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ENGLISH

THE TALE AND THE SHORT STORY

- Dr. S. Vasu

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THE TALE AND THE SHORT STORY

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THE TALE AND THE SHORT STORY

"A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman." – Thomas Hardy

1) Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (14th century) [England]

When that April with his showers sweet
The drought of March has pierced root deep,
And bathed each vein with liquor of such power
That engendered from it is the flower
– The opening lines of "The General Prologue"

With empty hand you will no falcon lure.
– from "The Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale"

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- **The month of April**
  - ❖ ***The Canterbury Tales*** opens with an optimistic tone: "**When that April with his showers sweet**". Here, **spring** with its sweet showers symbolizes fertility and faith, and it has not only renewed the earth but also revived the spirit of people. So, encouraged by favourable weather, they decide to go on a pilgrimage to cleanse themselves.
  - ❖ By contrast, T. S. Eliot's modernist poem ***The Waste Land*** (1922) begins with the reversal of its Chaucerian counterpart: "**April is the cruellest month**." Because, new life has to struggle its way through the hard land. Paradoxically, after a few lines, Eliot writes: "**Winter kept us warm, covering** / Earth in forgetful snow, feeding / A little life with dried tubers."

- **The Structure of *The Canterbury Tales***
  The General Prologue — The Twenty-four Tales — "Chaucer's Retraction"

- Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is a **frame tale** containing a collection of **24 tales**.
  - ❖ The framing story is about a group of pilgrims **(narrator + some 29 pilgrims)** gathering at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, across the Thames from London and travelling to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket in Canterbury, Kent.
  - ❖ **Harry Bailey**, the host of the Tabard Inn, joins with these **30 pilgrims** and suggests a storytelling contest while travelling. Accordingly, each of the 30 pilgrims has to tell four tales: two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. And, the best storyteller is promised a free meal at Tabard Inn by the Host.

❖ It should be noted here that there are **some discrepancies** when it comes to the exact number of pilgrims. In the General Prologue, we find this statement: **"Some nine and twenty** in a company / Of sundry persons who had chanced to fall / In fellowship". However, through the detailed description of each of the pilgrims in the General Prologue, we gather that **there are 30 pilgrims, excluding the Narrator and the Host**.

❖ Further, five miles from Canterbury, **two newcomers** join the pilgrims: **a Canon and his Yeoman** (both are alchemists). However, **the Canon leaves** as he does not want to be exposed. On the other hand, **the Canon's Yeoman stays** and revels their secret trade in his story ('The Canon's Yeoman's Tale').

❖ Thus, we can make the following list of characters in the framing story:

The Narrator (Chaucer)
The Host (Harry Bailey)
30 pilgrims (at the Tabard Inn)
2 newcomers (1 leaves)

❖ Nevertheless, traditionally, scholars believe *The Canterbury Tales* is supposed to have **120 tales** (30 pilgrims x 4 tales). However, **only 24 tales were completed**, thereby making this collection of tales an unfinished one.

❖ Even of the 24 tales, the narrator's "The Tale of Sir Thopas" is incomplete as it was stopped by the Host who considered it really bad and so the narrator told another one ("The Tale of Melibee"). Similarly, "The Monk's Tale" is incomplete as it was interrupted by the Knight and the Host as they were bored by the series of tragedies related by the Monk.

❖ Further, "The Squire's Tale" and "The Cook's Tale" are left unfinished by the author.

❖ Since the narrator (Chaucer) tells two tales out of the 24, we can conclude that **only 23 pilgrims tell tales**.

❖ **Two tales** are **in prose**: "The Tale of Melibee" (also called "The Tale of Melibeus) and "The Parson's Tale".

▪ The Portraits of the Pilgrims (in the General Prologue)

1. The Knight

- He is **the first pilgrim described** by the narrator, and also **the first one to tell a tale**.
- Portrayed as "a truly perfect, gentle knight", he has fought in numerous battles across the world: in Alexandria, Prussia, Latvia, Russia, Granada . . .
- Of mortal battles he has fought **fifteen.**
- Returning from his voyage recently, he has decided to go on a pilgrimage.

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2. The Squire [‘squire’ = an attendant to a knight before becoming a knight himself]

- He is a 20-year-old bachelor and is **the son of the Knight**.
- He has curly hair and is “**as fresh as is the month of May”.**
- Preoccupied with winning his ladylove, he sleeps “no more than does a nightingale”.

3. The Yeoman [‘yeoman’ = a servant in a royal household]

- Dressed in a woodman’s clothes and bearing **a mighty bow** and arrows like a hunter, he travels as **a servant to both the Knight and his son the Squire**.
- He looks like a forester to the narrator.

4. The Prioress

- Her name is **Madame Eglentine**, and she is the first pilgrim mentioned by a name and the first religious figure to be described.
- She speaks faulty French and wears a brooch with the letter **“A”**, meaning ‘Amor vincit omnia’ — **Love conquers all**.
- She appears **pretentious** to the narrator as she strains a lot to imitate the upper class. She wants to be perfect at table manners painstakingly.
- She **sheds tears on seeing a mouse caught in a trap**, but she never gives the leftovers to the poor. Instead, she feeds her dog with “roasted flesh, or milk and fine white bread”

5, 6, 7, 8. Little Nun and Three Priests

- The Prioress is accompanied by a little nun and three priests, but they are not described in detail.

9. The Monk

- The second religious figure to be described, the Monk has **abandoned his monastic life**, and instead pursues worldly pleasures. So, he does not follow St. Augustine’s instruction that monks should perform manual labour.
- Instead, he rides all day and night and has “full many a blooded horse” in his stable. And, he **loves hunting** hares and feasts on roasted swan.
- He is **fat and has bulging eyes.** He is **bald** and his head shines like any glass.

10. The Friar

[‘friar’ = a member of one of the four mendicant orders: Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans. As a wandering mendicant, he who lives in poverty and serves people.]

- The Friar is **corrupt** and is ironically described as “**a noble pillar of his Order**”, and his throat is “as lily of the May”.
- “This worthy limiter” is named **Hubert.**
- He attracts a lot of confessors as he **sells forgiveness** and prescribes easy and fake penance. He lisps “a little, out of wantonness, to make his English soft upon his tongue”.
- He avoids lepers, but flirts with barmaids.

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11. The Merchant

- A “worthy man”, he depends on the sea for his trade.
- He **seems to be in debt.** Though he talks a lot about how much he gained, he never touches on how much he lost.
- He **has a forked beard** and is motley-dressed.

12. The Clerk

- A **poor Oxford scholar**, he looks as thin as his horse.
- His clothes are threadbare. He “would rather have at his bed’s head some **twenty books**, all bound in black and red, **of Aristotle** and his philosophy than rich robes”.
- His friends help him buy books and in return he keeps them in his prayers.
- His speech is full of moral virtue, and “gladly would he learn and gladly teach”.

13. The Man of Law

- As a lawyer of high renown, he demands “large fees” and buys too many robes than he could afford to own.
- He has **an extensive knowledge of all the legal cases a**nd judgements since the time of King William I (1099).

14. The Franklin

[franklin = a free landowner but not of noble birth]

- He is **“Epicurus’ very son”**, living his life to his heart’s content. The philosopher Epicurus (321–270 BCE) believed that life is meant to be spent on pursuing sensual pleasures and eating excellent food.
- As hospitable as Saint Julian, the Franklin throws parties to everyone. He prefers his bread and ale perfectly made, and he **has the best wine cellar in his town**.
- The dining table in his home is always covered with numerous items of food all day long. As an epicurean, he changes his diet according to the season and his mood.

15, 16, 17, 18, 19. Haberdasher, Carpenter, Arras-maker, Dyer, Weaver

[Haberdasher = a dealer in items of sewing such as thread and buttons
Arras-maker = a maker of tapestry or curtains and carpets]

- The Haberdasher, Carpenter, Arras-maker, Dyer, and Weaver are **traders** and they all **belong to** “one sober, great fraternity” – **a guild** (which is similar to the modern-day trade union).
- Their well-adorned clothes reveal their **prosperity**, and their weapons are “not cheaply trimmed with brass, but all with silver”.
- They **aspire to hold higher social positions** such as an alderman (a chief of a county or borough). And, equally, their wives wear showy robes and enjoy being addressed “Madam” as though they were royalty.

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20. The Cook

- He is **brought along by the traders**, which again shows their prosperity.
- He is good at cooking as "he could roast and seethe and broil and fry, / And make a good thick soup, and bake a pie".
- However, the Cook seems very ill as he **has "a deadly sore"** (the ulcer: an open wound that fails to heal) **on his leg**.
- From "The Prologue to the Cook's Tale" , we gather that the name of the Cook is **Roger**:

  "If, since they named me Roger of Ware,
  I ever heard Miller so fooled for a lark,
  A malicious trick and done in the dark!"

21. The Seaman

- This **sailor of Dartmouth** town has seen many a tempest, and his vessel is named Madeleine. He seems more like a pirate as he sends "home to every land" those he has overpowered at sea.
- He **never has a conscience** and sneaks "full many a draught of wine" from the traders while they are sleeping.

22. The Doctor of Physic (The Physician)

- He knows the cause of and medicine for every sickness, or so he claims.
- **Grounded in astronomy**, he can diagnose all afflictions based on the symptoms listed down by his patients and based on their horoscopes. Medieval belief: one's health depends on one's planetary signs and on the balance of the four humours – blood, phlegm, black pile, yellow pile.
- He is well-read in Hippocrates and other renowned practitioners of medicine.
- He hardly reads the Bible. If he were to do so, he would understand that healing should not be associated only with money.
- In partnership with apothecaries (sellers of medicine), he makes a great deal of money. Further, the plague is a good source of income to him. He guards the gold he gains from the plague because **his true love is gold**.

23. The Wife of Bath

- She is **gap-toothed**, a bit deaf, and **good at cloth-making**. Her skill in weaving makes her an independent woman: "It put her out of all her charity. Her kerchiefs were of finest weave . . ."
- She condemns celibacy, details her experience of **five marriages** (excluding her dalliances in youth), anticipates the sixth one, and offers "remedies of love".
- From "The Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale", we get to know that her name is **Alison** and that she took her **fifth husband "for love, not for riches"**. Her **fourth husband was a "reveler"** and took control of her wealth. He always quoted women's deceitfulness from his book. When she tore three pages from that book, he landed so hard a blow on her head that she became a bit deaf. After his death, she regained her wealth and independence.

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- As she has enough means of her own (through her earnings and her inheritances from five marriages), she has **travelled around the world**: “Three times she’d journeyed to Jerusalem; And many a foreign stream she’d had to stem; At Rome she’d been, and she’d been in Boulogne, In Spain at Santiago, and at Cologne.”

24. The Parson

- A poor holy man **rich in virtues**, the learned Parson finds “sufficiency in little things” and even gives his own goods to the needy parishioners.
- Rain or shine, he **never neglects his sacred duties**. When any of his parishioners is sick, he visits them in person on foot even if they live far away.
- He **sets a fine example to his flock** by practising what he preaches. The maxim he lives by is: “That if gold rust, what should iron do? / For if the priest be foul in whom we trust, / No wonder if the layman turn to rust!”
- And, he never fails to scorn the sinful whether they are of high or low estate.
- Simply put, the Parson is “a shepherd not a mercenary”.

25. The Plowman

- Living in peace and perfect charity, he is the god-fearing **brother of the Parson**.
- He works hard on his land, scattering “many a load of dung”.
- He is **an honest labourer**: he pays “his taxes, fully, fairly, well, Both by his own toil and by stuff he’d sell”.

26. The Miller [Miller = one who owns a corn mill)

- A “**chunky fellow**, broad of build”, he can heave a door from hinges, if he wills. Or, he can smash the door with his head.
- He looks grotesque: his **beard is red** like a fox; there is a **wart on his nose**; his nostrils are wide; and **his mouth is as large as a furnace**.
- He is **a jester** who is full of dirty jokes.
- When he mills corn, he steals some from his customers, and in addition, he charges them thrice the actual price.
- He **can play the bagpipe well**, and he is the one who leads the company of pilgrims out of town.
- From the Host’s remark, we learn that the name of the Miller is **Robin**.

    Our Host saw that he was drunk with ale,
    And said; ‘Wait now, Robin, dear brother;
    Some fitter man shall tell us first another.
    Wait now, and let us work it all seemly.’

27. The Manciple [Manciple = a buyer of provisions for an Inn of Court]

- He is good at the art of buying food and drink and is well aware of markets.
- He outwits even the lawyers for whom he buys provisions. He purchases goods for a low price and sells the same to “the learned men” for a high price.

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28. The Reeve [Reeve = one who supervises a landowner's estate and serfs]

- A thin man who shaves "his beard as close as razor can" and **tonsures his top** like a pulpiteer's.
- He's good at foreseeing rain and drought, and at managing his lord's granary, "sheep and his oxen and his dairy, his swine and horses, all his stores, his poultry".
- He is so cunning that he has amassed more wealth than his lord. He **owns a luxurious cottage which his master cannot afford to buy**. What's more, he even lends money to his lord!
- He hails from Norfolk, which is near a town called Badeswell. And, he **always rides hindmost of the troop of pilgrims.**
- From Miller's remark, we learn that the name of the Reeve is **Oswald**.

  The drunken Miller spoke up again, / And replied: 'My dear brother Oswald,
  He who has no wife, he is no cuckold; / But I say not that therefore you are one.

29. The Summoner

[Summoner = one who serves summons to those who violate Church laws]

- He looks repulsive with his "black and scabby brows and scanty beard" (**skin disease**). No ointment is of use to free him of his boils and pimples. Even children are frightened by his features. He wears a garland on his head to get people's attention, but in vain.
- He **reeks of garlic and onion**. He drinks strong red wine and raves like a madman.
- He **pretends to speak Latin**, but he just knows a few words and phrases which he has "garnered out of some decree; No wonder, for he'd heard it all the day".
- He makes money by threatening people with false accusations and by taking bribes from wrong-doers (those who commit adultery, those who fail to pay tithe, those who lie, those who curse in God's name).

30. The Pardoner

[Pardoner = one who is authorized by the Church to sell relics and pardon sins]

- He has "**hair as yellow as wax**", and it hangs down like strings and spreads on his shoulders.
- He loudly **sings "Come hither, love, to me",** but it sounds like the bleating of a goat.
- He is **straight from Rome** with his wallet stuffed with pardons.
- The narrator compares him to "a gelding or a mare" (suggesting impotence).
- He makes money by selling pardons (forgiveness) and by **tricking innocent believers into buying fake relics**: a pillowcase as Virgin Mary's veil.
- He claims to have "a piece of the very sail / That good Saint Peter had, what time he went / Upon the sea, till Jesus changed his bent".
- Further, his collection of spurious relics includes "a latten cross set full of stones" and a bottle filled with some pig's bones.

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- **The 24 Tales**:

1. The Knight's Tale (the 1st tale; a chivalric romance; based on Boccaccio's *Teseida*)
2. The Miller's Tale (a ribald fabliau: a comic tale with a sexual element)
3. The Reeve's Tale (a ribald fabliau; Northern dialect is used for comic effect.)
4. The Cook's Tale (a bawdy story of a harlot; an incomplete story: a 58-line fragment)
5. The Man of Law's Tale (an adaptation of a popular medieval story)
6. The Wife of Bath's Tale (preceded by an 856-line prologue)
7. The Friar's Tale
8. The Summoner's Tale
9. The Clerk's Tale (borrowed from Petrarch's Latin translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*)
10. The Merchant's Tale (a story of an old husband, January, with a young wife, May)
11. The Squire's Tale (an incomplete tale)
12. The Franklin's Tale
13. The Physician's Tale
14. The Pardoner's Tale (The Pardoner gives a prologue about himself.)
15. The Shipman's Tale (a fabliau)
16. The Prioress's Tale (based on an anti-Semitic legend)
17. The Tale of Sir Thopas (Narrator's tale; a doggerel)
18. The Tale of Melibeus (Narrator's tale; written in prose; a homily: religious)
19. The Monk's Tale (The Monk lists a series of 17 tragedies.)
20. The Nun's Priest's Tale (a fable; a mock-heroic tale about the rooster Chanticleer)
21. The Second Nun's Tale
22. The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
23. The Manciple's Tale (a fable of the tell-tale crow)
24. The Parson's Tale (the final tale; written in prose; a sermon on 7 deadly sins and penance)

- "In the **858 lines** in his [Chaucer's] ***Prologue*** to the ***Canterbury Tales***, for example, there are almost **500 French** (or rather, Norman French) **loanwords**," observes Simon Winchester in *The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary*.

- **John Dryden,** in his Preface to *Fables*, *Ancient and Modern*, calls
  - **Chaucer "the father of English poetry"** and comments on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*: "'Tis sufficient to say . . . that **here is God's Plenty**":
    "He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours (as we now call them) of the whole English nation, in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons."

  - Further, Dryden adds:
    "From Chaucer the purity of the English Tongue began . . ."
    "Chaucer, I confess, is **a rough Diamond**; and must first be **polish'd e'er he shines**."

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▪ The General Prologue: An Estates Satire

❖ The 'General Prologue' to *The Canterbury Tales* provides not only the character sketches of the pilgrims but also the satiric portrayal of the 14th-century 'estates' (social classes). So, the 'General Prologue' can be aptly called an "estates satire"**.**

❖ It was said that there were **three major Medieval 'estates'**:

- The 1st estate: the Clergy
  – those who do clerical duties for the church and pray; e.g. the Monk
- The 2nd estate: the Nobility
  – those who own lands and fight in wars; e.g. the Knight
- The 3rd estate: the Peasantry
  – those who work under a feudal system: e.g. the Plowman

❖ Though Chaucer lists the pilgrims in a hierarchical order, he does so to poke fun at the very stratification. Being aware of social mobility, he was not inclined to pigeonhole people. He presents an amalgam of characters in *The Canterbury Tales* with their follies and pleasantness. In Dryden's words: the General Prologue has "God's plenty".

❖ An "**estates satire**" is a medieval literary genre concerned with the social life. And, it is a kind of satire that depicts the various representational aspects of the estates (such as occupation, clothing, food habits, physiognomy, language) and simultaneously parodies the same aspects by exposing contradictions, stereotypes, pretensions and hypocrisy.

❖ For instance, the narrator exposes the pretentious nature of the Prioress through contradictions.

- Firstly, the Prioress takes pains to imitate the way of court and tries to speak in French but her French is so bad that the French themselves cannot grasp her. The narrator puts this contradiction across with a hint of an irony:

  > "And fair French she spoke, all elegantly,
  > After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
  > For French of Paris was not hers to know."

  In this context, the readers can understand that the French honorific before her name – Madame Eglentine – is showy and functions as an emblem of her vanity.

- Secondly, the Prioress is a nun who is in charge of a convent and she is supposed to lead a *humble* life, but the elaborate description of her table manners in the General Prologue reveals that she is *dainty*.

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> "At meals she had been taught well withal;
> And from her lips she let no morsel fall,
> Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
> Well could she take a morsel and then keep
> The slightest drop from falling on her breast;
> Courtesy it was that pleased her best.
> Her upper lip she would wipe so clean
> That in her cup no trace of grease was seen
> When she had drunk her draught; and to eat,
> In a most seemly manner took her meat."

- Lastly, the narrator implicitly refers to her failure to carry out the duties and social roles assigned to her 'estate' (the Clergy / the Church). As a nun, the Prioress is obliged to be charitable (to feed the poor) when she can, but she rather feeds her dogs with "roasted flesh, or milk, and fine white bread". So her callousness is ironically delineated: "She would weep if she but saw a mouse / Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled." What's more ironic is that she wears a brooch with the letter "A", which stands for 'Amor vincit omnia' — Love conquers all.

❖ A detailed study of the other pilgrims will show how Chaucer has exploited the genre of 'estates satire' in *The Canterbury Tales.*

- **William Blake's** line engraving "**Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims**" (1810)

- **Fabliau**

❖ A short verse tale written in octosyllabic couplets in French
❖ In English, 'fabliau' refers to a comic, ribald tale; that is, a satirically humourous tale with a sexual element.
❖ Examples: Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale" and "The Reeve's Tale".

- **Doggerel** (badly written verse)
  - Crude verse whose rhymes are clumsy, rhythm is monotonous, subject matter is shallow and trivial
  - For example, in *The Canterbury Tales*, the narrator's (Chaucer's) tale **"The Tale of Sir Thopas"** is a doggerel and the Host interrupts him. So, the narrator tells another tale "The Tale of Melibee"
  - Some poets deliberately imitate doggerel for comic effect. For instance, *Colyn Cloute* (1519) by **John Skelton**.

- '**Frame narrative**' or 'frame story':
  - A story in which another story is related, or a story in which several other stories are told.
  - For example, in ***The Arabian Nights***, the story of the ruler Shahryār and his wife **Scheherazade** functions as a frame story, in which Scheherazade tells several stories to Shahryār, including "Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp", "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves", "The Seven Voyages of Sindbad, the Sailor", and so on.
  - The title of Salman Rushdie's 2015 novel ***Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*** refers to the 1001 nights spent by Scheherazade in telling her stories in *The Arabian Nights.*
  - In *The Canterbury Tales,* the storytelling competition is the frame story, in which the pilgrims tell their tales to relieve the weariness that sets in during their journey to Canterbury.
  - Modern **frame stories**:
    - Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)
    - Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847)
    - Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899)
    - Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)
  - The French critic **Gérard Genette** uses the term "**metanarrative**", in his book *Narrative Discourse*, to refer to 'a narrative within a narrative' or 'a story within a story'.

- Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* was influenced by the Italian writer Giovanni **Boccaccio's frame story *The Decameron***.
  - In it, a group of seven women and three men escapes from the plague-ridden Florence during the time of the Black Death and stays in a deserted villa in the countryside of Fiesole.
  - During their two-week stay in the villa, each of the ten characters tells a tale in the evening (except for four days) to pass time.
  - So, at the end of their stay, they have told **a hundred tales** (ten tales a day by ten characters for ten days).

- Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400), **"the Father of English Literature",** served as a diplomat and civil servant under three successive kings: Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV.

- **The Name: Chaucer**
  - ❖ Old French : *chaussier* — 'a shoemaker'
  - ❖ French : *chaussure* — 'a shoe'
  - ❖ Did Chaucer's ancestors have a humble beginning?

- **The works of Chaucer** are customarily divided into **three groups**: the French, the Italian, and the English.

  ❖ **The French Group**:
  - *The Romaunt of the Rose*, an allegorical poem in octosyllabic couplets, is based on *Le Romaunt de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung.
  - *The Book of the Duchess* or *The Death of Blanche* (1369), in octosyllabic couplets
  - *Complaint unto Pity*, in which Chaucer used "rhyme royal" (a 7-line decasyllabic stanza rhyming *ababbcc*) for the first time.
  - *The Complaint of Mars* and *A Complaint to his Lady*

  ❖ **The Italian Group:**
  - *Troilus and Criseyde* (written in the rhyme royal)
  - *The Parliament of Fowls* (written in the rhyme royal)
  - *Anelida and Arcite* (written in the rhyme royal)
  - *The House of Fame* (written in octosyllabic couplets)
  - *The Legend of Good Women* (written in the heroic couplet), which contains nine stories of famous (ten) women: Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle and Medea, Lucrèce, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis, and Hypermnestra. This work is based on Ovid's *Heroldes,* and Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and *Vitae Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium*

  ❖ **The English Group:**
  - *The Canterbury Tales*
  - *The Complaint of Chaucer to His (Empty) Purse*, whose purpose is to persuade King Henry IV to renew his annuity, but is written in the form of a love poem to his purse

- ***The Book of the Duchess*** by Chaucer
  - ❖ It is considered an elegy for the death of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche of Lancaster.
  - ❖ John of Gaunt, the third son of King Edward III and the uncle of King Richard II, was the patron of Chaucer.
  - ❖ Written in octosyllabic couplets, *The Book of the Duchess* is a dream-poem in 1,334 lines.
  - ❖ Its opening is influenced by the French writer Froissart's *Paradys d'Amours*, which in turn is indebted to Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*.

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- In Chaucer's elegy, an insomniac narrator, to pass the time, reads the story of Ceyx (who is dead at sea) and his wife Alcyone from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.
- Alcyone prays to Juno (goddess of marriage), who asks Morpheus (god of sleep) to go to Alcyone with the body of Ceyx. Later, Alcyone awakes to find Ceyx gone after listening to his consolation.
- Then, the narrator prays to Morpheus and promptly falls asleep. In the dream, on hearing the sounds of hunting, he dreams of waking in a chamber, whose window-glass is painted with images from the Troy story and the walls with images from the *Romance of the Rose*.
- Following a hunting party (of the emperor Octovian), he finds a knight dressed in black under an oak dress. The man in black (referring to John of Gaunt) tells the narrator that he has lost his queen in the game of chess to Fortune, signifying the loss of his beloved.
- The knight praises the lady "White" ('blanche' in French means 'white') comparing her with Penelope and Lucrece. He blurts out the death of White and then rides off to his castle. When a bell strikes twelve, the narrator awakens from the dream and finds himself still clutching his book. He pledges to relate his dream in the form of a poem, which the readers know is *The Book of the Duchess.*

- **Francis Meres**, *Palladis Tamia: Wits Treasury* (1598), declares:
  - "As Homer is reputed the Prince of Greek poets, and Petrarch of Italian poets: so Chaucer is accounted **the God of English poets.**"

- **Edmund Spenser**, in *The Faerie Queene*, proclaims:
  - "Dan Chaucer, **well of English undefiled**
    On Fame's eternal beadroll worthy to be filed."

- For **Roger Ascham** (known for his book on archery *Toxophilus*):
  - **Chaucer is 'the English Homer'.**

- John **Lydgate,** in *The Fall of Princes*, calls
  - **Chaucer the "lodestar"** of English, meaning 'a guiding star, especially the Pole Star' or 'an inspiring person'.

- **Thomas Hoccleve**
  - Thomas Hoccleve (1368– 1450) knew Chaucer (1340–1400) personally and his works were heavily influenced by Chaucer.
  - Hoccleve's ***The Regiment of Princes*** (1412) was written to offer advice on the virtues and vices of rulers to Prince Henry, the future Henry V of England.
  - *The Regiment of Princes* also laments the death of his master and includes the **portrait of Chaucer** (also called '**The Hoccleve Portrait of Chaucer**'):

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- **Scottish Chaucerians**
  - Also called "Makaris', meaning 'makers' or 'poets'
  - Scottish Chaucerians refer to the Scottish courtly poets who were vibrant between 1425 and 1550, and they are:
    - Robert Henryson
    - William Dunbar
    - Gavin Douglas
    - David Lyndsay
  - This group is also expanded to include James I of Scotland and Harry the Minstrel.

- **Matthew Arnold**, in "The Study of Poetry", on Chaucer:
  - "**With him is born our real poetry**."

- **Alfred Tennyson**, "A Dream of Fair Women", writes:

  The morning star of song, who made
  His music heard below;
  Dan Chaucer, **the first warbler**, whose sweet breath
  Preluded those melodious bursts that fill
  The spacious times of great Elizabeth
  With sounds that echo still."
  ["warbler", songbird / songster].

- **G. K. Chesterton**, in *Chaucer* (1932), writes:
  "Now even if we consider **Chaucer** only as a humorist, he was in this very exact sense **a great humorist**. And by this I do not only mean a very good humorist. I mean a humorist in the grand style; a humorist whose broad outlook embraced the world as a whole, and saw even great humanity against a background of greater things."

- **Ezra Pound**, in *ABC of Reading* (1934), writes:
  - "From Chaucer you can learn
  - (1) whatever came over into the earliest English that one can read without a dictionary, but for which a glossary is needed;
  - (2) and the specifically ENGLISH quality or component. Landor's dialogues of Chaucer, Petrarch and Boccaccio, are the best real criticism of Chaucer we have."

- The Theseus and Hippolyta of **Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*** might have been **based on** the Theseus and Hippolyta of **"The Knight's Tale"** in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

- Influenced by Chaucer and Boccaccio, the American poet **H. W. Longfellow** wrote *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863), a collection of narrative poems, of which "Paul Revere's Ride" is still famous.

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2) Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819) [the US]

On waking, he found himself on the green knoll whence he had first seen the old man of the glen. He rubbed his eyes—it was a bright sunny morning. The birds were hopping and twittering among the bushes, and the eagle was wheeling aloft, and breasting the pure mountain breeze. "Surely," thought Rip, "I have not slept here all night." He recalled the occurrences before he fell asleep. The strange man with a keg of liquor—the mountain ravine—the wild retreat among the rocks—the woe-begone party at ninepins—the flagon—"Oh! that flagon! that wicked flagon!" thought Rip—"what excuse shall I make to Dame Van Winkle!"

He looked round for his gun, but in place of the clean well-oiled fowling-piece, he found an old firelock lying by him, the barrel incrusted with rust, the lock falling off, and the stock worm-eaten. He now suspected that the grave roysterers of the mountain had put a trick upon him, and having dosed him with liquor, had robbed him of his gun. Wolf, too, had disappeared, but he might have strayed away after a squirrel or partridge. He whistled after him and shouted his name, but all in vain; the echoes repeated his whistle and shout, but no dog was to be seen.

[. . .] "Ah, poor man, Rip Van Winkle was his name, but it's **twenty years** since he went away from home with his gun, and never has been heard of since—his dog came home without him; but whether he shot himself, or was carried away by the Indians, nobody can tell. I was then but a little girl."

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- ***Parallel reading*:**
  - H. G. Wells's ***When the Sleeper Wakes*** (1899) – in this dystopian science fiction, the protagonist Graham takes drugs for insomnia, which results in his falling into a coma. He wakes up after sleeping for 203 years (1897–2100). And, he finds himself the ruler of the world as his inheritance has been used by the 'White Council' to establish a new world order. But, when the Sleeper wakes, the "Big Brother" status attributed to him is challenged by the rebels. So the tyrannical 'White Council' has to act fast to prevent him from joining the rebels and starting a revolution.
  - Edward Bellamy's ***Looking Backward: 2000–1887*** (1888) – in this utopian novel, the hero Julian West falls into a hypnosis-induced sleep and wakes up after 113 years. And, he tries to come to grips with the new reality.
  - Carol Ann Duffy's poem "**Mrs Rip Van Winkle**" (from *The World's Wife*)
    "And while he slept
    I found some hobbies for myself.

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Painting. Seeing the sights I'd always dreamed about:
The Leaning Tower. The Pyramids. The Taj Mahal.
I made a little watercolour of them all."

- Washington Irving's another famous story is **"The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"** (1820), which contains the legendary Headless Horseman.

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3) Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat" (1842) [Russia]

A rumour suddenly spread through St. Petersburg that a dead man had taken to appearing on the Kalinkin Bridge and its vicinity at night in the form of a tchinovnik seeking a stolen cloak, and that, under the pretext of its being the stolen cloak, he dragged, without regard to rank or calling, every one's cloak from his shoulders, be it cat-skin, beaver, fox, bear, sable; in a word, every sort of fur and skin which men adopted for their covering.

One of the department officials saw the dead man with his own eyes and immediately recognised in him **Akakiy Akakievitch**. This, however, inspired him with such terror that he ran off with all his might, and therefore did not scan the dead man closely, but only saw how the latter threatened him from afar with his finger. Constant complaints poured in from all quarters that the backs and shoulders, not only of titular but even of court councillors, were exposed to the danger of a cold on account of the frequent dragging off of their cloaks.

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- Gogol's "The Overcoat" is considered the foundation of Russian realism. And, it is said that **Dostoyevsky** remarked: **"We have all come out of Gogol's greatcoat."**
- Fyodor **Dostoevsky's first novel *Poor Folk*** (1846) is an epistolary novel, and in it the two major characters Makar Devushkin and Varvara Dobroselova exchange letters as well as books. One of the books sent by Dobroselova to Devushkin is Gogol's "The Overcoat", and Devushkin is offended as he feels that he and Gogol's Akakiy Akakievitch are leading a similar impoverished life.
- The title of **Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*** (2003) refers to Gogol, after whom the major character of this novel is named.

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4) Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) [The US]

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!— tear up the planks!—here, here!—it is the beating of his hideous heart!"

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- From the Mexican writer **Carlos Fuentes's *This I Believe***: *An A-Z of a Writer's Life*:
  "The person who truly reveals the terror of the North American fantastic . . . is Edgar Allan Poe, whose great discovery is that fantasy occurs not in castles on the Rhine or in Roman dungeons but in the heads and hearts of human beings. 'The Tell-Tale Heart' could be the title for everything he ever wrote . . ."
- From Poe's ***Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*** (1840):
  [Grotesque = (physical and psychical) deformity
  Arabesque = (fantastic and narrative) intricacy]
  In the "Preface", Poe says that his tales cannot be termed "Germanic" (pseudo-horror) as the terror in his productions "are not of Germany, but of the soul".

  from the "Preface":
  I speak of these things here, because I am led to think it is this prevalence of the "Arabesque" in my serious tales, which has induced one or two critics to tax me, in all friendliness, with what they have been pleased to term "Germanism" and gloom. The charge is in bad taste, and the grounds of the accusation have not been sufficiently considered. Let us admit, for the moment, that the "phantasy-pieces" now given are Germanic, or what not. [. . .] But the truth is that, with a single exception, there is no one of these stories in which the scholar should recognise the distinctive features of that species of pseudo-horror which we are taught to call Germanic, for no better reason than that some of the secondary names of German literature have become identified with its folly. **If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but of the soul, – that I have deduced this terror only from its legitimate sources, and urged it only to its legitimate results.**

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5) Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) [The US]

[Opening line]

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge.

. . .

[Last lines]

I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*

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- "The Cask of Amontillado" is a chilling **tale of revenge**.
  - **Montresor** has sustained a "thousand" insults from **Fortunato**; or Montresor, an unreliable narrator, claims so.
  - Thus, in the Italian season of carnival, Montresor lures his enemy Fortunato — who takes pride as a connoisseur of wine — to his family vault to sample a cask of Amontillado.
  - In the underground catacombs, Montresor gets Fortunato drunk, leads him to a dark recess, chains him to a wall, and bricks up the entry to the recess. In other words, Fortunato is buried alive.
  - And, Montresor remembers his revenge after "half a century", implying that he has never been caught for murder.

- Edgar Allan Poe is considered **the Father of Detective Fiction**
  - His 1841 short story "**The Murders in the Rue Morgue**" is the first modern detective story.
  - This story is one of his three detective stories or "**tales of ratiocination**" and the other two being:
    - "**The Mystery of Marie Rogêt"** (1842)
    - "**The Purloined Letter**" (1844)
  - These three stories feature a fictional **detective named C. Auguste Dupin**
  - Dupin is the prototype for
    - Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes
    - Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple
    - G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown.
  - Poe's "**ratiocination**" refers to 'deductive reasoning', putting two and two together!

- **"Little grey cells"**
  - The Belgian detective **Hercule Poirot** in Agatha Christie's murder mysteries claims that his method of detection involves the use of his superior "little grey cells", referring to the grey matter of the brain; thus, his brainpower (intelligence).
  - from Christie's 1926 novel ***The Murder of Roger Ackroyd***:

    Poirot's gaze took on an admiring quality.

    "You have been of a marvellous promptness," he observed. "How exactly did you go to work, if I may ask?"

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"Certainly," said the inspector. "To begin with—method. That's what I always say—method!"
"Ah!" cried the other. "That, too, is my watchword. Method, order, and the little grey cells."
"The cells?" said the inspector, staring.
"The little grey cells of the brain," explained the Belgian.
"Oh, of course; well, we all use them, I suppose."
"In a greater or lesser degree," murmured Poirot. "And there are, too, differences in quality. Then there is the psychology of a crime. One must study that."

Symbolism

- A **symbol** is an object, being, place or event that stands for an idea or concept. For instance, 'the olive branch' is the symbol of peace. And, 'spine' symbolizes 'courage'.
- Poe is known for his use of suggestive symbols, dreams and visions to put across the complex design of his characters' mind. For example, in "The Cask of Amontillado", **the coat of arms of Montresor's family** – 'a huge foot crushing the snake whose fangs are embedded in the heel' – symbolizes 'vengeance'. And, the vengeful Montresor "vowed revenge" when Fortunato "ventured upon insult".
- Poe's works influenced the writing style of **Charles Baudelaire**, who was one of the prominent French symbolist poets.
- Other **French symbolist poets** include:
  - Stéphane Mallarmé
  - Paul Verlaine, and
  - Arthur Rimbaud
- For Mallarmé, **symbolism** evokes an object "little by little so as to reveal a mood".
- And, the aim of symbolists is to make poems **suggestive by evoking subjective moods** in the reader through the use of symbols.
- The symbolist poets avoid making direct statements about external reality and so the readers have to discover the referent (idea or concept) of the symbols.
- Thus, for the Romantic poet **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**, the symbol "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible: and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative" (*Biographia Literaria* 1817).
- The symbols with their suggestiveness tantalize the readers, who become active participants in constructing the meaning of symbolist texts. For instance, in **Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Minister's Black Veil"**, what the black veil worn by Reverend Mr. Hooper symbolizes is left to the readers, who become as inquisitive as Hooper's congregation.
- A significant work on symbolism is the English writer **Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*** (1899).

Red herring

- In detective fiction, the term 'red herring' refers to '**a false clue**'.
- Through this device, writers divert the readers' attention and make them guessing about the identity of the killer and the mystery behind the murder.
- The readers are often (mis)led to wrong conclusions and they are surprised by how the literary detective unties the knots in the murder mystery.
- **The etymology of "red herring"**:

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- Herring is a long, silver-coloured sea fish. When it is cured, it turns red in colour. And, it gives off a foul smell.
- In the 17th century, criminals escaping from prisons would drag the strong-smelling herring to cover their track.
- The pursuing dogs were distracted by the putrid smell and couldn't follow the trail of the criminals. Thus, the phrase 'red herring' came to mean 'a false clue' in detective stories.

- "**Textual Analysis: Poe's 'Valdemar**'" is an essay by Roland Barthes.
- "**Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter**'" by **Jacques Lacan**
- The American writer Matthew Pearl wrote the novel ***The Poe Shadow*** (2006), in which a young lawyer tries to solve the mystery behind Poe's death in 1849.
- ***Poe: A Life Cut Short*** (2008) is a biography by Peter Ackroyd.

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6) Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death" (1842)

The "Red Death" had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal, or so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and its seal—the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains, and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution. The scarlet stains upon the body and especially upon the face of the victim, were the pest ban which shut him out from the aid and from the sympathy of his fellow-men. And the whole seizure, progress and termination of the disease, were the incidents of half an hour.

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- **"The Masque of the Red Death"**
  - Prince Prospero with his wealthy lot hides away in an abbey while the outside world is being ravaged by a deadly plague called the Red Death.
  - The Prince hosts a masquerade ball to entertain his friends.
  - A mysterious figure arrives at the ball wearing a mask that resembles the horror of the Red Death.
  - On confronting the masked stranger, the Prince lets out a cry and falls dead.
  - The guests rip the stranger's mask and costume apart and they find nothing underneath
  - To their horror, they also contract the plague and are doomed.

- **The Plague**
  - The French writer Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947) is perhaps the first literary work readers go to to read about the representation of the plague (which comes from the Latin word *plaga*, 'violent blow').
  - Camus's novel actually narrates how 'the plague' (here, a cholera outbreak) ravaged the French Algerian city of Oran.
  - Nevertheless, many an early writer has used the plague — a contagious bacterial disease — **as an essential literary backdrop**.

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- The plague-stricken Thebes sets the tone for the Greek playwright Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (430 BC).
- The outbreak of the Black Death (also called the Plague, the bubonic plague, or the Pestilence) in the fourteenth-century Florence forms the 'frame story' of the Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (14th C).

❖ Besides being employed as a backdrop, the plague has also been **portrayed allegorically** as in "The Pardoner's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales* (14th C) by the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer.

❖ Further, the **realistic narrative** of the plague could be found in abundance; for instance, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) is Daniel Defoe's account of the 1665 Great Plague of London (the city unravished by the bubonic plague). Defoe also talked about how people should quarantine themselves during the plague to avoid possible contamination in *Due Preparations for the Plague* (1722).

❖ Later, the portrayal of the cataclysm caused by the plague emerged as a **literary genre** per se: **post-apocalyptic fiction**.

- Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826)
- Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912)
- Hermann Hesse's *Narcissus and Goldmund* (1930)

❖ In sum, the plague (the Pestilence, the bubonic plague, the Black Death) has been represented as a literary backdrop, an allegory, a non-fiction, and a genre of fiction (post-apocalypse).

▪ *Cross-reference:*

1. Adieu, farewell earth's bliss!
   This world uncertain is:
   Fond are life's lustful joys,
   Death proves them all but toys.
   None from his darts can fly;
   I am sick, I must die—
   Lord, have mercy on us!
   – **Thomas Nashe's "In Time of Pestilence"** (1593)

2. O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
   Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
   Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
   Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
   Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
   Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
   – **P. B. Shelley's** "Ode to the West Wind"

▪ Cholera

❖ Apart from the plague (a fatal bacterial disease), the literary world has representations of other epidemic diseases such as cholera:

- the German writer Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912)

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- the French philosopher Albert Camus's *The Plague* (1947, a cholera outbreak in French Algeria)
- the British author Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil* (1925)
- the Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), and so on.

- **Polio**
  - ❖ J. G. Farrell's *The Lung* (1965)
  - ❖ Philip Roth's *Nemesis* (2010)

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7) Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" (1843)

Pluto—this was the cat's name—was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets.

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- ***The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*** (1838) is **the only novel by Poe**.
- **The Tomahawk Man**
  - ❖ For his hard-hitting criticism, Edgar Allan Poe was called "the tomahawk man" (tomahawk, an axe used as a weapon).
  - ❖ The transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson was annoyed by Poe's 'lack of moral gravity' and called him "**the Jingle Man**" (referring to the rhymes in "The Raven").
  - ❖ Poe in turn called **the Transcendentalists** (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau) **"Frog-Pondians**".
  - ❖ Frog Pond is a pond in Boston which was the centre of Transcendentalism, an American literary and philosophical movement that gave importance to a person's intuition, conscience, and personal revelation.
  - ❖ In the 1840s "Longfellow War", he accused **H. W. Longfellow** of "imitation" in the essay "Mr. Longfellow and Other **Plagiarists**".

- **The Short Prose Tale**
  - ❖ The term '**short story**' came into being only in the late nineteenth century and Poe used 'the short prose tale' to refer to a short piece of fiction (the short story).
  - ❖ Poe defines '**the plot**' in his review of *Night and Morning* by Lytton Bulwer:
    - "*that in which no part can be displaced without ruin to the whole*.
    - It may be described as a building so dependently constructed, that to change the position of a single brick is to overthrow the entire fabric.
    - It is content to think that plot a good one, in which none of the leading incidents can be removed without detriment to the mass."
  - ❖ For Poe, one can come up with a good plot (an aesthetic arrangement of story events) if one gives a great deal of thought to the ending (**dénouement**). In his essay **"The Philosophy of Composition**", Poe writes:

- "It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention."

❖ In "**A Chapter of Suggestions**", Poe says:

- "Pen should never touch paper, until at least a well-digested general purpose be established. In fiction, the dénouement— in all other composition the intended effect, should be definitely considered and arranged, before writing the first word . . ."

❖ Poe, in his **review of *Twice-Told Tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne**, put forth that a short story should be composed with a "**single effect**" in mind and be read "**at one sitting**".

- "We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal.
- During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption.
- A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect."

▪ "Closure" in the short story

John Gerlach discusses, in great detail, the endings in the short story in his 1985 work *Toward the End: Closure and Structure in the American Short Story.*

❖ "The short story blends the brevity and intensity of the lyric poem with the narrative traits (plot, character, and theme) of the novel, but it blends with a sacrifice: the brevity is not so brief, the intensity not so intense, and the novelistic luxury of multiple plot lines spanning broad vistas of time and space [. . .] must be forgone.

❖ The word most commonly used now to discuss endings is "closure".

❖ Closure characterizes all literary works in varying degrees; it is a natural property of any art form that moves in time, revealing itself gradually.

❖ [A]ll short stories use at least one of **five signals of closure**: solution of the central problem, natural termination, completion of antithesis, manifestation of a moral, and encapsulation.

❖ The short story as a genre shares each of these signals with poetry, the novel, and drama, though the central problem and the moral are particularly significant for the short story.

❖ **The central problem** is unique because short stories, more often than novels, tend to focus on only one problem—to strive, as Poe put it, for a single effect. Most commonly a character faces a problem or desires to reach a goal. Closure is achieved if he solves the problem or reaches the goal.

❖ **Natural termination**, which is not unique to the short story, is the completion of an action that has a predictable end. If the subject of a story is a character's entire life, death is the natural termination [. . .] If one goes on a visit or trip, a return at some point is implied.

❖ **Completion of antithesis** [. . .] Circularity, a return to any aspect of the beginning, through verbal or situation echo, is one form of antithesis. More broadly defined antithesis is any opposition, often characterized by irony, that indicates something has polarized into

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extremes. [. . .] Many of Aesop's fables end with an antithetical statement, one with epigrammatic force.

- **Manifestation of the moral** [. . .] is unique to the short story. The short story has many sources, one of which is the parable or exemplum. [. . .] Our sense of what constitutes a moral has greatly expanded since Aesop's time. More broadly defined, the moral has become the theme or character's (or reader's) self-realization. [. . .] The reader's perception that a theme has emerged can give a short story a sense of having closed.
- **Encapsulation**, a coda that distances the reader from the story by altering the point of view or summarizing the passage of time.
- These various levels of closure rarely operate in isolation. The problem level is usually combined with a natural terminator or an antithetical marker.

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8) Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil: A Parable" (1832)

[The US]

By the aid of his mysterious emblem—for there was no other apparent cause—he became a man of awful power over souls that were in agony for sin.

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- What the black veil worn by Reverend Mr. Hooper symbolizes is left to the readers, who become as inquisitive as Hooper's congregation.
- Hawthorne's allegorical "The Minister's Black Veil" is a psychological exploration of the notion of sin and guilt through a symbol: a black veil. This story was later published in his short-story collection ***Twice-Told Tales*** (1837 & 1842), which includes "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" and "Wakefield".
- In his 1842 review of *Twice-Told Tales* in *Graham's Magazine*, **Edgar Allan Poe** praised Hawthorne and also commented **on the novel and the short story** ("the prose tale"):

"[W]e should unhesitatingly speak of the prose tale, as Mr. Hawthorne has here exemplified it. We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal. The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*. Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption."

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9) Honoré de Balzac's "Sarrasine" (1830) [French]

"And he kissed her, despite La **Zambinella**'s efforts to avoid that passionate caress.

"'Tell me that you are a demon, that I must give you my fortune, my name, all my renown! Would you have me cease to be a sculptor? Speak.'

"'Suppose I were not a woman?' queried La Zambinella, timidly, in a sweet, silvery voice. "'A merry jest!' cried **Sarrasine**. 'Think you that you can deceive an artist's eye? Have I not, for

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ten days past, admired, examined, devoured, thy perfections? None but a woman can have this soft and beautifully rounded arm, these graceful outlines. Ah! you seek compliments!' "She smiled sadly, and murmured: "'Fatal beauty!'

"She raised her eyes to the sky. At that moment, there was in her eyes an indefinable expression of horror, so startling, so intense, that Sarrasine shuddered.

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- **The "Readerly" vs. the "Writerly"**
  - ❖ In his book *S/Z* (1970), the critic Roland Barthes does a structural analysis of Balzac's story **"Sarrasine"** and discusses it as a "writerly" text.
  - ❖ In a "writerly" text, the readers have to work things out, look for and provide meaning. In a "readerly" text, the readers accept the meaning without needing to make much effort.
  - ❖ In Barthes's words:
    - "On the one hand, there is what it is possible to write, and on the other, what it is no longer possible to write: what is within the practice of the writer and what has left it: which texts would I consent to write (to re-write), to desire, to put forth as a force in this world of mine? What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: **the *writerly***. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make **the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text**.
    - Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer of the text and its user, between its owner and its customer, between its author and its reader. **This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness** – he is intransitive; he is, in short, serious: instead of functioning himself, instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text: reading is nothing more than a *referendum*. Opposite the writerly text, then, is its countervalue, its negative, reactive value: what can be read, but not written: **the *readerly***. We call any readerly text a classic text."

- ***In common:***

  The Skin I Live In (2011), a thriller by the Spanish director Pedro Almodóvar

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10) Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (1853) [The US]

"Bartleby!"

No answer.

"Bartleby," in a louder tone.

No answer.

"Bartleby," I roared.

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

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"Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me."

"**I prefer not to**," he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared.

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- ***Parallel reading*:**
  Jean-Paul Sartre's "The Wall" (1939)

- ***Intertext:***
  The Spanish writer **Enrique Vila-Matas's *Bartleby & Co.*** (2001; trans. 2004):

[Opening paragraphs]

Twenty-five years ago, when I was very young, I published a short novel on the impossibility of love. Since then, on account of a trauma that I shall go into later, I had not written again, I stopped altogether, I became a Bartleby, and that is why I have been interested in them for some time.

We all know the Bartlebys, they are beings inhabited by a profound denial of the world. They are named after the scrivener Bartleby, a clerk in a story by Herman Melville, who has never been seen reading, not even a newspaper; who for long periods stands looking out at a pale window behind a folding screen, upon a brick wall in Wall Street; who never drinks beer, or tea and coffee, like other men; who has never been anywhere, living as he does in the office, spending even his Sundays there; who has never said who he is, or where he comes from, or whether he has any relatives in this world; who, when he is asked where he was born or given a job to do or asked to reveal something about himself, responds always by saying,

"I would prefer not to."

For some time now I have been investigating the frequent examples of Bartleby's syndrome in literature [. . .]

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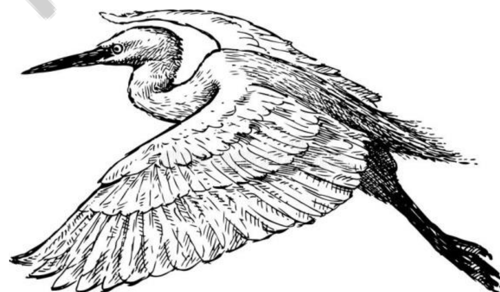
11) Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron" (1886) [The US]



The guest waked from a dream, and remembering his day's pleasure hurried to dress himself that it might sooner begin. He was sure from the way the shy little girl looked once or twice yesterday that she had at least seen the white heron, and now she must really be persuaded to tell. Here she comes now, paler than ever, and her worn old frock is torn and tattered, and smeared with pine pitch. The grandmother and the sportsman stand in the door together and

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question her, and the splendid moment has come to speak of the dead hemlock-tree by the green marsh.

But Sylvia does not speak after all, though the old grandmother fretfully rebukes her, and the young man's kind appealing eyes are looking straight in her own. He can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell.

No, she must keep silence! What is it that suddenly forbids her and makes her dumb? Has she been nine years growing, and now, when the great world for the first time puts out a hand to her, must she thrust it aside for a bird's sake? The murmur of the pine's green branches is in her ears, she remembers how the white heron came flying through the golden air and how they watched the sea and the morning together, and Sylvia cannot speak; she cannot tell the heron's secret and give its life away.

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12) Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) [The US]

There comes John, and I must put this away — he hates to have me write a word.

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- ***Parallel reading*:**

Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" (1917)

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13) Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" (1892) [England]

"Good-morning, madam," said Holmes cheerily. "My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering."

"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

"What, then?"

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"It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror." She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and gray, with restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature gray, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

"You must not fear," said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. "We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station."

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

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- **Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes**
  - The fictional detective Sherlock Holmes appears in 60 of Doyle's works: **4 novels and 56 stories**
  - Four novels: *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), *The Sign of the Four* (1890), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901–02), *The Valley of Fear* (1914–15)
  - *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) was the first work (and the novel) in which the popular sleuth Sherlock Holmes and his friend and foil Dr. Watson appeared. They stay at **221b Baker Street**, London.
  - "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891) was the first short story in which Holmes and Watson featured.
  - **Dr Joseph Bell**, a Scottish surgeon and lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, was the source of inspiration for Doyle to create Sherlock Holmes. Doyle met him in 1877 and served as his clerk at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

- ***The Strand Magazine***
  - A monthly magazine founded by George Newnes and it ran from January 1891 to March 1950
  - Most of Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories featuring the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes and his friend Dr. Watson were published in *The Strand Magazine* with illustrations by **Sidney Paget**.
  - Of the 56 stories in which Holmes appears, Paget illustrated 38 stories.

- **The 12 Best Sherlock Holmes Stories**
  - In March 1927, *The Strand Magazine* announced a competition for its readers: They should draw up a list of 12 best Holmes stories. Doyle would also come up with his list of 12 stories. A reader whose list comes close to the author's list would receive £100.
  - Here is Doyle's list of best 12 Sherlock Holmes stories:
    1. The Speckled Band ('the grim snake story')
    2. The Red-Headed League ('the originality of the plot')

3. The Dancing Men	('the originality of the plot')
4. The Final Problem	('the story which deals with the only foe who ever really extended Holmes, and which deceived the public (and Watson) into the erroneous inference of his death')
5. A Scandal in Bohemia	('the first story should go in, as it opened the path for the others, and as it has more female interest than is usual')
6. The Empty House	('the story which essays the difficult task of explaining away the alleged death of Holmes, and which also introduces such a villain as Colonel Sebastian Moran')
7. The Five Orange Pips	('though it is short it has a certain dramatic quality of its own')
8. The Second Stain	('which deal[s] with high diplomacy and intrigue')
9. The Devil's Foot	('It is grim and new.')
10. The Priory School	('for the dramatic moment when Holmes points his finger at the Duke')
11. The Musgrave Ritual	('a historical touch which gives it a little added distinction. It is also a memory from Holmes's early life')
12. The Reigate Squires	('Holmes himself shows perhaps most ingenuity')

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14) Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915) [Czech Republic]

As Gregor Samsa woke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into some kind of monstrous vermin. He lay on his hard, armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little, he could see his curved brown abdomen, divided by arch-shaped ridges, and domed so high that the bedspread, on the brink of slipping off, could hardly stay put. His many legs, miserably thin in comparison with his size otherwise, flickered helplessly before his eyes.

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- In "The Metamorphosis", the salesman **Gregor Samsa** wakes up one morning and finds himself transformed into a giant insect. This nightmarish story deals with the absurd nature of life and the existential crisis that plagues human beings.

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- The stories of Kafka's such as "The Metamorphosis", "**A Hunger Artist**" and "**The Great Wall of China**" depict the absurdity of life.
- His well-known novels include ***The Trial*** (1925)
  - In this novel, the protagonist Joseph K., a chief cahier in a bank, was arrested on the morning of his thirtieth birthday for an unspecified crime.
  - Almost after a year, he was led to a quarry where he was executed like a dog.
  - What makes this novel so weird is that the nature of Joseph K.'s crime is revealed neither to him nor to the readers.
- Kafka's stories are bizarre, surreal, metaphysical and angst-filled. Because of these reasons, his style of writing is termed as "**Kafkaesque**". And, he is considered one of the precursors of **Existentialist philosophy**.
- Numerous writers from around the world have been influenced by Kafka's writing and here are some:
  - The Japanese novelist **Kōbō Abe**:
    The Woman in the Dunes (1964), *The Face of Another* (1964)
  - The South African novelist **J. M. Coetzee**:
    Life & Times of Michael K (1983)
  - The Japanese novelist **Haruki Murakami**:
    Kafka on the Shore (2002)
- Inspired from Kafka's "The Metamorphosis", the British novelist **Ian McEwan** wrote a political satire ***The Cockroach*** (2019).
  - In this novel, McEwan goes for the reversal of Kafka's story: here, a cockroach is transformed into the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

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15) Franz Kafka's "Before the Law" (1915)

> But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the least of the doorkeepers. From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another, each more powerful than the last.

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- In "**Before the Law**" – a parable by Kafka – a man from the countryside approaches a doorkeeper who stands before the law, but he is denied admittance for the moment. He then waits for days, months and years, but only to die in the end outside the gate without ever trying to go past the gatekeeper.
- **Jacques Derrida** wrote an essay of the same name "Before the Law"
  - In it, he examines Kafka's parable in great detail.
  - For Derrida, the eternal delay in the parable is similar to the indefinite postponement of meaning while analyzing a literary text.
  - Briefly put, one cannot exactly pin down the definite meaning of a text.

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❖ Concerning the deferral of meaning (difference), Derrida in his essay "Before the Law" writes:
"On observing the doorkeeper more carefully, he decides to await a permission simultaneously given and deferred, although the first doorkeeper's hint suggests that the delay will be indefinite. After the first guardian there are an undefined number of others, perhaps they are innumerable, and progressively more powerful and therefore more prohibitive, endowed with greater power of delay. Their potency is différance, an interminable différance, since it lasts for days and "years," indeed, up to the end of (the) man. Différance till death, and for death, without end because ended."

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16) Franz Kafka's "A Report for an Academy" (1917)

If I review my development and its goal up to this point, I do not complain, but I not am content.

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- In "A Report for an Academy", a learned ape named **Red Peter** has been invited by an academy to give a talk on his earlier life as a wild ape and how diligently he has transformed into a "human".

- Most of Kafka's works were published posthumously.
  - ❖ He considered his stories unworthy of publishing and asked his friend **Max Brod** to destroy his manuscripts after his death.
  - ❖ However, Brod went against his friend's wish and became Kafka's literary executor.
  - ❖ Brod edited and published Kafka's works in the 1930s after Kafka's untimely death in 1924 at the age of 40.
  - ❖ Max Brod came out with ***Franz Kafka: A Biography*** in 1937.

- From the Mexican writer **Carlos Fuentes's** ***This I Believe***: *An A-Z of a Writer's Life*:
  'Have you read Kafka?' Milan Kundera asks me.
  'Of course,' I reply. 'To me, he is the essential writer of the twentieth century.'
  Kundera smiles scornfully. 'Have you read him in German?' he asks.
  'No.'
  'Then you have not read Kafka.'

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17) Scott Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" (1922)

[The US]

He dragged himself after her. At the end of a long hall they reached a room from which proceeded a variety of howls—indeed, a room which, in later parlance, would have been known as the "crying-room." They entered.

"Well," gasped Mr. Button, "which is mine?"

"There!" said the nurse.

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Mr. Button's eyes followed her pointing finger, and this is what he saw. Wrapped in a voluminous white blanket, and partly crammed into one of the cribs, there sat an old man apparently about seventy years of age. His sparse hair was almost white, and from his chin dripped a long smoke-coloured beard, which waved absurdly back and forth, fanned by the breeze coming in at the window. He looked up at Mr. Button with dim, faded eyes in which lurked a puzzled question.

"Am I mad?" thundered Mr. Button, his terror resolving into rage. "Is this some ghastly hospital joke?"

"It doesn't seem like a joke to us," replied the nurse severely. "And I don't know whether you're mad or not—but that is most certainly your child."

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- ***Parallel reading*:**

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890)
Marcel Aymé's "The Man Who Could Walk Through Walls" (1943)

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18) D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner" (1926) [England]

"Of course," said the boy, "I started it for mother. She said she had no luck, because father is unlucky."

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19) William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930) [The US]

We did not say she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.

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First-person plural narrative

- In a first-person singular narrative, the narrator, who is either a participant or the protagonist of a story, speaks in the first-person singular pronoun 'I'.
- On the other hand, in a first-person plural narrative, the narrators speak collectively in the first-person plural pronoun 'We'. For instance, in Faulkner's story "A Rose for Emily" (1930), **the collective voice of the townspeople** relates the life of Emily through the years.
- Another instance of a first-person plural narrative is **Jeffrey Eugenides's novel *The Virgin Suicides*** (1993), which is told from the perspective of an anonymous group of teenagers: "We knew to stay away from her. The bandages had been removed, but she was wearing a collection of bracelets to hide the scars. None of the other girls had any bracelets on, and we assumed they'd given Cecilia all they had. Scotch tape held the undersides of the bracelets to Cecilia's skin, so they wouldn't slide. The wedding dress bore spots of hospital food, stewed carrots and beets. We got our punch and stood on one side of the room while the Lisbon girls stood on the other."

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20) Jorge Luis Borges's "The Library of Babel" (1941) [Argentina]

Like all men of the Library, I have traveled in my youth; I have wandered in search of a book, perhaps the catalogue of catalogues; now that my eyes can hardly decipher what I write, I am preparing to die just a few leagues from the **hexagon** in which I was born. Once I am dead, there will be no lack of pious hands to throw me over the railing; my grave will be the fathomless air; my body will sink endlessly and decay and dissolve in the wind generated by the fall, which is infinite. I say that the Library is unending.

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- In this story, the Argentine writer Borges (1899–1986) imagines the universe in the form of a library which has an indefinite number of floors going high up into the sky. And, "The Library of Babel" is quite an interesting short story as **its protagonist** is **an imaginary library** and the meticulously detailed description of this library serves as the plot.
- In fact, Borges was **a librarian** and he was appointed director of the National Library of Argentine Republic. In the 1950s, he started losing his vision and **became completely blind**.
- The Brazilian writer **Lúcia Bettencourt**'s **"Borges's Secretary"** is a tribute to Borges, but with a twist. Bettencourt's short story invites a comparison between itself and Borges's "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*".
- Borges's "The library of Babel" influenced the Italian novelist **Umberto Eco** to build a labyrinthine library in his ***The Name of the Rose***. In this 1980 novel, Eco creates an elderly monk named Jorge of Burgos as a tribute to Jorge Luis Borges.
- Eco, in his essay **"Borges and My Anxiety of Influence"**, makes a confession:
  "When I later wrote *The Name of the Rose* it was more than obvious that in constructing the library I was thinking of Borges. If you go and read my entry "Codice" (Codex) in the Einaudi Encyclopaedia, you will see that in one of its sections I carry out an experiment on the Library of Babel. That entry was written in 1976, two years before I began *The Name of the Rose*, which indicates that I had been obsessed by Borges's library for some time. When I began the novel later, the idea of the library came naturally to me and with it the idea of a blind librarian, whom I decided to call Jorge da Burgos. I really do not remember whether it was because I had decided to give him that name that I went to see what was happening at Burgos, or whether I called him that because I already knew that in that period *pergamino de paño*, that is to say, paper instead of parchment, had been produced at Burgos. Sometimes things happen very quickly, as one reads here and there, and one cannot remember what came first."
- In his essay **"Between La Mancha and Babel"**, Eco compares and contrasts the library of Don Quixote in Cervantes's novel and the library of Babel in Borges's story:
  "For there once was, and perhaps there still is, a library in a village in this region [La Mancha], whose name people have never wanted to mention. This library, filled entirely with adventurous romances, was a library *with a way out*. Indeed, the wonderful story of Don Quixote begins at precisely the moment when our hero decides to leave the site of his bookish fantasies to venture out into life. He does so essentially because he is convinced that he has found truth in those books, so that all he needs to do is to imitate them, and reproduce their feats.

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Three hundred fifty years later, Borges would tell us the story of a library *with no way out*, where the search for the true word is endless and utterly hopeless.

There is a profound analogy between these two libraries: Don Quixote tried to find in the world the facts, adventures, and damsels his library had promised him: and consequently he wanted to believe and did believe that the universe was like his library Borges, less of an idealist, decided that his library was like the universe—and one understands then why he never felt the need to leave it. Just as one cannot say, 'Stop the world, I want to get off,' likewise one cannot escape from the Library."

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21) Jorge Luis Borges's "On Exactitude in Science" (1946)

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

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▪ Simulacra and Simulation

❖ The French sociologist and theorist **Jean Baudrillard** opens his book ***Simulacra and Simulation*** (1981) with the discussion of Borges's one-paragraph short story "On Exactitude in Science":

"If once we were able to view the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly (the decline of the Empire witnesses the fraying of this map, little by little, and its fall into ruins, though some shreds are still discernible in the deserts - the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction testifying to a pride equal to the Empire and rotting like a carcass, returning to the substance of the soil, a bit as the double ends by being confused with the real through aging) - as the most beautiful allegory of simulation, this fable has now come full circle for us, and possesses nothing but the discrete charm of second-order simulacra."

▪ "The first magical realist"

❖ In his 1955 essay "Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction", the critic Angel Flores coined the term "magical realism" (as opposed to "magic realism" coined by Franz Roh).

❖ Flores named Jorge Luis **Borges** the first magical realist, and called his 1935 collection of short stories ***A Universal History of Infamy*** the beginning of the 'magical realist' movement.

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