

There and Back Again: A Literary Tale

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If you think literature has no value in your life, you are wrong. Literature gives insight to a society's culture, and the literature of your time is reflecting upon what you do. When a society's culture changes, its literature changes along with it. These changes in literary movements could be described as a swinging pendulum. A current literary movement or ideology is usually the opposite of the preceding literary movement and any future movement would be opposite from its former and so on. This idea of the swinging pendulum can help predict the next literary ideology that is to come. However, the pendulum is not the only predictor. A society's own culture could also predict the "next big thing" in literature. It has been seen throughout history that literary works of a specific time period criticize the culture of that time. Therefore, if we are able to foresee what our society's culture will be in the future we can predict what the next literary ideology will be. I predict that our society is moving towards a more non-realistic, technological/virtual world. This means that the literature of the future will criticize the virtual world that we will be living in and promote a breaking away from technology and finding reality in simple and ordinary natural things. By predicting the next literary movement, we can be prepared for what the future may hold.

As mentioned previously, the idea of a swinging pendulum can be used to describe the literary ideologies of the past. Each consecutive movement opposes the former. The pendulum swings from one side to the next, and the next literary movement rebels against its "parent ideology" and acts more like its "grandparent" and the pendulum returns. The literary movements in which we can see this pendulum motion are: the

Medieval Period, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Realism. For an example of this swing from one ideology to the next and back again, we can look at the transition from the Enlightenment to the Romantic to the Realism Periods. The Enlightenment was a period of reason, rationalism and belief in God which produced literature such as Voltaire's novella *Candide*.

The next literary movement, Romanticism, followed and opposed its predecessor. Its works were more non-realistic and supernatural as seen in literature such as Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." After the Romantic Period came Realism; this opposed the supernatural and moved back towards the rational ideology of the Enlightenment. Each Period's culture also played a part in the swing of literary ideologies as can be shown by works critical of each society's culture of that time. The Enlightenment was a time of reason and rationalism in which many philosophers came up with many and different philosophies about why things are the way they are. Voltaire, via the novella *Candide*, criticizes all of the philosophies of that time, such as Leibniz who believed that everything was for the best. Even the last sentence of the novella states, "we must cultivate our garden," meaning that we should become our own thinker, think by ourselves and not just adopt the philosophies of others (Voltaire 75). We can find similar criticism in the Romantic Period.

The industrial revolution was happening around 1750-1850, the same time as the Romantic writers. It was a time of new machinery and technology, yet what literature was popular in that society? The supernatural, non-realistic and creative. Not only was this era counteracting the Enlightenment, but it was counteracting the industrial revolution and the lessening of human value. Coleridge criticizes this dehumanizing of people

by machines and shows us how we were just soulless machines that “raised [our] limbs like lifeless tools,” while working on assembly lines, just as the crew did in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (Coleridge).

So what is the current ideology of our society today? The literary movement that preceded us was Realism, which brought about literary rationality and non-supernatural answers to questions. Therefore, if we follow the idea of the swinging pendulum, our present society should be back to the ideology of the Romantics; we are the age of Neo-romanticism (however, we are technically called the Post-Modern Era). Although we have those literary works that parallel the Romantics with the supernatural and fantasy, we still have popular literature that has more realistic answers, for example Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. Therefore, the pendulum might be “twirling a little bit” in this current time. Just as the two generations before us were going through the industrial revolution, we are now going through a time of advanced technology and we are seeing a turn into literary fantasy and supernatural.

Many literary works still have the same supernatural and fantasy aspect of the Romantic Period such as, J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, C. S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*, and J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*. This is a response to Realism but is also a response to the zeitgeist of our time. We have had two world wars and are now at war with the Middle East. We are living in fear of a nuclear war and there is death, destruction, and darkness all around us. This is a recurrent theme in the books of our day. Darkness is always at our doorstep, evil is always pursuing us and our current literary works also show the “violence which underlies our society” (Newman 140). In *Harry Potter*, Harry is always being pursued by Voldemort and the Death Eaters. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo is being chased by the Black Riders and in *The*

Chronicles of Narnia the Pevensies are being sought after by the White Witch. However, in all these stories, good always prevails. We like to read stories in which the good always triumphs over evil but opposes what actually happens in society because in reality the “good” does not always triumph. We use the literature to escape reality and all the destruction and darkness around us; “fiction is the act of forgetting,” we try to forget about our everyday lives and live through a fictional character (Newman 139). But what if we escape reality completely? Are we “caring about an imaginary world more than any other?” (Newman 140). Where will this fantasy world take us? In today’s society, with all the advances in technology, it is hard to distinguish what is real and what is not.

What will the future hold? Going back to the idea of the pendulum, we could predict that the next literary ideology should be parallel to realism. A more realistic literary movement would be the opposition to the fantasy/ supernatural/ neo-romantic ideology of today. Predicting the future culture can also help predict the next literary ideology. I see us headed towards an even more technologically advanced society than we are in today. We may be using so much technology that we won’t even know what is real anymore. It will be like we are living in a virtual world. Therefore, since we know that literary works criticize and oppose the culture of the time, we can assume that the literary ideology will turn towards realism in response to the virtual technological world of the future and we will see writings of what is truly real in life, hearkening back to times with no technology, with real relationships, and real communication.

The following is part of a chapter of the “next big thing” in literature that we might see in the future:

As I'm tumbling down this steep hill, or at least that's what I think it is, the only thing that is running through my head is how in the world did I trip and fall? I don't think I've ever fallen due to tripping on something since I was able to walk. Gotta love those Nike Sensors (Nikesens). If they sense something in front of you they automatically change your walking course or stops you dead in your tracks, hence you should never trip over anything. So why the heck did I trip and why in the world am I tumbling down this hill? The Nikesens never malfunctioned before...Thud. I'm at the bottom. I look up at the hill and still hear the sound of the cars zooming by on the Turnpike. I can see people still walking on the walkway where I was, but no one seemed to notice that I had just fallen almost to my death because they were all looking into their i-eyes. Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating about almost dying...Ha, kind of reminds me of that time when Bobby...oh wait, Bobby! I was i-eyeing with Bobby when I tripped and fell. Great. He's probably wondering where I am now. If only my i-eye didn't fly off my head while I was tumbling I could get in contact with him right now. So where is it? It could have flown any which way. Time to go find it I guess.

Wait a minute, where am I? I'm sitting in a little patch of grass. I don't think I've ever sat in grass before...or have I even seen it? Of course I've seen grass before...or was that just on my i-eye? I run my fingers through the grass. It's cool and soft. I don't think I've ever felt anything like this before. As I get up I realize I'm in pain. My back and legs must have gotten a beating while I was falling. I look around. There are trees and I hear birds chirping. It's familiar to me, but not familiar at all. I'm sure I've seen trees like these and heard birds chirping before...but I guess I've never really been aware of it like this without my i-eye on. It's so peaceful here. What am I

doing? My face feels so naked without my i-eye, but Bobby can wait, I need to see this new world.

This text could be part of the literature of the future. It opposes the supernatural ideology of today by going back to reality, which in this case is found in nature, not technology. It is also criticizing the advanced technology of the future. It is important for us to understand the trends of society so we won't be surprised when our culture changes and a new literary movement forms. It gives us a better understanding of what is happening in our society and how people feel about it. It is important to know who we are as a people and where we are going to be going in the future because it may be coming sooner than we think.

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