

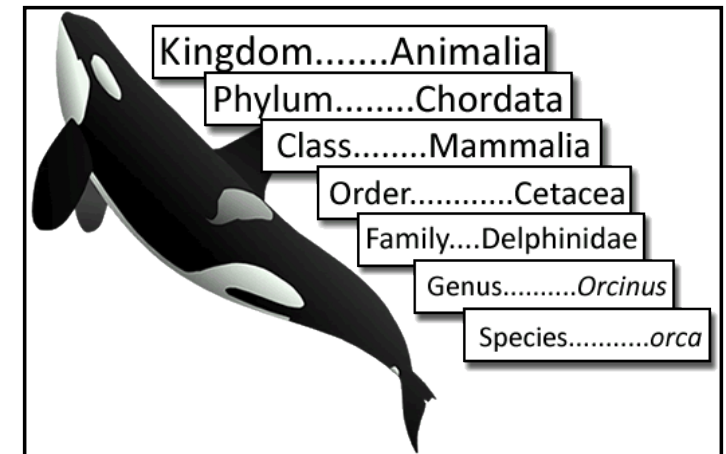
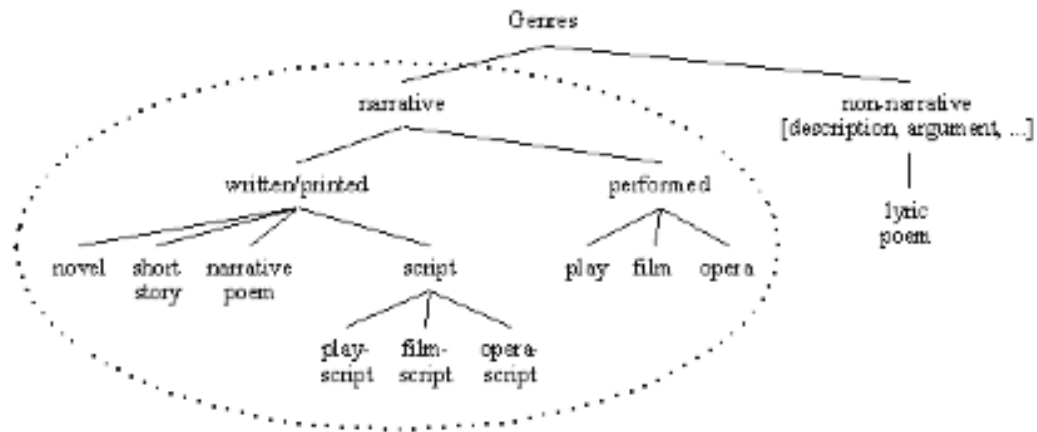
the canon & canonicity

digital text repositories, archives

collection

- repository: place where concrete (things) or abstract (information) resources are stored
- library: collection of texts; the building
- archive: specific, usually thematically connected documents (from Greek: public records)
- collection: systematically ordered assembly of items (from Latin: gather together)
- compilation: assembling previously separate items, often from different sources

taxonomy



taxonomy

... a certain Chinese encyclopaedia entitled
“Celestial Empire of benevolent Knowledge”...

In its remote pages it is written that the animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

(Borges, in Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 1966)

classification & canon

- classification implies collection
- what is collected?
- criteria?
- assumption about classification
 - totality
 - neutrality
- classification & canonization interrelated
- hierarchy - canon

canon

- *Literary Criticism.* A body of literary works traditionally regarded as the most important, significant, and worthy of study; those works of esp. Western literature considered to be established as being of the highest quality and most enduring value; the classics (now freq. in ***the canon***).
- Also (usu. with qualifying word): such a body of literature in a particular language, or from a particular culture, period, genre, etc.

definition *OED*: canon, *n.*

- In extended use (esp. with reference to art or music): a body of works, etc., considered to be established as the most important or significant in a particular field. Freq. with qualifying word.
 - The author concentrates on six major works in the operatic canon, masterpieces by two towering figures in the history of Western music. (*Compar. Lit.* 92 1188, 1977)
 - What looks like spaghetti Bolognese and keeps fresh on the shelf for 50 years? Japanese plastic food, the real-as-life models that restaurants in Japan use for the prosaic business of window display, and that visitors have gleefully added to the canon of pop art. (1985 *Washington Post* 5 July X12/1)
 - Mick taught himself to play the guitar and spent 'a great deal of time' studying songwriting; not just the soul and R'n'B legends... but the whole rock canon the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin and the Velvet Underground, but especially The Beatles. (1995 *Independent* (Nexis) 10 Dec. 2)
 - The concept has settled comfortably into the canon of accepted biological theory. (1998 *Herald* (Glasgow) 3 Sept. 22)

canon: definition

- (Greek): rule, yardstick
- originally biblical scripts
- since 18th century used in literary criticism
- books/documents/texts considered valuable by a culture or subgroup
- to be preserved because deemed important
- not timeless qualities, but context-specific values

canon: definition

- canonical texts
 - books, documents, texts
 - interpretations/readings canonical
- culture-specific “meaning” becomes canonical
- canon of interpretation
- historically and culturally variable norms
- stable vs. changing canon

inclusion - exclusion

- aesthetic
- social
- cultural
- moral
- political
- economic

canon: function

- sense of identity by representing norms and values
- legitimize a group/culture & norms
- set apart/differentiate group vs. context
- normative patterns of behaviour (manners)
- encode aesthetic, moral, social norms
- entrench aesthetic, moral, social norms
- ensures meaningful/successful communication about shared values

plurality

- homogeneous group – canon undisputed
- heterogeneous group – plurality of canons
- “World Literature” (usu. “dead white males”) vs. inclusion of feminist writing, postcolonial authors, immigrant texts
 - The canon was under attack from feminists and social historians who saw it as the preserve of male and bourgeois dominance. (*N.Y. Rev. Bks*, 1999)
- representative?
- centre vs. periphery: who has access?

literary canon

- time & place of publication
- author: language, culture, school
- formal criteria: genre properties
- definition of literature (high vs. popular culture)
- aesthetic quality? taste? changing values
- thematic criteria: common themes
- "relevance": intertextuality
- success: number of editions, commercial success, "presence" in the market - anthologies

canon as cultural memory

The canon, once we view it as the relation of an individual reader and writer to what has been preserved out of what has been written, and forget the canon as a list of books for required study, will be seen as identical with the literary Art of Memory, not with the religious sense of canon.

Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (1994)

canon: dominant discourse

- literature, arts, music
 - *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*
 - *The Norton Anthology of ... Literature*
- popular culture (advertisements, music)
 - “must-know”
- “required reading”, knowledge
 - syllabus

canon & anthology

- establish a canon
- limit the canon
- present selection

"anthology" (*EB*)

An anthology is a selection of choice pieces tastefully arranged. The typical modern anthology represents a collection of poems of a given period, nation, school or author selected for their excellence and representativeness.

"anthology" (*EB*)

... a collection of short pieces or extracts from different authors, especially in verse, and usually of literary value. An anthology may consist of the best or the most representative work of a period or of a literary kind, and occasionally of an author, or it may consist of pieces related to a given theme or subject.

space

Considerations of space make some shortenings inevitable

The New Oxford Book of English Verse

certain restrictions had to be imposed if [...] the selection was to be contained within a volume of manageable and economic size

The Penguin Book of English Verse

anthologies & culture

- selection of authors
- selection of texts (by authors)
- selection of passages
- revision of previous editions
- introduction & justification
- contextualized anthologies reflect (cultural) values
- teleological tendencies

PRINTED ANTHOLOGY	ELECTRONIC ANTHOLOGY
editor	editor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responds to changing paradigm - subjective criteria - selection: inclusion/exclusion - establishes canon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responds to changing paradigm - subjective criteria - selection: inclusion/exclusion - establishes canon
medium	medium
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - finite (book) - irreversible order - space limitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = limited number of texts = limited number of references = limited meta-discourse - authority, passive reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - expandable-infinite (web) - flexibility, non-sequential - no limitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = unlimited number of texts = hyperlinks = unlimited meta-discourse - limited authority, active reader
textuality	textuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - narrow definition of "text" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = Literature - one editor/group of editors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = one reading = narrows scope - suggests unity of discourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - broad definition possible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = literature - text - multiple editors/groups of editors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> = multiple readings = leave a trace - highlights the unfixity of text