

Western Canon

"If we read the Western Canon in order to form our social, political, or personal moral values, I firmly believe we will become monsters of selfishness and exploitation. To read in the service of any ideology is not, in my judgment, to read at all. The reception of aesthetic power enables us to learn how to talk to ourselves and how to endure ourselves. The true use of Shakespeare or of Cervantes, of Homer or of Dante, of Chaucer or of Rabelais, is to augment one's own growing inner self. Reading deeply in the Canon will not make one a better or worse person, a more useful or more harmful citizen. All that the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one's own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one's confrontation with one's own mortality."

– *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, Harold Bloom

The School of Resentment

The late Harold Bloom (1930-2019), Professor of Humanities, Yale University, coined the term "The Schools of Resentment" (TSOR) in the 1970s to describe those who are preoccupied with political social activism and social change at the expense of aesthetic values. According to Bloom TSOR is associated with Marxist critical theory, including African American studies, Marxist literary criticism, New Historicist criticism, feminist criticism, and poststructuralism — specifically as promoted by Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Bloom contends that TSOR threatens the nature of the canon itself and may lead to its eventual demise.

Philosopher Richard Rorty agreed that Bloom is at least partly accurate in describing TSOR, writing that those identified by Bloom do in fact routinely use "subversive, oppositional discourse" to attack the canon specifically and Western culture in general.

TSOR argue that some works of the Western Canon promote sexist, racist or otherwise biased values and should therefore be removed from the canon.

Bloom continues: *"The cardinal principle of the current TSOR can be stated with singular bluntness: what is called aesthetic value emanates from class struggle. This principle is so broad that it cannot be wholly refuted. I myself insist that the individual self is the only method and the whole standard for apprehending aesthetic value...my meditation upon literature is...vulnerable to the most traditional Marxist analyses of class interest.*

"I have enjoyed TSOR's repeated insistence that my notion of 'the anxiety of influence' applies only to Dead White European Males, and not to women and to what we quaintly term "multiculturalists". Thus, feminist cheerleaders proclaim that women writers lovingly cooperate with one another as quilt makers, while African-American and Chicano literary activists go even further in asserting their freedom from any anguish of contamination whatsoever: each of them is Adam early in the morning. They know no time when they were not as they are now; self-created, self-begot, their puissance (strength, power) is their own."

Literary Analysis

The value of extensive literary analysis has been questioned by several prominent artists. [Vladimir Nabokov](#) once wrote that good readers do not read books, and particularly those which are considered to be literary masterpieces, "for the academic purpose of indulging in generalizations". At a 1986 Copenhagen conference of [James Joyce](#) scholars, the late Stephen J. Joyce (the modernist writer's grandson, 1932-2020) said, "If my grandfather was here, he would have died laughing ... *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can be picked up, read, and enjoyed by virtually anybody without scholarly guides, theories, and intricate explanations, as can *Ulysses*, if you forget about all the hue and cry."

In his epic book "The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages" (1994) Professor Bloom has done a 'hero's work' in the analysis and categorization of canonical western literature. Bloom's Canon includes over 700 authors encompassing over two dozen countries. His erudite analysis breaks down the Western Canon into four major 'Ages':

Bloom's Four Ages

- 1) Theocratic Age (2000BC - 1321AD) (1321: death of Dante)
- 2) Aristocratic Age (1321-1832) (1832: death of Goethe)
- 3) Democratic Age (1832-1900) American and Russian literature appear on stage.
- 4) Chaotic Age (20th Century – present)

Themes & The Four Ages

The theme of a novel or epic poem concerns a universal idea, lesson or message and the lessons we learn from life and people. In "The Three Little Pigs", for example, we learn that it's not wise to cut corners, like building a house out of straw.

Examples of "100" classic canonical literature is presented in a matrix of ten major literary themes verses Bloom's Four Ages. Theme percentage ranking is provided for perspective in addition to convenient hyperlinks for quick access to the review comments.

1) Good & Evil (17%). The coexistence of good and evil. Found alongside the themes of war, judgement and even love.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	Medea (Euripides), Dialogues , The Republic (Plato), Nicomachean Ethics , Politics (Aristotle), Aeneid (Virgil)
Aristocratic	The Divine Comedy (Dante), Hamlet , King Lear (Shakespeare), Paradise Lost (Milton), Faust (Goethe)
Democratic	Les Misérables (Hugo), Hedda Gabler (Ibsen), A Tale of Two Cities (Dickens), Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Nietzsche)
Chaotic	Brave New World (Huxley), Animal Farm (Orwell), The Trial , The Castle (Kafka), Mourning Becomes Electra (O'Neill)

2) Deception (14%). This theme can take on many faces: physical or social - all about keeping secrets from others. Any mystery novel has some sort of deception.

Age	Literature
Aristocratic	Don Quixote (Cervantes), Hamlet , Romeo & Juliet , Macbeth , Othello , Julius Caesar (Shakespeare), Tartuffe (Moliere), Candide (Voltaire)
Democratic	Le Pere Griot (Balzac), Madame Bovary (Flaubert), A Doll's House (Ibsen), Vanity Fair (Thackeray), The Moonstone (Collins), The Importance of Being Earnest (Wilde), Moby Dick (Melville), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Twain)
Chaotic	Waiting for Godot (Beckett), Main Street (Lewis), Anna Christie (O'Neill)

3) Suffering (14%). Physical and internal suffering.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	Seven Against Thebes (Aeschylus), Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)
Aristocratic	Candide (Voltaire)
Democratic	Boule de Suif (Maupassant), Hedda Gabler (Ibsen), David Copperfield , The Adventures of Oliver Twist (Dickens), Wuthering Heights (E. Bronte), Crime & Punishment (Dostoevsky), The Cherry Orchard (Chekhov), The Scarlet Letter (Hawthorne)
Chaotic	Jude the Obscure (Hardy), Babbitt (Lewis), The Hairy Ape (O'Neill), Native Son (Wright), A Streetcar Named Desire (Williams)

4) Judgment (12%). Characters are judged for being different or doing wrong, whether the infraction is real or just perceived as wrongdoing by others. Some stories prove that judgement does not always equal justice.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	Seven Against Thebes (Aeschylus), Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)
Aristocratic	The Divine Comedy (Dante)
Democratic	The Cherry Orchard (Chekhov), The Scarlet Letter (Hawthorne)
Chaotic	The Age of Reason (Sartre), Lord Jim (Conrad), Ethan Frome (Wharton), Main Street (Lewis), The Iceman Cometh (O'Neill), The Sound & the Fury (Faulkner), Death of a Salesman (Miller)

5) Love (11%). Beyond the sultry romance novels (base love). Romantic Love: 'courtly love' beginning in the Middle Ages.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	Lysistrata (Aristophanes)
Aristocratic	Canterbury Tales (Chaucer)
Democratic	Le Pere Goriot (Balzac), Madame Bovary (Flaubert), Pride & Prejudice (Austen), Ibsen Plays , Jane Eyre (C. Bronte), Wuthering Heights (E. Bronte),
Chaotic	Of Human Bondage (W.S. Maugham), Anna Christie (O'Neill), A Streetcar Named Desire (Williams)

6) Heroism (11%). True or false heroic acts.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	Iliad , Odyssey (Homer), Aeneid (Virgil)
Aristocratic	Don Quixote (Cervantes), Le Morte D'Arthur (Malory)
Democratic	Ivanhoe (Scott), A Tale of Two Cities (Dickens), Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Nietzsche)
Chaotic	Captains Courageous (Kipling), The Bridge (Crane), The Sun Also Rises (Hemingway)

7) Coming of Age (6%). Growing up is not easy - reason why many books have this theme. Children or young adults mature through various events and learn valuable life lessons.

Age	Literature
Aristocratic	Candide (Voltaire)
Democratic	David Copperfield (Dickens)
Chaotic	The Magic Mountain (Mann), This Side of Paradise (Fitzgerald), The Catcher in the Rye (J.D. Salinger)

8) Peace & War (5%). The contradiction between peace and war.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	Lysistrata (Aristophanes), Peloponnesian Wars (Thucydides)
Aristocratic	The Prince (Machiavelli)
Democratic	War & Peace (Tolstoy)
Chaotic	Age of Innocence (Wharton), For Whom the Bells Tolls (Hemingway)

9) Survival (4%). Captivating stories where the protagonist must overcome countless odds.

Age	Literature
Aristocratic	Robinson Crusoe (Defoe)
Democratic	Moby Dick (Melville), Call of the Wild (London)
Chaotic	The Sound & the Fury (Faulkner), The Grapes of Wrath (Steinbeck),

10) Circle of Life (3%). Life begins with birth and ends with death. Exploration of immortality.

Age	Literature
Theocratic	The Bible
Aristocratic	Gargantua & Pantagruel (Rabelais)
Democratic	The Picture of Dorian Gray (Oscar Wilde), The Death of Ivan Ilych (Tolstoy), The Curious Case of Benjamin Button (Fitzgerald)
Chaotic	Lazarus Laughed (O'Neill)



THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

The Epic of Gilgamesh

Egyptian Book of the Dead

Holy Bible (King James Version)

Comments - The Bible

Main Theme: Circle of Life

All parts of the Bible relate to man's and woman's journey in life. They will have their 'Adam & Eve' period (birth/creation), 'Exodus' period (out of oppression), 'Desert' period (testing period), 'Rebirth' period and 'Resurrection' period.

The King James Version is the version of the Bible used in most English-speaking Protestant churches. It was prepared by translations from the original Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testaments and Greek manuscripts of the New Testament by a group of scholars in 1611 during the reign of King James I. The English name comes from the term applied by the Greeks to the writings, simply βιβλία ('books').

Jews, and the first Christians (converted Jews), held the Old Testament writings as sacred – the divine word of God revealed through prophets. The New Testament, compiled from the writings of men inspired by Jesus Christ (his message of divine love), was assembled in its present form around 200 CE, when it became the official (canonical) scripture for the existing Christian churches in the Mediterranean area which later developed into the Roman and Greek Orthodox Catholic churches. Modern Christians regard the Bible in different ways – the fundamentalists take all of it to be the literal word of God, while those on the other extreme attach no divine inspiration to any part of it.

The King James Version is one of the greatest works in the English language, both in its powerful simplicity and in the beauty of its language. One it at task to underestimate it's great influence on the language and upon the thinking and writing of almost all English and American writers. The Bible can be read with pleasure as literature whether or not one attaches any religious significance to the writings. And it is important to read the King James Version, since it is the source of the hundreds of phrases that have become a part of English speech and writing. Similar to the writings of Shakespeare, many words of the Bible have changed in meaning since 1600. For example, "suffer" has lost it former meaning of "permit" in Jesus' remark, "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Modern Roman Catholic churches typically used the Douay-Rheims Bible until the 1960s (translated into English from the Latin Vulgate Bible in 1582). It has never much influenced English writers because the Church of England separated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1532 (under Henry VIII) before the Douay bible was translated, and it was rarely seen in England.

The list of 'complete' Bibles is exhaustive owing to the many religious denominations (eg, Roman Catholic, Christians, Judaism, Baptists, Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Unitarian, etc.). In the realm of 'religious philosophy', the Gnostic Bible follows the tenants of the 'New Thought' spiritual movement. New Thought holds that Infinite Intelligence and Love (or God) is everywhere, spirit is the totality of real things, true human selfhood is divine, divine thought is a force for good, sickness originates in the mind, and "right thinking" has a healing effect.

The Apocrypha

Comments - The Apocrypha (c. 200-400AD)

The 14 books of the Apocrypha (A-po-crypha; 'what is hidden') were dropped from the King James Version around 1890 because biblical scholarship indicated that they were less authentic than the other books. They remain in Douai Bible and maybe partially in the King James Version.

Books: Esdras (1 & 2); Tobit; Judith, Rest of Esther; Wisdom; Ecclesiasticus; Baruch and the Epistel of Jeremy; Song of the Three Children; Story of Susanna and the Elders; The Idol Bel and the Dragon; Prayer of Manasseh.

Sayings of the Fathers (Pirke Aboth)

ANCIENT INDIA (SANSKRIT)

Mahabharata

Bhagavad-Gita

Ramayana

THE ANCIENT GREEKS



Homer (c. 800BCE): *Iliad*; *Odyssey*.

Comments – *Iliad* (c. 1180BCE) & *Odyssey* (c. 8th century BCE)

Main Theme: Heroic.

Western literature begins with Homer's two long epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (c1000-700 BCE). These works rank as immense artistic achievements especially so considering there was practically little written literature preceding them (eg, Old Testament writings). By the time of the Golden Age of Greece (500-350 BCE), Homer's writing was regarded as the outstanding works of Greek literature, held in much the same reverence that [Shakespeare's](#) works are by modern English speakers.

The *Iliad*, sometimes referred to as the Song of Illion (Greek name for Troy), is a Greek epic poem in dactylic hexameter (the 'heroic hexameter' or the 'meter of the epic'). Prior knowledge of Greek gods and goddesses is useful, for the *Iliad* makes many allusions to them (not so with *Odyssey*).

The *Iliad* tells of the battles of the mainland Greeks and the Trojan Greeks in the 10th year of the Trojan War (c1200 BCE), which was said to have started after Paris, son of King Priam of Troy, carried off Helen, the world's most beautiful woman and wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. Agamemnon, brother of Menelaus and king of Mycenae or Argos (according to legend), commands the united Greek armed forces. Achilles, who slays the Trojan prince Hector, is killed by Paris, who shoots him in the heel with an arrow ("Achilles' heel" has come to mean a point of weakness).

Key Themes of the *Iliad*:

- 1) Nostos – "Homecoming". Nostos is impossible without sacking Troy – King Agamemnon's motive for winning at any cost.
- 2) Kleos – "Glory" or "Fame". Achilles' fate is one of two rewards – either Nostos or Kleos. Achilles forgoes his Nostos to earn the greater reward of Kleos Aphthiton ('fame imperishable').
- 3) Time – "Respect" or "Honor". Time is acquired accomplishment (cultural, political, material). King Agamemnon is a dishonorable King (threatens the priest Chryses).
- 4) Wrath – The poem's initial word: Menin – "wrath", "rage", "fury". The principal theme of the *Iliad* is the 'wrath of Achilles'.
- 5) Ker – "Fate". Fate propels most of the events of the *Iliad*.

The *Odyssey* relates the wanderings and adventures of Odysseus during the 10-year period following the Trojan War.

Hesiod (c. 700BCE): *Works and Days*; *Theogony*.

Archilochos

Sappho (c. 600BCE)

Alkman

Pindar: *Odes*.

Aeschylus (525-456BCE): *Seven Against Thebes*; *Oresteia*; *Prometheus Bound*; *Persians*; *Suppliant Women*.

Comments – *Seven Against Thebes* (467BCE)

Main Themes: Judgment, Suffering

The play is a continuation of the story of Oedipus, the King of Thebes, who learned that he married his mother and had children with her: Eteocles and Polynices (see Sophocles' *Antigone*). Cursed by their father, the two sons divide the kingdom between them through bloodshed. Polynices leads 7 valiant Greeks who breach the 7 gates of Thebes. Polynices' attack on his native city fulfills Oedipus' curse, but the action that precipitated it was his brother Eteocles' unexpected refusal to surrender the throne at the end of his year. Aeschylus uses a chorus of women who speak between the speeches of the principals and show expression of public opinion (outrage, sympathy, alarm, etc).

Sophocles (c. 496-405BCE): *Oedipus the King (Rex)*; *Antigone*; *Oedipus at Colonus*; *Electra*; *Ajax*; *Women of Trachis*; *Philoctetes*.

Comments – *Oedipus Rex* (c. 429BCE), *Antigone* (c. 441BCE)

Main Themes: Judgment, Suffering.

'Oedipus Rex' is regarded by many scholars as the masterpiece of ancient Greek tragedy. It concerns the myth of Oedipus. Shortly after his birth, an oracle predicted that he would kill his father, King Laius, and marry his mother, Jocasta (whom Oedipus took as his queen after solving the riddle of the Sphinx). To prevent these things, King Laius had him sent away as a baby. The action of Sophocles' play concerns Oedipus's search for the murderer of Laius to end a plague ravaging Thebes, unaware that the killer he is looking for is none other than himself. By the curious working of inevitable fate (a favorite theme of the Greek tragedians) the prophecy is fulfilled.



At the end of the play, after the truth comes to light, Jocasta hangs herself while Oedipus, horrified at his patricide and incest, proceeds to gouge out his own eyes in despair.

In *Antigone*, brothers Eteocles and Polynices, leading opposite sides in Thebes' civil war, died fighting each other for the throne. Antigone, daughter of Oedipus, stubbornly defies King Creon (new ruler of Thebes and brother of the former Queen Jocasta) because he has refused a proper burial for the rebel warrior Polynices whose body will not be sanctified by holy rites and will lie unburied on the battlefield, prey for vultures, the harshest punishment at the time.

Euripides (480 or 484-406BCE): *Medea*; *Cyclops*; *Heracles*; *Alcestis*; *Hecuba*; *Bacchae*; *Orestes*; *Andromache*; *Ion*; *Hippolytus*; *Helen*; *Iphigenia at Aulis*.

Comments – Medea (431BCE)

Main Theme: Good & Evil.

The plot centers on the actions of the sorceress Medea, the daughter of King Aeetes of Colchis, niece of Circe and granddaughter of the sun god Helios. She aids Jason with her magic in his search for the Golden Fleece, a symbol of authority & kingship. Jason and Medea later marry and reside in Corinth. Ten years later Jason abandons her to wed Creusa, the daughter of Corinth King Creon. Both Medea and her sons are banished from Corinth. In revenge, Medea murders Creusa and the king with poisoned gifts and later murders her own sons. Would a mother be able to carry out such a fiendish and unnatural act? (the play tells). The part of Medea is one toward which actresses work as actors do toward Hamlet. 'Medea' has been explored and interpreted by playwrights across the centuries in a variety of ways, offering political, psychoanalytical and feminist interpretations.

Aristophanes (c. 446 BCE-385BCE): *Lysistrata*; *The Birds*; *The Clouds*; *The Frogs*; *The Knights*; *The Wasps*; *The Assemblywomen*.

Comments – Lysistrata (411BCE)

Main Themes: Love, War & Peace.

Aristophanes was the most famous Athenian writer of comedies. *Lysistrata* is a comic account, some say 'low comedy', about a group of women who go on strike to end the Peloponnesian War. Lysistrata persuades the women of the warring cities to withhold sexual privileges from their husbands and lovers as a means of forcing the men to negotiate peace – a strategy that inflames the battle between the sexes. Like Euripides' *Medea*, *Lysistrata* is open to various interpretations – political, psychoanalytical and feminist (hopefully beneficial, not hostile). One interpretation is that *Lysistrata* and her 'tribe' assume that sex is the only thing that men truly and deeply desire; another interpretation argues that women did not want to necessarily upend the existing power structure, but desired a return to a peaceful, male-led society; another interpretation is that *Lysistrata* is the early beginning of women's march toward equality and emancipation from oppression (perceived or actual).

Herodotus (485–420BCE): *The Histories*.

Comments – Herodotus (430BCE)

Herodotus is widely considered to have been the first writer to have treated historical subjects using a method of systematic investigation – specifically, by collecting his materials and then critically arranging them into an historiographic narrative. On account of this, he is often referred to as "The Father of History". H.G. Wells in his 'The Outline of History' concludes that Herodotus was the first individual embodying 'free intelligence' (a trait Wells later bestows on Roger Bacon - the precursor of a "great movement in Europe...toward reality" that contributed to the development of "intelligence").

Thucydides (c. 460-400BCE): *The Peloponnesian Wars*.

Comments – The Peloponnesian Wars (early 4th-century BC)

Main Theme: Peace & War

Peloponnesian Wars of Athens vs. Sparta and her allies from 431-404 BCE. Thucydides was a general who has been dubbed the father of "scientific history" due to his strict standards of impartiality, evidence-gathering and analysis of cause and effect. The surrender of Athens in 404 marked the beginning of the decline of her power and culture, which continued until all of the Greek cities were conquered by Alexander of Macedonia ('Alexander the Great') and united into the Greek empire (flourished around 300 BCE), uniting the eastern Mediterranean and southern Asia as far as India. After Alexander's death, the empire gradually decayed until the Greek cities and the Mediterranean wars conquered and united into the Roman empire, around 180 BCE, which lasted until the fall of the Roman empire and Rome, 476 CE. Pericles' famous Funeral Oration (II.34) is said to have close ties with Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.



The Pre-Socratics (Heraclitus, Empedocles)

Plato (c.427-347BCE): *Dialogues, The Republic*

Comments – *Dialogues* (399BCE) & *The Republic* (c. 375BCE)

Main Theme: Good & Evil

Socrates (470-399BCE), the famous Athenian teacher and philosopher, tried to establish standards of ethical and moral conduct by dialectics - arguments in which he tried to elicit the truth from his adversaries by carefully chosen questions. His methods and his radical views made enemies.

Socrates wrote nothing that has survived, but we know him through the writing of his pupils, especially of Plato. Most of Plato's philosophy is developed in 'Dialogues' in which Socrates is represented as one of the principle speakers. *Apology, Crito, and Phaedo* depict the dialogues of Socrates, beginning with his trial in 399 BCE where he was unjustly accused and convicted of corrupting the youth of Athens by false teaching and was forced to take his life by hemlock. It is not possible to distinguish which of the ideas developed in the dialogues are those of Socrates and which are Plato's, but the whole makes up a large system known as Plato's philosophy, which serves as the foundation for much of later philosophy. Plato can disappoint those who are looking for concise or clear-cut answers to questions of Beauty (aesthetics), Truth, Goodness or justice. In reviewing Truth, for example, Plato prefers to examine questions from several viewpoints and to stimulate thought on the questions, but often he arrives at no definite answers. John Stuart Mill in his essay "On Liberty" said, "The Socratic dialectics, so magnificently exemplified in the dialogues of Plato, were...essentially a negative discussion of the great questions of philosophy and life, directed with consummate skill to the purpose of convincing anyone who had merely adopted the commonplaces of received opinion, that he did not understand the subject."

In 'The Republic' Plato sets out to answer how we define justice and to define it in a way to show that justice is worthwhile in and of itself. He meets these two challenges with a single solution: a definition of justice that appeals to human psychology, rather than to perceived behavior.

In Books II, III and IV, Plato identifies political justice as harmony in a structured political body. An ideal society consists of three main classes of people:

- 1) Guardians (rulers).
- 2) Auxiliaries (warriors).
- 3) Producers (craftsmen, farmers, artisans, etc.).

The ideal society is just when relations between these three classes are right or optimal. Rulers must rule, auxiliaries must uphold rulers' convictions, and producers must limit themselves to exercising whatever skills they have acquired or nature granted them. Plato uses his 3-class ideal society to make an analogy of the soul's structure:

- 1) Rational (rulers) – the use of one's rational faculties and the search for wisdom (books V through VII focus on the rulers as the philosopher kings);
- 2) Spirited (auxiliaries) – the desire for honor; feelings of anger and indignation. Warriors are dominated by their spirits, which make them courageous;
- 3) Appetitive (producers) – the lust for material things, especially money. Producers are dominated by their appetites—their urges for money, luxury, and pleasure.

In Book II of *The Republic*, the 'Ring of the Gyges' grants its owner the power to become invisible at will. Through the story of the ring, *Republic* considers whether an intelligent person would be just if one did not have to fear any bad reputation for committing injustices and not concern oneself with society's moral code. Comparison and contrast of Plato's three societal levels can be made against the fictional society of the "Lord of the Rings":

- 1) Rulers ('parent') = "The Elves" (3 rings);
- 2) Auxiliaries ('adult') = "The Race of Men" (9 rings);
- 3) Producers ('child') = "The Dwarf Lords" (7 rings).

Aristotle (384–322BCE): *Nicomachean Ethics; Politics;*

Comments – *Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 340BCE), *Politics* (c. 340BCE)

Main Theme: Good & Evil.

The *Nicomachean Ethics* is regarded as Aristotle's best-known work on ethics. It consists of ten books based on his lectures at the Lyceum (Peripatetic school of philosophy founded by Aristotle). The theme of the work extends and explores the query of how men should best live (ie, what good is, what happiness is). Previous philosophical inquiries about good living, largely theoretical and contemplative, shifted to debates on *how* to create good living - a practical treatise on the problem. The end of *Nicomachean Ethics* declared that the inquiry into ethics necessarily follows into politics - dealing with the "philosophy of human affairs" and of people becoming good. Where ethics is about how an individual should best live, while the study of



politics is from the perspective of a law-giver, looking at the good of a whole community. The title of Politics literally means "the things concerning the polis" and is the origin of the modern English word *politics*. Aristotle attempted to classify and systematize all knowledge, set up rules for formal logic and invented the syllogism (eg, "All men are mortal (A=B), Socrates is a man (C=A), Therefore, Socrates is mortal (C=B)"). His reading is not easy and much of his material on definitions and categories is best left to specialists. His contribution to physics was influential in the Middle Ages, however his understanding exact terms like mass, acceleration and momentum was limited if not erroneous (eg, heavier bodies fall faster). In his book *Metaphysics* ("after physics"), Aristotle originated the most basic branch of philosophy, the science of being or existing. According to Aristotle, there is a science (episteme) that studies 'being qua being' and the attributes belonging to it in its own right. This claim within IV-1 is both surprising and unsettling — surprising because Aristotle seems elsewhere to deny the existence of any such science, and unsettling because his denial seems very plausibly grounded (everything is infinite; the magnitude of Creation is far beyond most finite minds' wildest dreams or concepts). "Being qua Being" is sometimes translated as 'Being that considers his own Being as a problem'; close in spirit to Rene Descartes famous phrase "cogito ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"). It examines what can be asserted about any being insofar as it is and not because of any special qualities it has (metaphysical conclusion: "the world is such that matter is governed by physical laws"; ontological conclusion: "there is a physical law of gravity"). Also covered are different kinds of causation, form and matter, the existence of mathematical objects, and a prime-mover God (the "unmovable mover").

Hellenistic Greeks

Menander (c. 342–291BCE): *The Girl from Samos*.

Longinus: *On the Sublime*.

Callimachus: *Hymns and Epigrams*.

Theocritus: *Idylls*.

Plutarch (46–119): *Parallel Lives; Moralia*.

[Comments – Parallel Lives](#) (c. 100)

Plutarch is the best known of the late Greek biographers. He wrote about famous Greeks and Romans who lived one or more centuries before this time. His biographies are therefore not to be relied upon as entirely factual, but they are the source of most of the well-known Greeks and Romans. Usually they were written in pairs, each biography being about 40 or 50 pages long, with a comparison intended between each member of the pair (whence the name of the book) - such a pair were Caesar (Roman) and Alexander (Greek) or Demosthenes (Greek) and Cicero (Roman). Emerson once said that if the world's libraries were burning, he would rescue Plutarch's works as soon as Shakespeare's and Plato's, or immediately afterwards.

Aesop (620-560BCE): *Fables*.

Lucian: *Satires*.

The Romans

Plautus: *Pseudolus; The Braggart Soldier; The Rope; Amphitryon*.

Terence (195/185–159BCE): *The Girl from Andros; The Eunuch; The Mother-in-Law*.

Lucretius (98?–55 BCE): *The Way Things Are*.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE): *On the Nature of the Gods (De Natura Deorum)*

[Comments – On the Nature of the Gods](#) (45BCE)

Marcus Tullius Cicero was a Roman statesman, lawyer, scholar and Academic Skeptic who played an important role in the politics of the late Roman Republic. Towards the end of his life, Cicero turned away from his oratorical and political career and looked to matters of philosophy and religion. The dialogue 'On the Nature of the Gods' both explores his own views on these subjects, as a monotheist and member of the Academic School, and considers the opinion of other philosophical schools of the Hellenistic age through the figures of Velleius the Epicurean and Balbus the Stoic. Eloquent, clearly argued and surprisingly modern, it focuses upon a series of fundamental religious questions including: is there a God? If so, does he answer prayers, or intervene in human affairs? Does he know the future? Does morality need the support of religion? Profoundly influential on later thinkers, such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Horace (65-8BCE): *Odes; Epistles; Satires*.

[Comments – Odes](#) (23-13BCD)

The Odes, a collection of poems in four books, exemplifies the Horatian Ode format, a Latin descendant of the Aeolic ode, which both were written to project a tranquil, contemplative tone meant for meditation. Horace's format was influenced by the Greek poets Pindar, Sappho and Alcaeus. His genius lay in applying



these older forms to the social life of Rome in the age of Augustus. The Odes cover a range of subjects – Love, Friendship, Wine, Religion, Morality, Patriotism ("Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto", or "I am human, and I think nothing human is alien to me."), including the uncertainty of life.

The aesthetics of Horatian poetry can be inspiring, but it important to remember that the major attribute of Roman society was 'absolutist-obedience mythic order'. A purposeful, authoritarian period of human evolution where a righteous Order enforced a code of conduct based on absolutist and unvarying principles of "right" and "wrong". Basis of ancient nations. Violating the code or rules had severe and everlasting repercussions. Following the code yielded rewards for the faithful. Rigid social hierarchies; one right way & only one right way to think about everything. Law & order; impulsivity controlled through guilt; concrete-literal & fundamentalist belief; strongly conventional & conformist.

Persius: *Satires*.

Catullus (c. 84-54BCE): *Attis and Other Poems*.

Virgil (70-19 BCE): *Aeneid*; *Eclogues*; *Georgics*.

Comments – *Aeneid* (29-19BCE)

Main Theme: Heroism.

Julius Caesar died in 44 BCE. His successor, Octavius (Caesar Augustus), proclaimed the re-establishment of the Roman republic in 27BCE and continued to rule with the power of a dictator. He commissioned Virgil, the leading Roman poet of the period, to write a long epic poem (9,896 lines in dactylic hexameter) to extol the glories of Rome. The result was the *Aeneid*, in which Virgil attributes the founding of Rome to Aeneas, a Trojan hero of the *Iliad*, who was supposed by Virgil to have come to Italy after the Trojan War. The first six of the poem's twelve books tell the story of Aeneas's wanderings from Troy to Italy, and the poem's second half tells of the Trojans' ultimately victorious war upon the Latins. More than any other work by a single author, The *Aeneid* has had a major influence on European literature. One can hardly pick up a serious book written in Europe up to 1800 without finding references to, and quotations from, the *Aeneid*.

Lucan: *Pharsalia*.

Ovid (43BCE-17CE): *Metamorphoses*; *The Art of Love*; *Heroides*.

Juvenal: *Satires*.

Martial: *Epigrams*.

Seneca, Lucius Annaeus (c. 4BCE–65CE): *Tragedies, particularly Medea and Hercules Furens*.

Petronius (c. 27-66): *Satyricon*.

Comments - *The Satyricon* (c. 50)

Only a fragment (~100pgs) of this long work have survived, but the description of a banquet given by Trimalchio, one of the newly rich men of the period of Nero, has become well known for the disgusting picture it paints of decadent luxury and moral laxity that characterized the Roman life of this period. The story is told by Encolpius, who, with a friend and servant, Gito, has been invited to the banquet.

Apuleius (c. 123/125-180): *The Golden Ass*.

THE MIDDLE AGES: LATIN, ARABIC, AND THE VERNACULAR BEFORE DANTE

Augustine of Hippo (354–430): *Confessions*; *City of God*.

Comments - *The Confessions* (397-400)

Main Theme: Judgment.

Confessions, an autobiographical work, consists of 13 books on the general theme of how much Augustine regretted having led a sinful, lustful and immoral life. He discussed his regrets for following the Manichaean religion, for believing in astrology (not just incorrect, but evil) and Saint Ambrose's role in his conversion to Christianity. The first nine books are autobiographical and the last four are commentary and more philosophical (speculations on memory, time, eternity, matter, etc.). He shows intense sorrow for his sexual sins and writes on the importance of sexual morality. The books were written as prayers to God, thus the title, based on the Psalms of David. It begins with "For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." The work is thought to be divisible into books which symbolize various aspects of the Trinity and trinitarian belief. Augustine later becomes a Bishop of Hippo, a north African town, where he wrote extensively on Roman Catholic doctrine.



The Koran (Al-Qur'an)

One Thousand and One Night (The Arabian Nights)

Comments – The Arabian Nights (c. 1000)

Main Theme: Heroism.

The translation of R.F. Burton is a good one for it preserves some of the flavor of the original Arabic (although not without its criticism: "obsessive focus on sexuality"; an "eccentric ego-trip"; "obtrusive, kinky and highly personal"). It is uncertain where, when or by whom the stories were first written or collected - the time seems to have been between 800-1300 CE, during the period when Moslem power was near its peak in the Mediterranean area and in Asia Minor, and when Spain was under Moorish control. The stories are believed to have been put together in their present form around 1450, probably in Cairo. Selections: Ali Baba, 7 Voyages of Sindbad, Aladdin.

The Poetic Edda: Snorri Sturluson: *The Prose Edda*.

The Nibelungen Lied

Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170–1220): *Parzival*.

Chrétien de Troyes (12th cent): *Yvain: The Knight of the Lion*.

Beowulf (c. 800)

The Poem of the Cid

Christine de Pisan: *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

Pedro, Diego de San: *Prison of Love*.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274): *Summa Theologica*, *Summa Contra Gentiles*

Comments - *Summa Theologica* (c. 1273)

Little literature of significance appeared during the Dark Ages after the Fall of Rome (476CE) until about 1100 when some of the tales of chivalry and a few Roman Catholic philosophical-religious works began to appear. The writing of Thomas Aquinas are a landmark in the theological philosophy, and form the basis of much Roman Catholic doctrine. In his greatest work, the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas tried to synthesize Greek philosophy (especially the works of Aristotle) with the Bible and the Christian teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. The topics of the *Summa Theologica* follow the cycle: God → Creation → Man → Man's purpose → Christ → the Sacraments → back to God.

Aquinas proposes a question, then states arguments on both sides, then states his own opinion ("I answer that..."), then refutes the arguments contrary to his opinion. The scheme is as systematic as a proof in Euclid, but not as free from errors in reasoning. Typical of the questions he proposes are: Whether God exists, whether truth resides only in the intellect, whether God causes evil. The term "The Philosopher" that occurs so frequently means Aristotle. Among non-scholars, the *Summa* is perhaps most famous for its five arguments for the existence of God, which are known as the "five ways" (*quinque viae*): 1) "first mover", 2) causation, 3) contingency, 4) degree, 5) final cause or ends. Aquinas expands the first - God as the "unmoved mover" - in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

WESTERN CANON: THE ARISTOCRATIC AGE (1321-1832)
(Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor Humanities, Yale University)

[Shakespeare](#) and [Dante](#) (c.1265-1321) are the center of the Canon because they excel all other Western writers in cognitive acuity, linguistic energy and power of invention (Dante's death marks the break between the Theocratic Age and the Aristocratic Age). Dante has been the poet's poet, while Shakespeare has been the people's poet. Shakespeare is like the Arabian moon in Wallace Stevens that "throws his stars around the floor" – his gifts were so abundant that he could afford to be careless.

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is essentially versified Saint Augustine. Nothing else in Western literature is as sublimely outrageous as Dante's spectacular invention known as Beatrice: sublimated from being an image of desire to angelic status, in which role she becomes crucial element in the church's hierarchy of salvation. His poem is a prophecy and takes on the function of a third Testament – the poem is the truth, universal and not temporal. Theology is not Dante's ruler, however no one can deny that Dante is a supernaturalist, a Christian and a theologian, or at least a theological allegorist. The theological Dante of modern American scholarship is a blend of Augustine, [Thomas Aquinas](#) and their companions (ironically, neither Augustine nor Aquinas saw poetry as anything except childish play).

When you read Dante or Shakespeare, you experience the limits of art, and then you discover that the limits are extended or broken. Where the two poets challenge each other, most is in their representations of love – which return us to where love begins and ends in Dante, the figure of Beatrice.

Shakespeare necessarily depended upon aristocrats for patronage and protection, and his politics – if pragmatically he had any – were appropriate for the pinnacle of the long Aristocratic Age (in the Viconian sense). The fundamental inner cause of Shakespeare's fame is this: that his dramas corresponded to the irreligious and immoral frame of mind of the upper classes of his time and ours.

Shakespeare's Falstaff, and even Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's", preach an overwhelming immanence, a justification of life by life, in the here and now. A fierce individualist and hedonist who denies commonplace morality and anticipates Blake's great Proverb of Hell: "One Law for the Lion and Ox is oppression." The peculiar magnificence of Shakespeare is in his power of representation of human character and personality and their mutabilities. In the thirteen or fourteen years after the creation of Falstaff, we are given the succession worthy of him: Rosalind, Hamlet, Othello, Iago, Edmund, Macbeth, Cleopatra, Antony, Coriolanus, Timon, Imogen, Prospero, Caliban, and so many others. One cannot persuade oneself convincingly that one's sense of reality is more comprehensive than that of Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespearean drama seems at once utterly familiar and yet too rich to absorb all at once. His characters are so open to multiple perspectives that they become analytical instruments for **judging you**. If you are a moralist, Falstaff outrages you; if you are rancid, Rosalind exposes you; if you are dogmatic, Hamlet evades you forever. And if you are an explainer, the great Shakespearean villains will cause you to despair. For many readers, the limits of human art and the power of individualization is touched in *King Lear*, which with Hamlet appears to be the height of the Shakespearean canon.

ITALY

[Dante \(1265-1321\): *The Divine Comedy*; *The New Life*.](#)

[Comments – *The Divine Comedy* \(1320\)](#)

Main Themes: Good & Evil, Judgment

The *Divine Comedy* is an allegory of a human soul's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise or Heaven. The three 'cantiches' allude to the Trinity for the poem is a representation the soul's journey towards God beginning with the recognition and rejection of sin (Inferno), followed by the penitent Christian life (Purgatorio), which is then followed by the soul's ascent to God (Paradiso). Dante draws on medieval Roman Catholic theology and philosophy, especially Thomistic philosophy derived from the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas (*Divine Comedy* has been called "the *Summa in verse*"). In Part I (best known part) the poet Dante has a vision in which he is led through the 9 circles of Hell by the Latin poet, Virgil. On each of the 9 levels, he finds sinners of certain kinds of according to a complicated hierarchy of sins. In Part II, Purgatory, Virgil leads Dante to see repentant sinners who will eventually reach Heaven. In Part III (Heaven or Paradiso), Dante is led by Beatrice, an angelic version of the real Beatrice who Dante loved. The whole work is supposed to culminate in Dante's approach to an understanding of man's relation to God. The *Divine Comedy* has consistently maintained its reputation as one of the most influential books ever written, and one of the greatest pieces of literature.

[Petrarch \(1304-1374\): *Lyric Poems*; *Selections*.](#)

[Giovanni Boccaccio \(1313-1375\): *The Decameron*.](#)

[Matteo Maria Boiardo \(1440-1494\): *Orlando Innamorato*.](#)



Lodovico Ariosto (1474-1533): *Orlando Furioso*.

Michelangelo Buonarroti: *Sonnets and Madrigals*.

Machiavelli, Niccolò (1469–1527): *The Prince*; *The Mandrake, a Comedy*.

Comments – *The Prince* (1532)

Main Theme: Peace & War, Deception

The Prince was intended by Machiavelli as a practical guide for new renaissance princes and royals to instruct them in how to hold on to their power to unify the squabbling Italian states and the use of immoral means to achieve those ends. Machiavelli believed that in a world where men were deceitful and greedy, it was necessary for the powerful leader (the Prince) of a nation to keep control by suppressing all opposition, using whatever means were necessary and expedient. He drew his recommendations by studying the methods of famous rulers of history, and he was especially impressed with the duke of Cesare Borgia's combination of audacity and diplomatic prudence, his clever use of fraud and cruelty in dealing with false friends and doubtful allies, and his reliance upon citizen armies rather than paid mercenaries. Machiavelli's name has become synonymous with evil largely through his philosophy that good ends justify immoral means. The Prince is sometimes claimed to be one of the first works of modern philosophy, especially modern political philosophy, in which the "effectual" truth is taken to be more important than any abstract ideal. It is also notable for being in direct conflict with the dominant Catholic and scholastic doctrines of the time, particularly those concerning politics and ethics.

Leonardo da Vinci: *Notebooks*.

Baldassare Castiglione: *The Book of the Courtier*.

Gaspara Stampa: *Sonnets and Madrigals*.

Giorgio Vasari: *Lives of the Painters*.

Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571): *Autobiography*.

Comments – *Autobiography* (1563)

Cellini (Che-le-ne) was a famous silversmith and sculptor, and a friend of some of the leading figures of Renaissance Florence. His biography shows us a picture of the Renaissance man in Italy, in whom, by modern standards, much of elegance and chivalry is combined with much of moral depravity and cruelty (depriving a plaintiff's use of his legs who tried to sue him). Cellini's attitude of self-righteous infallibility in all that he does is at the same time amusing and annoying.

Torquato Tasso: *Delivered*

Giordano Bruno: *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*.

Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639): *Poems*; *The City of the Sun*.

Giambattista Vico: *Principles of a New Science*.

Carlo Goldoni: *The Servant of Two Masters*.

Vittorio Alfieri: *Saul*.

PORTUGAL

Camoëns, Luis de: *The Lusíads*.

Ferreira, António: *Poetry*.

SPAIN

Jorge Manrique: *Coplas*.

Fernando de Rojas: *La Celestina*.

Anonymous: *Lazarillo de Tormes*.

Francisco de Quevedo: *Visions*; *Satirical Letter of Censure*.

León, Fray Luis de: *Poems*.

St. John of the Cross: *Poems*.

Góngora, Luis de: *Sonnets*; *Soledades*.

Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616): *Don Quixote*; *Exemplary Stories*.

Comments – *Don Quixote* (1605-1615)

Main Theme: Heroism, Deception.

Don Quixote is a founding work of Western literature; it is often labeled "the first modern novel" and many authors consider it to be the best literary work ever written. The book, intended to ridicule the tales of chivalry, so popular in the Renaissance, became famous for character studies in literature - that of a man who fights for lofty ideals in the face of crushing oppositions and his own inadequacy. The plot revolves around the adventures of a noble (hidalgo) from La Mancha named Alonso Quixano, who reads so many chivalric romances that he loses his mind and decides to become a



knight-errant (caballero andante) to revive chivalry and serve his nation, under the name Don Quixote de la Mancha. He recruits a simple farmer, Sancho Panza, as his squire, who often employs a unique, earthy wit in dealing with Quixote's rhetorical monologues on knighthood. Don Quixote's influence on future works include Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* (1844), Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1897).

Lope de Vega: *La Dorotea; Fuente Ovejuna; Lost in a Mirror; The Knight of Olmedo.*

Tirso de Molina: *The Trickster of Seville.*

Pedro Calderon de la Barca (1600–1681): *Life is a Dream; The Mayor of Zalamea; The Mighty Magician; The Doctor of His Own Honor.*

Cruz, Sor Juana Inés de la: *Poems.*

ENGLAND & SCOTLAND

Chaucer, Geoffrey (c.1343-1400): *The Canterbury Tales; Troilus and Criseyde.*

Comments - *Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400)

Main Theme: Love.

The tales of *The Canterbury Tales* are presented as part of a story-telling contest by 29 pilgrims as they travel together from London to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return. The pilgrims are identified by occupations (Knight, Squire, Yeoman, Nun, etc) and their character is often set out quite clearly in 3 or 4 lines by a discriminating choice of detail.

The Canterbury Tales is near-unanimously seen as Chaucer's magnum opus. He uses the tales and descriptions of its characters to paint an ironic and critical portrait of English society at the time, and particularly of the Church. Chaucer's use of such a wide range of classes and types of people was without precedent in English. The reader assumes the pilgrims are on a spiritual quest, however it is learned that they are more concerned with worldly things than spiritual. Structurally, the collection resembles Boccaccio's *Decameron* ('10 days'), which Chaucer may have read during his first diplomatic mission to Italy in 1372.

Chaucer's English is archaic and a little hard to read as poetry, since some of the final e's were pronounced and others not, and a great many vowel sounds have changed (eg, champioun rhymed with toun (= town) in Chaucer). The first two lines of the Prologue illustrate the difficulties:

"Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote

The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote."

In the modern English version the lines becomes:

"When April with its showers sweet

The drought of March has pierced to the root."

Thomas Malory (1430-1471): *Le Morte D'Arthur.*

Comments – *Le Morte D'Arthur* (The Death of Arthur; 1485)

Main Theme: Heroism.

Le Morte d'Arthur is a 15th-century Middle English prose reworking by Sir Thomas Malory of tales about the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin and the Knights of the Round Table—along with their respective folklore. The modern version is preferable to the original Malory due to hard reading and many tedious repetitions. Most of the events take place in a historical fantasy version of Britain and France at an unspecified time. Malory harkens back to an age of idealized knighthood, jousting tournaments, and grand castles to suggest a medieval world. His stories lack any agricultural life or commerce, which makes the story feel as if it were an era of its own. The original Arthur was probably one of the Celtic (original British) kings of some region of Britain, who had taken on Christianity from the Roman occupation troops (~450CE). He fought against the Anglo and Saxon invaders around 470, who took over the island after the Romans left and drove the Celts back into Wales and Cornwall (the original Celtic languages survive in Modern Welsh, Irish and Gaelic, but so complete was the Anglo-Saxon domination of England that almost no Celtic words remain in modern English).

William Dunbar: *Poems.*

John Skelton: *Poems.*

Thomas More (1478-1535): *Utopia.*

Thomas Wyatt: *Poems.*

Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey: *Poems.*



Philip Sidney (1554-1586): *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia; Astrophel and Stella; An Apology for Poetry.*

Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke: *Poems.*

Edmund Spenser (1552-1599): *The Faerie Queene; The Minor Poems.*

Walter Raleigh: *Poems.*

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593): *Poems and Plays.*

Michael Drayton: *Poems.*

Samuel Daniel: *Poems; A Defence of Ryme.*

Thomas Nashe (1567-1601): *The Unfortunate Traveller.*

Thomas Kyd: *The Spanish Tragedy.*

William Shakespeare (1564-1616): Plays: *Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, The Tempest, Henry IV (Parts I,II), Henry V, Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice, The Taming of the Shrew; Sonnets and Poems.*

Comments – Hamlet (c. 1600), King Lear (1606)

Main Theme: Good & Evil.

Hamlet, a tragedy, is Shakespeare's longest play (30,557 words) and many contend that it is his magnum opus (with King Lear a close second). Set in Denmark within the fictional Elsinore castle (modeled after the actual Kronborg castle), the play depicts Prince Hamlet and his revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother. Hamlet is considered among the most powerful and influential works of world literature, with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others". It has inspired many other writers — from [Johann von Goethe](#) and [Charles Dickens](#) to [James Joyce](#) and Iris Murdoch.

King Lear, another tragedy, tells the tale of the aging king of Britain who decides to step down from the throne and divide his kingdom evenly among his three daughters. He puts them through a test, asking each to tell him how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan, Lear's older daughters, declare their love for him in a fawning and obsequious manner. Cordelia, seeing right through her sisters' feigned professions of love, refuses to do the same. Lear asks her, "What can you say...more opulent than your sisters?" Cordelia replies, "Nothing, my lord." Cordelia, gets nothing, because she will not flatter him as her sisters had done. Later, when Lear feels he has been treated with disrespect by Goneril and Regan, who now have his wealth and power, becomes furious to the point of madness. He eventually becomes tenderly reconciled to Cordelia, just before tragedy strikes her and then the king.

Popular Hamlet lines:

"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world" (Hamlet, I-II) (*state of depression*)

'Neither a borrower, nor lender be' (Polonius, I-iii)

'This above all: to thine own self be true' (Polonius, I-iii)

'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (Marcellus, I-iv) (we live in the world of Elsinore)

'Angels and ministers of grace defend us' (Hamlet, I-iv, when the ghost of King Hamlet appears)

'There are more things in Heaven & Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy' (I-v)

'Brevity is the soul of wit' (Polonius, II-ii)

'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty!' (Hamlet, II-ii)

'To be, or not to be. That is the question. Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings of arrows and outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing them' (Hamlet, III-i) (theme: to be against corruption, the oppressor's wrong).

Thomas Campion: *Songs.*

John Donne (1572-1631): *Poems; Sermons.*

Ben Jonson (1573-1637): *Poems, Plays, and Masques.*

Francis Bacon (1561–1626): *Essays.*

Comments – Essays (1597)

These 60 essays offer reflections, usually learned, sometimes witty and profound, upon a variety of topics. Their style is unique, and they are often quoted in later English literature. There are a good many Latin quotations in them, which Bacon does not translate, since all educated men of his day read Latin, so that you may need to find a book with quotations translated in the footnotes. Some of the best known essays are: VII-Of Marriage & Single Life, X-Of Love, XVI-Of Atheism, XVII-Of Travel, XXII-Of Cunning, XLII-Of Youth & Age, XLVI-Of Gardens, L-Of Studies.



Robert Burton (1577–1640): *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.
Thomas Browne (1605–1682): *Religio Medici; Hydriotaphia, or Urne-Buriall; The Garden of Cyrus*.
Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679): *Leviathan*.
Herrick, Robert (1591-1674): *Poems*.
Thomas Carew: *Poems*.
Richard Lovelace: *Poems*.
Andrew Marvell (1621-1678): *Poems*.
George Herbert: *The Temple*.
Thomas Traherne: *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings*.
Henry Vaughan: *Poetry*.
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester: *Poems*.
Richard Crashaw: *Poems*.
Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher: *Plays*.
George Chapman: *Comedies, Tragedies, Poems*.
John Ford (1586-c.1640): *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.
John Marston: *The Malcontent*.
John Webster (1580-c.1634): *The White Devil; The Duchess of Malfi*.
Thomas Middleton and William Rowley: *The Changeling*.
Cyril Tourneur: *The Revenger's Tragedy*.
Philip Massinger: *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*.
John Bunyan: *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
Izaak Walton (1593-1683): *The Compleat Angler*.
John Milton (1608-1674): *Paradise Lost; Paradise Regained; Lycidas, Comus, and the Minor Poems; Samson Agonistes; Areopagitica*.
Comments – Paradise Lost (1667)

Main Theme: Good & Evil.

Paradise Lost is the epic poem in blank verse that concerns the biblical story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Milton's purpose was to "assert Eternal Providence...and justify the ways of God to men". Paradise Lost follows the epic tradition of starting in medias res (in the midst of things), the background story being recounted later.

Milton's story has two narrative arcs, one about Satan (Lucifer) and the other, Adam and Eve. It begins after Satan and the other fallen angels have been defeated and banished to Hell. In Pandemonium, capital city of Hell, Satan employs his rhetorical skill to organize his followers; he is aided by Mammon and Beelzebub. Belial and Moloch are also present. At the end of the debate, Satan volunteers to corrupt the newly created Earth and God's new and most favored creation, Mankind. He braves the dangers of the Abyss alone, in a manner reminiscent of Odysseus or Aeneas. After an arduous traversal of the Chaos outside Hell, he enters God's new material World, and later the Garden of Eden.

God gave Adam and Eve total freedom and power to rule over all creation. In the Garden of Eden they can have a romantic and sexual relationship without sin, however God gave them one explicit command: not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on penalty of death. Satan, disguised in the form of a serpent, successfully tempts Eve to eat from the Tree by preying on her vanity and tricking her with rhetoric. Adam, learning that Eve has sinned, knowingly commits the same sin. After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve have lustful sex. After they awake, they experience guilt and shame for the first time. Realizing that they have committed a terrible act against God, they engage in mutual recrimination. Satan returns triumphantly to Hell, amid the praise of his fellow fallen angels, and tells them about how their scheme worked and Mankind has fallen, giving them complete dominion over Paradise. Adam and Eve approach God and try to sue for grace and to receive forgiveness. Archangel Michael tells them about Mankind's potential redemption from original sin through Jesus Christ. Adam and Eve are cast out of Eden with Michael saying "a paradise within thee, happier far". Adam and Eve now have a more distant relationship with god, who is omnipresent but invisible (unlike the tangible Father in the Garden of Eden). (Comic relief: "It wasn't the apple in the tree that caused the trouble in the Garden of Eden – it was the pear on the ground").

John Aubrey (1626–1697): *Brief Lives*.
Jeremy Taylor: *Holy Dying*.
Samuel Butler (1612-1680): *Hudibras*.
John Dryden (1631-1700): *Poetry and Plays; Critical Essays*.



Thomas Otway: *Venice Preserv'd*.

William Congreve: *The Way of the World*; *Love for Love*.

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745): *Gulliver's Travels*; *A Tale of a Tub*; *Shorter Prose Works*; *Poems*.

[Comments – Gulliver's Travels](#) (1726)

Main Themes: Heroism, Good & Evil.

Gulliver's Travels is satirical story satirizing both human nature and the "travellers' tales" literary subgenre. Gulliver experiences several voyages to fantastical lands:

- 1) Lilliput & Bleufscu (island nations inhabited by tiny people).
- 2) Laputa (flying island whose inhabitants can maneuver using magnetic levitation).
- 3) The Houyhnhnm (an intelligent society of horses, with values based upon reason, and only upon reason, that practice eugenics based on their analyses of benefit and cost).

George Etherege: *The Man of Mode*.

Alexander Pope (1688-1744): *Poems*.

John Gay (1685-1732): *The Beggar's Opera*.

James Boswell (1740-1795): *Life of Johnson*; *Journals*.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784): *Works*.

Edward Gibbon (1737–1794): *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Edmund Burke (1729–1797): *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*;
Reflections on the Revolution in France.

Maurice Morgann: *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*.

William Collins: *Poems*.

George Farquhar: *The Beaux' Strategem*; *The Recruiting Officer*.

William Wycherley: *The Country Wife*; *The Plain Dealer*.

Christopher Smart: *Jubilate Agno*; *A Song to David*.

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774): *The Vicar of Wakefield*; *She Stoops to Conquer*; *The Traveller*;
The Deserted Village.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816): *The School of Scandal*; *The Rivals*.

William Cowper (1731-1800): *Poetical Works*.

George Crabbe: *Poetical Works*.

Defoe, Daniel (1661?-1731): *Robinson Crusoe*; *Moll Flanders*; *A Journal of the Plague Year*.

[Comments - Robinson Crusoe](#) (1719)

Main Theme: Survival.

Usually regarded as the first novel written in English, this English classic is often read in childhood, but the original is not childish in style or form. Its story of a man's survival against nature has made it enduringly popular.

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761): *Clarissa*; *Pamela*; *Sir Charles Grandison*.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754): *Joseph Andrews*; *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*.

Tobias Smollett (1721-1771): *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*;
The Adventures of Roderick Random.

Serne (1713 -1768): *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*; *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*.

Fanny Burney (1752-1840): *Evelina*.

Joseph Addison and Richard Steele: *The Spectator*.

FRANCE

There appears no single figure in French literature who is at the center of the national canon: no [Shakespeare](#), no [Dante](#), [Goethe](#), [Cervantes](#), Pushkin, [Whitman](#). Instead there is a concourse of titans, any of whom might be nominated: [Rabelais](#), [Montaigne](#), [Moliere](#), [Racine](#), [Rousseau](#), [Hugo](#), Baudelaire, [Flaubert](#) and [Proust](#). Perhaps one could designate a composite author, Montaigne-Moliere, for the greatest of essayists was the spiritual father of [Shakespeare's](#) only rival as a comic dramatists. Moliere's audiences welcome all his indecencies. His crucial playgoer was Louis XIV, the 'Sun King', whereas Queen Elizabeth and even James I never quite became Shakespeare's patron. Moliere's Hamlet is Alceste, protagonist of *The Misanthrope*. Both Hamlet and Alceste justify Nietzsche's savage, permanently disturbing apothegm: *"That which we can find words for is something already dead in our hearts; there is always a kind of contempt in the act of speaking"*. Emerson, like Nietzsche a professed disciple of Montaigne, famously said of the Essays, *"Cut these words and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive."*

Jean Froissart (1337-1405): *Chronicles*; *The Song of Roland*.



François Villon: *Poems*.

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592): *Essays*.

Comments – *Essays* (1580)

Montaigne is the first of great modern essayists, who also include [Bacon](#), Lamb, Macaulay, [Emerson](#) and [Mill](#). Montaigne's essays (over 100) are a mixture of opinions, often inconclusive.

Recommendations:

“Of Sadness or Sorrow”; “That Our Affections Carry Themselves Beyond Us”; “That the Intentions is Judge of Our Actions”; “Of Idleness”, “Not To Judge of Our Happiness Till After Death”; “Of Moderation”, “Of Profit & Honesty”; “Of the Inconvenience of Greatness”, “Of Books”, “Cowardice the Mother of Cruelty”.

François Rabelais (1494?-1553?): *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.

Comments – *Gargantua & Pantagruel* (c. 1532-1564)

Main Theme: Circle of Life.

Rabelais loved his life and believed that life was to be enjoyed. His books capture the boisterous and irreverent spirit of the French Renaissance, mixing the satire, nonsense, passion for knowledge, linguistic ornamentation, and sexual and scatological vulgarity that were characteristic of the age. Book I tells of the birth and education of the giant, Gargantua, of his friend, Friar John, and of the Abbey Theleme, where the rule of the monks was "Do as thou wilt." Books II-V tell of Gargantua's son, Pantagruel (also a giant), his remarkable teacher, Panurge, Friar John, and their many adventures.

Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549): *The Heptameron*.

Joachim Du Bellay: *The Regrets*.

Maurice Scève: *Délie*.

Pierre Ronsard: *Odes, Elegies, Sonnets*.

Philippe de Commines: *Memoirs*.

Agrippa d'Aubigné: *Les Tragiques*.

Robert Garnier: *Mark Antony; The Jewesses*.

Pierre Corneille: *The Cid; Polyeucte; Nicomède; Horace; Cinna; Rodogune*.

François de La Rochefoucauld: *Maxims*.

Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695): *Fables*.

Molière (1622-1673): *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme; Tartuffe; The Misanthrope; The School for Wives; The Learned Ladies; Don Juan; School for Husbands; Ridiculous Precieuses; The Would-Be Gentleman; The Miser; The Imaginary Invalid*.

Comments – *Moliere*

Main Themes: Deception.

The playwright Moliere is generally considered the Shakespeare of the French stage. ‘*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*’ (The Middle-Class Gentleman), satirizes social climbing and the bourgeois personality, poking fun both at the vulgar, pretentious middle-class and the vain, snobbish aristocracy. Monsieur Jourdain tries to rise from his shop-keeper background to assume the role of a gentleman of leisure. In *Tartuffe* the religious hypocrite Tartuffe is unmasked. King Louis XIV suppressed the play due to due religious objections from the archbishop of Paris ('...suffer this resemblance of vice to virtue, which could be mistaken for each other.'). In ‘*Le Misanthrope*’ (Cantankerous Lover), a Comedy of Manners play, the hypocrisies and pretensions of of the *ancient regime* and French aristocratic society, with its artificial social conventions, are satirized, while also pointing out the flaws that all humans possess.

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662): *Pensées*.

Comments – *Pensees* (1670)

Pascal was both a religious philosopher and a competent mathematician and physicist. His life was torn, however, by conflict over his religious views, and he was often unable to reconcile the rationalist views of a mathematician/physicist with the religious faith that wanted to hold to. This uncertainty is reflected in *Pensées* (Thoughts), fragments of thoughts about the sufficiency of reason, the validity of experience, of free will and of man's insignificance in the universe. Pascal's religious conversion led him into a life of asceticism, and the *Pensées* was in many ways his life's work. It represented Pascal's defense of the Christian religion, and the concept of "**Pascal's wager**": **that humans bet with their lives that God either exists or does not.**

Originally his essays were edited to make it appear that Pascal strongly endorsed religious faith. Later, at the time of the French revolutions, they were re-edited to make it appear that Pascal



opposed orthodox religious beliefs. That either meaning can be made out shows that they reflect the thoughts of an uncertain mind.

Bosuet, Jacques-Bénigne: *Funerary Orations*.

Boileau-Despréaux, Nicolas: *The Art of Poetry; Lutrin*.

Jean Racine: *Phaedra; Andromache; Britannicus; Athaliah*.

Pierre Carlet de Marivaux: *Seven Comedies*.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (1712–1778): *The Social Contract, The Confessions; Émile; La Nouvelle Héloïse*.

Comments - The Social Contract (1762)

'The Social Contract' argued against the idea that monarchs were divinely empowered to legislate ('The Divine Right of Kings'). Rousseau asserts that only the people, who are sovereign, have that all-powerful right and puts forth the idea that government is a contract entered into by the governed, who surrender some of their rights for the good of the state. He believed that man was inherently good but depraved by civilization and social convention. It is important to note that Rousseau's 'depraved' society was under the rule of the *ancien regime* ('old rule'). Rousseau's 'revolutionary' spirit, summarized in the famous opening line, "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains!", was motivated by the regime's bungling politicians, of nobles feeding off the labors of masses of peasants, of the immorality and corruption among Europe's ruling elites. Rousseau's 1762 treatise exerted a considerable influence toward democracy, toward the idealism of the French revolutions and toward progressive education. The French Revolution of 1789 ended the *ancien regime* and a century of stupidity, avarice, and corruption.

Critics have noted that Rousseau's political theory is a paradox of freedom and of economic and administrative organization. And that the clichés about his views stand in the way of what he plainly said. For example, he did not say "Back to Nature!" nor did he want men to return to innocent or 'noble savagery' (highly doubtful that Rousseau ever met a 'savage'). His personal life appears to illustrate his belief, since he abandoned his children and turned against those who tried to befriend him.

Rousseau's work, while sometimes inconsistent in its emphasis on both the infallibility of the "general Will" and the rights of the individual, does give a key to understanding the modern age: conflict of *reason* and *feelings*. Rousseau ranked emotional development and experience above book learning. The men and women of the 18th-century did not live by reason alone -- they had feelings, passions, fears, and prejudices. An abstract, regular, and utilitarian model of society does not suit wayward man with his diverse, sometimes irrational, impulses, traditions, and faiths.

Voltaire (1694-1778): *Candide; Zadig; Letters on England; The Lisbon Earthquake*.

Comments – Candide (or 'Optimism', 1759)

Main Themes: Coming of Age, Suffering, Deception

Candide's sheltered castle life, indoctrinated by the Leibnizian optimism of his mentor, Professor Pangloss, is rudely upset - he is evicted for inappropriate sexual advances toward Cunegonde. Candide is captured by Bulgar (Prussian) recruiters, coerced into military service and forced to participate in a major battle between the Bulgars and the Avars. The tale continues with Candide witnessing and experiencing many hardships and travails. Possibly rejecting Leibnizian optimism outright ("all is for the best" in the "best of all possible worlds"), Voltaire concludes 'Candide' by advocating a deeply practical precept – "we must cultivate our garden". The message from the old fruit farmer is that wise to keep good distance between ourselves and the world; that taking too close an interest in politics or public opinion is a fast route to aggravation and danger; that we should know well enough that humans are troublesome and will never achieve – at a state level – anything like the degree of logic and goodness we would wish for.

Voltaire's Candide was his attempt to satirically to destroy the perceived false hope of his age - a hope that centered around science, love, technical progress and reason. To Voltaire science wasn't going to improve the world – it would merely give new power to tyrants; philosophy would not be able to explain away the problem of evil – it would only show up in our vanity; love was an illusion. That humans are irredeemably wicked and the future absurd. Hope was a disease, and it was Voltaire's generous goal to try to cure us of it.

Abbe Prevost: *Manon Lescaut*.

Madame de La Fayette: *The Princess of Cleves*.

Chamfort, Sébastien-Roch Nicolas de: *Products of the Perfected Civilization*.

Denis Diderot: *Rameau's Nephew*.



Pierre Choderlos de Laclos (1741-1803): *Dangerous Liaisons*.

Baron de Montesquieu - *De L'esprit des Lois (The Spirit of Laws)*

Comments – *De L'esprit de Lois* (1748)

'De L'esprit de Lois' (The Spirit of Laws) is regarded by the French as one of their greatest works. Montesquieu regarded England's government as the best existing in his time, but he pleaded for a constitutional system of government with separation of powers, the preservation of legality and civil liberties, and the end of slavery. Montesquieu's treatise had an enormous influence on others including the works of Catherine the Great, who produced Nakaz (Instruction); of the Founding Fathers of the United States Constitution; and of Alexis de Tocqueville, who applied Montesquieu's methods to a study of American society, in *Democracy in America*.

GERMANY

Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536): *In Praise of Folly*.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832): *Faust, Parts One and Two*; *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; *Egmont*; *Elective Affinities*; *The Sorrows of Young Werther*; *Poems*; *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*; *Wilhelm Meister's Years of Wandering*; *Italian Journey*; *Verse Plays*; *Hermann and Dorothea*; *Roman Elegies*; *Venetian Epigrams*; *West-Eastern Divan*.

Comments - *Faust* (Part I, 1808)

Main Theme: Good & Evil.

The most famous play of the most famous German author. Superficially, it is the story of Faust who sells his soul to the Devil (Mephistopheles) for power, knowledge, wealth and pleasure. At a deeper level, the play probes the struggle of man against the temptations of evil and the Enlightenment's premise that humanity's perfection is solely based on the advancement of knowledge and technology. Faust strives for a taste of the spiritual and discovers that his own nature contains a spiritual dimension, that of love, which he finds in his relationship with the young girl, Gretchen. Goethe argues that love and tragedy can conquer the tyranny of extreme science and rationalism. Part II, written later, is concerned with society's rather than one man's struggle against evil. Much of Part II is allegorical and incomprehensible. It ends by offering final redemption to man as a reward for good intent in his earthly strivings.

Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805): *The Robbers*; *Mary Stuart*; *Wallenstein*; *Don Carlos*; *On the Naïve and Sentimental in Literature*.

Gotthold Lessing: *Laocoön*; *Nathan the Wise*.

Freidrich Hölderlin: *Hymns and Fragments*; *Selected Poems*.

Heinrich von Kleist: *Five Plays*; *Stories*.

WESTERN CANON: THE DEMOCRATIC AGE (1832-1900)
(Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor Humanities, Yale University)

ITALY

Ugo Foscolo: *On Sepulchres; Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis; Odes and The Graces*.
Alessandro Manzoni: *The Betrothed; On the Historical Novel*.
Giacomo Leopardi: *Essays and Dialogues; Poems; The Moral Essays*.
Belli, Giuseppe Gioacchino: *Roman Sonnets*.
Giosu  Carducci: *Hymn to Satan; Barbarian Odes; Rhymes and Rhythms*.
Giovanni Verga (1840-1922): *Little Novels of Sicily; Mastro-Don Gesualdo; The House by the Medlar Tree; The She-Wolf and Other Stories*.

SPAIN & PORTUGAL

B cquer, Gustavo Adolfo: *Poems*.
Gald s, Benito P rez: *Fortunata and Jacinta*.
(Clar n), Leopoldo Alas: *La Regenta*.
Queir s, Jos  Maria de E a de: *The Maias*.

FRANCE

Benjamin Constant: *Adolphe; The Red Notebook*.
Fran ois-Auguste-Ren  de Chateaubriand: *Attala; Ren ; The Genius of Christianity*.
Alphonse de Lamartine: *Meditations*.
Alfred de Vigny: *Chatterton; Poems*.
Victor Hugo (1802-1885): *Les Mis rables; The Distance, the Shadows: Selected Poems; Notre-Dame of Paris; William Shakespeare; The Toilers of the Sea; The End of Satan; God*.

[Comments - Les Miserables](#) (1862)

Main Themes: Love, Good & Evil.

Beginning in 1815 and culminating in the 1832 June Rebellion in Paris (anti-monarchist insurrection), the novel follows the lives and interactions of several characters, particularly the struggles of ex-convict but upright unfortunate hero, Jean Valjean, and his experience of on-the-run police pursuits and eventual redemption. *Les Mis rables* is a considerable undertaking – runs to five volumes (~2000 pgs); many of its passages are unforgettable (eg, Battle of Waterloo, drama of the candlesticks, the Benedictine monastery, the flight through the sewers of Paris). The epic novel progresses from evil to good, from injustice to justice, from falsehood to truth, from appetite to conscience, from corruption to life; from bestiality to duty, from hell to heaven, from nothingness to God; from the ‘hydra’ at the beginning to the ‘angel’ at the end.

Upton Sinclair described the novel as "one of the half-dozen greatest novels of the world", and remarked that Hugo set forth the purpose of *Les Mis rables* in the Preface:

“So long as there shall exist, by reason of law and custom, a social condemnation, which, in the face of civilization, artificially creates hells on earth, and complicates a destiny that is divine with human fatality; so long as the three problems of the age – the degradation of man by poverty, the ruin of women by starvation, and the dwarfing of childhood by physical and spiritual night—are not solved; so long as, in certain regions, social asphyxia shall be possible; in other words, and from a yet more extended point of view, so long as ignorance and misery remain on earth, books like this cannot be useless.”

Alfred de Musset: *Poems; Lorenzaccio*.
Nerval, G rard de: *The Chimeras; Sylvie; Aurelia*.
Gautier, Th ophile (1811–1872): *Mademoiselle de Maupin; Enamels and Cameos*.
Balzac, Honor  de (1799-1850): *Le Pere Goriot; The Girl with the Golden Eyes; Louis Lambert; The Wild Ass’s Skin; Cousin Bette; A Harlot High and Low; Eug nie Grandet; Ursule Mirouet*.

[Comments - Le Pere Goriot](#) (Old Goriot, 1835)

Main Themes: Love, Deception (side theme: money).

Set in Paris in 1819, the novel takes place during the Bourbon Restoration (1814-30), which brought profound changes to French society. *Goriot* is a pathetic story of the intertwined lives of the elderly dotting Goriot, spurned by his daughters who regard him as a hindrance, Vautrin, the



mysterious criminal-in-hiding, and a naive law student named Eugène de Rastignac. Goriot bankrupts himself to support his two well-married daughters. Rastignac, Vautrin, and Goriot represent individuals corrupted by their desires and struggles to secure higher social status. Rastignac has been compared to Faust, with Vautrin as Mephistopheles. *Le Père Goriot* is widely considered Balzac's most important novel and Balzac is credited with starting the trend toward realism in modern literature. He also wrote a well-known collection of Rabelaisian short stories called *Droll Stories*.

Stendhal (1783-1842): *On Love; The Red and the Black; The Charterhouse of Parma*.

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880): *Madame Bovary; Sentimental Education; Salammbô; A Simple Soul*.

Comments - *Madame Bovary* (1856)

Main Themes: Deception, Love

Madame Bovary has become well known as the first careful study of the psychological motivation of a neurotic woman. Emma Bovary, the wife of a country physician, finds that her tiresome life does not measure up to the exciting and romantic visions of the novels that she has read. The partners of Emma's 'ecstatic' lusty affairs end (Léon Dupuis and the rich & rakish landowner Rodolphe Boulanger) due to her emotional excesses and irrational romantic fantasies. The shock is so great that Emma falls deathly ill and briefly returns to religion. Unable to control her derangement she indulges her fancy for luxury goods to the point of financial ruin. Emma's plead for support is met with silence. In despair, she swallows arsenic and dies an agonizing death. Flaubert is famous for meticulous attention to detail and objectivity in his writing. It is said that he often spent days on a single sentence. Marcel Proust praised the "grammatical purity" of Flaubert's style, while Vladimir Nabokov said that "stylistically it is prose doing what poetry is supposed to do".

George Sand (1804-1876): *The Haunted Pool*.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867): *Flowers of Evil; Paris Spleen*.

Mallarmé, Stéphane: *Selected Poetry and Prose*.

Paul Verlaine: *Selected Poems*.

Arthur Rimbaud: *Complete Works*.

Corbière, Tristan: *Les Armours Jaunes*.

Jules Laforgue: *Selected Writings*

Guy de Maupassant, 1850-1893): *Boule de Suif; A Piece of String; The Necklace*

Comments – *Bouile de Suif* ('Butterball', 1880)

Main Theme: Suffering.

Boule de Suif is considered Maupassant's masterpiece. The story is set in the Franco-Prussian War and follows a group of French residents of Rouen. Upon a carriage ride to Le Havre the group meets several passengers who constitutes a microcosm of French society: a prostitute (Elisabeth Rousset, otherwise known as Bouile de Suif or 'Butterball'), a strict Democrat (Cornudet), a petty bourgeoisie shop-owning couple (M. and Mme. Loiseau), a wealthy upper-bourgeoisie factory-owner and his wife (M. and Mme. Carré-Lamadon), the Comte and Comtesse of Bréville and two nuns. The occupants initially snub Boule de Suif, but their attitudes change when she produces a picnic basket full of lovely food and offers to share its contents with the hungry travelers. The travelers' virtues are tested when they are detained by a Prussian officer who wishes the favors of Bouile de Suif. Her initial refusal is supported by the travelers, but their indignation soon disappears as they grow angry at Boule de Suif for not sleeping with the officer so that they can leave. The travelers use various examples of logic and morality to convince her it is the right thing to do; she finally gives in and sleeps with the officer. Upon the return to Le Havre, the travelers refuse to acknowledge Bouile de Suif and share their food as she did with them earlier. Bouile de Suif finally weeps for her lost dignity.

One theme of *Boule de Suif* focuses on French resistance to the German occupiers during the war. The occupants talk a great deal about resisting the invaders, however they are running away in a cowardly fashion rather than staying in the town to resist. Class themes are exposed where Bouile de Suif, the unpopular prostitute, and, interestingly, the nuns, are portrayed as fiercely patriotic whereas the aristocrats and bourgeois are portrayed as happier to betray their country in order to



end the war and return to their comfortable lives. The manufacturer and his wife are portrayed as greedy and materialistic (The Greed Myth).

Emile Zola (1840-1902): *Germinal*; *L'Assommoir*; *Nana*.

SCANDINAVIA

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906): *Doll's House*; *Ghosts*; *An Enemy of the People*; *Hedda Gabler*; *Brand*; *Peer Gynt*; *Emperor and Galilean*; *The Master Builder*; *The Lady from the Sea*; *When We Dead Awaken*.

Comments – [Henrik Ibsen Plays](#)

Main Themes: Suffering, Love, Deception, Good & Evil

Henrik Ibsen is considered one of the founders of modernism in theater ("the father of realism"). He is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare. The concept of the drama as a form of social comment begins with Ibsen, whose ideas were well ahead of his time. Ibsen's plays are known for dramatic last lines or last-line actions.

In '*A Doll's House*' (1879) Ibsen dared to suggest, for the first time on the stage, that a wife might leave her husband for incompatibility, all more the difficult due to the lack of reasonable opportunities for a woman to gain self-fulfillment in Norway's male-dominated society (the woman sacrifices her integrity). Appearances prove to be misleading veneers that mask the reality of the play's characters and situations. Nora initially seems a silly, childish woman, but later she is seen as intelligent, motivated, strong-willed and independent thinker. Torvald appears to be strong in the beginning but though he plays the part of the strong, reveals himself to be cowardly, petty, and selfish. '*A Doll's House*' aroused a great sensation at the time, and caused a "storm of outraged controversy" that went beyond the theatre to the world newspapers and society ('*A Doll's House*' was the world's most performed play in 2006). **Theme: Deception.**

Strong controversy and negative criticism arose on the release of '*Ghost*' (1881) where Ibsen dared to discuss several controversial subjects such as venereal disease, adultery, incest, and euthanasia. Critics have commented that regular tragedy deals with the unhappy consequences of breaking the moral code. '*Ghosts*', on the contrary, deals with the consequences of not breaking it. Ibsen wrote '*An Enemy of the People*' (1882) as a response to the public outcry against '*Ghosts*' which exposed the hypocrisy of 19th-century morality: the story of a man who dares to speak an unpalatable truth, and is punished for it. Upon later reflection, Ibsen wrote to his publisher on whether he many have gone too far in his zeal to tell the truth: "I am still uncertain as to whether I should call "*An Enemy of the People*" a comedy or a straight drama. It may have many traits of comedy, but it also is based on a serious idea."

'*Hedda Gabler*' (1891) is considered a masterpiece within the genres of literary realism, 19th-century theater and world drama. Hedda, the daughter of a general and an apparently innocent and conventional wife, is trapped in a marriage and a house that she does not want. The story of her machinations and the destruction of her surroundings have been described as a female variation of Hamlet.

August Strindberg: *To Damascus*; *Miss Julie*; *The Father*; *The Dance of Death*; *The Ghost Sonata*; *A Dream Play*.

GREAT BRITAIN

Robert Burns: *Poems*.

William Blake (1757-1827): *Complete Poetry and Prose*.

William Wordsworth (1770–1850): *Poems*; *The Prelude*.

Walter Scott (1771-1832): *Waverley*; *Ivanhoe*; *The Heart of Midlothian*; *Redgauntlet*; *Old Mortality*.

Comments – [Ivanhoe](#) (1819)

Main Theme: Heroism

Scott's many novels of chivalry and men of actions and damsels in distress have made him probably the most widely read novelist in English. His novels tell good stories and show that Scott had a remarkable knowledge of the history and manners of the Middle Ages, but they can claim no literary merit. The influence of his novels was so widespread and so pervasive that some historians



have maintained that they were in part responsible for sustaining illusions of aristocracy and chivalry in our southern states, thus contributing to the failure of the South to follow the industrialization of the North in pre-Civil War days. Scott wrote 27 "Waverley" novels, including *Waverley*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor* (from which Donizetti's opera was made), *Rob Roy*, *Ivanhoe*, and *Kenilworth*. *Ivanhoe* deals with the adventures of a young hero (Ivanhoe) and Locksley (similar to Robin Hood) and the attempts to restore Richard I (the Lion-Heart) to the throne usurped by his evil brother, John, after Richard's return from the 3rd Crusade (1189-1192). The Saxons are the heroes and the Norman French conquerors, who won the battle of Hastings in 1066 under William the Conqueror (Duke of Normandy), are the villains.

Jane Austen (1775-1817): *Pride and Prejudice*; *Emma*; *Mansfield Park*; *Persuasion*.

Comments – *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)

Main Theme: Love

Austen's plots explore the agony and ecstasy of young love and the dependence of women on marriage in the pursuit of favorable social standing and economic security. Her works critique the novels of sensibility of late 18th century and are part of the transition to 19th-century literary realism. Her use of biting irony, along with her realism, humor, and social commentary have long earned her acclaim among critics, scholars, and popular audiences alike. Jane Austen did not use a pen name. 'Pride and Prejudice' follows the character development of Elizabeth Bennet, the dynamic protagonist of the book who learns about the repercussions of hasty judgments and comes to appreciate the difference between superficial goodness and actual goodness.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834): *Poems and Prose*.

Dorothy Wordsworth: *The Grasmere Journal*.

Hazlitt, William (1778-1830): *Essays and Criticism*.

George Byron (1788-1824): *Don Juan*; *Poems*.

Walter Savage Landor: *Poems*; *Imaginary Conversations*.

Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859): *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; *Selected Prose*.

Charles Lamb: *Essays*.

Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849): *Castle Rackrent*.

John Galt: *The Entail*.

Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865): *Cranford*; *Mary Barton*; *North and South*.

James Hogg: *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824): *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822): *Poems*; *A Defence of Poetry*.

Mary Shelley (1797-1851): *Frankenstein*.

John Clare: *Poems*.

John Keats (1795-1821): *Poems and Letters*.

Beddoes, Thomas Lovell: *Death's Jest-Book*; *Poems*.

George Darley: *Nepenthe*; *Poems*.

Thomas Hood: *Poems*.

Thomas Wade: *Poems*.

Robert Browning (1812-1889): *Poems*; *The Ring and the Book*.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870): *David Copperfield*; *A Tale of Two Cities*; *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*; *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*; *Bleak House*; *Hard Times*; *Nicholas Nickleby*; *Dombey and Son*; *Great Expectations*; *Martin Chuzzlewit*; *Christmas Stories*; *Little Dorrit*; *Our Mutual Friend*; *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Comments - *David Copperfield* (1850), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859)

Main Themes: *David Copperfield* (Suffering, Coming of Age); *A Tale of Two Cities* (Heroism, Good & Evil)

'David Copperfield' is probably the best and most popular of Dicken's many novels and said to be his own favorite ("a very complicated weaving of truth and invention"). The novel, written in first person, describes David's life until middle age. It is a journey of change of growth from infancy to maturity. Dickens focuses on orphans, women, and the mentally disabled to show that exploitation – not pity or compassion – is the rule in an industrial society. Dickens draws on his own experience



as a child to describe the inhumanity of child labor and debtors' prison. Some of its characters, like Uriah Heep, are known throughout the world. Uriah serves as a foil to David and contrasts David's qualities of innocence and compassion with his own corruption. Even though David and Uriah are raised in a cruel environment, Uriah's upbringing causes him to become bitter and vengeful rather than honest and hopeful.

'A Tale of Two Cities' is a historical novel set in London and Paris during the French Revolution. The novel tells the story of the French Doctor Manette, his 18-year-long imprisonment in the Bastille in Paris and his release to live in London with his daughter Lucie, whom he had never met. The story is set against the conditions that led up to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror. The death of Sydney Carton (alcoholic attorney) secures a new, peaceful life for Lucie Manette, Charles Darnay, and even Carton himself. By delivering himself to the guillotine, Carton ascends to the plane of heroism, becoming a Christ-like figure whose death serves to save the lives of others. His own life thus gains meaning and value. Supporting the revolutionary cause, 'A Tale of Two Cities' points to the evil of the revolutionaries themselves: the atrocities committed both by the aristocracy and by the outraged peasants. However, Dickens condemns the strategy of the latter: in the struggle of overcoming society's atrocities, in fighting cruelty with cruelty, the peasants effect no true revolution, they only perpetuate the violence that they themselves have suffered.

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892): *Poems*.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): *Poems and Translations*.

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888): *Poems; Essays*.

Clough, Arthur Hugh: *Poems*.

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894): *Poems*.

Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866): *Nightmare Abbey; Gryll Grange*.

Hopkins, Gerald Manley: *Poems and Prose*.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): *Selected Prose; Sartor Resartus*.

John Ruskin (1819-1900): *Modern Painters; The Stones of Venice; Unto This Last;*

The Queen of the Air.

Walter Pater: *Studies in the History of the Renaissance; Appreciations; Imaginary Portraits;*

Marius the Epicurean.

FitzGerald, Edward: *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873): *On Liberty; Autobiography*.

Comments - On Liberty (non-fiction)

Probably the most famous and most passionately argued defense of liberty in a free society. It is a philosophical essay against arbitrary absolutes and a society planned for the privileged few and defines some of the bases of liberal thought on what constitutes a good society. Mill's essay applies his ethical system of utilitarianism to society and state and suggests standards for the relationship between authority and liberty. He emphasizes the importance of individuality - the *summum bonum* (supreme good) of utilitarianism - and asserts that democratic ideals may result in the tyranny of the majority. Mill's writing style illustrates the best in elegance and eloquence of the Victorian era.

Newman, John Henry: *Apologia pro Vita Sua; A Grammar of Assent; The Idea of a University*.

Anthony Trollope (1815-1882): *The Barchester Novels; The Palliser Novels; Orley Farm;*

The Way We Live Now.

Lewis Carroll (1832-1898): *Complete Works*.

Edward Lear: *Complete Nonsense*.

George Gissing (1857-1903): *New Grub Street*.

Swinburne, Algernon Charles: *Poems and Letters*.

Charlotte Bronte (1816-1855): *Jane Eyre; Villette*.

Comments - Jane Eyre (1847)

Main Theme: Love

Jane Eyre is a Bildungsroman which follows the experiences of the protagonist including her growth to adulthood and her love for Mr. Rochester, the brooding master of Thornfield Hall. The novel revolutionized prose fiction by being the first to focus on its protagonist's moral and spiritual



development through an intimate first-person narrative ('private consciousness'). The novel is considered by many to be ahead of its time because of Jane's individualistic character and how the novel approaches the topics of class, sexuality, religion, and feminism. Along with Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, is one of the most famous romance novels of all time. The English writer Charlotte Bronte was published under the pen name "Currer Bell".

Emily Bronte (1818-1848): *Wuthering Heights*; *Poems*;

[Comments - Wuthering Heights \(1847\)](#)

Main Themes: Love, Suffering

At the time of its publication, *Wuthering Heights* was a controversial novel due its unusually stark depiction of mental and physical cruelty (to some, still is). The book challenged Victorian ideas about religion, morality, class and a women's place in society. It is a story of emotional violence, set in the moors of northern England, telling of the love of Heathcliff, an orphan, for Catherine Earnshaw, and his destructive revenge following her marriage to Edgar Linton, concluding with the fate of their children (the first three chapters take place around 1800 and the fourth drops back to 1770, so that Catherine who first appears is not Catherine Earnshaw, the heroine). Like her sister Charlotte Bronte, Bronte was published under a pseudonym ("Ellis Bell").

Anne Bronte (1820-1849): *Agnes Grey*

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863): *Vanity Fair*; *The History of Henry Esmond*.

[Comments - Vanity Fair \(1847-1848\)](#)

Main Theme: Deception.

Thackeray is held to be the best Victorian novelist, although Dickens was more popular. Some critics consider *Vanity Fair* the best English novel ever written in its style, plot and character development, and generally high literary quality. *Vanity Fair* follows the lives of Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley amid their friends and families during and after the Napoleonic Wars. The heroine, Becky Sharp, is brilliant and opportunistic in her relentless social climb. The novel was intended as a criticism of the crassness and vulgarity of the English aristocracy in the mid-Victorian era.

George Meredith (1828-1909): *Poems*; *The Egoist*.

Francis Thompson: *Poems*.

Lionel Johnson: *Poems*.

Robert Bridges: *Poems*.

Chesterton, G. K. (Gilbert Keith) (1874-1936): *Collected Poems*; *The Man Who Was Thursday*.

Samuel Butler (1835-1902): *Erewhon*; *The Way of All Flesh*.

Gilbert, W.S.: *Complete Plays of Gilbert and Sullivan*; *Bab Ballads*.

Wilkie Collins (1824-1889): *The Moonstone*; *The Woman in White*; *No Name*.

[Comments - The Moonstone \(1868\)](#)

The Moonstone is typically considered the first "mystery" or "detective" novel and established many of the ground rules for the modern genre. Collins' story, enjoyed for its assortment of odd characters, is told entirely through letters from the persons directly or indirectly involved in a jewel theft.

Coventry Patmore: *Odes*.

Thomson, James (1834-1882): *The City of the Dreadful Night*.

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900): *The Importance of Being Earnest*; *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; *The Artist as Critic*; *Letters*.

[Comments - The Importance of Being Earnest \(1895\)](#)

Main Theme: Deception

A farcical comedy where the protagonists maintain fictitious personae to escape burdensome social obligations and conventions of late Victorian London. Many consider the play to be the perfect example of the sophisticated comedy of manners and the trivial treatment of institutions as serious as marriage, and the resulting satire of Victorian ways. It has a totally artificial plot, but scintillating dialogue. Some critics have called it the only play written in English in the 19th century worthy of being preserved as a classic.



John Davidson: *Ballads and Songs*.

Ernest Dowson: *Complete Poems*.

George Eliot (1819-1880): *Adam Bede*; *Silas Marner*; *The Mill on the Floss*; *Middlemarch*; *Daniel Deronda*.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894): *The Black Arrow*; *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; *Treasure Island*; *The New Arabian Nights*; *The Master of Ballantrae*; *Weir of Hermiston*; *Kidnapped*.

Comments - The Black Arrow: A Tale of the Two Roses (1888)

The story of Richard Shelton during the Wars of the Roses (control of the English throne between the House of Lancaster (Red) and The House of York (White); 1455-1487); how he becomes a knight, rescues his lady Joanna Sedley and obtains justice for the murder of his father, Sir Harry Shelton. The antagonist are the outlaws known as The Black Arrow whose leader is Ellis Duckworth. Sir Shelton suspects that the Black Arrow murdered his father; his struggle sweeps him up into a greater conflict. The period of Shelton's ordeals is similar to the period of Shakespeare's plays.

William Morris (1834-1896): *Early Romances*; *Poems*; *The Earthly Paradise*; *The Well at the World's End*; *News from Nowhere*.

Bram Stoker (1847-1912): *Dracula*.

George MacDonald, 1824-1905): *Lilith*; *At the Back of the North Wind*.

GERMANY

Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenburg): *Hymns to the Night*; *Aphorisms*.

Jakob Grimm (1785–1863) and Grimm, Wilhelm (1786–1859): *Fairy Tales*.

Mörike, Eduard: *Selected Poems*; *Mozart on His Way to Prague*.

Theodor Storm: *Immensee*; *Poems*.

Gottfried Keller: *Green Henry*; *Tales*.

Hoffmann, E. T. A. (Ernst Theodor Amadeus), 1776-1822): *The Devil's Elixir*; *Tales*.

Jeremias Gotthelf: *The Black Spider*.

Adalbert Stifter: *Indian Summer*; *Tales*.

Friedrich Schlegel: *Criticism and Aphorisms*.

Büchner, Georg: *Danton's Death*; *Woyzeck*.

Heinrich Heine: *Complete Poems*.

Richard Wagner: *The Ring of the Nibelung*.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900): *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*; *The Birth of Tragedy*; *Beyond Good and Evil*; *On the Genealogy of Morals*; *The Will to Power*.

Comments - Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-1885)

Main Themes: Good & Evil; Heroism

Nietzsche philosophical novel deals with ideas such as the "eternal recurrence" (that the universe and all existence and energy has been recurring across infinite time/space); the parable on the "death of God" (that the Enlightenment had eliminated the possibility of the existence of God or, possibly, the enlightened view that the Old Testament 'God' with human qualities is dead); and the prophecy of the "Übermensch" (Superhuman). Nietzsche's philosophy of the Superhuman has been discredited by some because they believe the "Übermensch" inspired Hitler's racial-superiority ideas (Will to Power). Nietzsche himself considered Zarathustra to be his magnum opus.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra is one of the strangest books in the Western philosophical tradition. It is a mock-gospel: it relates the sayings and doings of Zarathustra in a style reminiscent of the Gospels in the Bible and it is laden with biblical allusions, but it also harshly condemns Christianity and mocks the idea of a holy scripture or a holy person. Zarathustra is essentially a man who praises laughter, and who is able even to laugh at himself.

Theodor Fontane: *Effi Briest*.

Stefan George: *Selected Poems*.



RUSSIA

Aleksandr Pushkin (1799-1837): *Complete Prose Tales; Complete Poetry; Eugene Onegin; Narrative Poems; Boris Godunov.*

Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852): *The Complete Tales; Dead Souls; The Government Inspector.*

Mikhail Lermontov (1814-1841): *Narrative Poems; A Hero of Our Time.*

Segey Aksakov: *A Family Chronicle.*

Aleksandr Herzen: *My Past and Thoughts; From the Other Shore.*

Ivan Goncharov: *The Frigate Pallada; Oblomov.*

Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883): *A Sportsman's Notebook; A Month in the Country; Fathers and Sons; On the Eve; First Love.*

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881): *The Brothers Karamazov; Notes from the Underground* (theme of the 'Beat Generation'); *Crime and Punishment; The Idiot; The Possessed (The Devils).*

Comments - *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880)

Main Themes: Good & Evil, Heroism

Final novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky. A passionate philosophical novel that explores God, free will and morality with an interesting combination of passion, violence and Russian mysticism. It is a theological drama that deals with problems of faith, doubt and reason in the context of a modernizing Russia where the idealist must cope in a new world of materialists. Faith refers to the positive, assenting belief in God (as practiced by Zosima and Alyosha) which lends itself to an active love of mankind, kindness, forgiveness, and a devotion to goodness. Doubt refers logical skepticism and pursuing the truth through the logical examination of evidence (as practiced by Ivan), lends itself to the rejection of God, the rejection of conventional notions of morality, a coldness toward mankind, and a crippling inner despair.

Since its publication, it has been acclaimed as one of the supreme achievements in world literature. Proper names can offer some difficulty in reading Russian novels. Russian men bear a Christian name followed by a middle name derived from their father's first name (the patronymic) - thus the hero is Alexei Fyodorovich Karamzov ('son of Fyodor') - the youngest child by Karamazov's second wife. The Russians use both names in polite address: Alexei Fyodorovich. In familiar address, they use a diminutive of the first name: Alyosha.

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910): *War and Peace; The Ossacks; Anna Karenina; A Confession; The Power of Darkness; The Death of Ivan Ilych.*

Comments - *War and Peace* (1869)

Called the national novel of Russia. The huge novel (4 volumes) chronicles the French invasion of Russia (1810) and the impact of the Napoleonic era on Tsarist society through the stories of five Russian aristocratic families. Tolstoy said *War and Peace* is "not a novel, even less is it a poem, and still less a historical chronicle." Large sections are philosophical discussions rather than narrative: it symbolizes the peasants as the embodiment of everything good in Russia; shows how various classes of people react in time of war; and attempts to justify the author's theory that history is made by chance and has little to do with the efforts of great men or small.

Nikolay Leskov: *Tales.*

Aleksandr Ostrovsky: *The Storm.*

Nikolay Chernyshevsky: *What is to Be Done?.*

Aleksandr Blok: *The Twelve and Other Poems.*

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904): *The Cherry Orchard; The Seagull, Three Sisters, and Uncle Vanya.*

Comments - *The Cherry Orchard* (1903)

Main Themes: Suffering, Judgment

The Cherry Orchard is the last play by Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. The play revolves around an aristocratic Russian landowner who returns to her family estate (which includes a large and well-known cherry orchard) just before it is auctioned to pay the mortgage. She permits the sale of the estate to the son of a former serf. The cutting down of the cherry tree symbolizes the themes of cultural futility – both the futile attempts of the aristocracy to maintain its status and of the bourgeoisie to find meaning in its newfound materialism. The play dramatizes the socio-economic forces in Russia at the turn of the 20th century, including the rise of the middle class after the



abolition of serfdom in the mid-19th century and the decline of the power of the aristocracy. Chekhov described the play as a comedy, with some elements of farce, and the director, Konstantin Stanislavski, treated it as a tragedy. The Cherry Orchard ranks along Chekhov's other outstanding plays: *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, and *Uncle Vanya*.

THE UNITED STATES

Washington Irving (1783-1859): *The Sketch Book*.

Bryant, William Cullen: *Collected Poems*.

James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851): *The Deerslayers*.

Whittier, John Greenleaf: *Collected Poems*.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882): *Essays; Nature; Representative Men; The Conduct of Life*.

Comments – Essays (1841-1844)

Essays regarding transcendentalism: "Self-Reliance", "Compensation", "The Over-soul", "Circles", "Spiritual Laws", "The Poet", "Experience", "Politics", "Nominalist & Realists"...). Transcendentalism, developed in the United States in the late 1820s and 1830s, is a philosophical movement whose core tenet is the inherent goodness of people and nature and that society and its institutions have corrupted the purity of the individual. Transcendentalism, while having the faith that people are at their best when truly "self-reliant" and independent, acknowledge a divine experience inherent in the every day, rather than believing in a distant heaven. Emerson's essays acknowledge the independent American spirit of thought, action, self-reliance and a belief in man's inherent worth, as well as a healthy disdain for meaningless religious and social convention.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886): *Complete Poems* ('*The brain is wider than the sky*'; '*Because I could not stop for death*'; '*This quiet dust was gentlemen and ladies*').

Comments – Emily Dickinson

Some declare Dickinson's poetry to be the finest by a woman in English. It shows a great variety of imagery with dissimilar comparisons and unexpected conclusions. Her poems (nearly 1,800) were unique to her era. They contain short lines, typically lack titles and often use slant rhyme as well as unconventional capitalization and punctuation. Many of her poems deal with themes of death and immortality and explore aesthetics, society, nature and spirituality. On the other side Dickinson has been criticized for poor rhymes, obscure meaning and lack of concern for science and humanity.

Walt Whitman: *Leaves of Grass, first edition; Leaves of Grass, third edition; The Complete Poems; Specimen Days*.

Comments - Leaves of Grass (1855)

Leaves of Grass, a poetry collection, is loosely connected and represents the celebration of Whitman's philosophy of life and humanity. Whitman spent most of his professional life writing and rewriting "*Leaves of Grass*". Influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Transcendentalist movement (an offshoot of Romanticism), Whitman's poetry praises nature and the individual human's role in it. Rather than relying on symbolism, allegory, and meditation on the religious and spiritual, like much of the poetry to come before it, *Leaves of Grass* exalts the body and the material world instead. *Leaves of Grass* was highly controversial for its discussion (frankness?) of delight in sensual pleasures (heterosexual and homosexual) during a time when such candid displays were considered immoral or of bad taste. There is much about nature and love that is powerfully and originally expressed in Whitman, and his reputation with critics has continually risen since his death.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864): *The Scarlet Letter; Tales and Sketches; The Marble Faun; Notebooks*.

Comments - The Scarlet Letter (1850)

Main Themes: Judgment, Suffering

Hester Prynne conceives a daughter through an affair. Experiencing suffering and shame Hester struggles to create a new life of repentance and dignity. She emerges triumphant in spirit over those who have shamed her and have yielded to the pressure of public opinion. The book explores themes of legalism, Puritanical moral standards, sin and guilt (in colonial times, convicted adulterers were made to wear a scarlet A).



Herman Melville (1819-1891): *Moby-Dick; The Piazza Tales; Billy Budd; Collected Poems; Clarel.*

[Comments - Moby Dick \(1851\)](#)

Main Themes: Survival, Deception

A giant of a novel and a complex psychological treatment of a man's (Captain Ahab) obsession with revenge - an irrational revenge on a non-human being (a giant sperm whale). Although Moby Dick was influenced by canonical icons [Shakespeare](#) and the [Bible](#), its reputation as a "Great American Novel" was not established until 100 years after Melville's birth. [William Faulkner](#) said he wished he had written the book himself and [D.H. Lawrence](#) called it "one of the strangest and most wonderful books in the world" and "the greatest book of the sea ever written". The novel's Biblical allegorical opening sentence "Call me Ishmael", sets the tone of the outcast plot: the whaling ship Pequod similar fate of Ishmael's, son Of Abraham, banishment into the desert.

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849): *Poetry (The Raven) and Tales; Essays and Reviews; The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym; Eureka.*

[Comments - Edgar Allan Poe, Short Stories](#)

Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre. He is widely regarded as a central figure of Romanticism in the United States and of American literature, and he was one of the country's earliest practitioners of the short story. He is also generally considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre and is further credited with contributing to the emerging genre of science fiction. "The Raven" (1845), a narrative poem, is noted for its musicality, stylized language, and supernatural atmosphere. It tells of a talking raven's mysterious visit to a distraught lover, tracing the man's slow fall into madness.

Jones Very: *Essays and Poems.*

Tuckerman, Frederick Goddard: *The Cricket and Other Poems.*

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862): *Walden; Poems; Essays.*

[Comments - On Civil Disobedience \(1849\), Walden \(1854\)](#)

'Civil Disobedience' is the American classic on a man's right to disregard laws conflicting with his principles. Thoreau argues that individuals should not permit governments to overrule or atrophy their consciences and that they have a duty to avoid allowing such acquiescence to enable the government to make them the agents of injustice. Thoreau was motivated in part by his disgust with slavery and the Mexican-American War (1846-48).

'Walden' is a diary of Thoreau's simple life in his self-built cabin beside Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts. The book is part personal declaration of independence, social experiment, voyage of spiritual discovery and a manual for self-reliance.

Dana, Richard Henry: *Two Years Before the Mast.*

[Comments - Two Years Before the Mast \(1840\)](#)

Dana, after two years of college, signed on as a common seaman aboard one of the square-rigged ships that carried cargo from the California coast to Boston around Cape Horn. He spent the years 1834-36 at sea and at settlements along the coast of California in its days as a Mexican province. The book, a diary, became one of the most famous sea stories ever written. It is not a tale of sea adventure in the form of a novel, but a factual account of life on board a ship of that period and of the incredible hardships of the sailor's lives, of coastal trade and sea conditions, and of life in the California towns. The book is full of sailing terminology (halyards, frapping, lines, sheeted home, spars, etc). "Before the mast" means having sleeping quarters in the forecabin, forward of the forward mast (quarters for the common sailor).

Frederick Douglass: *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882): *Selected Poems.*

Sidney Lanier: *Poems.*

Francis Parkman: *France and England in North America; The California & Oregon Trail.*

Henry Adams: *The Education of Henry Adams; Mont Saint-Michel and Chartres.*

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1913): *Collected Writings.*

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888): *Little Women.*



Chesnutt, Charles W.: *The Short Fiction*.

Kate Chopin (1850-1904): *The Awakening*.

William Dean Howells (1837-1920): *Rise of Silas Lapham; A Modern Instance*.

Stephen Crane: *The Red Badge of Courage; Stories and Poems*.

Henry James (1843-1891): *The Portrait of a Lady; The Ambassadors; The Wings of the Dove; The Bostonians; The Princess Casamassima; The Awkward Age; Short Novels and Tales; The Golden Bowl; The Turn of the Screw*.

Comments - Henry James

James has exerted a great influence on literature and is respected by modern critics for his innovations. He is regarded as a key transitional figure between literary realism and literary modernism. He is best known for several novels dealing with the social and marital interplay between emigre Americans, English people, and continental Europeans. Examples of such novels include *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Ambassadors* (1903). James developed the method of minute analysis of seemingly insignificant emotional experiences, a method later used by Marcel Proust. Most of his novels have a neurotic woman as the central figure.

Harold Frederic: *The Damnation of Theron Ware*.

Mark Twain (1835-1910): *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn; Complete Short Stories; The Devil's Racetrack; Number Forty-Four: The Mysterious Stranger; Pudd'nhead Wilson; A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Comments - The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)

Main Theme: Deception

Huck Finn is a direct sequel to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (about a young boy growing up along the Mississippi River with his friend Huckleberry Finn). Huck Finn is a poor, motherless boy with an abusive father who has an ingenious way with words and a love-hate relationship with societal conventions. Huck's adventures revolve around sailing down the Mississippi with Jim, a formerly enslaved man. Set in Southern antebellum society, Twain's book is an often-scathing satire on entrenched attitudes, particularly racism, and continues to be a magnet for controversy. In 1885 the Concord Public Library banned the book, attacking the novel as "absolutely immoral in its tone." Twain's ultimate effect was to humanize Jim and to attack the brutal racism of enslavement.

William James (1842-1910): *The Varieties of Religious Experience; Pragmatism*.

Frank Norris: *The Octopus*.

Jewett, Sarah Orne: *The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories*.

Trumbull Stickney: *Poems*.

WESTERN CANON: THE CHAOTIC AGE (20th Century – Present)

(Harold Bloom, Sterling Professor Humanities, Yale University)

"I am not as confident about this list as the first three. Cultural prophecy is always a mug's game. Not all of the works here can prove to be canonical . . . literary overpopulation is a hazard to many among them. But I have neither excluded nor included on the basis of cultural politics of any kind."

ITALY

Luigi Pirandello: *Naked Masks: Five Plays*.
D'Annunzio, Gabriele: *Maia: In Praise of Life*.
Dino Campana: *Orphic Songs*.
Umberto Saba: *Stories and Recollections; Poems*.
Lampedusa, Giuseppe Tomasi di: *The Leopard*.
Giuseppe Ungaretti: *Selected Poems; The Buried Harbour: Selected Poems*.
Eugenio Montale: *The Storm and Other Things: Poems; The Occasions: Poems; Cuttlefish Bones: Poems; Otherwise: Last and First Poems; The Second Life of Art: Selected Essays*.
Salvatore Quasimodo: *Selected Writings: Poems and Discourse on Poetry*.
Tommaso Landolfi: *Gogol's Wife and Other Stories*.
Leonardo Sciascia: *Day of the Owl; Equal Danger; The Wine-Dark Sea: Thirteen Stories*.
Pasolini, Pier Paolo: *Poems*.
Cesare Pavese: *Hard Labor: Poems; Dialogues with Leucò*.
Primo Levi: *If Not Now, When?; Collected Poems; The Periodic Table*.
Italo Svevo: *The Confession of Zeno; As a Man Grows Older*.
Giorgio Bassani: *The Heron*.
Natalia Ginzburg: *Family*.
Elio Vittorini: *Women of Messina*.
Alberto Moravia: *1934*.
Andrea Zanzotto: *Selected Poetry*.
Italo Calvino: *Invisible Cities; The Baron in the Trees; If on a Winter's Night a Traveler; t zero*.
Antonio Porta: *Kisses from Another Dream: Poems*.

SPAIN

Miguel de Unamuno: *Three Exemplary Novels; Our Lord Don Quixote*.
Antonio Machado: *Selected Poems*.
Jiménez, Juan Ramón: *Invisible Reality: Poems*.
Pedro Salinas: *My Voice Because of You: Poems*.
Guillén, Jorge: *Guillén on Guillén: The Poetry and the Poet*.
Vicente Aleixandre: *A Longing for the Light: Selected Poems*.
Lorca, Federico Garcia: *Selected Poems; Three Tragedies: Blood Wedding, Yerma, The House of Bernardo Alba*.
Rafael Alberti: *The Owl's Insomnia: Poems*.
Luis Cernuda: *Selected Poems*.
Hernández, Miguel: *Selected Poems*.
Blas de Otero: *Selected Poems*.
Cela, Camilo José: *The Hive*.
Juan Goytisolo: *Space in Motion*.

CATAONIA

Ribá, Carles: *Selected Poems*.
Foix, J.V. : *Selected Poems*.
Joan Perucho: *Natural History*.
Merce Rodoreda: *The Time of the Doves*.
Pere Gimferrer: *Selected Poems*.
Esprú, Salvador: *La Pell de Brau: Poems*.



PORTUGAL

Fernando Pessoa: *The Keeper of Sheep; Poems; Selected Poems; Always*.
Astonished: *Selected Poems; The Book of Disquiet*.
Jorge de Sena: *Selected Poems*.
Saramago, José: *Baltasar and Blimunda*.
José Cardoso Pires: *Ballad of Dogs' Beach*.
Breyner, Sophia de Mello: *Selected Poems*.
Andrade, Eugénio de: *Selected Poems*.

FRANCE

Anatole France (1844-1924): *Penguin Island; Thaïs*.
Alain-Fournier: *Le Grand Meaulnes*.
Marcel Proust (1871-1922): *Remembrance of Things Past* ('A la recherche du temps perdu').
[Comments - Remembrance of Things Past](#) (1913-1927)
"Search of Lost Time" is the literal rendering of the French title ('A la recherche du temps perdu'). The novel's voluminous nature (7 volumes) reflects Proust's style to dwell at length on all the impressions that one receives from an experience ("involuntary memory"), such as the famous "episode of the Madeline" (Swann's Way, vol. 1) where the reader must wade through 'fifty' pages on how one is affected by the aroma of tea and the taste of cake. *Remembrance of Things Past* follows the narrator's recollections of childhood and experiences into adulthood in the late 19th century and early 20th century aristocratic France, while reflecting on the loss of time and lack of meaning to the world. Marcel Proust was the first person to coin the term 'involuntary memory' - the main theme of the novel ("essence of the past"),

Andre Gide: *The Immoralist; Corydon; Lafcadio's Adventure (The Caves of the Vatican); The Journals*.

Colette: *Collected Stories; Retreat from Love*.

Georges Bataille: *Blue of Noon*.

Céline, Louis-Ferdinand: *Journey to the End of Night*.

Daumal, René: *Mount Analogue*.

Jean Genet: *Our Lady of the Flowers; The Thief's Journal; The Balcony*.

Jean Giraudoux: *Four Plays*.

Alfred Jarry: *Selected Works*.

Jean Cocteau: *The Infernal Machine and Other Works*.

Guillaume Apollinaire: *Selected Writings*.

Breton, André: *Poems; Manifestoes of Surrealism*.

Valéry, Paul: *The Art of Poetry; Selected Writings*.

Char, René: *Poems*.

Éluard, Paul: *Selected Poems*.

Louis Aragon: *Selected Poems*.

Jean Giono: *The Horseman on the Roof*.

Michel Leiris: *Manhood*.

Raymond Radiguet: *Count d'Orgel's Ball*.

Sartre, Jean-Paul: *The Age of Reason; No Exit; Nausea; Saint Genet; The Words; The Family Idiot*

[Comments - The Age of Reason](#) (1945)

Main Theme: Judgment.

'The Age of Reason' is set in the bohemian Paris of the late 1930s where the protagonist, philosophy teacher Mathieu, is faced with the problem of paying for a costly abortion for his mistress, Marcelle, while at the same time, he is growing bored with her and attracted to a younger girl. He finds himself unable to act until a grotesque action of the young girl enables him to break through his inertia and act - although rather unwisely and pointlessly. Sartre analyses of the motives of the various characters and their actions takes into account the perceptions of others to give the reader a comprehensive picture of the main character. *The Age of Reason* is concerned with Sartre's conception of freedom as the ultimate aim of human existence. The work seeks to



illustrate the existentialist notion of ultimate freedom through presenting a detailed account of the characters' psychologies as they are forced to make significant decisions in their lives.

The existentialist believes that principles are arbitrarily established by man and therefore many be suspended at will. Hence, most existentialists endorse atheism, believing that God is man's hypothesis, and some believe that criminal acts and unconventional sexual acts, may, under certain circumstances, become acceptable modes of behavior and constitute a "victory" for the doer.

Simone de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*.

Albert Camus (1913-1960): *The Stranger; The Plague; The Fall; The Rebel*.

Henri Michaux: *Selected Writings*.

Jabès, Edmond: *The Book of Questions; Selected Poems*.

Perse, Saint-John: *Anabasis; Birds; Exile and Other Poems*.

Pierre Reverdy: *Selected Poems*.

Tristan Tzara: *Seven Dada Manifestoes*.

Max Jacob: *Selected Poems*.

Jouve, Pierre-Jean: *Selected Poems*.

Francis Ponge: *Things: Selected Writings, tr. by Cid Corman*.

Prévert, Jacques: *Paroles*.

Philippe Jacottet: *Selected Poems, tr. by Derek Mahon*.

Péguy, Charles: *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*.

Péret, Benjamin: *Selected Poems*.

Malraux, André: *The Conquerors; The Royal Way; Man's Fate; Man's Hope; The Voices of Silence*.

Mauriac, François: *Therese; The Desert of Love; The Woman of the Pharisees, tr. by Gerard Hopkins*.

Jean Anouilh: *Becket; Antigone; Eurydice; The Rehearsal*.

Ionesco, Eugène: *The Bald Soprano; The Chairs; The Lesson; Amédée; Victims of Duty; Rhinoceros*.

Maurice Blanchot: *Thomas the Obscure, tr. by Robert Lamberton*.

Pierre Klossowski: *The Laws of Hospitality; The Baphomet*.

Raymond Roussel: *Locus Solus*.

Antonin Artaud: *Selected Writings, tr. by Helen Weaver*.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude: *Tristes Tropiques*.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain: *The Voyeur; Jealousy; In the Labyrinth; The Erasers; Project for a Revolution in New York; For a New Novel, tr. by Richard Howard*.

Nathalie Sarraute: *The Use of Speech, tr. by Barbara Wright; The Planetarium, tr. by Maria Jolas*.

Claude Simon: *The Grass; The Wind; The Flanders Road, tr. by Richard Howard*.

Marguerite Duras: *The Lover, tr. by Barbara Bray; Four Novels, tr. by Sonia Pitt-Rivers and others*.

Robert Pinget: *Fable; The Libera Me Domine; That Voice, tr. by Barbara Wright*.

Michel Tournier: *The Ogre; Friday*.

Marguerite Yourcenar: *Coup de Grace; Memoirs of Hadrian*.

Jean Follain: *Transparance of the World: Poems, tr. by W. S. Merwin*.

Yves Bonnefoy: *Words in Stone, tr. by Susanna Lang*.

GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND

Yeats, W. B. (William Butler) (1865-1939): *Collected Poems; Collected Plays; A Vision*;

George Bernard Shaw: *Pygmalion; Saint Joan; Major Barbara; Back to Methuselah*.

[Comments – George Bernard Shaw plays](#)

His "Pygmalion" (1913), based on the Greek legend of the sculptor, Pygmalion, whose statue of the beautiful Galatea came to life, has become well known as the basis for a modern stage musical show (*My Fair Lady*). "Saint Joan" (1923) is a sympathetic treatment of the Joan of Arc story. In "Major Barbara" (1907), Shaw explores the motivations of an idealistic young woman, Barbara Undershaft, who is engaged in helping the poor as a Major in the Salvation Army in London. Many of the prefaces to Shaw's plays, in which he expounds his philosophy at length, have become as well known as the plays.



John Millington Synge (1871-1909): *Collected Plays*.

Sean O'Casey: *Juno and the Paycock*; *The Plough and the Stars*; *The Shadow of a Gunman*.

George Douglas Brown (1869-1902): *The House with the Green Shutters*.

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928): *Jude the Obscure*; *The Return of the Native*; *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; *The Well-Beloved*; *The Woodlanders*; *Far From the Madding Crowd*;

[Comments - Jude The Obscure](#) (1895)

Main Theme: Suffering

Thomas Hardy was a Victorian realist (avoidance of speculative fiction and supernatural elements) in the tradition of George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). He was highly critical of Victorian society, especially the declining status of rural people in Britain, such as those from his native South West England (a region he called Wessex). In addition to "Jude the Obscure", "The Return of the Native", "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" and "The Mayor of Casterbridge" are well known. All of them are pessimistic in tone; they deal with heroes and heroines who strive valiantly for a happy life but are defeated by fate or circumstance. 'Jude the Obscure' is said to be his best novel, more relentlessly pessimistic than the others. It concerns a young man (Jude Fawley) who yearns to be a scholar at "Christminster", a city modelled on Oxford. Jude is unable to get into college and is subsequently trapped in an unhappy marriage and other 'illegitimate' relationships. Jude's employers dismiss him because of an illicit relationship and his family is forced into a nomadic lifestyle. Jude's socially troubled boy, "Little Father Time", comes to believe that he and his half-siblings are the source of the family's woes. Jude murders his children and kills himself by hanging. He leaves behind a note that simply reads, "Done because we are too menny."

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936): *Captains Courageous*; *Kim*.

[Comments - Captains Courageous](#) (1897)

Main Theme: Heroism.

A novel that follows the adventures of fifteen-year-old Harvey Cheyne Jr., the spoiled son of a railroad tycoon, after he is saved from drowning by a Portuguese fisherman in the north Atlantic. It is Kipling's only novel set entirely in America. In 1900, Teddy Roosevelt extolled the book in his essay "What We Can Expect of the American Boy," praising Kipling for describing "in the liveliest way just what a boy should be and do." For children, Kipling's "Just-So Stories" are very entertaining. Cautionary note: Kipling's writings often reflect a pro-imperialist world-view and an objectionably patronizing attitude toward non-British peoples and customs. He was labelled "a jingo imperialist" by [George Orwell](#), who also described him as "morally insensitive and aesthetically disgusting".

Housman, A. E. (1859-1936): *Collected Poems*.

Max Beerbohm (1872-1956): *Zuleika Dobson*, *Seven Men and Two Others*.

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924): *Lord Jim*; *The Secret Agent*; *Nostromo*; *Under Western Eyes*; *Victory*.

[Comments - Lord Jim](#) (1900)

Main Theme: Judgment.

Lord Jim is the story of lost honor. The British crew including the young seaman named Jim abandon the passenger ship Patna when she hits something and takes on water. He is publicly censured for this action and the novel follows the hero, Jim, who wanders the East in a futile attempt to escape the guilt he feels over an act of cowardice. On the island of Patusan, Jim becomes Tuan, or Lord Jim – a heroic figure whose honor is not questioned. Nevertheless, Jim remains burdened with the knowledge of his dishonorable past.

Ronald Firbank (1886-1926): *Five Novels*.

Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939): *Parade's End*; *The Good Soldier*.

W. Somerset Maugham, 1874-1965): *Of Human Bondage*; *The Moon and Sixpence*.

[Comments – Of Human Bondage](#) (1915)

Main Theme: Love.

'Of Human Bondage' is generally agreed to be W. Somerset Maugham's masterpiece and to be strongly autobiographical in nature, although Maugham stated, "This is a novel, not an autobiography; though much in it is autobiographical, more is pure invention." The title of the novel



comes from Spinoza, Part IV of his Ethics titled "Of Human Bondage, or the Strength of the Emotions". Philip Carey, the orphan, follows Spinoza's theme of people's inability to control their emotions which constitute bondage: Philip falls in love with several woman, suffers heartbreak, bears a child, breaks up with a lover, reunites and breaks up again. The novel concludes with Philip engaged to the daughter of a doctor (Sally) with Philip concluding that "the simplest pattern – that in which a man was born, worked, married, had children, and died – was likewise the most perfect". He stops searching for happiness and decides to be content with his lot.

John Cowper Powys (1872-1963): *Wolf Solent; A Glastonbury Romance*.

Saki (1870-1916): *The Short Stories*.

Wells, H. G. (1866-1946): *The Outline of History; The Science Fiction Novels*.

David Lindsay (1876-1945): *A Voyage to Arcturus*.

Arnold Bennett (1867–1931): *The Old Wives' Tale*.

Walter De la Mare (1873-1956): *Collected Poems; Memoirs of a Midget*.

Wilfred Owen: *Collected Poems*.

Isaac Rosenberg: *Collected Poems*.

Edward Thomas: *Collected Poems*.

Robert Graves: *Collected Poems; King Jesus*.

David Jones: *In Parenthesis; The Anathemata*.

John Galsworthy (1867-1933): *The Forsyth Saga*.

E.M. Forster: *Howard's End; A Passage to India*.

Frank O'Connor (1903-1966): *Collected Stories*.

Lawrence, D. H. (1885-1930): *Complete Poems; Studies in Classic American Literature; Complete Short Stories; Sons and Lovers; The Rainbow; Women in Love*.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941): *Mrs. Dalloway; To the Lighthouse; Orlando: A Biography; The Waves; Between the Acts*.

James Joyce (1882-1941): *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man; Dubliners; Ulysses; Finnegans Wake*.

[Comments – Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man \(1916\)](#)

Main Theme: Coming of Age

'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' traces the religious and intellectual awakening of young Stephen Dedalus who is reared in a narrow home and educated under strict Catholic rules. His surname alludes to Daedalus the skilled architect, craftsman and artist and symbol of wisdom, knowledge and power. Stephen goes through long phases of hedonism and deep religiosity, questioning and rebelling against the Catholic and Irish conventions under which he has grown, culminating in his self-exile from Ireland to Europe. He eventually moves from religion towards art and literature, adopting a philosophy of aestheticism.

In this novel, Joyce first used the stream-of-consciousness technique, which he later exploited (beyond reason, many believe) in his famous novels Ulysses and Finnegans Wake, both of which are extremely difficult to read.

Samuel Beckett: Plays: *Waiting for Godot; Endgame; Happy Days*. Novels: *Murphy; Watt; Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable*.

[Comments - Waiting for Godot \(1953\)](#)

Main Theme: Deception

The play revolves around two characters, Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo) and their pitiful awaiting for Godot, who never arrives. At various times during the play, hope is constructed as a form of salvation, in the personages of Pozzo and Lucky. A boy shows up and explains to Vladimir and Estragon that he is a messenger from Godot, and that Godot will not be arriving tonight, but tomorrow. The next day the boy reappears to report that Godot will not be coming. The boy claims that he didn't talk to Vladimir yesterday. Vladimir and Estragon consider suicide, but they don't have a rope. They decide to leave, but again they remain as the curtain falls on the final act.

Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973): *Collected Stories*.

J.G. Farrell (1935-1979): *The Siege of Krishnapur*.



Henry Green: *Nothing; Loving; Party Going*.

Evelyn Waugh: *A Handful of Dust; Scoop; Vile Bodies; Put Out More Flags*.

Anthony Burgess: *Nothing Like the Sun*.

Edwards, G.B.: *The Book of Ebenezer Le Page*.

Iris Murdoch: *The Good Apprentice; Bruno's Dream*.

Graham Greene: *Brighton Rock; The Heart of the Matter; The Power and the Glory*.

Christopher Isherwood: *The Berlin Stories*.

Norman Douglas: *South Wind*.

Aldous Huxley: *Brave New World; Collected Essays; Antic Hay; Point Counter Point*;

[Comments - Brave New World \(1932\)](#)

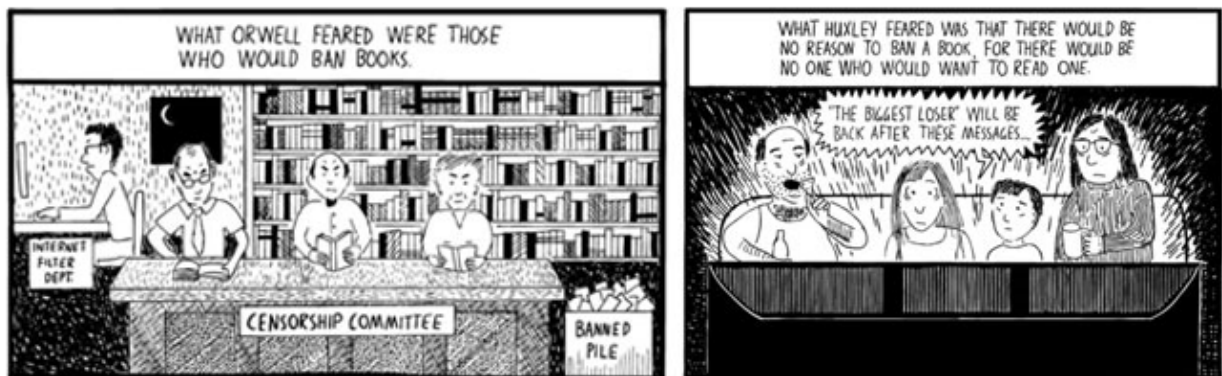
Main Theme: Good & Evil

A satirical social-science fiction novel set in a scientifically controlled, state-operated "Utopia" World State, whose citizens are engineered through artificial wombs and childhood indoctrination programs into predetermined classes based on intelligence and labor. The World State controls every aspect of human life, all psychological, economic, and social factors. The world that Huxley has created is a place where free thinking has never been a thought, and the freedom to choose can never be chosen. A world of huge scientific advancements in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation and classical conditioning. The dystopian society is challenged by two protagonists. From the beginning to Chapter 7 Bernard Marx is the protagonist, an outsider in the World State. He is physically small so people make fun of him. Bernard values his individuality and he wants to feel even more individual which, ultimately, drives him to visit the Savage Reservation. From Chapter 8 until the end of the novel, John is the story's protagonist. John is the ultimate outsider in the World State, because he grew up on the Savage Reservation, where none of the World State's technologies or forms of social control have been introduced. John believes the purpose of life is not to be happy but to seek truth. He is disgusted by the World State, where everything is set up to make people happy and no one is allowed to seek truth and meaning (He is upset when Helmholtz Watson, lecturer at the college 'Emotional Engineering', laughs at Shakespeare). At the end of the novel the Controller, Mustapha Mond, allows John to live however he chooses. John chooses to seek truth through ritual self-punishment, but he fails in his search and gives into the temptations of pleasure. After taking part in an orgy, he kills himself.

The title comes [Shakespeare's](#) *The Tempest*: "Oh, Brave new world, that has such people in it."

Huxley followed the novel with a reassessment in essay form, *Brave New World Revisited* (1958),

and with his final novel, *Island* (1962), the utopian counterpart. The novel is often compared to [George Orwell's](#) *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).



Lawrence Durrell: *The Alexandria Quartet*.

William Golding: *Pincher Martin*.

Doris Lessing: *The Golden Notebook*.

Mervyn Peake: *The Gormenghast Trilogy*.

Jeanette Winterson: *The Passion*.

Auden, W.H.: *Collected Poems; The Dyer's Hand*.

Roy Fuller: *Collected Poems*.



Gavin Ewart: *Selected Poems*.
Basil Bunting: *Collected Poems*.
William Empson: *Collected Poems; Milton's God; Some Versions of Pastoral*.
Knight, George Wilson: *The Wheel of Fire; The Burning Oracle*.
Thomas, R.S.: *Poems*.
Frank Kermode: *The Sense of an Ending*.
Stevie Smith: *Collected Poems*.
Prince, F.T.: *Collected Poems*.
Philip Larkin: *Collected Poems*.
Donald Davie: *Selected Poems*.
Geoffrey Hill: *Selected Poems*.
Jonathan Spence: *The Death of Woman Wang; The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*.
Elizabeth Jennings: *Selected Poems*.
Keith Douglas: *The Complete Poems*.
MacDiarmid, Hugh: *Complete Poems*.
MacNeice, Louis: *Collected Poems*.
Dylan Thomas (1914-1953): *The Poems*.
Nigel Dennis: *Cards of Identity*.
Seamus Heaney: *Selected Poems: 1969-1987; Field Work; Station Island*.
Thomas Kinsella: *Peppercanister Poems*.
Paul Muldoon: *Selected Poems*.
John Montague: *Selected Poems*.
John Arden: *Plays*.
Joe Orton: *The Complete Plays*.
Flann O'Brien: *The Dalkey Archive; The Third Policeman*.
Tom Stoppard: *Travesties*.
Harold Pinter: *The Caretaker; The Homecoming*.
Edward Bond: *The Fool; Saved*.
George Orwell (1903-1950): *Animal Farm; 1984*.
Comments - [Animal Farm](#) (1945), [1984](#) (1949)

Main Theme: Good & Evil

[Animal Farm](#), an allegorical novella, tells the story of a group of farm animals who rebel against their human farmer, hoping to create a society where the animals can be equal, free, and happy. The rebellion is betrayed and the farm ends up in a state as bad as it was before, under the dictatorship of a pig named Napoleon. Many (extreme) liberals argue for the rights of the masses, while Orwell worries about the rights of the individual under a proletarian dictatorship. *Animal Farm's* parable on the betrayal of a revolution illustrates the theory that political and social revolutions are often followed by reactionary tyranny acting in the name of the revolution (eg, the French Revolution). The the plot is a thinly disguised history of the 1917 Russian Communist revolution. The human masters represent the tsars, Napoleon is Stalin, Snowball is Trotsky. [1984](#) has become best known for the nightmarish omnipresence of Big Brother, symbol of patriotism. The hero, Winston Smith, is employed by the "Truth Ministry" and spends his time rewriting and revising newspaper files whenever party policy requires a rewriting of history. He gets fed up with it, or course.

O'Brien, Edna: *A Fanatic Heart*.

GERMANY

Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Poems and Verse Plays, tr. by Michael Hamburger and others; Selected Prose, tr. by James Huttlinger and Tania and James Stern; Selected Plays and Libretti, tr. by Michael Hamburger and others*.
Rilke, Rainer Maria: *Selected Poetry; The Sonnets to Orpheus; The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge all tr. by Stephen Mitchell; New Poems: First Part and Other Part, tr. by Edward Snow*.
Hermann Broch: *The Sleepwalkers; The Death of Virgil; Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time*.
Georg Trakl: *Selected Poems*.



Gottfried Benn: *Selected Poems*.

Franz Kafka (1883–1924): *The Trial*; *The Castle*; *Amerika*; *The Blue Octavo Notebook*; *Diaries*; *Parables, Fragments, Aphorisms*.

Comments – *The Trial* (1915), *The Castle* (1926)

Main Theme: Good & Evil

Kafka's novels are best known for an eerie, nightmarish quality in which the hero plods onward toward a nebulous goal, which he is hindered in reaching by strange and unreal events. He keeps on going, trying to make sense of what he can, but never succeeds in understanding what is happening to him. *Der Process* (*The Trial*) concerns a man who is arrested and prosecuted by a remote, inaccessible authority, with the nature of his crime revealed neither to him nor to the reader. Heavily influenced by Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*) is often understood to be about alienation, unresponsive bureaucracy, the frustration of trying to conduct business with non-transparent, seemingly arbitrary controlling systems, and the futile pursuit of an unobtainable goal.

Bertolt Brecht: *Poems 1913-1956*; *The Threepenny Opera*, tr. by Desmond Vesey and Eric Bentley; *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, tr. by Eric Bentley; *Galileo*, tr. by Charles Laughton; *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

Arthur Schnitzler: *Plays*; *Stories*.

Frank Wedekind: *Lulu Plays*; *Spring Awakening*, tr. by Edward Bond.

Karl Kraus: *The Last Days of Mankind*.

Eich, Günter: *Moles*.

Thomas Mann: *The Magic Mountain*; *Stories of Three Decades*; *Joseph and His Brothers*; *Doctor Faustus*; *Confessions of Felix Krull*, *Confidence Man*.

Comments – *The Magic Mountain* (1924)

Main Theme: Coming of Age

'The Magic Mountain' (1924) is widely considered to be one of the most influential works of twentieth-century German literature. Mann's work reflects his experiences and impressions during a period when his wife was a resident at a Swiss Sanatorium. His stay at Waldsanatorium influenced the opening chapter: "Arrival". World War I interrupted his work and greatly influenced a radical revision of the novel: re-examination of European bourgeois society; on how a 'civil' society could be so destructive; speculation on questions related to personal attitudes to life, health, illness, sexuality and mortality. Throughout the book Mann employs the discussion with and between Settembrini, Naphta and the medical staff to introduce the young Castorp to a wide spectrum of competing ideologies about responses to the Age of Enlightenment. 'The Magic Mountain' can be read both as a classic example of the European Bildungsroman – a "novel of education" or "novel of formation" – and as a parody of this genre.

Döblin, Alfred: *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Hermann Hesse: *The Glass Bead Game (Magister Ludi)*; *Narcissus and Goldmund*.

Robert Musil: *Young Törless*; *The Man Without Qualities*.

Joseph Roth: *The Radetzky March*.

Paul Celan: *Poems*, tr. by Michael Hamburger.

Thomas Bernhard: *Woodcutters*.

Böll, Heinrich: *Billiards at Half-Past Nine*.

Ingeborg Bachmann: *In the Storm of Roses*, tr. by Mark Anderson.

Enzensberger, Hans Magnus: *Poems for People Who Don't Read Poems*.

Walter Benjamin: *Illuminations*.

Robert Walser: *Selected Stories*, tr. by Christopher Middleton et al.

Christa Wolf: *Cassandra*.

Peter Handke: *Slow Homecoming*.

Max Frisch: *I'm Not Stiller*; *Man in the Holocene*.

Grass, Günter: *The Tin Drum*; *The Flounder*.

Dürrenmatt, Friedrich: *The Visit*.

Johannes Bobrowski: *Shadow Lands*, tr. by Ruth and Matthew Mead.



RUSSIA

Anna Akhmatova: *Poems, tr. by Stanley Kunitz and Max Hayward.*
Leonid Andreyev: *Selected Tales.*
Andrey Bely: *Petersburg.*
Osip Mandelstam: *Selected Poems, tr. by Clarence Brown and W. S. Merwin.*
Velimir Khlebnikov: *The King of Time.*
Vladimir Mayakovsky: *The Bedbug and Selected Poetry, tr. by Max Hayward and George Reavey.*
Mikhail Bulgatov: *The Master and Margherita.*
Mikhail Kuzmin: *Alexandrian Songs.*
Maksim Gorky (1868-1936): *Reminiscences of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Andreev; Autobiography.*
Ivan Bunin: *Selected Stories.*
Isaac Babel: *Collected Stories.*
Boris Pasternak: *Doctor Zhivago; Selected Poems, tr. by Jon Stallworthy and Peter France.*
Yury Olesha: *Envy.*
Marina Tsvetayeva: *Selected Poems, tr. by Elaine Feinstein.*
Mikhail Zoshchenko: *Nervous People and Other Satires.*
Andrei Platonov: *The Foundation Pit.*
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich; The Cancer Ward; The Gulag Archipelago; August 1914.*
Joseph Brodsky: *A Part of Speech: Poems.*

SCANDINAVIA

Isak Dineson: *Winter's Tales; Seven Gothic Tales.*
Nexo, Martin Anderson: *Pelle the Conqueror.*
Knut Hamsun (1859-1952): *Hunger; Pan.*
Sigrid Undset: *Kristin Lavransdatter.*
Ekelöf, Gunnar: *Guide to the Underworld, tr. by Rika Lesser.*
Tranströmer, Tomas: *Selected Poems.*
Lagerkvist, Pär: *Barrabas.*
Lars Gustafsson: *Selected Poems.*

SERBIAN / CROATIAN

Ivo Andric: *The Bridge on the Drina.*
Vasko Popa: *Selected Poems.*
Danilo Kis: *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich.*

CZECH

Karel Capek (1890-1938): *War with the Newts; R.U.R.*
Vaclav Havel: *Largo Desolato.*
Milan Kundera: *The Unbearable Lightness of Being.*
Jaroslav Seifert: *Selected Poetry.*
Miroslav Holub: *The Fly.*

POLISH

Bruno Schulz: *The Street of Crocodiles; Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass.*
Czeslaw Milosz: *Selected Poems.*
Witold Gombrowicz: *Three Novels.*
Stanislaw Lem: *The Investigation; Solaris.*
Zbigniew Herbert: *Selected Poems.*
Adam Zagajewski: *Tremor.*

HUNGARIAN

József, Attila: *Perched on Nothing's Branch.*
Ferenc Juhasz: *Selected Poems.*
Németh, Laszlo: *Guilt.*



MODERN GREEK

Cavafy, C.P.: *Collected Poems*.
George Seferis: *Collected Poems*.
Nikos Kazantzakis: *The Greek Passion; The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*.
Yannis Ritsos: *Exile and Return*.
Odysseas Elytis: *What I Love: Selected Poems*.
Angelos Sikelianos: *Selected Poems*.

YIDDISH

Sholem Aleichem: *Tevye the Dairyman; The Railroad Stories, tr. by Hillel Halkin; The Nightingale*.
Seforim, Mendele Mokher: *The Travels and Adventures of Benjamin the Third*.
Peretz, I.L.: *Selected Stories*.
Jacob Glatstein: *Selected Poems*.
Halpern, Moshe-Leib: *Selected Poems*.
H. Leivick (Leivick Halpern): *Selected Poems*.
Singer, Israel Joshua: *The Brothers Ashkenazi; Yoshi Kalb*.
Chaim Grade: *The Yeshiva*.
Ansyky, S.: *The Dybbuk*.
Mani Leib: *Selected Poems*.
Sholem Asch: *East River*.
Singer, Isaac Bashevis: *Collected Stories; In My Father's Court; The Manor, the Estate, the Family Moskrat; Satan in Goray*.

HEBREW

Bialik, Hayyim Nahman: *Shirot Bialik: The Epic Poems*.
Agnon, S.Y.: *In the Heart of the Seas*.
Aharon Appelfeld: *The Immortal Bartfuss; Badenheim 1939*.
Yaakov Shabtai: *Past Continuous*.
Yehuda Amichai: *Selected Poetry, tr. by Stephen Mitchell and Chana Bloch; Travels, tr. by Ruth Nevo*.
Yehoshua, A.B.: *A Late Divorce*.
Amos Oz: *A Perfect Peace*.
Carmi, T.: *At the Stone of Losses, tr. by Grace Schulman*.
Nathan Zach: *Selected Poems*.
Dalia Ravikovitch: *A Dress of Fire*.
Dan Pagis: *Selected Poems*.
David Shahar: *The Palace of Shattered Vessels*.
David Grossman: *See Under: Love*.
Yoram Kaniuk: *His Daughter*.

ARABIC

Najib Mahfuz: *Midaq Alley; Fountain and Tomb; Miramar*.
Adunis: *Selected Poems*.
Mahmud Darwish: *The Music of Human Flesh*.
Taha Husayn: *An Egyptian Childhood*.

LATIN AMERICA

Dário, Rubén: *Selected Poetry*.
Borges, Jorge Luis: *The Aleph and Other Stories; Dreamtigers (The Maker); Ficciones; Labyrinths; A Personal Anthology*.
Alejo Carpentier: *Explosion in a Cathedral; The Lost Steps; Reasons of State; The Kingdom of this World*.
Infante, Guillermo Cabrera: *Three Trapped Tigers; View of Dawn in the Tropics*.
Severo Sarduy: *Maitreya*.
Reinaldo Arenas: *The Ill-Fated Peregrinations of Fray Servando*.



Pablo Neruda: *Canto General*, tr. by Jack Schmitt; *Residence on Earth*, tr. by Donald Walsh; *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, tr. by W. S. Merwin; *Fully Empowered*, tr. by Alastair Reid; *Selected Poems*, tr. by Ben Belitt.

Octavio Paz: *The Collected Poems*; *The Labyrinth of Solitude*.

Vallejo, César: *Selected Poems*, tr. by H. R. Hays; *Spain, Take This Cup from Me*.

Asturias, Miguel Angel: *Men of Maize*.

Lima, José Lezama: *Paradiso*.

Donoso, José: *The Obscene Bird of Night*.

Cortázar, Julio: *Hopscotch*; *All Fires the Fire*, tr. by Suzanne Jill Levine; *Blow-up and Other Stories*, tr. by Paul Blackburn.

Gabriel Garcia Márquez: *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, tr. by Gregory Rabassa; *Love in the Time of Cholera*, tr. by Edith Grossman.

Llosa, Mario Vargas: *The War of the End of the World*.

Carlos Fuentes: *A Change of Skin*; *Terra Nostra*.

Andrade, Carlos Drummond de: *Travelling in the Family*, tr. by Elizabeth Bishop, et al.

THE WEST INDIES

James, C.L.R.: *The Black Jacobins*; *The Future in the Present*.

Naipaul, V.S.: *A Bend in the River*; *A House for Mister Biswas*.

Derek Walcott: *Collected Poems*.

Wilson Harris: *The Guyana Quartet*.

Michael Thelwell: *The Harder They Come*.

Césaire, Aimé: *Collected Poetry*.

AFRICA

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*.

Wole Soyinka: *A Dance of the Forest*.

Amos Tutuola: *The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm-Wine Tapster in the Dead's Town*.

Christopher Okigbo: *Labyrinths, with Path of Thunder*.

(Bekederemo), John Pepper Clark: *Casualties: Poems*.

Armah, Ayi K.: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Ngugi, Wa Tiang'o: *A Grain of Wheat*.

Gabriel Okara: *The Fisherman's Invocation*.

Nadine Gordimer: *Collected Stories*.

Coetzee, J.M.: *Foe*.

Athol Fugard: *A Lesson from Aloes*.

Senghor, Léopold S.: *Selected Poems*.

INDIA (In English)

Narayan, R.K.: *The Guide*.

Salman Rushdie: *Midnight's Children*.

Jhabvala, Ruth Praver: *Heat and Dust*.

CANADA

Malcolm Lowry: *Under the Volcano*.

Robertson Davies: *The Deptford Trilogy*; *The Rebel Angels*.

Alice Munro: *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*.

Northrop Frye: *Fables of Identity*.

Hébert, Anne: *Selected Poems*.

Jac Macpherson: *Poems Twice Told*.

Margaret Atwood: *Surfacing*.

Daryl Hine: *Selected Poems*.



AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

Miles Franklin (1879-1954): *My Brilliant Career*.
Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923): *The Short Stories*.
Hope, A.D.: *Collected Poems*.
Patrick White: *Riders in the Chariot; A Fringe of Leaves; Voss*.
Christina Stead: *The Man Who Loved Children*.
Judith Wright: *Selected Poems*.
Les A. Murray: *The Rabbit's Bounty; Collected Poems*.
Thomas Kennealy: *The Playmaker; Schindler's List*.
David Malouf: *An Imaginary Life*.
Kevin Hart: *Peniel and Other Poems*.
Peter Carey: *Oscar and Lucinda; Illywhacker*.

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Robinson, Edwin Arlington: *Selected Poems*.
Robert Frost: *The Poetry*.
Edith Wharton (1862–1937): *Ethan Frome; The Age of Innocence; The House of Mirth; The Custom of the Country*.

Comments - [Ethan Frome](#) (1911), [The Age of Innocence](#) (1920)

Main Themes: Ethan Frome (Judgment); The Age of Innocence (War & Peace)

'Ethan Frome' is a masterpiece in character study: the bleak lives of three New Englanders whose whose prospects are bleaker. A young minister, Rev. Smith, is struck by the sight of Ethan Frome limping awkwardly through the snow. Rev. Smith gains more insight about Frome when he is invited into his home and learns of his invalid wife.

'The Age of Innocence' is a study of New York society in the 1870's. Wharton wrote of 'The Age of Innocence' that it had allowed her to find "a momentary escape in going back to my childish memories of a long-vanished America... it was growing more and more evident that the world I had grown up in and been formed by had been destroyed in 1914." Scholars and readers alike agree that *The Age of Innocence* is fundamentally a story which struggles to reconcile the old with the new. *The Age of Innocence* won the 1921 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Wharton became the first woman to win the prize.

Willa Cather (1873-1947): *My Antonia; The Professor's House; A Lost Lady*.
Gertrude Stein (1874–1946): *Three Lives; The Geographical History of America; The Making of Americans; Tender Buttons*.
Wallace Stevens: *Collected Poems; The Necessary Angel; Opus Posthumous; The Palm at the End of the Mind*.
Vachel Lindsay: *Collected Poems*.
Masters, Edgar Lee: *Spoon River Anthology*.
Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945): *Sister Carrie; An American Tragedy*.
Sherwood Anderson: *Winesberg, Ohio; Death in the Woods and Other Stories*.
Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951): *Main Street; Babbitt; It Can't Happen Here*.

Comments - [Main Street](#) (1920), [Babbitt](#) 1922)

Main Themes: Main Street (Judgment, Deception); Babbitt (Suffering)

[Main Street](#) satirizes the provincialism and narrowness of small town life with its rigid conformity, its interest only in material success and its lack of intellectual concern. The story relates the life and struggles of Carol Milford Kennicott in the small town of Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, as she comes into conflict with the small-town mentality of its residents. Lewis exposes the myth of the goodness of small town-life as a falsehood, which shocked American readers in 1920. Lewis paints a scathing portrait townspeople as suspicious spies rather than warm and trusting neighbors. 'Main Street' was Lewis's first successful book and remains a recognized American classic.

[Babbitt](#), considered by most critics to be Lewis' best and most important novel, is a study and satire of the conforming American, whose individuality has been suppressed by his fears of offending business relations, by his membership in civic clubs and by his general fear of differing from his neighbor. The controversy provoked by *Babbitt* was influential in the decision to award the



Nobel Prize in Literature to Lewis in 1930. The word "Babbitt" entered the English language as a "person and especially a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle-class standards".

Elinor Wylie: *Last Poems*.

Williams, William Carlos: *Spring and All; Paterson; Collected Poems*.

Ezra Pound: *Personae: Collected Poems; The Cantos; Literary Essays*.

Robinson Jeffers: *Selected Poems*.

Marianne Moore: *Complete Poems*.

H.D. (Hilda Doolittle) : *Selected Poems*.

Ransom, John Crowe: *Selected Poems*.

Eliot, T.S.: *The Complete Poems and Plays; Selected Essays*.

Porter, Katherine Anne: *Collected Stories*.

Jean Toomer: *Cane*.

Passos, John Dos: *U.S.A.*

Conrad Aiken: *Collected Poems*.

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953): *Anna Christie, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Hairy Ape, Lazarus Laughed; The Iceman Cometh; Long Day's Journey into Night*.

Comments – O'Neill's Plays

It has been said that Greek tragedy was the tragedy of fate, Shakespearian tragedy - the tragedy of character, and O'Neill's tragedy - the tragedy of personal neuroticism. His plays record some of the most unpleasant aspects of life, thwarted hopes, twisted loves, concealed dreams. O'Neill believed that part of the sickness of the 1920's and 1930's was that man's faith in God and in human goodness had died, and that nothing had come to replace it. O'Neill won the Nobel prize for literature in 1936.

Anna Christie (1921). **Main Theme: Love**

A girl who has been forced into prostitution is reunited with her father and falls in love with a sailor on her father's barge. She is faced with the problem of whether to confess her past to her father and future husband.

Mourning Becomes Electra (1931). **Main Theme: Good & Evil**

O'Neill transfers the Agamemnon myth, as treated by Aeschylus, to a modern American setting. Ezra Mannon (Agamemnon) returns from the war to find that his wife Christine (Clytemnestra) has been involved in an illicit affair with Brant (Aegisthus). Her daughter, Lavinie (Electra) and son, Grin (Orestes) play roles similar to those in the original.

The Hairy Ape (1922). **Main Theme: Main Suffering.**

The main character, Tank, a brawny but stupid ship's stoker, becomes disillusioned with his life after discovering that a girl has regarded him as a disgusting beast, and tries to find some class or group to which he can "belong". Rejected by several groups, he eventually seeks the company of a gorilla, with unsatisfactory results.

Lazarus Laughed (1925). **Main Theme: Circle of Life.**

The play is a theo-philosophical mediation where Lazarus returns from the realm of the dead to declare that there is no death – only God's eternal laughter. The more Lazarus laughs, the younger and stronger he becomes. The more he laughs, the older and weaker his wife, Miriam, becomes. The play's underlying premise is that human beings must learn to live as the products and extensions of nature, not as the outgrowths of their individual egos. It is not human psychology or history that governs life but rather the eternal cycles of death and rebirth. Death, Lazarus argues, is a release and a fulfillment, and in that sense there is no death, no final end to things.

The Iceman Cometh (1946). **Main Theme: Judgment.**

The play is set in New York in 1912 in Harry Hope's Greenwich Village saloon. The patrons, twelve men and three prostitutes, are dead-end alcoholics who spend every possible moment seeking oblivion in one another's company. Traveling salesman "Hickey" informs the patrons that he has abandoned his drinking days and implores them, with great passion, to cast away their delusions and to accept that their heavy drinking and inactions will never fulfill their hopes and dreams. The men try to turn their lives around, but fail to make any progress. Their image of Hickey is jolted by learning that he has murdered his wife (the title of the play refers to a running gag between Hickey



and the dead-enders about coming home after traveling his sales route to find his wife "rolling in the hay with the iceman", similar to the 'milkman'). The central contention of the play is the human need for self-deceptions or "pipe dreams" to carry on with life: to abandon them or to see them for the lies that they are is to risk death. One of the permutations of the pipe dream is the fantasy that enables the evasion of guilt. The demystification of this fantasy is concomitant with a surrender of the dreamer to judgment.

Long Day's Journey into Night (1956). Main Theme: Deception.

O'Neill posthumously received the 1957 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The play takes place on a single day in August 1912, from around 8:30 a.m. to midnight. The setting is the seaside Connecticut home of the Tyrone family, Monte Cristo Cottage. This play portrays a family in a ferociously negative light as the parents and two sons express accusations, blame, and resentments. The story deals with the mother's addiction to morphine (Mary Tyrone), the family's addiction to whiskey, the father's miserliness (James Tyrone Sr), the older brother's licentiousness (Jamie), and younger brother's illness (Edmund). In Act IV, Part 2, O'Neill gives voice to the expression of pathetic and self-defeating attempts at affection, encouragement, tenderness in Jamie's disclosure of his true feelings toward Edmund: "...I'd like to see you become the greatest success in the world. But you'd better be on your guard. Because I'll do my damndest to make you fail. Can't help it. I hate myself. Got to take revenge. On everyone else. The dead part of me hopes you won't get well."

Cummings, E.E.: *Complete Poems*.

Wheelwright, John B: *Collected Poems*.

Robert Fitzgerald: *Spring Shade: Poems*.

Louise Bogan: *The Blue Estuaries: Selected Poems*.

Léonie Adams: *Poems: A Selection*.

Hart Crane: *The Bridge: To Brooklyn Bridge (long poem)*.

[Comments – The Bridge](#) (1930)

Main Theme: Heroic

'The Bridge' (1930) was Crane's attempt to create an epic myth of the American experience: the Brooklyn Bridge stood as the creative power of man uniting the present and the past. The poem has 15 parts and is unified by a structure modeled after that of the symphony. However, as a coherent epic it has been deemed a failure, but many of its individual lyrics are judged to be among the best American poems of the 20th century.

Allen Tate: *Collected Poems*.

Fitzgerald, F. Scott: *This Side of Paradise; Babylon Revisited and Other Stories; The Great Gatsby; Tender is the Night*.

[Comments - This Side of Paradise](#) (1920)

Main Theme: Coming of Age.

Fitzgerald captured the spirit of American youth and the hedonism and decadence of the "jazz age" or the "roaring 20's" in the aftermath of World War I. The story concerns Amory Blaine, rich and spoiled, a Princeton student who becomes disillusioned with college life (especially football) and turns to literature, high life and women. The novel explores the theme of love warped by greed and status seeking, and takes its title from a line of Rupert Brooke's poem *Tiare Tahiti*. Fitzgerald is at his best in describing the dialogue of flappers, playboys, neurotic wealthy women and in his descriptions of the extravagant, drunken parties supposedly a commonplace of the 1920's. The book ends with Amory's iconic lament: "I know myself, but that is all". John Grier Hibben, president of Princeton University, was not entirely pleased with the novel: "I cannot bear to think that our young men are merely living four years in a country club and spending their lives wholly in a spirit of calculation and snobbishness".



William Faulkner: *The Sound and the Fury*; *As I Lay Dying*; *Sanctuary*; *Light in August*; *Absalom, Absalom!*; *The Wild Palms*; *The Collected Stories*; *The Hamlet*.

Comments - The Sound & the Fury (1929)

Main Themes: Judgment, Survival

Faulkner's novels are laid in an imaginary town in Mississippi (Jefferson) and the surrounding county, and many of his characters appear in more than one of his novels. He uses stream-of-consciousness and flashback techniques. He is concerned primarily with moral and economic decay of the South, and its effect on old Southern families now fallen upon hard times.

Because of sudden switches of time without warning, one has to read a way into this novel before understanding the scheme of it. Main characters: children of Jason Compson and Caroline Compson (Quentin, Candace ('Caddy'), Jason Jr and Benjy (an idiot); Candace's daughter (Quentin). The first chapter (28Apr) is related from the viewpoint of Benjy; the next chapter (10Jun) is from the viewpoint of others (Quentin, Candace's brother, etc). The primary event taking place at the 'present' time (28Apr) is a theft of money from Jason Jr. by Quentin (his niece) and her running off with a carnival man, but most of the story consists of flashbacks to explain events leading up to the present event. At the start, we have Benjy's recollections and the time is 1928, at which Benjy, Candace (living in Europe) and Jason Jr. are in their mid-thirties. Quentin, the daughter, is around the age of 17. The first paragraph in italics marks a drop back to around 1905, and continues there until the next paragraph in italics. In 1928, Luster, grandson of Dilsey, the black housekeeper, looks after Benjy; in 1905, Bersh, Dilsey's son, looked after him.

The Sound & the Fury's name comes from Shakespeare's Macbeth (V-5), where King Macbeth is contemplating the death of the Queen: "...The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The line "the way to dusty death" signifies the decline of the traditional 19th-century upper-class Southern family. In regards to Macbeth's last line, Faulkner said in his Nobel Prize in Literature acceptance speech (1950) that people must write about things that come from the heart, "universal truths...love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice...Otherwise, they signify nothing."

Ernest Hemingway: *The Sun Also Rises*; *Complete Short Stories*; *A Farewell to Arms*; *The Garden of Eden*; *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Comments - The Sun Also Rises (1926)

Main Theme: Heroism.

'The Sun Also Rises' is a roman à clef novel – based on Hemingway's trip to Spain in 1925 – that portrays American and British expatriates who travel from Paris to the Festival of San Fermín in Pamplona to watch the running of the bulls and the bullfights. The setting was unique and memorable, depicting sordid café life in Paris and the excitement of the Pamplona festival, with a middle section devoted to descriptions of a fishing trip in the Pyrenees. Hemingway presents his notion that the "Lost Generation" – considered to have been decadent, dissolute, and irretrievably damaged by World War I – was in fact resilient and strong.

Hemingway's spare writing style seems to be almost conversational in its simplicity – his restrained use of description to convey characterizations and action, demonstrates his "Iceberg Theory" of writing. Gertrude Stein, one of Hemingway's early idols during the 1920's in Paris, told him "Hemingway, talk's not literature." Hemingway is at his best in describing the type of active masculine hero whom he pictured himself to be, and his exploits (bull-fighting, wild game hunting), and in describing the life of artists, writers and other expatriates who gathered in Paris in the late 1920's. This novel is considered his most representative, and possibly his best, although many prefer "For Who the Bell Tolls", which describes the fighting in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1938) in which many of Europe's and American's liberals, including Hemingway, enlisted their services on the side of the republic opposing the Fascist takeover of power under Franco.



John Steinbeck: *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Comments - *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

Main Theme: Survival

An American classic about poor midwestern farmers' migrations to California to escape the dust bowl and the depression of the early 1930s. The novel focuses on the Joads, a poor family of tenant farmers driven from their Oklahoma home by drought, economic hardship, agricultural industry changes, and bank foreclosures forcing tenant farmers out of work. Due to their nearly hopeless situation, and in part because they are trapped in the Dust Bowl, the Joads set out for California along with thousands of other "Okies" seeking jobs, land, dignity, and a future.

Zora Neale Hurston: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Nathanael West (1903-1940): *Miss Lonelyhearts*; *A Cool Million*; *The Day of the Locust*.

Richard Wright: *Native Son*; *Black Boy*.

Comments - *Native Son* (1940)

Main Theme: Suffering

'Native Son' tells the story of 20-year-old Bigger Thomas, a black youth living in a rat-infested Chicago slum who accidentally kills his white employer's daughter and then kills his girlfriend to prevent her from telling the police. Wright avoids apologizing for Bigger's crime, however he portrays a systemic causation behind them and of the harsh reality of discrimination and prejudice playing a part in Bigger's antisocial development. Bigger's lawyer, Boris Max, makes the case that there is no escape from this destiny for his client or any other black American since they are the necessary product of the society that formed them and told them since birth who exactly they were supposed to be. The conditions and attitudes described in the book were something of a revelation to most white readers in 1940. "No American Negro exists", James Baldwin once wrote, "who does not have his private Bigger Thomas living in his skull."

Eudora Welty: *Collected Stories*; *Delta Wedding*; *The Robber Bridegroom*; *The Ponder Heart*.

Langston Hughes: *Selected Poems*; *The Big Sea*; *I Wonder as I Wander*.

Edmund Wilson: *The Shores of Light*; *Patriotic Gore*.

Kenneth Burke: *Counter-statement*; *A Rhetoric of Motives*.

Joseph Mitchell: *Up in the Old Hotel*.

Abraham Cahan: *The Rise of David Levinsky*.

Kay Boyle: *Three Short Stories*.

Ellen Glasgow: *Barren Ground*.

Marquand, John P.: *H. M. Pulham, Esquire*.

O'Hara, John: *Collected Stories*; *Appointment in Samarra*.

Henry Roth: *Call It Sleep*.

Thornton Wilder: *Three Plays*.

Warren, Robert Penn: *All the King's Men*; *World Enough and Time*; *Selected Poems*.

Delmore Schwartz: *Summer Knowledge*; *Selected Poems*.

Weldon Kees: *Collected Poems*.

Elizabeth Bishop: *The Complete Poems*.

John Berryman: *Collected Poems*.

Paul Bowles: *The Sheltering Sky*.

Randall Jarrell: *Complete Poems*.

Charles Olson: *The Maximus Poems*; *Collected Poems*.

Robert Hayden: *Collected Poems*.

Robert Lowell: *Collected Poems*.

Theodore Roethke: *Collected Poems*; *Straw for the Fire*.

James Agee: *Permit Me Voyage*; *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men (with Walker Evans)*.

Jean Garrigue: *Selected Poems*.

May Swenson: *New & Selected Things Taking Place*; *In Other Words*.

Robert Duncan: *Bending the Bow*.

Richard Wilbur: *New and Collected Poems*.

Richard Eberhart: *Collected Poems*.



Tolson, M.B.: *Harlem Gallery*.
Kenneth Koch: *Seasons on Earth*.
O'Hara, Frank: *Selected Poems*.
James Schuyler: *Collected Poems*.
James Baldwin: *The Price of the Ticket*.
Saul Bellow: *Seize the Day; The Adventures of Augie March; Herzog*.
John Cheever: *The Stories; Bullet Park*.
Ralph Ellison: *Invisible Man*.
Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood*.
McCullers, Carson: *The Ballad of the Sad Café; The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*.
O'Connor, Flanner: *Complete Stories; The Violent Bear It Away; Wise Blood*.
Vladimir Nabokov: *Lolita; Pale Fire*.
Gore Vidal: *Myra Brechinridge; Lincoln*.
William Styron: *The Long March*.

Salinger, J.D.: *The Catcher in the Rye; Nine Stories*.

[Comments – The Catcher in the Rye \(1951\)](#)

Main Theme: Coming of Age.

A novel of post-war alienation narrated by angst-ridden teen Holden Caulfield. Holden, who has a history of mental treatment and expulsion from several schools, is soon to be expelled from his fourth school (prep school Pencey). The story involves episodes of dorm roommate drama, unrequited love (Jane Gallagher) and encounters with a prostitute and her pimp. After his ordeals, Holden becomes cautiously optimistic about his future and the future attendance to a new school. Released in 1951, 'Catcher in the Rye' was scorned by ultra-conservative society for its use of vulgar language, sexual references, blasphemy, undermining of family values, and moral codes, encouragement of rebellion, and promotion of drinking, smoking, lying, promiscuity, and sexual abuse. Between 1961 and 1982, 'The Catcher in the Rye' was the most censored book in high schools and libraries in the United States. The book was briefly banned in the Issaquah, WA, high schools in 1978 when three members of the School Board alleged the book was part of an "overall communist plot." Title comes from "When a body catch a body" – to catch children from falling into the perils of adulthood. Holden learns the wisdom that one can enter adulthood without becoming false ('phony') or sacrificing one's values. Salinger himself accepted the notion that the knowledge of evil does not ensure damnation.

Wright Morris: *Ceremony in Lone Tree*.

Bernard Malamud: *The Stories; The Fixer*.

Norman Mailer: *Advertisements for Myself; The Executioner's Song; Ancient Evenings*.

John Hawkes: *The Cannibal; Second Skin*.

William Gaddis: *The Recognitions*.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire; A Glass Menagerie; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Night of the Iguana; Summer and Smoke*.

[Comments: A Streetcar Named Desire \(1947\)](#)

Main Themes: Love, Suffering

The play dramatizes the experiences of Blanche DuBois, a former Southern belle who, after encountering a series of personal losses, leaves behind her privileged background to move into a shabby apartment in New Orleans French Quarter to live with her younger married sister, Stella, and Stella's husband, Stanley Kowalski. Blanche is in her thirties and, with no money and has nowhere else to go. Stanley becomes abusive toward Stella (she forgives him) and eventually rapes Blanche having learned that she is not the chaste lady she pretends to be. Blanche eventually loses her grip on reality and is sent to an insane asylum.



Arthur Miller: *Death of a Salesman*.

Comments: [Death of a Salesman](#) (1949)

Main Theme: Judgment

'Death of a Salesman' is a two-act tragedy set in the 1940's New York told through a montage of memories, dreams and arguments of the protagonist Willy Loman, a travelling salesman who is disappointed from his life and appears to be slipping into senility. Willy believes wholeheartedly in what he considers the promise of the American Dream—that a “well liked” and “personally attractive” man in business will deservedly acquire the material comforts offered by modern American life. Oddly, his fixation with the superficial qualities of attractiveness and likeability is at odds with a more gritty, more rewarding understanding of the American Dream that identifies hard work without complaint as the key to success.

Mayer, Edwin Justus: *Children of Darkness*.

Harold Brodkey: *Stories in an Almost Classical Mode*.

Ursula K. Le Guin: *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

Raymond Carver: *Where I'm Calling From*.

Robert Coover: *Spanking the Maid*.

Don DeLillo: *White Noise*; *Libra*; *Running Dog*; *Mao II*.

John Crowley: *Little, Big*; *Aegypt*; *Love and Sleep*.

Guy Davenport: *Tatlin!*

James Dickey: *The Early Motion*; *The Central Motion*.

E.L. Doctorow: *The Book of Daniel*; *World's Fair*.

Stanley Elkin: *The Living End*.

William Gass: *In the Heart of the Country*; *Omensetter's Luck*.

Russell Hoban: *Riddley Walker*.

Denis Johnson: *Angels*; *Fiskadoro*; *Jesus' Son*.

Cormac McCarthy: *Blood Meridian*; *Suttree*; *Child of God*.

William Kennedy: *Ironweed*; *The Albany Cycle*.

Toni Morrison: *Song of Solomon*.

Gloria Naylor: *The Women of Brewster Place*.

Joyce Carol Oates: *Them*.

Walker Percy: *The Moviegoer*.

Grace Paley: *The Little Disturbances of Man*.

Thomas Pynchon: *V.*; *The Crying of Lot 49*; *Gravity's Rainbow*.

Cynthia Ozick: *Envy, or Yiddish in America*; *The Messiah of Stockholm*.

Ishmael Reed: *Mumbo Jumbo*.

Philip Roth: *Portnoy's Complaint*; *My Life as a Man*; *Zuckerman Bound: A Trilogy and Epilogue*; *The Counterlife*; *Patrimony*; *Operation Shylock*.

James Salter: *Solo Faces*; *Light Years*.

Robert Stone: *Dog Soldiers*; *A Flag for Sunrise*.

John Barth: *The Floating Opera*; *The End of the Road*; *The Sot-Weed Factor*.

Walter Abish: *Alphabetical Africa*; *How German Is It*; *Eclipse Fever*; *I am the Dust Under Your Feet*.

Donald Barthelme: *Forty Stories*; *The Dead Father*.

Thomas M. Disch: *On Wings of Song*.

Paul Theroux: *The Mosquito Coast*.

John Updike: *The Witches of Eastwick*.

Kurt Vonnegut: *Cat's Cradle*.

Edmund White: *Forgetting Elena*; *Nocturnes for the King of Naples*.

James McCourt: *Time Remaining*.

James Wilcox: *Modern Baptists*.

A.R. Ammons: *Collected Poems*; *Selected Longer Poems*; *Collected Poems*; *Sphere: The Form of a Motion*.

John Ashbery: *The Double Dream of Spring*; *Houseboat Days*; *Selected Poems*; *Flow Chart*; *Hotel Lautréamont*; *And the Stars Were Shining*.

David Mamet: *American Buffalo*; *Speed-the-Plow*.



David Rabe: *Streamers*.
Sam Shepard: *Seven Plays*.
August Wilson: *Fences; Joe Turner's Come and Gone*.
Anthony Hecht: *Collected Earlier Poems*.
Edgar Bowers: *Living Together: New and Selected Poems*.
Donald Justice: *Selected Poems*.
James Merrill: *From the First Nine*.
W.S. Merwin: *The Changing Light at Sandover*.
James Wright: *Above the River: The Complete Poems*.
Galway Kinnell: *Selected Poems*.
Philip Levine: *Selected Poems*.
Irving Feldman: *New and Selected Poems*.
Donald Hall: *The One Day; Old and New Poems*.
Alvin Feinman: *Poems*.
Richard Howard: *Untitled Subjects; Findings*.
John Hollander: *Reflections on Espionage; Selected Poetry; Tesserae*.
Gary Snyder: *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*.
Charles Simic: *Selected Poems*.
Mark Strand: *Selected Poems; The Continuous Life; Dark Harbor*.
Charles Wright: *The World of the Ten Thousand Things*.
Jay Wright: *Dimensions of History; The Double Invention of Komo; Selected Poems; Elaine's Book; Boleros*.
Amy Clampitt: *Westward*.
Allen Grossman: *The Ether Dome and Other Poems: New and Selected*.
Howard Moss: *New Selected Poems*.
James Applewhite: *River Writing: An Eno Journal*.
McClatchy, J.D.: *The Rest of the Way*.
Alfred Cord: *A Call in the Midst of the Crowd*.
Douglas Crase: *The Revisionist*.
Rita Dove: *Selected Poems*.
Thylias Moss: *Small Congregations: New and Selected Poems*.
Edward Hirsch: *Earthly Measures*.
Tony Kushner: *Angels in America*.