-1702 saw some of the finest examples of this dramatic form in Congreve's *The Way of the World*. The period from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century saw a revival of this type of play in the works of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw.

FARCE

Farce is a type of comedy designed simply to make the audience laugh. Its humour is based on highly exaggerated or caricatured characters, ludicrous situations, broad verbal humour and slapstick physical horseplay. There have been elements of farce in English theatre since the Middle Ages but the term 'farce' was not used until after the Restoration. Eighteenth and nineteenth century audiences were particularly fond of this type of drama, however, it was somewhat frowned upon by the critics until the end of the 19th century, when Oscar Wilde introduced artfulness and polish to the form. Elements of farce can be found in the works of more recent playwrights such as Tom Stoppard and Samuel Beckett.

A farce is a type of broad comedy. It depends less on a narrative storyline and more on physical humour, sight gags, silly jokes. Here are the parts of a farcical comedy:

- Exaggerated humour
- Slapstick gags
- Nonsensical storyline
- Improbable events
- One or two settings
- Humour is often crude and inappropriate

For a film reference, think of anything by Monty Python or National Lampoon. On the stage, the absurd humour in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a farcical commentary on life, religion, and human relationships.

OPERA

Operas are dramas in which the characters sing each line rather than speaking. The entire production is set to a musical score. You can tell you are watching an opera if it includes these attributes:

- Musical soliloquies known as arias;
- Plot-driving passages that can be non-melodic;
- A libretto (text) set to a musical score;
- Subject matter that is tragic, comic, or melodramatic;

- Can incorporate an element of dance, but typically relies on singing performances;
- Elaborate sets, costume design, and production.

One of the most famous operas of all time is Giacomo Puccini's *La Boheme*. It tells the tragic story of Rodolfo, Mimi, and the world of French Bohemia. Set to one of opera's most memorable scores, the story reveals itself over the course of a year.

MELODRAMA

When you hear drama, you probably think of melodrama. Melodramas tell a serious story in serious ways. Not sure if a drama is a melodrama? Check if it includes the following:

- Character tropes such as heroes, heroines, villains, mentors, etc.
- Sweeping stories of romance or serious topics;
- Larger-than-life plots and circumstances (or very small stories told in big ways);
- Exaggerated character reactions;
- Clear literary themes;
- Flawed characters who must overcome their faults in order to reach their resolution;
- Ending that is sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy.

Consider Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* when referring to a melodrama. Nora's over-the-top reactions place the play right into the definition of melodrama. The ending is a mix of both happiness and hope for Nora, and sadness and despair for Torvald.

MUSICAL DRAMA

It is tempting to put opera and musical drama into the same category. However, their production proves that there are significant differences between the two. But how can you tell a musical drama apart from an opera? Use this checklist:

- Periods of standard storyline interrupted by songs;
- Characters often singing in unison to express feelings;

- Songs as plot-changing devices;
- Dramatic or comedic storylines;
- Catchy, distinctive musical score;
- Often lots of singing and dancing.

Many musicals, such as *Les Miserables* or *Phantom of the Opera*, are adapted from longer literary works. Both of these musical dramas express their themes directly through song and progress the plot with musical numbers. They simplify their source material by putting the most important characters and story elements on the stage.

TRAGEDY

The origins of tragedy date back to ancient Greece, when people held festivals involving ritualistic practices including human sacrifice in honour of the god Dionysius. Dionysius was usually represented in the form of a goat and the word ‘tragedy’ means ‘goat song’. Through the time the term ‘tragedy’ has come to be used to refer to any serious dramatic representation in which the main character, or tragic hero, undergoes a series of misfortunes that eventually lead to his downfall. The hero is usually a nobleman or king or great leader that we look up to. His downfall arouses pity and fear. We feel fear because we see an extraordinary man reduced to a weakened and tragic state. We feel pity because we recognise that the hero has a tragic flaw, something negative in his character which eventually causes his fall. We understand his weakness and feel that his misfortunes are greater than he deserves.

When analysing tragedy, we can, broadly speaking, refer to five stages:

1. exposition: the playwright provides the audience with the information necessary to follow what is happening when the play opens. Who are the characters? What situation do they find themselves in?
2. development: when the tragic hero usually commits the act that will lead to his downfall;
3. climax: the point at which the protagonist realises his terrible mistake;

4. decline: the loss of order and the moral destruction of the protagonist;
5. dénouement or resolution: the death of the hero and the re-establishment of order.

Just from the word tragedy, you can assume that the ending will be sad. But there is more to a tragedy than a play with no happy ending. You can tell if a play is a tragedy if it includes:

- A protagonist with a tragic flaw
- Circumstances that quickly get out of control – and not in a funny way
- Darker themes than a melodrama, such as human suffering, hatred, or poverty
- Features the downfall of a previously heroic or well-liked character
- An irredeemable ending that results in one or more characters' deaths
- Reaches a tragic catharsis

Shakespeare has any number of tragedies to choose from. But few can rival Othello for its cruel villain, its hero's tragic downfall, and its desperately sad ending. Othello loses everything he has ever loved or wanted because he cannot trust that he deserves the life he has.

TRAGICOMEDY

When you combine the elements of a comedy and a tragedy, you get a tragicomedy. Tragicomedies are more complex than a drama with a few jokes, or a comedy with a serious scene. Some ways to tell if you are watching a tragicomedy are if it has:

- A serious storyline told in a humorous, sardonic, or snide way;
- Tragically flawed characters whose actions do not result in death;
- An ambiguous theme;
- Broad characters who act in classically comical ways;
- Neither a happy nor a comic ending.

Classic dramas mainly dealt in clear-cut comedy, tragedy, or melodramatic styles. But many modern dramas are considered complex enough to be tragicomedies. Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* has enough elements of a comedy to keep it out of the tragedy

genre – but no one can claim that Blanche DuBois is anything but a tragically flawed character. It is the quintessential modern tragicomedy.

MASQUE

An elaborate mixture of songs, poetry, dance and drama that developed in Renaissance Italy and was taken to England during Elizabethan times. Masques were performed for private entertainment at court. The speaking character, who were often ladies and gentlemen of the court, wore masks. Ben Jonson (1572-1637) wrote some of the best masques of the period.

MYSTERY, MIRACLE AND MORALITY PLAYS

During the Middle Ages, in an attempt to involve its followers in the celebration of the sacraments, the church added elements of drama to its religious services. These primitive dramatizations of parts of the Latin liturgical service gradually evolved into Mystery plays and Miracle plays.

Mystery plays were based on stories from the Bible. Each Mystery play was a single episode from the Bible, such as the Fall of Lucifer, Noah's Flood or the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Together they formed 'The Mystery Cycle' which told the story of Christianity from creation to the last judgement.

Miracle plays were dramatizations of the lives of the saints and were performed to celebrate the great Christian events of the Nativity and the Resurrection during the festivals of Christmas and Easter.

As liturgical drama became more popular, the churches grew more crowded and eventually religious performances had to move outside. Latin was replaced by English and lay people performed instead of priests. A new non-religious form of drama, the Morality play, developed. Morality plays were allegorical tales in which the characters were personifications of abstract concepts such as greed, laziness and kindness. Their principal purpose was to teach moral lessons.

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

The name is used to refer to a number of works of drama which have in common the sense that the human condition is essentially absurd. The Absurd movement, which also includes fiction, emerged after the

Second World War as a reaction to traditional beliefs and values. Writers of the absurd rejected the notion that man lives in an intelligible universe, that he lives in an orderly social structure, and that he is capable of heroic actions and dignity. The universe depicted in their work is alien and meaningless and man's existence is both anguished and irrational. The greatest playwright in English in this genre is widely recognised to be the Irish dramatist Samuel Beckett.

HISTORY OF DRAMA

The word drama means “action” in Greek. Greek drama began with the work of Aristotle's *Poetics* (335 B.C.), which is the oldest recorded work of dramatic theory. The tradition continued throughout Greek culture, marked by the famous laughing/crying masks of drama (Thalia, Muse of comedy, and Melpomene, Muse of tragedy).

The Roman Empire adapted drama into their literary tradition, where it spread into Europe and became known as Theatre in France and England. The Elizabethan era in particular was a flourishing time for European theatre, which set the stage for theatre around the world.

TYPES OF FICTION IN LITERATURE

WHAT IS FICTION?

The term ‘fiction’ comes from the Latin word *fingere* and refers to any narrative in prose or verse that is entirely or partly the work of the imagination. Although in its broadest sense fiction includes plays and narrative poems, it is most commonly used when referring to the short story and the novel.

Storytelling has always been an essential part of man’s existence. From the earliest times, man has exchanged stories based on both his experience and imagination. Fiction, in the form of the novel and the short story, most directly fulfils our innate need for storytelling. It takes us to imaginary times and places, introduces us to new people and tells us about significant events in their lives. Fiction, since its emergence in the form of the novel in the 18th century has been the most popular literary genre in Western culture.

TYPES OF FICTION AND NON-FICTION IN LITERATURE

Most people divide fiction and nonfiction in two plain categories where they put fiction into the interesting catchy side and nonfiction into the boring simple literature, but in fact, there is more to them than just that. There are many types of fiction and non-fiction that when put together constitute every other form of writing. Simply put, fiction is a work crafted purely of imagination while nonfiction is based on facts. These notions of writing further divide into many subtypes and have now given rise to a vast expanse of subgenres.

FICTION VERSUS NONFICTION: UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT TYPES OF FICTION AND NON-FICTION

What are the basic differences between fiction and nonfiction that make them so distinct, despite the similarity in their sound, and what are the types they represent? To get a better understanding of the types of fiction and nonfiction, let's go over their basic concept one more time.

Fiction: Definition and Examples

We know that fiction refers to the “type of literature created from the writer’s imagination.”

Fiction can be defined as: *Fiction is a genre that revolves around the things that don't exist or happen in reality.* OR *Fiction is writing based on its author's creativity and the imagination that he/she possesses.*

Some popular fiction genres are:

Mysteries
Science fiction
Romance
Crime thrillers and
Fantasy

EXAMPLES OF POPULAR FICTION

A number of writers have written many popular reads on fiction, some classic examples of which are:

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

To Kill a Mocking Bird by Harper Lee

Nonfiction: Definition and Examples

We know that nonfiction refers to the “type of literature based solely on facts.”

Nonfiction can be defined as:

Nonfiction is a category of literature that deals with reality where the author's creativity is in the writing style instead of the story itself.

Some popular nonfiction categories are:

Biographies

Religion

History

Science

Humor

True crime and

Languages

Examples of Popular Nonfiction

A number of writers have written many popular non-fiction reads, some examples of which are:

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank

The Story of My Life by Helen Keller

ALLEGORY

An allegory is a story that can be interpreted at two levels: the primary, literal level and the secondary, symbolic level. An allegory has a complete system of equivalents: characters, action and often the setting not only make sense in themselves but also represent a second order of persons, things, concepts, or events. Allegorical literature is distinctly different from symbolic literature. Symbols are open-ended: they evoke a wealth of associations in the reader which enrich his reading of the text. Allegory is not open-ended: the symbolic meaning of the elements is well-defined. Once the correlation between elements has been established the secondary meaning of the text becomes immediately apparent. Most allegorical works have religious, political or social themes. One of the best-known allegories in English literature is George Orwell's *Animal Farm* which draws parallels between events on a pig farm in Britain and events in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Russia.

ANTI-NOVEL

An anti-novel is a work which opposes, parodies or in some way undermines the form and content of the traditional novel. Anti-novels appear to be ordinary novels but through the distortion or omission of traditional elements they challenge the expectations created in the reader by conventional novels. Laurence Sterne is generally regarded as the father of the English anti-novel. The plot of his masterpiece *Tristram Shandy* (1760) contains such unconventional elements as unfinished sentences, blank pages, pages containing just one word, and idiosyncratic syntax. Sterne seems to suggest that the orderly chronological narration of events which could be found in traditional novels did not reflect the perception of time and space which exists in the human mind. *Tristram Shandy* is the first of many anti-novels which have as their subject the novel itself, and which explore the limitations of this literary form in conveying human experience.

BILDUNGSROMAN OR INITIATION NOVEL

Bildungsroman is a German term which means ‘novel of formation or education.’ The common subject of these novels is the development of the protagonist’s mind as he grows from childhood to adulthood and maturity. The first example of this type of fiction is the German writer Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795-1796). It tells the story of an innocent well-meaning but often foolish young man who sets out in life unsure of what he wants from his future. Having made many mistakes and with the help of some good friends he finally reaches maturity and understands the direction he must take in his life. In English literature the form has always been popular and it has been exploited by noted writers such as Charles Dickens (*David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*), D. H. Lawrence (*Sons and Lovers*) and James Joyce in *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*.

ENGLISH LITERARY TIMELINE

1000 – BEOWULF

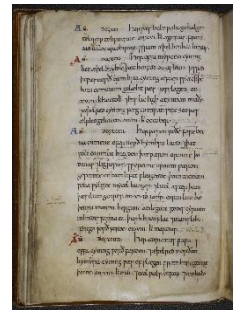
Beowulf is the longest epic poem in Old English, the language spoken in Anglo-Saxon England before the Norman Conquest. It tells the breath-taking story of a struggle between the hero, Beowulf, and a bloodthirsty monster called Grendel. Poems of this kind would often have been recited from memory by a court minstrel, or scop, to the accompaniment of a harp. This fire-damaged manuscript is the only surviving copy of the story. It was written down in about 1000, but the poem may have been created by storytellers as early as the 700s.

The language of Beowulf

The opening word of the poem Hwæt is related to our modern word 'what' - translated as 'Lo!', 'Behold!', or 'Hark!'. The storyteller uses it here to attract the audience's attention. About a third of the words in Beowulf are words known as kennings. Kennings combine two words to create an evocative and imaginative alternative word, such as banhus (bone-house) – meaning 'human body', or beadoleoma (battle-light) – meaning sword.

11TH CENTURY - ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE

This national chronicle, or annual record of events, was originally compiled around 890 during the reign of King Alfred the Great. It was the first attempt to give a systematic year-by-year account of English history, and it was later maintained, and added to, by generations of anonymous scribes until the middle of the 1100s. This version is an 11th-century copy, probably made in Worcester.



1031 – BOOK OF LIFE

The purpose of a 'Book of Life' (or Liber Vitae), was to record the names of members and friends of monasteries or convents: the belief was that these names would also appear in the heavenly book opened on the Day of Judgement. Some lists from religious houses are neat and well-

ordered, but this page – from the Liber Vitae of the New Minster, Winchester – has a distinctly cluttered appearance, with several different inks and scripts. It is evidently a ‘work in progress’, clearly conveying the dynamic role that this text played in the monastery’s daily life.

There is a big social difference between the names in the centre, all classically Anglo-Saxon, and those in the left margin, where we see the impact of a post-Conquest society: Ricardus (Richard), Baldwin, Simon, Roger, William – all names associated with a new Norman social elite, and reflecting the cultural shift that was beginning to distance England from its Germanic past. Few of the Anglo-Saxon names are still in use today. They all had a meaning, outlined below, which was doubtless of great significance to the bearer.



1066 - WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR

Battle Abbey was founded in 1066 by William the Conqueror, on the site of his famous victory over King Harold at the Battle of Hastings (which actually took place about 7 miles from Hastings). This manuscript, created in 1150, contains two historical accounts of the abbey, almost certainly written there. The page is the start of the second account, introduced by an exceptionally large initial 'A' containing an image of King William enthroned.

The Normans would transform England, both culturally and linguistically. For over 300 years French was the language spoken by the most powerful people - royalty, aristocrats and high-powered officials. French was used in political documents, in administration, and in literature. Latin was still the language of the church and of scholars, but most of the general population spoke English in their everyday lives.

12TH CENTURY – FIRST TEXT IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

Most sermons (or homilies) in this collection are copies of earlier ones in Old English. But this one is different. It is an English translation of a Latin sermon in which we can see many of the changes that signal the end of Old English. The rhythm and pattern of the sentences are

beginning to sound distinctly modern. That is why linguists have called it the first text in Middle English. The sermon was given by Ralph d'Escures, Archbishop of Canterbury, in the 12th century.

The homily begins *Se godspellere Lucas sægð on þyssen godspelle* (The evangelist Luke says in this gospel). Word order is identical to present-day English, and remains so across much of the text. The origins of the word 'gospel' would have been clearer in the 12th century: *god* (good) combined with *spel* (news or story).

C.1189 – 1216 - THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE

'The Owl and the Nightingale' is a poem in which two competing characters trade insults with each other. It is the earliest example in English of a popular literary form known as a verse contest. The narrator overhears an owl and a nightingale haranguing each other in a lengthy and comical debate about whose song is the more beautiful. This copy of the poem from early 13th century is written in Middle English.

1215 – MAGNA CARTA

Magna Carta – Latin for 'Great Charter' – is one of the most celebrated documents in western history. It was the first written material to set limits on the power of an English monarch, and was intended to prevent King John from exploiting his people. The charter established that, despite his royal status, John was obliged to abide by the law.

Magna Carta is often seen as the basis of liberty and justice as we know it in the west. The 39th clause of the charter is still part of British law today. It states that: 'No free man shall be seized or imprisoned, or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land.'

In fact, Magna Carta was never meant to be a lasting declaration of legal principle, but was a practical solution to a political crisis. Throughout his reign, King John had exploited his subjects, particularly the barons. He arbitrarily imposed harsh taxes and seized property, using the funds to pay for expensive battles. Eventually, the barons, who had become increasingly angry at his actions, rebelled. Magna Carta dealt mainly with those at the top of the social scale, and had relatively little

impact on the majority of people at the time, but its re-use in later centuries has meant that its legacy has lived on.

1348 – CHRONICLE OF THE BLACK DEATH

The catastrophic plague known as the Black Death hit Europe in 1348 and swept through the continent rapidly. It would eventually kill between a third and half of the population. These huge death tolls sparked off a chain of events that would change the position of the peasant in England forever. Because so many had died, there were far fewer people to work the land: peasants were therefore able to demand better conditions and higher wages from their landlords. Many advanced to higher positions in society.

This chronicle, written at the cathedral priory of Rochester between 1314 and 1350, includes a first-hand account of the Black Death, describing the changes in the everyday lives of people across the social scale: 'there was such a shortage of servants, craftsmen, and workmen, and of agricultural workers and labourers...[that] churchmen, knights and other worthies have been forced to thresh their corn, plough the land and perform every other unskilled task if they are to make their own bread.'

C. 1350 – GENESIS PICTURE BOOK

Many bibles from the Middle Ages are beautifully illustrated with large pictures showing the stories of the old and new testaments. In this richly decorated 'picture book' there are images of God creating the earth, of the Tower of Babel and of many other scenes from Genesis. Here we see Lamech killing Cain with bow and arrow; the death of the boy Jabal, and below Noah and family entering the ark. The images dominate the pages, suggesting that the book was used for instruction and education.

1367-1386 – WILLIAM LANGLAND, PIERS PLOWMAN

There are several manuscript versions of The Vision of Piers Plowman, giving three recognised texts dating from 1367 to 1386, varying enormously in length.

The poem concerns a quest for truth through faith, featuring personifications of Conscience, Reward, Thought, Wit, Study, and Imagination. The text contains passages showing the state of English society in the period following the Black Death, and the transition from decaying feudalism towards a labour economy, with discussion of the

rights and duties of labourers. The poem's relevance in its own time is seen in its discussion of the condemnation of Wycliffe's translation of the Bible into English, its attack on Church corruption, and in the fact that *Piers Plowman* was cited by John Ball during the Peasants' Revolt (1381).

Langland's response to the upheavals of society is that of a medieval Christian, seeing all change as decay and leading towards apocalypse; but as a visionary poet he interprets this in terms of a call to transform society to function on a fairer basis. While accepting the new urban society as a reality, with victims oppressed by poverty, and calling on the monarch to rule by Conscience and Reason, rather than corruptly, the poem can only offer a vision of active compassion and rewards after death.

C. 1370 – LA PALMER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA

This encyclopedia was written by a London clerk named James le Palmer. The book must have been exhausting to complete - it has more than 2,000 pages and 800 illustrations, and it is not even finished. It covers subjects as broad as natural sciences, the history of man, theology, the liberal arts and religion. This illustration shows a variety of birds. As he tells us in the introduction, le Palmer consulted over 100 different texts in compiling his great work. This was the first time a book of this kind had been arranged in alphabetical order, a technique that would influence the way that future encyclopedias were created.

LATE 14TH CENTURY – SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight' is one of the most famous romances in medieval English literature. It tells of the adventures of Sir Gawain, a knight of King Arthur's Round Table.

A mysterious 'Green Knight' pays an unexpected visit to Arthur's court, offering to allow anyone to strike him with an axe if, after exactly one year, the challenger will take a return blow. Gawain accepts the challenge, and beheads the knight in one blow, only to then see him stand up, pick up his own severed head, and remind Gawain to meet him at the appointed time. The story of Gawain's struggle to meet the appointment, and his adventures along the way, demonstrate the spirit of chivalry and loyalty that played a central part in English culture in this period.

C. 1390 – FIRST ENGLISH COOKERY MANUSCRIPT

This is the oldest known cookery manuscript in the English language. It is entitled *The Forme of Cury* (meaning 'Form of Cookery' in Middle English). It was written by the master-cooks of King Richard II, and is in the form of a scroll made of vellum - a kind of fine calfskin parchment. This section shows a recipe for 'chastletes', which were small pastry castles. The pastries were filled with pork or almonds and coloured with saffron or sandalwood. The word 'coffin' referred to the pastry case, which was made in advance.

At the beginning of the manuscript, the author writes that the recipes are intended to teach a cook to make everyday dishes ('Common pottages and common meats for the household, as they should be made, craftily and wholesomely'), as well as unusually spiced and spectacular dishes for banquets ('curious potages and meats and sotiltees for all manner of States both high and low'). The word 'sotiltee' (or subtlety) refers to the elaborate edible sugar sculptures that were often made for grand feasts.

C. 1387-1400 – CHAUCER, THE CANTERBURY TALES

The *Canterbury Tales* is one of the best loved works in the history of English literature. Written in Middle English, the story follows a group of pilgrims who are travelling the long journey from London to Canterbury Cathedral. Setting off from a London inn, the innkeeper suggests that during the journey each pilgrim should tell two tales to help pass the time. The best storyteller, he says, will be rewarded with a free supper on his return.

Chaucer introduces us to a vivid cast of characters, including a carpenter, a cook, a knight, a monk, a prioress, a haberdasher, a dyer, a clerk, a merchant and a very bawdy miller. These characters come from all corners of 14th century society, and give Chaucer the chance to speak in many different voices. Some of the characters' tales are humorous, rude and naughty, while others are moral and reflective.

One of the reasons Chaucer is so important is that he made the decision to write in English and not French. In the centuries following the Norman invasion, French was the language spoken by those in power. The *Canterbury Tales* was one of the first major works in literature written in English. Chaucer began the tales in 1387 and continued until his death in 1400. No text in his own hand still exists, but a surprising number of copies survive from the 1500s - more than 80.

This suggests the tales were enormously popular in medieval England. This early and handsomely ornamented manuscript copy, from c.1450, was made within a generation of Chaucer's death.

C. 1400 – ILLEGAL ENGLISH BIBLE

Throughout medieval times the English church was governed from Rome by the Pope. All over the Christian world, church services were conducted in Latin. It was illegal to translate the Bible into local languages. John Wycliffe was an Oxford professor who believed that the teachings of the Bible were more important than the earthly clergy and the Pope. Wycliffe translated the Bible into English, as he believed that everyone should be able to understand it directly.

Wycliffe inspired the first complete English translation of the Bible, and the Lollards, who took his views in extreme forms, added to the Wycliffe Bible commentaries such as this one in Middle English. Made probably just before Henry IV issued the first orders for burnings to punish heretics in 1401, this manuscript escaped a similar fate.

Wycliffe was too well connected and lucky to have been executed for heresy, although the archbishop of Canterbury condemned him. The support of his Oxford colleagues and influential layman, as well as the anti-clerical leanings of King Richard II, who resisted ordering the burning of heretics, saved his life. Forty years after his death, the climate had changed, and his body was dug up, and along with his books, were burned and scattered. Nonetheless the English translations had a lasting influence on the language. 'The beginning of the gospel of Ihesu Crist the sone of god,' opens the Gospel of Mark, its first letter decorated with the Mark's symbol, the lion. The commentary begins, 'Gospel: the gospel is seid a good tellyng.' Red underscores pick out the gospel text, while the commentary is written in slightly smaller script. The gold frame decorated with flowers and leaves and presentation of text and commentary are completely conventional for their time.

More than 1100 words are recorded for the first time in the Wycliffe Bible. Wycliffe is the earliest known writer to use the word 'abominable' to describe other people. It appears in these pages from the Book of Psalms, in the final column. The full phrase is: 'pei ben corrupt and maad abhominable in her wickednessis' (they are corrupt and made abominable in their wickednesses).

1469 – THE LEGEND OF KING ARTHUR BY THOMAS MALORY

This manuscript tells the famous legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, centring around their quest for the mystical Holy Grail. It was written by Thomas Malory in 1469 while he was imprisoned for a series of violent crimes.

The chivalry of Arthur's world a long way from the reality Malory's own life, which was torn apart by the War of the Roses. Despite the upheavals of Malory's day, there was a strong revival of interest in chivalry and Britain's past. The adventures of Arthur's knights seemed to represent all the old fashioned noble values that were being eroded by the war.

1473 – THE FIRST BOOK PRINTED IN ENGLISH

William Caxton was the first Englishman to learn to use a printing press. The Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye was his first printed book, and the first book printed anywhere in English. It was produced in 1473 on the Continent, in either Bruges or Ghent. The text is a recuyell (compilation) of stories about the Trojan Wars by Raoul Lefèvre, originally written in French. The translation was also by Caxton.

C. 1476 – CAXTON'S CHAUCER

In 1476, Caxton introduced the printing press to England, revolutionising forever the way that books were created. This book, produced in the same year, is the first printed edition of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Caxton printed all kinds of texts: mythic tales, popular stories, poems, phrasebooks, devotional pieces and grammars. Thanks to the invention of printing, books became quicker to produce and cheaper to purchase - although they were still a luxury. An ever-increasing number of writers were able to publish their works, literacy rates rose, language gradually became more uniform, and an early form of modern English began to emerge.

1477 FEBRUARY – VALENTINE'S DAY LOVE LETTER

This is probably the oldest surviving Valentine's letter in the English language. It was written by Margery Brews to her fiancé John Paston in February 1477. Describing John as her 'right well-beloved valentine', she tells him she is 'not in good health of body nor of heart, nor shall I be till I hear from you.' She explains that her mother had tried to persuade her father to increase her dowry - so far unsuccessfully.

However, she says, if John loves her he will marry her anyway: 'But if you love me, as I trust verily that you do, you will not leave me therefore.' There was a happy ending to the story, as the couple would eventually marry.

The letter comes from one of the largest collections of 15th century English private correspondence, known as the Paston letters. The collection offers a unique glimpse in to the personal lives of the Paston family from Norfolk - the family name comes from a Norfolk village about twenty miles north of Norwich. The Pastons had risen from peasantry to aristocracy in just a few generations: the first member of the family about whom anything is known was Clement Paston (d. 1419), a peasant, who gave an excellent education to his son William, enabling him to study law. John and Margery's son, William, would become a prominent figure at the court of King Henry VIII.

C. 1493 - 1496 – MEDIEVAL PHRASE BOOK

This English-French phrase book gives us a glimpse of everyday English expressions of the 15th century. It was probably intended as a guide for merchants who traded with France, equipping the reader with a set of common colloquial phrases. Several phrases, though familiar, sound distinctly old-fashioned, such as Sir god spede you and Sir howe fare ye. Others may seem quaint, but hint at current expressions. Sir god gyue you good day is not unlike 'have a nice day' in present-day American English. Right wele is still used in the north of England in response to someone asking after our health.

1516 – THOMAS MORE'S UTOPIA

Sir Thomas More (1477 - 1535) was the first person to write of a 'utopia', a word used to describe a perfect imaginary world. More's book imagines a complex, self-contained community set on an island, in which people share a common culture and way of life. He coined the word 'utopia' from the Greek ou-topos meaning 'no place' or 'nowhere'. It was a pun - the almost identical Greek word eu-topos means 'a good place'. So at the very heart of the word is a vital question: can a perfect world ever be realised? It is unclear as to whether the book is a serious projection of a better way of life, or a satire that gave More a platform from which to discuss the chaos of European politics.

More was an English lawyer, writer, and statesman. He was at one time, one of Henry VIII's most trusted civil servants, becoming Chancellor of England in 1529.

1526 – FIRST PRINTED BIBLE IN ENGLISH

William Tyndale's Bible was the first English language Bible to appear in print. During the 1500s, the very idea of an English language Bible was shocking and subversive. This is because, for centuries, the English Church had been governed from Rome, and church services were by law conducted in Latin. Most people in Europe were unable to speak Latin, and so could not understand the Bible directly. The Church therefore acted as the mediator between God and the people, with Priests interpreting the bible on behalf of their congregations.

By Tyndale's day, vernacular Bibles (those written in local languages) were available in parts of Europe, where they added fuel to the fight for the Reformation, a political crisis that resulted in the splitting of Christianity into Catholic and Protestant Churches. But in England it was still strictly forbidden to translate the Bible into English. Tyndale believed that ordinary people should be able to read (or listen to) the Bible in a language they could understand, but his Bible was highly illegal. The book was banned and Tyndale was eventually executed.

1590-1596 – EDMUND SPENSER, THE FAERIE QUEENE

‘I have already undertaken a work ... under the title of a Faerie Queene, to represent all the moral vertues, assigning to every virtue, a Knight to be the patron and defender of the same.’

Edmund Spenser's description of his epic poem *The Faerie Queene* is perhaps the best summary of a text that is long, complex and notoriously difficult to pin down. *The Faerie Queene* is an allegory of how to attain Christian virtue, an imaginative reworking of aspects of British history, folklore and mythology, and a poem in praise of Elizabeth I. It is told in six books, each of which focuses on a different virtue. These virtues are defended by different knights, and are threatened by various forces, but ultimately upheld.

The Faerie Queene is perhaps most memorable for its vivid descriptions of individual characters, such as the ‘foul and hideous’ witch Duessa, the Redcross Knight, who represents Holiness, and the Dragon who symbolises evil, ‘swolne with wrath, and poison, and with bloody

gore'. Spenser's admiration for Elizabeth I is shown through characters such as Britomart, who represents Chastity, and Gloriana, while his attacks on the Catholic church – and his references to the execution of Mary Queen of Scots – give the poem a clear political dimension.

1588-1592 – PUBLISHED 1604, DOCTOR FAUSTUS BY MARLOWE

This play tells the story of the man who sells his soul to the devil in return for 24 years of power and knowledge - a legend that began in Germany in the 1500s. The story has inspired countless writers, dramatists and composers ever since, but the first major stage version of the story in England is this one by Shakespeare's contemporary Christopher Marlowe (1564-93). Written sometime between 1588 and 1592, but first published in 1604, the play was extremely controversial at the time, as it explores the paths human beings can take when they allow the devil into their lives.

Doctor Faustus was performed many times around the year of Marlowe's death, and its demonic impact on the audiences became the stuff of legend. During the Elizabethan period, the popularity of theatre had grown so much that the Crown was concerned about the effects of controversial plays. Plays were given an official licence if they were deemed suitable, but playwrights could be censored, arrested or even imprisoned. James I passed an act in 1606, which forbade any blasphemous or profane references to God or Christ - actors were fined £10 for each profanity. Marlow was forced to make a number of revisions to Doctor Faustus.

1597 - SHAKESPEARE'S RICHARD III

If a writer's style is admired by enough people, it will be copied and might come to influence the standard variety of a language. This was the case with William Shakespeare (1564–1616). Not only have many of his phrases entered the English language, but the Oxford English Dictionary cites him as the first person on record to use some 1,800 words, around 800 of which survive.

The first edition of Richard III was written by Shakespeare in 1597. The first line 'Now is the winter of our discontent' is familiar to many English speakers. Elsewhere in this history play, Shakespeare introduces us to the phrase a tower of strength, and the word hunchbacked appears for the first time.

1601 - SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET

Written between 1599 and 1601, Hamlet is widely recognised as one of the most powerful plays in the history of English theatre. It is a revenge tragedy that revolves around the agonised interior mind of a young Danish prince. In the first Act, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears to him, revealing that he has been murdered by Hamlet's uncle, Claudius. Claudius has subsequently married Hamlet's mother and claimed the throne.

The suspense is built upon a central question: when will Hamlet take revenge for his father's murder? But the prince, throughout the play, seems emotionally paralysed and, in turn, tortured by his inability to take action. The fact that Hamlet continually delays taking revenge for his father's murder is the key that opens up Hamlet's inner thoughts to the audience.

Hamlet is unpredictable, manipulative, misogynistic ('Frailty, thy name is woman'), indecisive, testing his relationships with his mother and Ophelia to destruction; and yet he is capable of deep contemplation on the nature of human existence, examining the relationships between life and death, action and inaction, fear and fury, inward emotion versus physical violence, and performance versus reality. These concepts are perhaps explored most eloquently in the famous soliloquy that begins 'To be or not to be'.

1603 – SHAKESPEARE'S OTHELLO

Othello, the Moor of Venice is a tragedy by William Shakespeare believed to have been written in approximately 1603, and based on the Italian short story 'Un Capitano Moro' ('A Moorish Captain') by Cinthio, a disciple of Boccaccio, first published in 1565. The work revolves around four central characters: Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army; his wife Desdemona; his lieutenant, Cassio; and his trusted ensign Iago. Because of its varied themes - racism, love, jealousy, and betrayal - Othello is widely felt to remain relevant to the present day and is often performed in professional and community theatres alike. The play has also been the basis for numerous operatic, film, and literary adaptations.

1605 (NOVEMBER 10) – LETTER ABOUT GUY FAWKES

In 1605, a group of Catholic conspirators, including the now infamous Guy Fawkes, devised a plan to blow up the Houses of

Parliament. They wanted to overthrow the government, kill King James I, and make James's daughter a Catholic head of state.

Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, Catholics had been terribly persecuted, but they had high hopes for better treatment after James came to the throne in 1603. However, the situation did not improve. In March 1605 the group rented a ground floor cellar directly beneath the House of Lords, filling it with 36 barrels of gunpowder. Guy Fawkes, who had years of munitions experience after serving in the Spanish Army, was chosen to light the fuse. However, Westminster was searched and the gunpowder was discovered before it could be ignited by Fawkes. He was arrested and tortured, before he and seven other conspirators were hung, drawn and quartered for high treason. The rest fled to the Midlands, where they were either captured or died fighting. The repercussions for Catholics were felt for centuries, in a series of repressive laws introduced against them.

1607 – NEWSBOOK

Newsbooks were the ancestors of newspapers, printed at this time in editions of up to 250 copies, though being read probably by a much larger number. While newsbooks became widespread during the 1640s, their origin can be traced back to official statements about public events, such as *The Trewe encountre*, a pamphlet published following the Battle of Flodden in 1513, and *corantos*, newsletters carrying collected information, which often contained reported speech.

1608 – SHAKESPEARE, KING LEAR

William Shakespeare is one of the best loved playwrights in the history of English literature. He began his career as an actor and playwright around 1592, not long after the first public playhouses were opened in London. He wrote at least 37 plays, many of which were very successful both at court and in the public playhouses. This extract is from the 1608 quarto edition of *King Lear*, a tragedy in which an aging king goes insane as the social hierarchy around him crumbles.

Shakespeare was writing at a time of great cultural and intellectual development, with wonderful discoveries and innovations taking place in the fields of arts and sciences. Scholars were taking a renewed interest in classical languages, and explorers and traders were making intrepid expeditions to the New World. Shakespeare therefore had a wealth of

words with which to tell his tales. Words to enter the lexicon at this time include enthusiasm, skeleton, utopian, bizarre, chocolate, explore, and violin. Many of the expressions found in Shakespeare's plays are today part of our everyday language usage, including 'love is blind' and 'I must be cruel to be kind'.

1608 – ENGLISH ARRIVES IN NORTH AMERICA

The first permanent English colony in America was founded at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. The founder of the Jamestown settlement was the adventurer Captain John Smith, famous for being saved from execution by Pocahontas, the daughter of an Indian chief. A True Relation is his description of coastal Virginia, its local peoples, and the new English colony.

1609 – SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

The sonnet is a 14-line fixed-pattern rhyming verse, borrowed from Italian poetry. Shakespeare was a master at creating them. His collection of 154 sonnets, first printed in 1609 but written many years earlier, is somewhat mysterious. Scholars have yet to reach agreement on the identity of either the 'Fair Youth' or the 'Dark Lady' to whom many of the poems are addressed.

1611 – KING JAMES BIBLE

The year 2021 marks 410 years since the publication of the King James or Authorised Version of the Bible. Around 250 phrases from the King James Bible are now part of present-day English, many of which appear in the Gospel of Matthew. Among the expressions still heard are 'Salt of the earth' (chap V, verse 13) and 'An eie for an eie, and a tooth for a tooth' (chap V, verse 38).

The compilers used the Bishops' Bible of 1568 as their main source (in its 1602 edition), but also drew on the best of earlier translations including Tyndale's New Testament (1526). The result was a conservative text that kept some outdated words and phrases. This Authorised Version was used in most English and Scottish churches until the mid-20th century, and so its language achieved greater prestige than previous translations.

1612-1613 – JOHN WEBSTER, THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

‘Webster was much possessed by death and saw the skull beneath the skin’ (T.S. Eliot)

Little is known about the dramatist John Webster, but his play *The Duchess of Malfi* has become one of the most famous tragedies of the Jacobean era. It was first performed in the spring of 1614 and is set in a world of intrigue, revenge and horror. The play tells the story of a young, widowed Duchess who falls in love with her steward, Antonio, and has three children with him. As a result, her brothers – the corrupt Cardinal and the unstable Ferdinand – plot to kill her, fearing for their inheritance and the future of their family name. The Duchess is imprisoned on her brothers’ orders, and is strangled by a group of executioners, along with her maid and her two youngest children.

The play follows the principles of Senecan tragedy – it turns on violence, cruelty and spectacle – and has been criticised for its startling plot twists. However, the calm steadfastness of the Duchess, who urges her executioners to ‘pull, and pull strongly’ as they prepare to kill her, makes her a highly memorable character.

1616 – THE GLOBE THEATRE

The panorama of London was produced in 1616, and includes the Globe Theatre, in which Shakespeare performed many of his plays.

The first public playhouses were built in London in the late 1500s. Theatres were not permitted within the boundaries of the City itself, but were tolerated in outer districts of London, such as Southwark, where the Globe was located. Southwark was notorious for its noisy, chaotic entertainments and for its sleazy low-life: its theatres, brothels, bear baiting pits, pickpockets and the like.

The Globe was built in 1599, from the reused timbers of a playhouse known as *The Theatre*. It was an open-air amphitheatre, with three tiers of galleries, a covered stage and a thatched roof. The first Globe was burnt down in 1613, when its thatch caught fire during a performance of Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*. The second Globe was built on the foundations of the first, but given a tiled roof. It could accommodate an audience of 3,000.

1623 – SHAKESPEARE’S FIRST FOLIO

This is the first collected edition of the Shakespeare's plays, published in 1623, only 7 years after the playwright’s death. It is known

as the 'First Folio'. The word 'folio' comes from the Latin for a leaf, and usually means a leaf in a manuscript. But in printers' jargon it had another sense: it referred to page size. It was two of Shakespeare's fellow actors and closest friends, John Heminge and Henry Condell, who undertook the work of editing the text and supervising the printing.

None of Shakespeare's manuscripts survive, so the printed texts of his plays are our only source for what he originally wrote. The quarto editions are the texts closest to Shakespeare's time. Some are thought to preserve either his working drafts or his finished 'fair copies'. Others are thought to record versions remembered by actors who performed the plays in Shakespeare's day.

William Shakespeare began his career as an actor and playwright around 1592, not long after the first public playhouses were opened in London. He belonged to The Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors who performed in the Globe, an open-air playhouse built on the south bank of the Thames in 1599. Shakespeare wrote at least 37 plays, many of which were very successful both at court and in the public playhouses.

1633 – JOHN DONNE, POETRY

'The Flea' and 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' are two of the most famous examples of metaphysical poetry, which use jarring but intimate rhythms, rich and often contradictory metaphors, and explorations of deeply emotional themes such as eroticism, shame, pain, death and joy.

In 'The Flea', Donne uses the image of the flea, sucking first on his blood and then on his beloved's, to persuade her to sleep with him, arguing that as their blood is united in the flea, there should be no barriers to their physical union:

'This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed and marriage temple is'

In 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning', the relationship between two lovers who are shortly to be parted is compared to a pair of compasses: the legs of the compass may move apart, but they will always be joined together. The poems celebrate different kinds of love (one carnal, the other spiritual), but both display a wit and elegance that are characteristic of Donne's poetry.

1640 – BEN JONSON, THE ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Ben Jonson's works range from the down to earth drama *Bartholomew Fair* with its witty observations of London life, to refined translations of Greek and Roman poetry. Less well-known is *The English Grammar*, written in 1623 and lost in a fire, but rewritten and published after Jonson's death.

Jonson's *Grammar* gives us a snapshot of English in the early seventeenth century. He considers syntax and spelling, and is one of the first writers to leave us a clear indication of the pronunciation of English. Here Jonson tells us that the letter 'r' at the end of a word would be heard clearly, because it is 'the Dogs letter' – we are directed to think of the sound a dog makes – it 'hurreth in the sound'.

It is notable that the book is printed in both Latin and English, as Jonson used Latin examples both for pronunciation and spelling; the book was intended 'for the benefit of all strangers (foreigners)', for whom Latin would be a generally known language. Though the literary critic A V Waite found this both 'tedious and of doubtful value', he described the work as 'a sturdy effort to write down the truth about the English language in the seventeenth century, so far as known or reducible to system'.

1644 – AREOPAGITICA BY JOHN MILTON

State control of printing was introduced by Henry VIII and continued into Elizabeth's reign, with further controls issued in 1586 and 1637 over the growing number of printing presses. In April 1638, political agitator John Lilburne was arrested for importing subversive books. He was fined £500 for contempt, and flogged for the two miles between Fleet Prison and the pillory. This controversial pamphlet, entitled *Areopagitica*, was written by the writer and poet John Milton as a protest against Lilburne's treatment. It was the first great impassioned plea for free speech. In fact, it had little impact. It was not until 1695 that the laws on printing were relaxed, allowing for a blossoming of newspapers and provincial presses.

1666 – THE LONDON GAZETTE, FIRE OF LONDON

This article reporting the Great Fire of London was published in *The London Gazette*, Monday September 3 to Monday September 10 1666.

The fire had started in a baker's shop in Pudding Lane on 2 September. In 17th century London fires were common, but none of them had spread so widely or caused as much damage as this. London was by far the largest city in England and mainly consisted of wooden buildings, tightly packed together along very narrow streets. This poorly built urban sprawl, together with dry weather and a strong easterly wind, created the perfect conditions for the rapid spread of the fire. It raged for four days until it was finally extinguished, largely due to a change in wind direction. By then it had destroyed 373 acres of the city of London, including over 13,000 houses and 84 churches as well as St Paul's Cathedral and much of London Bridge.

1667 – JOHN MILTON'S PARADISE LOST

John Milton's ambitious rewriting of the Fall of Man is one of the most influential poems in the English language. First published in 1667, its aim was no less than to 'justifie the wayes of God to Man' - to explain why God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. One of the most striking aspects of the poem is its portrayal of Satan, a charismatic rebel who is so intriguing that the poet William Blake commented that Milton was 'of the Devil's party without knowing it'. The poem enacts debates about the nature of free will and predestination, and has sparked much critical and philosophical discussion. It is told in blank verse, in twelve books, and its exuberant imagery, lengthy suspended sentences and distinctive sound-patterning can be attributed to the fact that the poem was composed after Milton went blind: it was dictated to a series of amanuenses, including the poet's daughters.

Milton lived at a time of immense political change, and spent much of his life as a radical. Educated at Cambridge, he was a prolific pamphleteer, and campaigned vigorously for religious and civil liberties and the freedom of the Press.

1677 – APHRA BEHN, THE ROVER

'All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds.' (Virginia Woolf)

Aphra Behn, the first English woman to make her living as a professional writer, was employed as a spy by Charles II before embarking on her career as a dramatist, poet and novelist.

It is fitting, then, that her most famous play *The Rover* (1677) features powerful female characters who argue wittily for their rights. In the play, two women battle for the affections of the cavalier Willmore. One is the sparky Hellena, who declares that she would rather become a nun than be forced into marriage with a man she does not love; the other is the prostitute Angellica Bianca. In their struggle, Hellena and Angellica must also fight against the limitations of sex and social class. The play, which is set in Naples amidst a licentious society of exiled libertines and Spanish noblemen, is strikingly modern in its frank discussion of gender roles and pleas for sexual freedom.

1678 – JOHN BUNYAN, PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

John Bunyan was an itinerant tinker who produced one of the most widely-read books in the western canon. A non-conformist who spent many years in prison for refusing to obey injunctions not to preach, he wrote the greater part of *Pilgrim’s Progress* while in Bedford Gaol.

An allegorical novel, *Pilgrim’s Progress* tells the story of Christian’s struggle to overcome various obstacles that hinder his passage from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Bunyan’s language is permeated by that of the King James Bible alongside the colloquial language of his day. In applying the idea of the voyage/quest narrative to a spiritual subject, the book is an early model for the novel as a journey of the self towards fulfilment, seen later in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, and Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse 5*.

Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* was an instant publishing success, with eleven editions within a decade of its first appearance, and selling possibly 100,000 copies in its first fifteen years. During the later 18th and the 19th centuries it became regarded in Britain as essential family reading, and has been claimed as one of the ten most published books of all time.

1700 – CONGREVE, THE WAY OF THE WORLD

With its cast of rakes, fops and aristocrats, *The Way of the World* is often presented as the the most quintessential Restoration comedy. In

fact, it was a failure when first performed in 1700, and effectively put an end to Congreve's dramatic career.

Its complex plot revolves around the relationship between two lovers, the protagonist Mirabell and the 'fine lady' Millamant, and Mirabell's attempts to secure Millamant's full dowry from her aunt, Lady Wishfort. It is set in iconic, fashionable London locations - St. James's Park, the salons of rich ladies, and the chocolate-houses that were dens of gossip and gambling - and its characters, relentless in their pursuit of financial and social power, can be difficult to sympathise with. Nevertheless, it is extremely acute in its depiction of a society in which capitalism is on the rise, and in which marriage is less about love than material gain.

1700 – JOHN DRYDEN, FABLES

Like Robert Henryson two centuries earlier, Dryden is here reworking a well-known tale, in this case the Greek legend of Pygmalion, as told by Roman poet Ovid in *Metamorphoses*, and which G B Shaw was to rework in the early 20th century. The *Fables Ancient and Modern* are considered one of Dryden's best works, a model of linguistic clarity and elegance. A major figure in Restoration drama, Dryden wrote several essays explaining and exploring ideas about literature, particularly where these influenced his own writing. His work on literary theory was less to do with the application of principles than close reading and critiquing of the work of other writers, such as Jonson and Shakespeare.

Dryden's successful and prolific career as a dramatist and satirist during the reign of Charles II saw him made poet laureate in 1668; he followed the establishment's change of religion to Catholicism on the accession of James II, and lost his place at court following the accession of William and Mary. His later works include translations from French, Latin and Greek, and literary criticism. Dryden felt strongly that knowledge of Latin grammatical construction was beneficial to clear writing in English. His style of written composition became a model for writing in English during the 18th century.

18TH CENTURY – THE SPECTATOR

The Spectator was a periodical published daily by Joseph Addison and Sir Richard Steele, both politicians, which was one of the bestsellers of the 18th century. Its 500 issues sold up to 4000 copies a day, and carried news and comment, but especially comments on manners, morals and literature. The publication pretended to be the reports by a Mr Spectator on the conversations of a club comprising representatives of the country squirearchy, the town, commerce and the army. Its essays, as seen in this example, show that urban life in the 18th century was not so far different from today, with observations on begging and binge-drinking. ‘Mr Spectator’ particularly comments on debt – ‘[I am] extremely astonished that Men can be so insensible of the Danger of running into Debt’.

The magazine of essays was a popular model for expressing various views on society in the 18th century. Though often short-lived, they sold well and were read by thousands. The Gentleman’s Magazine, Steele’s The Tatler, Samuel Johnson’s The Rambler and The Idler and others created an enthusiasm for discussing ideas and literature that were at the heart of literate thinking in 18th century England.

1712 JONATHAN SWIFT, A PROPOSAL FOR CORRECTING, IMPROVING AND ASCERTAINING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

In 1712, the English language, according to satirist Jonathan Swift, was in chaos. He outlined his complaints in this public letter to Robert Harley, leader of the government, proposing the appointment of experts to advise on English use. The model was to be based on that of the Académie Française, which had been regulating French since 1634. His proposal, like all the others, came to nothing. To this day no official regulation of the English language exists.

The aim of Swift's proposed academy is given on page 31: 'some Method should be thought of for ascertaining and fixing our Language for ever'. The section before suggests how this might be done, for example by rejecting 'very defective' grammatical forms and restoring some antiquated words 'on account of their Energy and Sound.'

1719 – DANIEL DEFOE, ROBINSON CRUSOE

Often hailed as the first English novel, Robinson Crusoe has a story that will be familiar to many: that of the sailor Crusoe, who finds himself

shipwrecked on a remote island and must carve an existence for himself out of the few resources that are available to him. Its author, Daniel Defoe, based his tale on the experiences of the traveller Alexander Selkirk, who spent four years marooned on the Pacific island of Juan Fernandez in the early eighteenth century. The adventures of Crusoe – his struggle to cultivate the land, his encounters with cannibals and mutineers, and his friendship with Man Friday – were hugely popular when the novel was first published, and sparked a vast number of spinoffs and translations.

While it can be read as a simple adventure story, Robinson Crusoe also has a wider resonance: its themes of self-reliance and hard work have been seen as an embodiment of the Protestant work ethic, and Crusoe can be viewed as the archetypal colonist.

1721 – BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

Bartholomew Fair was by far the largest and most spectacular event of its kind, and was the scene of much public excitement. Held in London every September for 4 days, the thousands of visitors who went there could witness dozens of entertainments and spectacles: tumblers, acrobatics and tightrope walkers, for example, or exhibitions of exotic animals, boxing competitions, puppet shows and displays of human strength. There were dozens of 'booths' selling a wide range of foods such as gingerbread, nuts, puddings, sausages and hot pies to the huge crowds. Vast quantities of alcohol were consumed there, which was the cause of much concern to local authorities.

1729 – SWIFT, A MODEST PROPOSAL

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassée or a ragout.

Jonathan Swift's attack on the British government's inability to solve the problem of poverty in Ireland is one of the literary canon's most famous examples of satire. It proposes that the most obvious solution to Ireland's economic crisis is for the Irish to sell their children as food: shockingly, it also suggests various ways in which they can be prepared and served. It was first published anonymously, in 1729, and the

detached, serious tone of its narrator emphasises the horror of what Swift is actually recommending: only in its final paragraphs, when the essay turns to the realities of the Irish economic system and the problems caused by absentee landlords, does the author's view become clear. Despite its power as a piece of rhetoric, *A Modest Proposal* did not lead to any lasting changes for Ireland's rural poor; and just over a century later, thousands would perish in the Great Potato Famine.

1740 – SAMUEL RICHARDSON, PAMELA

The author and printer Samuel Richardson was one of the earliest English novelists. *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, which was published anonymously in 1740-1, was his first novel. Written as a series of letters, it tells the story of the 15-year old servant Pamela Andrews, who is left without protection after the death of her mistress Lady B. Pamela is pursued by Lady B's son, Mr B, who is infatuated with her and has her imprisoned in his remote house in Lincolnshire. During her imprisonment Pamela keeps a journal recording her feelings for Mr B: although she rejects him at first and resists his advances, she eventually falls in love with him and the two are united after admitting both their faults and their affection for each other. The reward Pamela gains for her virtue is therefore access to upper-class society, and to circles she could never otherwise have entered.

The novel's epistolary style allows the reader access to Pamela's thoughts and feelings, and was praised by contemporary critics for its psychological realism. *Pamela* was extremely popular, although some readers criticised it for its heroine's transcending of class barriers and rise to high status. It sparked many parodies, including Henry Fielding's novel *Shamela* (1741), whose heroine is a manipulative social climber.

1749 – HENRY FIELDING, TOM JONES

Tom Jones is one of the earliest English novels, and was hugely popular when it was first published in 1749. It tells the story of the foundling Tom and his journey towards adulthood and marriage. As might be expected, this journey is a complicated one: Tom falls in love with a neighbour's daughter, discovers that he has a rival for his love in the shape of the unpleasant Master Blifil, and is expelled from Mr Allworthy's house after a series of misadventures. His picaresque journey leads him to encounter a vivid cast of characters including robbers,

soldiers, gypsies and untrustworthy lawyers - the latter perhaps an arch nod to Fielding's own legal career.

Yet the plot alone is only part of Tom Jones. The novel is written in a mock-epic style in which Tom's adventures are paralleled with those of the heroes of Classical mythology: whole chapters are given up to seemingly irrelevant digressions, and the story is frequently underscored with a bawdy humour that led Samuel Johnson to comment that he 'scarcely knew a more corrupt work'. Fielding's influence can be seen on a number of later writers, most notably the great 19th-century novelists Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray.

1755 – JOHNSON'S DICTIONARY

Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language is one of the most famous dictionaries in history. First published in 1755, the dictionary took just over 8 years to compile and listed 40,000 words. Johnson required only 6 helpers. Each word was defined in detail; the definitions illustrated with quotations covering every branch of learning. It was a huge scholarly achievement, more extensive and complex than any of its predecessors - and the comparable French Dictionnaire had taken 55 years to compile and required the dedication of 40 scholars.

1759 – LAURENCE STERNE, TRISTRAM SHANDY

'Shut the door.-was begot in the night, betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was.'

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, is a witty and highly original novel. Its title makes it sound like a typical 'bildungsroman': the 'novel of experience' that charts an individual's growth from childhood to maturity. In reality, it is a strikingly modern attempt to chart the difficulty of writing such an account. In trying to tell the story of his origins, Tristram gets bogged down by his desire to make his explanations as precise and all-encompassing as possible: he goes off on tangents, is led up blind alleys, and sometimes descends into inarticulacy, with words giving way to squiggles, asterisks and occasional blank pages. His digressions - on topics as diverse as siege warfare, the naming of children, the importance of having a large and attractively-shaped nose, and his own accidental circumcision - are often extremely funny.

Laurence Sterne was criticised by some of his contemporaries for his borrowings from other texts, but *Tristram Shandy* is praised today as a very early example of metafiction.

1764 – HORACE WALPOLE, THE CASTLE OF OTRANTO

The *Castle of Otranto*, by Horace Walpole, is generally viewed as the first Gothic novel. Its first edition, published in 1764, claimed to be a translation of a work printed in Naples in 1529 and newly discovered in the library of ‘an ancient Catholic family in the north of England’. It tells the story of Manfred, the prince of Otranto, who is keen to secure the castle for his descendants in the face of a mysterious curse. The novel begins with the death of Manfred’s son, Conrad, who is crushed to death by an enormous helmet on the morning of his wedding to the beautiful princess Isabella. Faced with the extinction of his line, Manfred vows to divorce his wife and marry the terrified Isabella himself.

The *Castle of Otranto* blends elements of realist fiction with the supernatural and fantastical, laying down many of the plot devices and character-types that would become typical of the Gothic: secret passages, clanging trapdoors, hidden identities and vulnerable heroines fleeing from men with evil intent. The novel was a success all over Europe, and the poet Thomas Gray commented in a letter to Walpole that it made ‘some of us cry a little, and all in general afraid to go to bed o’ nights.’

1774– GOLDSMITH, SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER

She Stoops to Conquer is a play of mistaken identities, practical jokes, and plots-within-plots. The play was first performed at Covent Garden on 15 March 1773, and its fast-paced storyline centres on the spirited Kate Hardcastle's attempts to win over the rich but socially inept young aristocrat Charles Marlow by pretending to be a barmaid. It draws on many of the conventions and character-types of Shakespearean comedy: Kate's quick-witted play-acting places her firmly in the tradition of cross-dressing heroines such as Rosalind and Viola, while the joker Tony Lumpkin has been described by one critic as ‘a mischievous Puck in 18th-century riding clothes’. The emphasis on deception, disguise and farcical confusion draws attention to the play's theatricality, but it also contains some vivid moments of psychological realism.

Its author, Oliver Goldsmith, was born in rural Ireland and studied in Dublin, Edinburgh and Paris before settling in London. He was best known in his own lifetime as a novelist and poet, and *She Stoops to Conquer* is by far his most famous play.

1780s – BURNS, POEMS CHIEFLY IN THE SCOTTISH DIALECT

Scots reached a literary peak in the 18th century in the work of Robert Burns (1759–96), later acknowledged as Scotland’s national poet. This poem ‘To a Louse’ is from his first published collection: *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), also known as the ‘Kilmarnock Volume’.

Burns wrote both in standard and non-standard English, but is mainly celebrated for his use of Scots. His poem contains features still widespread in Scotland, such as *canna* (can’t), *sae* (so) and *gae* (go), and less familiar terms such as *grozet* (gooseberry) and *smeddum* (powder or finely ground grain).

1789 – OLAUDAH EQUIANO

Olaudah Equiano was an African slave who, after buying his freedom, became a prominent anti-slavery campaigner. This is an extract from his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, describing his capture in Nigeria as a young boy and the subsequent journey to the Caribbean on a slave ship. The book formed an important part of the campaign to abolish slavery when it was published in 1789, selling several thousand copies; many to the political elite. The story of Equiano's passage into slavery arrived just at a moment when the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was circulating slave ship diagrams around the country.

Between 1789 and 1794, there were 9 editions and it was translated and printed in many European countries. Although not the first account of slavery from an African point of view, Equiano's book became the most popular and widely read.

1787-1818 – WILLIAM BLAKE’S NOTEBOOK

William Blake (1757-1827) was an artist, poet, mystic, visionary and radical thinker. The closely-filled pages of this working notebook give a fascinating insight into his compositional process, allowing us to

follow the genesis of some of his best-known work, including 'London', 'The Tyger' and 'The Sick Rose'.

It is believed that Blake first used the notebook in February 1787, starting from the front and entering a series of pencil emblems, framed in the centre of each page, under the tentative title 'Ideas of Good and Evil'. Blake's series of emblems in this notebook record man's journey from birth to death. From this series, Blake was to select 17 designs that he engraved and published in a small volume entitled *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793).

At around the same time, having reached the end of the book, Blake turned it upside-down, and used these pages to transcribe fair copies (later heavily annotated) of earlier drafts of poems, many of which would appear in *Songs of Experience* (1794). When he started to enter these poems, some of the pages were already covered with sketches for an aborted edition of illustrations of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Some of these sketches were preserved, while others were overwritten. Although Blake mostly worked in this notebook between 1792 and 1794, he kept it with him throughout his life. He picked it up again to draft further poems at the front from 1801, and was still composing as late as 1818.

Working at a time of great social and political upheaval, Blake's work explores the tensions between human passions and the repressive nature of social, religious and political conventions. Alongside searing observations of injustices in the physical world around him, he weaves mystical visions and esoteric meditations on the 'contrary states of the human soul'. Although widely recognised today as one of the greatest poets of the 19th century, his work was largely ignored during his own lifetime, and took many years to gain widespread appreciation.

1791 – THOMAS PAINE'S RIGHTS OF MAN

Thomas Paine's most famous work, *The Rights of Man*, was published in 1791, 2 years after the French Revolution. In it he defended the values of the Revolution - those of 'Liberté, Égalité, fraternité' (the French for 'liberty, equality, brotherhood'). Paine explored the idea that government based on true justice should support not only mankind's natural rights (life, liberty, free speech, freedom of conscience) but also its civil rights (relating to security and protection).

He highlighted the fact that only a fraction of the people who paid taxes were entitled to vote. Using detailed calculations, Paine showed how a tax system, including a form of income tax, could provide social welfare in support of those civil rights. Decades ahead of his time, he outlined a plan covering widespread education, child benefit, pensions for the elderly, poor relief and much more. The book sold tens of thousands of copies and became one of the most widely read books in the Western world at the time.

1794 – WILLIAM BLAKE, SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

William Blake (1757-1827) was an artist, poet, mystic, visionary and radical thinker. Working at a time of great social and political change, his work explores the tensions between the human passions and the repressive nature of social and political conventions. In this, perhaps his most famous collection of poems he investigates, as he put it in the subtitle, 'the two contrary states of the human soul'.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience is as much a work of art as a collection of poems. Produced laboriously from etched copper-plates, it combines text and hand-coloured illustrations, and draws on the nursery rhymes, chapbooks and popular ballads that Blake would have encountered during his London childhood. His intention was to dramatise the concepts of innocence and experience, giving them an unorthodox twist that sprang from his reading of philosophers such as Emmanuel Swedenborg and Jacob Boehmen.

At first glance, his poems seem childlike and insubstantial, with simple rhythms and rhyming patterns and images of children, animals and flowers. However, they are often argumentative or satirical, and reflect his deeply held political beliefs. Blake deals with radical subjects such as poverty, child labour, political and social revolution, industrialisation and the abuses of the Church. Many of the poems in Songs of Experience respond to counterparts in Songs of Innocence, exploring their themes from darker, more complex angles.

The oddness of Blake's vision led many of his contemporaries to denounce him as mad: his biographer Peter Ackroyd has commented that, 'He might have been some star-child, or changeling, who withdrew into himself and into his own myth because he could not deal directly or painlessly even with the human beings closest to him'.

1807 – WORDSWORTH, ‘I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD’

I wandered lonely as a cloud / That floats on high o'er vales and hills, / When all at once I saw a crowd. / A host of golden daffodils.

The work of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth was revolutionary in its day. Wordsworth believed that poetry should explore the purity and beauty of nature, and the deep human emotion inspired by the natural landscape. Previously, poets had focused on grand, moralizing themes. Initially a supporter of the French Revolution, Wordsworth was horrified by the industrialisation of Britain and by the social injustices that came with modernisation - over-crowded cities, poverty, oppression.

The 24-line poem sums up the simple splendour of flowers waving in a Lake District breeze. It is one of England's most famous poems. Wordsworth wrote it in 1804, remembering a walk with his sister two years earlier. It was first published in 1807.

1811 – JANE AUSTEN, LETTER TO HER SISTER

This is an extract from a letter written by Jane Austen to her sister Cassandra on 25 April 1811. In it, she details the events of a party held at the house of her sister-in-law in London. She paints a vivid picture of the occasion, describing the flowers, the music and the heat of the drawing room; listing the numerous male guests; and questioning the reliability of ‘Captain S.’ who had consumed too much alcohol. She makes a number of sharp observations, for instance she writes that ‘Miss M. seems very happy, but has not beauty enough to figure in London.’ This evocative account, in which Austen so powerfully portrays the minutia of everyday life, will be recognisable to anyone familiar with the settings of her novels.

1816 – JANE AUSTEN, PERSUASION

The much-loved novels of Jane Austen (1775-1817) explore the complexities of genteel English society, and the relationship between wealth, love and freedom of thought for women. On the surface, Austen's works may seem like pure love stories in which women search for romance. But the novels are powerful social commentaries, which reflect so many of the restrictions placed on women at the time. It must be remembered that the prospects for a woman who did not find a husband could be terrifying, both in terms of her social reputation and her financial stability.

Persuasion, Austen's final completed book, was published after her death in 1818. The heroine, Anne Elliot, is 27 and still unmarried. She had been forced as a young woman to break off her engagement to her lover, a man her family felt was neither distinguished or wealthy enough for her. It is possible that the novel reflected aspects of Austen's own life.

1817 – P.B. SHELLEY, 'OZYMANDIAS'

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) is often thought of as a rebel and revolutionary. It is appropriate, then, that 'Ozymandias' – one of his most famous poems – is a warning about the arrogance of great leaders. The poem is thought to have been inspired by a gigantic statue of Rameses II that was bought for the British Museum by the Italian explorer Giovanni Belzoni. It was written in late 1817 as part of a competition between Shelley and his friend Horace Smith, and was published in *The Examiner* in January 1818.

'Ozymandias' is a sonnet, written in iambic pentameter, and gains much of its power from the taut compression of its language. Its vivid evocation of the ruined statue underlines the hubris of Ozymandias' proud boast 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!' The irony is, of course, that the Mighty will despair – not at the power of Ozymandias, but at the recognition that their power is ultimately transitory.

1817 – SIR WALTER SCOTT, ROB ROY

Rob Roy is one of Sir Walter Scott's most famous novels. Its title character is based on a real person: the folk hero Rob Roy McGregor, sometimes referred to as the Scottish 'Robin Hood', an outlaw and a rebel whose story embodied for Scott an ideal of courage, independence and romance. The novel recounts the adventures of its narrator, a young Englishman called Frank Osbaldistone, who encounters Rob Roy after being sent to the Highlands to collect a debt that is owed to his father. The action takes place against the backdrop of the Jacobite Rebellion of 1715, and is set in various locations including Northumberland, Glasgow and the beautiful countryside around Loch Lomond. It is notable for being told partly in Scots dialect, and for its depiction of the living conditions endured by many Scots in the early 18th century.

Robert Louis Stevenson considered it the best of Scott's novels, and said that he would never forget 'the pleasure and surprise' he felt on first reading it as a child.

1818 – MARY SHELLEY, FRANKENSTEIN

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

For many, the name 'Frankenstein' conjures up ghoulish images of a green-skinned, square-headed monster. Yet the novel that gave rise to this enduring cultural image is much more complex, and much more striking, than this. First published in 1818 when its author Mary Shelley was just 21 years old, it had its origins in a holiday on the shores of Lake Geneva. Mary Shelley and her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley were guests of the poet Lord Byron: one rainy night, Byron suggested that the company should amuse themselves by making up ghost stories. Frankenstein was the result.

Subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus', Frankenstein draws on contemporary ideas about the nature of human life and the potential of science. It also emphasises humanity's ultimate responsibility for its creations. The novel's complex narrative structure means that while we witness Victor Frankenstein's agony at the results of his horrific experiment, we also see the pains of the monster at being abandoned by its creator.

Some critics have drawn parallels between the monster's tortuous origins and those of Mary Shelley herself: her mother, the feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft, died shortly after her birth. Others argue that this is to deny Mary Shelley's status as an artist in her own right, and have seen Frankenstein as the product of an exceptional creative mind.

1819 – JOHN KEATS' 'ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE'

'Ode to a Nightingale' is one of John Keats' great odes, written in May 1819, when the poet was just 23 years old. The poem is dominated by thoughts of death, underpinned by meditations on immortality and on the finite nature of joy. The previous year, Keats' brother Tom had died from tuberculosis, the illness that had also killed their mother. When writing the poem, Keats was aware that he himself had started to experience the first symptoms of the disease.

The poem's rich imagery emphasises a desire for an escape into a world of hallucinogenic bliss, with references to 'drowsy numbness', a 'dull opiate' and wine with 'beaded bubbles winking at the brim' . Speaking to the nightingale and its exquisite song, he writes: 'Though the dull brain perplexes and retards: Already with thee! tender is the night'. But the ecstasy brought by the nightingale is itself transient, and as the bird flies away the poet is left back in thoughts of hopelessness. Keats died, aged just 25, in February 1821.

1819 - 1824 – LORD BYRON, DON JUAN

Famously described as 'mad, bad and dangerous to know', the poet Lord Byron caused a sensation when he published the first instalments of Don Juan in 1819. A long satirical poem, divided into sections called 'cantos', Don Juan is based on the legend of the famous womaniser. However, Byron's Don Juan is not the seducer, but the seduced. From his origins in Seville, Don Juan travels across Europe, facing shipwreck, starvation and slavery, and succumbing to the charms of numerous women on the way. The poem is written in ottava rima, a rhyming pattern used in Italian comic verse, and contains a number of lengthy and provocative digressions in which Byron insults his fellow poets and comments upon social conditions in England. Don Juan runs to over 16,000 lines, and was uncompleted on Byron's death in 1824. Harold Bloom and Lionel Trilling describe it as both 'unfinished and unfinishable ... it would have gone on as long as Byron did.'

Stanza 221, the penultimate stanza in the poem's first canto, is an example of Byron in characteristically mischievous mode in a direct address to the reader, taking his leave and promising not to try the reader's patience. This technique of 'breaking the frame' of the text can be seen as prefiguring later developments in narrative as writers experiment with their authorial role and direct the reader's response.

1837 – CHARLES DICKENS, OLIVER TWIST

Oliver Twist is Charles Dickens's second novel, about an orphan boy whose good heart and healthy appetite help him escape the terrible underworld of crime and poverty in 19th century London. It has proven to be one of the best loved novels in the history of literature. This is Dickens's handwritten preface to the 'cheap edition' of the book, first published in 1850. In it he refutes claims that 'Jacob's Island' (the squalid

South London slum depicted in the book) did not exist in reality. He appeals to his readers to recognise that reforms were desperately needed to improve the living conditions of the poor.

The book first appeared in monthly instalments from 1837-39. Balancing suspense, melodrama, pathos and humour, it paints a picture of a city tainted by social deprivation. An often sarcastic comment on the Poor Laws, which forced many into hard labour, it must have drawn on Dickens's own childhood experiences of poverty. Luckily for Oliver, as for Dickens himself, things turned out rather well in the end.

Nonetheless, the book is generally much darker and bleaker than its many stage and screen adaptations: Fagin, the head of the gang of pickpockets, is hanged, Oliver's half-brother steals his money and dies in jail, Sikes murders Nancy before himself meeting a gruesome death, and the Artful Dodger is transported to Australia.

1838 – CHARLES DICKENS, NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

Dickens was not only a master of storytelling; he was also foremost among 19th-century novelists in confronting his middle-class readers with the human face of social deprivation. In doing so, his writings smoothed the path of reform. Through his sharply drawn characters and compelling plots, Dickens created an evocative and enduring image of the Victorian underclass, tempering poverty with hope and wringing humour from despair.

Charles Dickens's novel, *Nicholas Nickleby*, was first published in monthly parts between March 1838 and September 1839. Nicholas's adventures take him to Dotheboys Hall, home of the brutal schoolmaster Wackford Squeers – one of Dickens's greatest grotesques. Nicholas is appalled by the treatment of the school's orphans, in particular a frail and simple-minded boy called Smike. It was Dickens's intention to reveal to the public the horrors of Yorkshire's boarding schools, where parents would dump their unwanted children for indefinite periods. The lack of hygiene and the inhumane treatment of pupils was a source of great scandal at the time.

1842 – ROBERT BROWNING, DRAMATIC LYRICS

Dramatic Lyrics, published in 1842 when Robert Browning was just 30 years old, was a remarkable early achievement. 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess' are two of its most striking poems, and

bear a number of similarities. Both are examples of the dramatic monologue, a form pioneered by Browning, in which characters reveal their own personalities and shortcomings as they tell their stories. In addition, both are about suspicious deaths. The narrator of ‘Porphyria’s Lover’ strangles the woman he loves with her own hair in an apparent attempt to preserve a moment in which their relationship is at its most perfect. ‘My Last Duchess’ is narrated by the vain and materialistic Duke of Ferrara, who grows jealous at his young wife’s apparent lack of regard for the riches he bestows on her. The consequences of his anger are chilling:

*'This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together.'*

Both poems draw their energy from the interplay between what the speakers say, and what their words reveal about them. ‘The Pied Piper of Hamelin’, in contrast, was a late addition to Dramatic Lyrics, and is a much more straightforward example of narrative verse. It is a lively retelling of the famous 13th-century legend, drawing on the ballad tradition to tell the story of the strange figure in ‘a gypsy coat of red and yellow’ who disappears with the children of Hamelin after its mayor refuses to pay him for ridding the city of its rats.

1843 – CHARLES DICKENS, A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.

The miserly Ebenezer Scrooge is one of Charles Dickens’s most famous and enduring characters, and his story will be familiar to many, thanks to countless stage and screen adaptations. A Christmas Carol, first published on 17 December 1843, tells the story of Scrooge’s dramatic conversion from cold-hearted villain to generous benefactor, brought about by the visitation of a sequence of ghosts: the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come, and the ghost of Jacob Marley, Scrooge’s former partner.

The story is unashamedly sentimental, but its depiction of the contrasts between rich and poor and between miserliness and generosity draw on very real concerns about the nature of human society, and were undoubtedly influenced by Dickens’s own early experiences of poverty.

Perhaps the novel's greatest achievement is its portrayal of the causes and consequences of Scrooge's loneliness, which enable him to become a complex and fully-realised character rather than a simple pantomime villain.

1847 – CHARLOTTE BRONTE, JANE EYRE

Jane Eyre (1847) secured Charlotte Brontë's status as one of the greatest Victorian novelists. It tells the story of an orphan girl turned governess who overcomes hardships and setbacks to marry her beloved employer, Mr Rochester. It is also a passionate expression of the rights of women who lacked the money and social connections to make their voices heard:

'Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart!'

Brontë had her own deeply personal reasons for making this plea. Jane Eyre draws heavily on her attempts to make her way in life as the daughter of a Yorkshire parson, and Jane's miserable childhood years at Lowood have their roots in Brontë's experiences at the Clergy Daughters' School in Cowan Bridge, where poor living conditions led to the deaths of her older sisters Maria and Elizabeth. The novel was first published under the pseudonym 'Currer Bell', but there was so much speculation about who could have written such a powerful and unusual novel that Brontë was forced to reveal her true identity.

Denounced by some contemporary reviewers for Jane's 'unchristian' rebellion against her lowly status, Jane Eyre has been seen since as an archetypal love story, a key text in the feminist canon, and a classic example of Victorian Gothic.

1847 – EMILY BRONTE, WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Nelly, I am Heathcliff – he's always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being.

Wuthering Heights is one of the most strikingly original novels ever written. Its elements are simple to relate: the passionate relationship between Catherine Earnshaw and the dark, brooding Heathcliff, the destructive effects of their love, and the wild backdrop of the Yorkshire moors, based on the landscape around Emily Brontë's native Haworth.

Yet the novel is much more complex than this. It has an intricate structure in which events are recounted to an external narrator, a traveller called Lockwood, by the housekeeper Nelly Dean, whose down-to-earth voice throws the intensity of Catherine and Heathcliff's story into sharp relief. Names are repeated down the generations, relationships are interwoven, and devices such as Catherine's diary give us further insights into the characters.

Published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* was Emily Brontë's only novel. Her sister Charlotte said that it was 'hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials', but its images are often nightmarish and cruel, bordering on the Gothic.

1859-1860 – WILKIE COLLINS, THE WOMAN IN WHITE

There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung from the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments.

The Woman in White was the first example of the Victorian 'sensation novel', a genre that overflowed with suspense, passion and melodrama. It was first published in serial form in 1859-60 in the periodical *All The Year Round*, and its twists, turns and cliffhangers reflect these origins. Its dramatic opening chapters tell the story of a late-night encounter between a young drawing master, Walter Hartright, and a mysterious woman, clad in white and in a state of extreme distress.

The plot, which turns on the themes of disguise, madness and wrongful imprisonment, held an enormous appeal for the new reading public of the mid-Victorian age: one commentator noted that 'everyone was raving about it'. The novel is notable today for its use of multiple narrative voices and for Collins's careful plotting, influenced by his background in the law. It is also memorable for its eccentric villain, the menacing Count Fosco, an obese Italian who carries his pet mice with him in his pockets.

1862-1864 – ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is of the best loved children's books of all time. The original manuscript of the book, titled *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, and handwritten and illustrated by Lewis Carroll.

The story tells of a young girl who falls down a rabbit hole into a hallucinogenic world populated by talking packs of cards, and animals who look at pocket watches, smoke pipes and have tea parties. The tale was first told by Carroll to three young girls on a river boat trip in Oxford in 1862. The children, especially Alice, adored the story and begged Carroll to write it down. Between 1862 and 1864, he wrote out the whole text, using neat handwriting so that the young Alice was able to read it. The book was first published in 1865, edited and enlarged from the original manuscript.

1871 – GEORGE ELIOT, MIDDLEMARCH

Middlemarch tells the intertwining stories of various characters in a fictitious 1830s provincial town. It was written by Mary Anne Evans (1819-1880) under the masculine pen name George Eliot, and in its rich, realistic style covers many themes - the status of women (such as Dorothea Brooke, one of the main characters), idealism, religion, hypocrisy, contemporary politics, love, and the coming of the railways. The novel explores the idea that the search for one's true aim in life may be warped or frustrated by one's environment - but also that these obstacles may ultimately be overcome.

It first appeared in monthly parts in 1871, to reviews ranging from gushing to critical, and sold well when it appeared in one volume in 1874. Its popularity continued into the 20th century: Virginia Woolf called Middlemarch 'the magnificent book that, with all its imperfections, is one of the few English novels written for grown-up people'.

1879 – OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY

In 1879 an agreement was reached with Oxford University Press to begin work on a revolutionary New English Dictionary. The plan was to create a vast and comprehensive collection of English words, those from the Early Middle English period (1150) onwards, a lexicon of the language more complete than any English dictionary-maker had ever attempted. The dictionary would include lost and outmoded words as well as the newest fashionable or technical terms; it would trace the history (or etymology) of every word, showing the earliest known usage of each word, and would map how the word had shifted in meaning over time; and it would search through a whole range of texts, taking its quotations

from sources previously thought to be insignificant such as song lyrics or slang. Fifty years later the first version of the dictionary - 178 miles of type - was published.

The dictionary's editor, James Murray, appealed to readers around the English speaking world to get involved. Eventually hundreds of volunteers were working as word detectives, scouring historical and contemporary texts to collect evidence for as many words as possible. They rummaged through literature (popular and classic), newspapers, specialist scientific or technological journals, song sheets, theatre scripts, recipe books, wills, and political documents, collecting a myriad of words and meanings. The readers sent millions of quotations to Murray, which were then checked, sorted and filed by his team of editors. The archive box shown here contains quotations for words beginning with the letter M in the range miler to mischief.

1885 – MARK TWAIN, THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (pen-name Mark Twain) has been called the 'father of American literature'. His novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) is set in Missouri along the Mississippi River. Twain captures the essence of everyday midwest American English on almost every page, largely because the story is narrated by Huck Finn himself. The language is also notable because of the early representation of African-American dialects.

The first piece of African-American speech appears at the start of chapter two. Who dah?calls Jim, and later Say - who is you? Whar is you? Dog my cats ef I didn' hear sumf'n. Several of these non-standard linguistic features are shared by all the characters, regardless of colour. It is chiefly their relative frequency in the narrative that marks Jim out as a black speaker.

1886 –THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JEKYLL AND MR HYDE

At first, Henry Jekyll and Edward Hyde seem to be two different people: the former a respectable physician, the latter a vicious murderer who leaves all who see him with a 'haunting sense of unexpressed deformity'. Only later is the chilling truth revealed: that Hyde is actually part of Jekyll himself, unleashed by a mysterious drug as part of the doctor's exploration of human identity.

This short novel, first published in 1886, reflects a fascination with duality that had haunted Robert Louis Stevenson for many years. As a boy in Edinburgh, he had heard the story of the cabinetmaker Deacon Brodie, a craftsman by day but a robber by night. His interest in doubleness has also been linked to the repression demanded by Scottish Calvinism and by the bourgeois strictures of middle-class Edinburgh society. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* he explores the contrast between outward respectability and a subversive inner life. Much of the story is set at night, and the fogs and moonlit streets of late-Victorian London add to its eerie atmosphere.

1891 – THOMAS HARDY, TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

Most of Thomas Hardy's novels are set in the imaginary region of Wessex, centred on his native Dorchester. Against a backdrop of extraordinary social upheaval affecting traditional rural ways of life, Hardy examined the social constraints of Victorian England. His writing explored love and relationships that crossed class boundaries, often using dialect in character dialogue to mark these social distinctions.

1894 – OSCAR WILDE, THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

The Importance of Being Earnest was described by its author, Oscar Wilde, as 'by a butterfly for butterflies'. It is a story of courtships, betrothals and confused identities in which two young men – Jack Worthing and Algernon Moncrieff – pursue two young women who are both determined to marry someone called Ernest. Set in fashionable London society, the play is characterised by its wit, artifice and highly polished surfaces. Wilde's fellow playwright George Bernard Shaw complained that it 'lacked reality', but this is exactly what Wilde intended.

First performed on St Valentine's Day in 1895, *The Importance of Being Earnest* was to be Wilde's last play, as his increasingly public relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas would soon bring about his downfall. Douglas' father, the Marquess of Queensberry, had launched a campaign against Wilde that would lead to his imprisonment in Reading Gaol. On his release Wilde went to France, and died in self-imposed exile in Paris in 1900.

1895 – H.G. WELLS, THE TIME MACHINE

The science-fiction novels of H G Wells are undoubtedly more than fantasies located in imagined future worlds; *The Invisible Man* (1897) is an examination of the isolation of the pioneer-scientist in an uncomprehending world, *The War of the Worlds* (1898) a vision of apocalypse, and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901) an exploration of the idea of imperialism.

Wells' first book in the genre, *The Time Machine*, is a critique of utopian ideas, set in the year 802701, in which the human race is divided into two groups, the subterranean workers, the Morlocks, and the decadent Eloi. It sets a pattern for science-fiction to critique extreme developments of class, seen later in works from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927) to Orwell's *1984* (1949), though arguably Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) had established the idea with the yahoos and the houghnhnms.

In the time-traveller's encounters with future people Wells speculates that technology would produce a race of docile and uninvolved humans who would no longer need to struggle with their environment. But such a race is dependent on a worker-race, the Morlocks, who both enable and prey on the Eloi. Deleted drafts suggested that Wells looked into history for the source of the division of humanity into two forms. While clearly within the genre of science-fiction, the book is clearly also an exploration of the nature of humanity, its duality and its relationship with and expectations from technology.

1902 – RUDYARD KIPLING, JUST SO STORIES

Kipling's reputation as a poet and novelist has varied according to fashion: regarded widely in the late-19th century as an unofficial poet laureate of the British Empire, he was later criticised for vulgarity and jingoism. However, his writing for children has never lost its appeal, and the *Just So Stories for Little Children* show him at his most whimsical and inventive.

Kipling's early professional life was spent as a journalist in India, and his sharp observation of civilian and military life provided the material for several short stories which brought him success and celebrity. His use of colloquial dialect and accent in his poems, such as the *Barrack Room Ballads* (1892), show him to have been a great listener, and his poetry was always popular with the general reading public. But his use of alliteration and invented words in the *Just So Stories* locate his

manipulation of language in a tradition dating back to the earliest English literature. The direct addressing of the reader in the repeated phrase ‘O best beloved’, running through all the stories, indicate that the stories are designed to be read aloud, while the extended glosses on the illustrations show the writer in a more intimate and less performative role.

1904 – SHERLOCK HOLMES MANUSCRIPT

Sherlock Holmes is perhaps the most popular detective in literary history. The creation of Scotsman Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Holmes is famous around the world for his brilliant analytical skills and his ability to sort carefully through the subtleties of complex clues.

The meticulous manuscript of one of Conan Doyle's 56 Sherlock Holmes short stories, 'The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter', first published in 1904. One 'gloomy February morning', a 'weird' telegram is delivered to Holmes's flat at 221B Baker St, London, so beginning another fascinating mystery.

1913 – GEORGE BERNARD SHAW, PYGMALION

George Bernard Shaw's play Pygmalion, which was written in 1913 and opened in London in 1914, explores the relationship between elocution teacher Professor Henry Higgins and Cockney flower girl Eliza Doolittle. It was a finely crafted examination of early 20th-century attitudes to language and social class, and includes the then infamous line ‘not bloody likely’, shown here.

Shaw inserted hand written notes to this script with additional stage directions and lines that add realism to the dialogue. The printed dialogue shows Eliza's broad Cockney (London) dialect – 'I ain't dirty: I washed my hands and face afore I come'. Only in Shaw's hand written revisions do we glimpse his recommended Cockney pronunciation – 'Eah (Here)! you gimme thet enkecher (handkerchief)'. In the pages shown here, Eliza reveals her newly eloquent and 'polite' tones. Yet, in spite of this transformation, Eliza still shocks those in her company; her mastery of language and dialogue is of 'the new ways'.

1917-1918 – ‘DULCE ET DECORUM EST’ BY WILFRED OWEN

Wilfred Owen is among the most famous poets of the First World War. The original manuscript of the poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est', was written in Owen's own hand while he served as a soldier in the appalling

conditions of the trenches. Composed between 1917 and 1918 (the year of his death), the poem gives a chilling account of the senselessness of war.

Using a combination of gritty realism and an aching sense of compassion, it describes a mustard gas attack on a group of war-weary soldiers. Owen's despair at the crumbling morality of the world around him is expressed in phrases such as 'froth-corrupted lungs' and 'sores on innocent tongues'. The deliberately ironic title of the poem comes from one of the 'Odes' of Horace, the ancient Roman poet, which translates as 'it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country'.

1925 – VIRGINIA WOOLF, MRS DALLOWAY

Virginia Woolf was one of the most innovative and experimental English writers of her time. This extract is taken from the working draft of one of her most admired novels - Mrs Dalloway, first published in 1925. In her own handwriting, we see her explore a new style of writing called 'stream of consciousness', in which the imprint of experience and emotion on the inner lives of characters is as important as the stories they act out. The technique aims to give readers the impression of being inside the mind of the character - an internal view that illuminates plot and motivation in the novel. Thoughts spoken aloud are not always the same as those 'on the floor of the mind', as Woolf put it.

PRACTICE TASKS

Genre Worksheet

Directions: Read the descriptions of the texts. Look for details that reveal the genre. Write the genre and subgenre on the lines and write a sentence explaining your answer.

1. *The Hard Way Out* by Terry Vaughn

In this novel, Brian is struggling. After losing both of his parents in a tragic car accident, Brian is living at his Aunt's house and sharing a room with his cousin. Basketball is his only escape. But after getting benched for low progress report grades, Brian's world shatters. Does he have it in him to improve his grades? Will Brian come to peace with his emotions? Can anyone help him?

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

Explain your answer

2. *Newton's Law* by Morton Mallon

After a life of studying the nano-transportation sciences, Professor Melton stumbles upon a major breakthrough. On April 20th, 2042, Melton discovers a way to transport particles at light-speed across fixed distances. Now he can teleport from one location to another. But Professor Melton soon discovers that there is no such thing as a free lunch. He learns that the body ages relative to the distance travelled, not just the time. This means that a teleporting body ages very rapidly. Can Melton solve this problem before his time is up?

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

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|---------------------|
| Explain your answer |
|---------------------|

3. *Intermediate Math Problems for Students* by M. Colwell

This workbook explains how to perform basic mathematical operations, like double-digit addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. It also explains fractions and decimals.

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

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|---------------------|
| Explain your answer |
|---------------------|

4. *"If a Tree Falls"* adapted by Stan Tanner

This is the very short story of a buck. The buck was admiring his horns in the water's reflection and feeling bad about his skinny legs. Then a hunter tries to kill him. As the buck tries to escape, his big horns get stuck in some tree branches, but his skinny legs manage to pull him free. The moral is that what is truly valuable is often unappreciated.

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

| |
|---------------------|
| Explain your answer |
|---------------------|

5. *The Tinfoil Key* by Rob Burnside

When young Ian Bradley accidentally switches suitcases with an intergalactic space explorer, he ends up going on the trip of a lifetime. Now that he's left holding the bag, Ian must deliver it to the light scientists on Gamma Outpost 9 in time. Every life form in the galaxy is unknowingly depending on the success of Ian's efforts.

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

Explain your answer

6. *Seeing More, Being More* by Fletch Carpenter

"Dr." Fletch gives readers a dose of hard medicine. He believes that most people cause their own problems. Fletch teaches readers to solve problems such as bullying, insecurity, and relationship troubles. He does this with a three-step strategy: letting go of ego, seeing the "real" reality, and finding a role. Some readers find Carpenter's ideas to be refreshing. Others find them to be offensive.

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

Explain your answer

7. *Bronze Star* by Irwin Keene

World War II has been hard for Mama Conner. While her husband and three sons have been away at war, Mama Conner has had to fend for herself. She keeps the house together, raises money, and provides for Baby Maple. The mood in town suddenly darkens when her neighbor

Betsy loses one of her loved ones in battle. At Mama Conner's ladies club, several upstanding ladies of the town are on edge. They heard a garbled news report announcing that a man from their town was lost in battle. But the man's name went unheard and the women are left to speculate. This novel ends in a surprising twist.

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

Explain your answer

8. "*Rapunzel*" adapted by Craig Hooper

Once upon a time a young girl named Rapunzel was running an errand for her mother. An evil witch kidnaps Rapunzel and imprisons her in the tower of a castle. After years in the tower, Rapunzel grew long, beautiful hair. Having seen nobody but the evil witch her whole life, Rapunzel is very lonely. One day a prince wanders by and climbs up her hair. The witch doesn't like this and action ensues. Eventually the prince and Rapunzel live happily ever after.

Genre: _____

Subgenre: _____

Explain your answer

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