

Literary Terms:

Adventure novel. A novel where exciting events are more important than character development and sometimes theme. Examples:

H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*

Baroness Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

Alexandre Dumas, *The Three Musketeers*

Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*

Allegory. A figurative work in which a surface narrative carries a secondary, symbolic or metaphorical meaning. In *The Faerie Queene*, for example, Red Cross Knight is a heroic knight in the literal narrative, but also a figure representing Everyman in the Christian journey. Many works contain allegories or are allegorical in part, but not many are entirely allegorical. Some examples of allegorical works include

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*

Dante, *The Divine Comedy*

William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (allegorical novel)

Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (allegorical novel)

George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (allegorical novel)

Apologue. A moral fable, usually featuring personified animals or inanimate objects which act like people to allow the author to comment on the human condition. Often, the apologue highlights the irrationality of mankind. The beast fable, and the fables of Aesop are examples. Some critics have called Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* an apologue rather than a novel because it is more concerned with moral philosophy than with character or plot. Examples:

George Orwell, *Animal Farm*

Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*

Autobiographical novel. A novel based on the author's life experience. More common that a thoroughly autobiographical novel is the inclusion of autobiographical elements among other elements. Many novelists include in their books people and events from their own lives, often slightly or even dramatically altered. Nothing beats writing from experience, because remembrance is easier than creation from scratch and all the details fit together. Examples of autobiographical novels are:

James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*

Blank Verse. Unrhymed iambic pentameter. Shakespeare's plays are largely blank verse, as are other Renaissance plays. Blank verse was the most popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England.

Here are some examples you likely won't see elsewhere:

At last,

The clouds consign their treasures to the fields,

And softly shaking on the dimpled pool

Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow

In large effusion o'er the freshened world.

--James Thomson, *The Seasons*, Spring, 172-176

Delightful task! to rear the tender thought,

To teach the young idea how to shoot,

To pour the fresh instruction o'er the mind,

To breathe the enlivening spirit, and to fix

The generous purpose in the glowing breast.

--James Thomson, *The Seasons*, Spring, 1152-1156

How poor, how rich, how abject, how august,
How complicate, how wonderful is man!
How passing wonder He, who made him such!
Who centred in our make such strange extremes?

.....

Distinguish'd link in being's endless chain!
Midway from nothing to the Deity!

--Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, Night the First, 67-70, 73-74

John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1667)

John Dryden, *All for Love*

James Thompson, *The Seasons*

Burlesque. A work designed to ridicule a style, literary form, or subject matter either by treating the exalted in a trivial way or by discussing the trivial in exalted terms (that is, with mock dignity). Burlesque concentrates on derisive imitation, usually in exaggerated terms. Literary genres (like the tragic drama) can be burlesqued, as can styles of sculpture, philosophical movements, schools of art, and so forth. See Parody, Travesty.

John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), burlesques Italian opera by trivializing it

Henry Fielding, *Tom Thumb the Great* (1730), burlesques heroic drama by trivializing it

Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (1711-14), burlesques the eighteenth century upper crust social mores by treating them with the machinery of epic poetry

Caesura. A pause, metrical or rhetorical, occurring somewhere in a line of poetry. The pause may or may not be typographically indicated (usually with a comma). An example from George Herbert's "Redemption":

At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth
Of theeves and murderers: there I him espied,
Who straight, Your suit is granted, said, and died.

Canon. In relation to literature, this term is half-seriously applied to those works generally accepted as the great ones. A battle is now being fought to change or throw out the canon for three reasons. First, the list of great books is thoroughly dominated by DWEM's (dead, white, European males), and the accusation is that women and minorities and non-Western cultural writers have been ignored. Second, there is pressure in the literary community to throw out all standards as the nihilism of the late 20th and early 21st century makes itself felt in the literature departments of the universities. Scholars and professors want to choose the books they like or which reflect their own ideas, without worrying about canonicity. Third, the canon has always been determined at least in part by political considerations and personal philosophical biases. Books are much more likely to be called "great" if they reflect the philosophical ideas of the critic.

On the other hand, a great case can be made for reading through the traditional canon because over many years (hundreds or thousands in some cases) some works have emerged as the best--reaching the deep truths of human nature or discussing the greatest of ideas (who we are, why we live, what our purpose here is, why we go wrong) in the most intelligent, fruitful, and thoughtful ways. The canon works raise the most interesting questions, sometimes offer answers, and often present both Q and A in a beautiful way. You could do worse than read Aristotle, or Samuel Johnson, or Charles Dickens, or Epictetus, or George Herbert.

For some sample traditional lists, see the great books lists and programs at The Center for the Study of Great Ideas, The Great Books Index, and Robert Teeter's Great Books Lists.

Children's novel. A novel written for children and discerned by one or more of these: (1) a child character or a character a child can identify with, (2) a theme or themes (often didactic) aimed at children, (3) vocabulary and sentence structure available to a young reader. Many "adult" novels, such as *Gulliver's Travels*, are read by children. The test is that the book be interesting to and--at some level--accessible by children. Examples:

Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer
L. M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables
Booth Tarkington, Penrod and Sam

Christian novel. A novel either explicitly or implicitly informed by Christian faith and often containing a plot revolving around the Christian life, evangelism, or conversion stories. Sometimes the plots are directly religious, and sometimes they are allegorical or symbolic. Traditionally, most Christian novels have been viewed as having less literary quality than the "great" novels of Western literature. Examples:

Charles Sheldon, In His Steps
Lloyd C. Douglas, The Robe
Henryk Sienkiewicz, Quo Vadis
Par Lagerkvist, Barabbas
Catherine Marshall, Christy
C. S. Lewis, Perelandra
G. K. Chesterton, The Man Who was Thursday
Bodie Thoene, In My Father's House

Coming-of-age story. A type of novel where the protagonist is initiated into adulthood through knowledge, experience, or both, often by a process of disillusionment. Understanding comes after the dropping of preconceptions, a destruction of a false sense of security, or in some way the loss of innocence. Some of the shifts that take place are these:

ignorance to knowledge
innocence to experience
false view of world to correct view
idealism to realism
immature responses to mature responses

Examples:

Jane Austen Northanger Abbey
Charles Dickens, Great Expectations
Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage

Conceit. An elaborate, usually intellectually ingenious poetic comparison or image, such as an analogy or metaphor in which, say a beloved is compared to a ship, planet, etc. The comparison may be brief or extended. See Petrarchan Conceit. (Conceit is an old word for concept.) See John Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," for example, lines 21-32, where he compares his and his love's souls first to gold (which can be hammered to such a thinness that a small lump can cover the dome of a building) and then to a drawing compass whose foot in the center allows the other to draw a perfect circle. Romantic, isn't it:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to aery thinness beat,

If they be two, they are two so
 As stiff twin compasses are two ;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
 To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
 Yet, when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as that comes home.

Detective novel. A novel focusing on the solving of a crime, often by a brilliant detective, and usually employing the elements of mystery and suspense. Examples:

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*

Dorothy Sayers, *Strong Poison*

Dystopian novel. An anti-utopian novel where, instead of a paradise, everything has gone wrong in the attempt to create a perfect society. See utopian novel. Examples:

George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

End-stopped. A line that has a natural pause at the end (period, comma, etc.). For example, these lines are end stopped:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.

Coral is far more red than her lips red. --Shakespeare

Enjambed. The running over of a sentence or thought into the next couplet or line without a pause at the end of the line; a run-on line. For example, all the lines here are enjambed:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments. Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds

Or bends with the remover to remove. . . . --Shakespeare

A hint to those who read poetry aloud: Don't pause a long time at the end of a line with no punctuation. Pause for a comma, pause longer for a semicolon, longer still for a period, but at the end of an enjambed line, if you pause at all, only the hemidemisemiquaver of a pause. On the other hand, don't go out of your way to join the lines together by a forceful lack of spacing.

Epic. An extended narrative poem recounting actions, travels, adventures, and heroic episodes and written in a high style (with ennobled diction, for example). It may be written in hexameter verse, especially dactylic hexameter, and it may have twelve books or twenty four books. Characteristics of the classical epic include these:

- The main character or protagonist is heroically larger than life, often the source and subject of legend or a national hero
- The deeds of the hero are presented without favoritism, revealing his failings as well as his virtues
- The action, often in battle, reveals the more-than-human strength of the heroes as they engage in acts of heroism and courage
- The setting covers several nations, the whole world, or even the universe
- The episodes, even though they may be fictional, provide an explanation for some of the circumstances or events in the history of a nation or people
- The gods and lesser divinities play an active role in the outcome of actions
- All of the various adventures form an organic whole, where each event relates in some way to the central theme

Typical in epics is a set of conventions (or epic machinery). Among them are these:

•Poem begins with a statement of the theme ("Arms and the man I sing")

•Invocation to the muse or other deity ("Sing, goddess, of the wrath of Achilles")

•Story begins in medias res (in the middle of things)

•Catalogs (of participants on each side, ships, sacrifices)

•Histories and descriptions of significant items (who made a sword or shield, how it was decorated, who owned it from generation to generation)

•Epic simile (a long simile where the image becomes an object of art in its own right as well as serving to clarify the subject).

- Frequent use of epithets ("Aeneas the true"; "rosy-fingered Dawn"; "tall-masted ship")
- Use of patronymics (calling son by father's name): "Anchises' son"
- Long, formal speeches by important characters
- Journey to the underworld
- Use of the number three (attempts are made three times, etc.)
- Previous episodes in the story are later recounted

Examples:

- Homer, Iliad
- Homer, Odyssey
- Virgil, Aeneid
- Tasso, Jerusalem Delivered
- Milton, Paradise Lost

Epistolary novel. A novel consisting of letters written by a character or several characters. The form allows for the use of multiple points of view toward the story and the ability to dispense with an omniscient narrator.

Examples:

- Samuel Richardson, Pamela
- Samuel Richardson, Clarissa
- Fanny Burney, Evelina
- C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters
- Hannah W. Foster, The Coquette

Euphemism. The substitution of a mild or less negative word or phrase for a harsh or blunt one, as in the use of "pass away" instead of "die." The basic psychology of euphemistic language is the desire to put something bad or embarrassing in a positive (or at least neutral light). Thus many terms referring to death, sex, crime, and excremental functions are euphemisms. Since the euphemism is often chosen to disguise something horrifying, it can be exploited by the satirist through the use of irony and exaggeration.

•"The war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage." --Emperor Hirohito, upon surrendering after the dropping of the atom bombs on Japan.

Euphuism. A highly ornate style of writing popularized by John Lyly's Euphues, characterized by balanced sentence construction, rhetorical tropes, and multiplied similes and allusions.

Existentialist novel. A novel written from an existentialist viewpoint, often pointing out the absurdity and meaninglessness of existence. Example:

- Albert Camus, The Stranger

Fantasy novel. Any novel that is disengaged from reality. Often such novels are set in nonexistent worlds, such as under the earth, in a fairyland, on the moon, etc. The characters are often something other than human or include nonhuman characters. Example:

- J. R. R. Tolkien, The Hobbit

Flashback. A device that allows the writer to present events that happened before the time of the current narration or the current events in the fiction. Flashback techniques include memories, dreams, stories of the past told by characters, or even authorial sovereignty. (That is, the author might simply say, "But back in Tom's youth. . .") Flashback is useful for exposition, to fill in the reader about a character or place, or about the background to a conflict.

Foot. The basic unit of meter consisting of a group of two or three syllables. Scanning or scansion is the process of determining the prevailing foot in a line of poetry, of determining the types and sequence of different feet.

Types of feet: U (unstressed); / (stressed syllable)

Iamb: U /

Trochee: / U

Anapest: U U /

Dactyl: / U U

Spondee: //

Pyrrhic: U U

Iambic words: about, event, infuse, persuade

Trochaic words: woman, daisy, golden, patchwork

Anapestic words: underneath, introduce

Dactylic words: fantasy, alchemy, penetrate

Note that poetic feet are composed of words fitted together to form the meter. That is, anapestic hexameter is not composed of lines of six anapestic words each, but lines of six anapestic feet, made up of various words. Here is an off-the-cuff anapestic hexameter couplet:

On the wall, under light, stood a man in a coat, with a dog by his side.
Looking up, looking down, our eyes met with a frown--and a smile from the dog.

See also versification, below.

Frame. A narrative structure that provides a setting and exposition for the main narrative in a novel. Often, a narrator will describe where he found the manuscript of the novel or where he heard someone tell the story he is about to relate. The frame helps control the reader's perception of the work, and has been used in the past to help give credibility to the main section of the novel, through the implication or claim that the novel represents a true account of events, written by someone other than the author. In the 16th through the 18th centuries, frames were sometimes used to help protect the author and publisher from persecution for the ideas presented.

Examples of novels with frames:

- Mary Shelley *Frankenstein*
- Nathaniel Hawthorne *The Scarlet Letter*

Free verse. Verse that has neither regular rhyme nor regular meter. Free verse often uses cadences rather than uniform metrical feet.

I cannot strive to drink
dry the ocean's fill
since you replenish my gulps
with your tears

Gothic novel. A novel in which supernatural horrors and an atmosphere of unknown terror pervades the action. The setting is often a dark, mysterious castle, where ghosts and sinister humans roam menacingly. Horace Walpole invented the genre with his *Castle of Otranto*. Gothic elements include these:

- Ancient prophecy, especially mysterious, obscure, or hard to understand.
- Mystery and suspense
- High emotion, sentimentalism, but also pronounced anger, surprise, and especially terror
- Supernatural events (e.g. a giant, a sighing portrait, ghosts or their apparent presence, a skeleton)
- Omens, portents, dream visions
- Fainting, frightened, screaming women
- Women threatened by powerful, impetuous male
- Setting in a castle, especially with secret passages
- The metonymy of gloom and horror (wind, rain, doors grating on rusty hinges, howls in the distance, distant sighs, footsteps approaching, lights in abandoned rooms, gusts of wind blowing out lights or blowing suddenly, characters trapped in rooms or imprisoned)
- The vocabulary of the gothic (use of words indicating fear, mystery, etc.: apparition, devil, ghost, haunted, terror, fright)

Examples:

- Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*
- William Beckford, *Vathek*
- Anne Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- Daphne du Maurier, *Rebecca*

For more information, see *Elements of the Gothic Novel*.

Graphic Novel. A novel illustrated panel by panel, either in color or black and white. Graphic novels are sometimes referred to as extended comics, because the presentation format (panel by panel illustration, mostly dialog with usually little exposition) suggests a comic. So too does the emphasis on action in many graphic novels. Characters who are not human, talking monsters, and imaginary beings sometimes populate graphic novels, bringing them closer to science fiction or fantasy than realism.

- Jeff Smith, *Bone*
- Matt Wagner, *Mage: The Hero Discovered*

Heroic Couplet. Two lines of rhyming iambic pentameter. Most of Alexander Pope's verse is written in heroic couplets. In fact, it is the most favored verse form of the eighteenth century. Example:

u / u / u / u / u / 'Tis hard to say, if greater want of skill u / u / u / u / u /
Appear in writing or in judging ill. . . . --Alexander Pope

[Note in the second line that "or" should be a stressed syllable if the meter were perfectly iambic. Iambic= a two syllable foot of one unstressed and one stressed syllable, as in the word "begin." Pentameter= five feet. Thus, iambic pentameter has ten syllables, five feet of two syllable iambs.]

Historical novel. A novel where fictional characters take part in actual historical events and interact with real people from the past. Examples:

- Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*
- Sir Walter Scott, *Waverly*
- James Fenimore Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*
- Lloyd C. Douglas, *The Robe*

Horatian Satire. In general, a gentler, more good humored and sympathetic kind of satire, somewhat tolerant of human folly even while laughing at it. Named after the poet Horace, whose satire epitomized it. Horatian satire tends to ridicule human folly in general or by type rather than attack specific persons. Compare Juvenalian satire.

Humanism. The new emphasis in the Renaissance on human culture, education and reason, sparked by a revival of interest in classical Greek and Roman literature, culture, and language. Human nature and the dignity of man were exalted and emphasis was placed on the present life as a worthy event in itself (as opposed to the medieval emphasis on the present life merely as preparation for a future life).

Humours. In medieval physiology, four liquids in the human body affecting behavior. Each humour was associated with one of the four elements of nature. In a balanced personality, no humour predominated. When a humour did predominate, it caused a particular personality. Here is a chart of the humours, the corresponding elements and personality characteristics:

- blood...air...hot and moist: sanguine, kind, happy, romantic
- phlegm...water...cold and moist: phlegmatic, sedentary, sickly, fearful
- yellow bile...fire...hot and dry: choleric, ill-tempered, impatient, stubborn
- black bile...earth...cold and dry: melancholy, gluttonous, lazy, contemplative

The Renaissance took the doctrine of humours quite seriously--it was their model of psychology--so knowing that can help us understand the characters in the literature. Falstaff, for example, has a dominance of blood, while Hamlet seems to have an excess of black bile.

Hypertext novel. A novel that can be read in a nonsequential way. That is, whereas most novels flow from beginning to end in a continuous, linear fashion, a hypertext novel can branch--the reader can move from one place in the text to another nonsequential place whenever he wishes to trace an idea or follow a character. Also called hyperfiction. Most are published on CD-ROM. See also interactive novel. Examples:

- Michael Joyce, *Afternoon*
- Stuart Moulthrop, *Victory Garden*

Interactive novel. A novel with more than one possible series of events or outcomes. The reader is given the opportunity at various places to choose what will happen next. It is therefore possible for several readers to experience different novels by reading the same book or for one reader to experience different novels by reading the same one twice and making different choices.

Invective. Speech or writing that abuses, denounces, or attacks. It can be directed against a person, cause, idea, or system. It employs a heavy use of negative emotive language. Example:

- I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth. --Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

Irony. A mode of expression, through words (verbal irony) or events (irony of situation), conveying a reality different from and usually opposite to appearance or expectation. A writer may say the opposite of what he means, create a reversal between expectation and its fulfillment, or give the audience knowledge that a character lacks, making the character's words have meaning to the audience not perceived by the character. In verbal irony, the writer's meaning or even his attitude may be different from what he says: "Why, no one would dare argue that there could be anything more important in choosing a college than its proximity to the beach." An example of situational irony would occur if a professional pickpocket had his own pocket picked just as he was in the act of picking someone else's pocket. The irony is generated by the surprise recognition by the audience of a reality in contrast with expectation or appearance, while another audience, victim, or character puts confidence in the appearance as reality (in this case, the pickpocket doesn't expect his own pocket to be picked). The surprise recognition by the audience often produces a comic effect, making irony often funny.

An example of dramatic irony (where the audience has knowledge that gives additional meaning to a character's words) would be when King Oedipus, who has unknowingly killed his father, says that he will banish his father's killer when he finds him.

Irony is the most common and most efficient technique of the satirist, because it is an instrument of truth, provides wit and humor, and is usually at least obliquely critical, in that it deflates, scorns, or attacks.

The ability to detect irony is sometimes heralded as a test of intelligence and sophistication. When a text intended to be ironic is not seen as such, the effect can be disastrous. Some students have taken Swift's "Modest Proposal" literally. And Defoe's contemporaries took his "Shortest Way with the Dissenters" literally and jailed him for it. To be an effective piece of sustained irony, there must be some sort of audience tip-off, through style, tone, use of clear exaggeration, or other device.

Juvenalian Satire. Harsher, more pointed, perhaps intolerant satire typified by the writings of Juvenal. Juvenalian satire often attacks particular people, sometimes thinly disguised as fictional characters. While laughter and ridicule are still weapons as with Horatian satire, the Juvenalian satirist also uses withering invective and a slashing attack. Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope are Juvenalian satirists.

Lampoon. A crude, coarse, often bitter satire ridiculing the personal appearance or character of a person.

Literary quality. A judgment about the value of a novel as literature. At the heart of this issue is the question of what distinguishes a great or important novel from one that is less important. Certainly the feature is not that of interest or excitement, for pulp novels can be even more exciting and interesting than "great" novels. Usually,

books that make us think--that offer insight into the human condition--are the ones we rank more highly than books that simply titillate us. In non-literary fiction, plot is emphasized. If the value of the novel lies in how clever the plot twists are or how thrilling the story is, then it is more likely to be classified as fiction than literature. If you don't ever want to read the book again because now you know how it comes out, you have just read fiction, not literature. If you want to read the book again even though you know the plot and the ending, you might just be reading literature. If the book causes you to think, maybe even grow wiser, you are very likely reading literature. Yeah, I know how Hamlet comes out--spoiler alert--pretty much everybody of importance is dead at the end, but I still want to read it or watch it again.

Metaphysical Poetry. The term metaphysical was applied to a style of 17th Century poetry first by John Dryden and later by Dr. Samuel Johnson because of the highly intellectual and often abstruse imagery involved.

Chief among the metaphysical poets are John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughan. While their poetry is widely varied (the metaphysicals are not a thematic or even a structural school), there are some common characteristics:

- 1. Argumentative structure. The poem often engages in a debate or persuasive presentation; the poem is an intellectual exercise as well as or instead of an emotional effusion.
- 2. Dramatic and colloquial mode of utterance. The poem often describes a dramatic event rather than being a reverie, a thought, or contemplation. Diction is simple and usually direct; inversion is limited. The verse is occasionally rough, like speech, rather than written in perfect meter, resulting in a dominance of thought over form.
- 3. Acute realism. The poem often reveals a psychological analysis; images advance the argument rather than being ornamental. There is a learned style of thinking and writing; the poetry is often highly intellectual.
- 4. Metaphysical wit. The poem contains unexpected, even striking or shocking analogies, offering elaborate parallels between apparently dissimilar things. The analogies are drawn from widely varied fields of knowledge, not limited to traditional sources in nature or art. Analogies from science, mechanics, housekeeping, business, philosophy, astronomy, etc. are common. These "conceits" reveal a play of intellect, often resulting in puns, paradoxes, and humorous comparisons. Unlike other poetry where the metaphors usually remain in the background, here the metaphors sometimes take over the poem and control it.

Metaphysical poetry represents a revolt against the conventions of Elizabethan love poetry and especially the typical Petrarchan conceits (like rosy cheeks, eyes like stars, etc.).

Meter. The rhythmic pattern produced when words are arranged so that their stressed and unstressed syllables fall into a more or less regular sequence, resulting in repeated patterns of accent (called feet). See feet and versification.

Mock Epic. Treating a frivolous or minor subject seriously, especially by using the machinery and devices of the epic (invocations, descriptions of armor, battles, extended similes, etc.). The opposite of travesty. Examples:

- Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*
- Alexander Pope, *Rape of the Lock*

Multicultural novel. A novel written by a member of or about a cultural minority group, giving insight into non-Western or non-dominant cultural experiences and values, either in the United States or abroad. Examples:

- Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
- Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*
- Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*
- Margaret Craven, *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*
- James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*
- Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*
- Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Penitent*
- Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*

Mystery novel. A novel whose driving characteristic is the element of suspense or mystery. Strange, unexplained events, vague threats or terrors, unknown forces or antagonists, all may appear in a mystery novel. Gothic novels and detective novels are often also mystery novels.

Novel. Dare we touch this one with a ten foot pole? Of course we dare, provided that you accept the caveat that novels are so varied that any definition is likely to be inadequate to cover all of them. So here is a place to start: a novel is an extended prose fiction narrative of 50,000 words or more, broadly realistic--concerning the everyday events of ordinary people--and concerned with character. "People in significant action" is one way of describing it.

Another definition might be "an extended, fictional prose narrative about realistic characters and events." It is a representation of life, experience, and learning. Action, discovery, and description are important elements, but the most important tends to be one or more characters--how they grow, learn, find--or don't grow, learn, or find. Compare the definition of a romance, below, and you will see why this definition seems somewhat restrictive.

Novella. A prose fiction longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. There is no standard definition of length, but since rules of thumb are sometimes handy, we might say that the short story ends at about 20,000 words, while the novel begins at about 50,000. Thus, the novella is a fictional work of about 20,000 to 50,000 words. Examples:

- Henry James, *Daisy Miller*
- Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*
- Henry James, *Turn of the Screw*
- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Novel of manners. A novel focusing on and describing in detail the social customs and habits of a particular social group. Usually these conventions function as shaping or even stifling controls over the behavior of the characters. Examples:

- Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*
- William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*

Parody. A satiric imitation of a work or of an author with the idea of ridiculing the author, his ideas, or work. The parodist exploits the peculiarities of an author's expression--his propensity to use too many parentheses, certain favorite words, or whatever. The parody may also be focused on, say, an improbable plot with too many convenient events. Fielding's *Shamela* is, in large part, a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*.

Persona. The person created by the author to tell a story. Whether the story is told by an omniscient narrator or by a character in it, the actual author of the work often distances himself from what is said or told by adopting a persona--a personality different from his real one. Thus, the attitudes, beliefs, and degree of understanding expressed by the narrator may not be the same as those of the actual author. Some authors, for example, use narrators who are not very bright in order to create irony.

Petrarchan Conceit. The kind of conceit (see above) used by Italian Renaissance poet Petrarch and popular in Renaissance English sonnets. Eyes like stars or the sun, hair like golden wires, lips like cherries, etc. are common examples. Oxymorons are also common, such as freezing fire, burning ice, etc. If you wonder where Shakespeare got the images he criticizes in Sonnet 130 ("My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun), take a look at Petrarch's Sonnet 69, which includes the following lines (these translated by Charles Tomlinson in 1874): "Her golden hair was streaming in the wind," "Her walk was not the step of mortal thing, / But of angelic form," "her accents clear had in their music more than human sound."

Picaresque novel. An episodic, often autobiographical novel about a rogue or picaresque (a person of low social status) wandering around and living off his wits. The wandering hero provides the author with the opportunity to connect widely different pieces of plot, since the hero can wander into any situation. Picaresque novels tend to be satiric and filled with petty detail. Examples:

- Daniel Defoe, Moll Flanders
- Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote
- Henry Fielding, Jonathan Wild

Pseudonym. A "false name" or alias used by a writer desiring not to use his or her real name. Sometimes called a nom de plume or "pen name," pseudonyms have been popular for several reasons.

First, political realities might make it dangerous for the real author to admit to a work. Beatings, imprisonment, and even execution are not unheard of for authors of unpopular works.

Second, an author might have a certain type of work associated with a certain name, so that different names are used for different kinds of work. One pen name might be used for westerns, while another name would be used for science fiction.

Lastly, an author might choose a literary name that sounds more impressive or that will garner more respect than the author's real name. Examples:

- Samuel Clemens used the name Mark Twain
- Mary Ann Evans used the name George Eliot
- Jonathan Swift used the name Lemuel Gulliver (once)

Pulp fiction. Novels written for the mass market, intended to be "a good read,"--often exciting, titillating, thrilling. Historically they have been very popular but critically sneered at as being of sub-literary quality. The earliest ones were the dime novels of the nineteenth century, printed on newsprint (hence "pulp" fiction) and sold for ten cents. Westerns, stories of adventure, even the Horatio Alger novels, all were forms of pulp fiction.

Regional novel. A novel faithful to a particular geographic region and its people, including behavior, customs, speech, and history. Examples:

- Harper Lee, To Kill a Mockingbird
- Thomas Hardy, Return of the Native

Rhyme. The similarity between syllable sounds at the end of two or more lines. Some kinds of rhyme (also spelled rime) include:

- Couplet: a pair of lines rhyming consecutively: "These lines make up a couplet with a rhyme. / Just don't expect the lines to be sublime."
- Eye rhyme: words whose spellings would lead one to think that they rhymed (slough, tough, cough, bough, though, hiccough. Or: love, move, prove. Or: daughter, laughter.)
- Feminine rhyme: two syllable rhyme consisting of stressed syllable followed by unstressed.
- Masculine rhyme: similarity between terminally stressed syllables.

Ridicule. Words intended to belittle a person or idea and arouse contemptuous laughter. The goal is to condemn or criticize by making the thing, idea, or person seem laughable and ridiculous. It is one of the most powerful methods of criticism, partly because it cannot be satisfactorily answered ("Who can refute a sneer?") and partly because many people who fear nothing else--not the law, not society, not even God--fear being laughed at. (The fear of being laughed at is one of the most inhibiting forces in western civilization. It provides much of the power behind the adolescent flock urge and accounts for many of the barriers to change and adventure in the adult world.) Ridicule is, not surprisingly, a common weapon of the satirist.

Roman a clef. [French for "novel with a key," pronounced roh MAHN ah CLAY] A novel in which historical events and actual people are written about under the pretense of being fiction. Examples:

- Aphra Behn, Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister
- Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises

Romance. An extended fictional prose narrative about improbable events involving characters that are quite different from ordinary people. Knights on a quest for a magic sword and aided by characters like fairies and trolls would be examples of things found in romance fiction. Examples:

- Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote

- Sir Philip Sidney, *The Arcadia*

In popular use, the modern romance novel is a formulaic love story (boy meets girl, obstacles interfere, they overcome obstacles, they live happily ever after). Computer software is available for constructing these stock plots and providing stereotyped characters. Consequently, the books usually lack literary merit. Examples:

- Harlequin Romance series

Sarcasm. A form of sneering criticism in which disapproval is often expressed as ironic praise. (Oddly enough, sarcastic remarks are often used between friends, perhaps as a somewhat perverse demonstration of the strength of the bond--only a good friend could say this without hurting the other's feelings, or at least without excessively damaging the relationship, since feelings are often hurt in spite of a close relationship. If you drop your lunch tray and a stranger says, "Well, that was really intelligent," that's sarcasm. If your girlfriend or boyfriend says it, that's love--I think.)

Satire. A literary mode based on criticism of people and society through ridicule. The satirist aims to reduce the practices attacked by laughing scornfully at them--and being witty enough to allow the reader to laugh, also. Ridicule, irony, exaggeration, and several other techniques are almost always present. The satirist may insert serious statements of value or desired behavior, but most often he relies on an implicit moral code, understood by his audience and paid lip service by them. The satirist's goal is to point out the hypocrisy of his target in the hope that either the target or the audience will return to a real following of the code. Thus, satire is inescapably moral even when no explicit values are promoted in the work, for the satirist works within the framework of a widely spread value system. Many of the techniques of satire are devices of comparison, to show the similarity or contrast between two things. A list of incongruous items, an oxymoron, metaphors, and so forth are examples. See "The Purpose and Method of Satire" for more information.

Science fiction novel. A novel in which futuristic technology or otherwise altered scientific principles contribute in a significant way to the adventures. Often the novel assumes a set of rules or principles or facts and then traces their logical consequences in some form. For example, given that a man discovers how to make himself invisible, what might happen? Examples:

- H. G. Wells, *The Invisible Man*
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*
- Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*
- Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*

Sentimental novel. A type of novel, popular in the eighteenth century, that overemphasizes emotion and seeks to create emotional responses in the reader. The type also usually features an overly optimistic view of the goodness of human nature. Examples:

- Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*
- Henry Mackenzie, *The Man of Feeling*
- Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*
- Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton*

Sequel. A novel incorporating the same characters and often the same setting as a previous novel. Sometimes the events and situations involve a continuation of the previous novel and sometimes only the characters are the same and the events are entirely unrelated to the previous novel. When sequels result from the popularity of an original, they are often hastily written and not of the same quality as the original. Occasionally a sequel is written by an author different from that of the original novel. See series. Examples:

- Mark Twain, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*
- Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*
- Mark Twain, *Tom Sawyer Detective*
- Margaret Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*
- Alexandra Ripley, *Scarlett*

Series. Several novels related to each other, by plot, setting, character, or all three. Book marketers like to refer to multi-volume novels as sagas. Examples:

- Anthony Trollope, Barsetshire novels
- C. S. Lewis, Chronicles of Narnia novels
- L. M. Montgomery, Anne of Avonlea novels
- James Fenimore Cooper, The Leatherstocking Tales

Setting. The total environment for the action of a fictional work. Setting includes time period (such as the 1890's), the place (such as downtown Warsaw), the historical milieu (such as during the Crimean War), as well as the social, political, and perhaps even spiritual realities. The setting is usually established primarily through description, though narration is used also. Some novels include frames that supply an extended description of the setting (where a character is looking back to an earlier era, an "editor" is describing the characters or the context of the tale).

Sonnet. A fourteen line poem, usually in iambic pentameter, with a varied rhyme scheme. (See Foot and Versification for explanations of iambic pentameter.) The two main types of sonnet are the Petrarchan (or Italian) and the Shakespearean. The Petrarchan Sonnet is divided into two main sections, the octave (first eight lines) and the sestet (last six lines). The octave presents a problem or situation which is then resolved or commented on in the sestet. The most common rhyme scheme is A-B-B-A A-B-B-A C-D-E C-D-E, though there is flexibility in the sestet, such as C-D-C D-C-D.

The Shakespearean Sonnet, (perfected though not invented by Shakespeare), contains three quatrains and a couplet, with more rhymes (because of the greater difficulty finding rhymes in English). The most common rhyme scheme is A-B-A-B C-D-C-D E-F-E-F G-G. In Shakespeare, the couplet often undercuts the thought created in the rest of the poem.

Spenserian Stanza. A nine-line stanza, with the first eight lines in iambic pentameter and the last line in iambic hexameter (called an Alexandrine). The rhyme scheme is A-B-A-B B-C-B-C C. Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* is written in Spenserian stanzas.

Style. The manner of expression of a particular writer, produced by choice of words, grammatical structures, use of literary devices, and all the possible parts of language use. Some general styles might include scientific, ornate, plain, emotive. Most writers have their own particular styles.

Subplot. A subordinate or minor collection of events in a novel or drama. Most subplots have some connection with the main plot, acting as foils to, commentary on, complications of, or support to the theme of, the main plot. Sometimes two opening subplots merge into a main plot.

Symbol. Something that on the surface is its literal self but which also has another meaning or even several meanings. For example, a sword may be a sword and also symbolize justice. A symbol may be said to embody an idea. There are two general types of symbols: universal symbols that embody universally recognizable meanings wherever used, such as light to symbolize knowledge, a skull to symbolize death, etc., and constructed symbols that are given symbolic meaning by the way an author uses them in a literary work, as the white whale becomes a symbol of evil in *Moby Dick*.

Tone. The writer's attitude toward his readers and his subject; his mood or moral view. A writer can be formal, informal, playful, ironic, and especially, optimistic or pessimistic. While both Swift and Pope are satirizing much the same subjects, there is a profound difference in their tone.

Travesty. A work that treats a serious subject frivolously-- ridiculing the dignified. Often the tone is mock serious and heavy handed.

Utopian novel. A novel that presents an ideal society where the problems of poverty, greed, crime, and so forth have been eliminated. Examples:

- Thomas More, Utopia
- Samuel Butler, Erewhon
- Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward

Verisimilitude. How fully the characters and actions in a work of fiction conform to our sense of reality. To say that a work has a high degree of verisimilitude means that the work is very realistic and believable--it is "true to life."

Versification. Generally, the structural form of a verse, as revealed by scansion. Identification of verse structure includes the name of the metrical type and the name designating number of feet:

- Monometer: 1 foot
- Dimeter: 2 feet
- Trimeter: 3 feet
- Tetrameter: 4 feet
- Pentameter: 5 feet
- Hexameter: 6 feet
- Heptameter: 7 feet
- Octameter: 8 feet
- Nonameter: 9 feet

The most common verse in English poetry is iambic pentameter. See foot for more information.

Western. A novel set in the western United States featuring the experiences of cowboys and frontiersmen. Many are little more than adventure novels or even pulp fiction, but some have literary value. Examples:

- Walter Van Tilburg Clark, The Ox-Bow Incident
- Owen Wister, The Virginian