BCE

~2100

The Epic of Gilgamesh written. Development of the written alphabet begin; to mark the transition from the oral age of communication to the written age, the second of four literary epochs. This age will continue to develop until the invention of movable type and the Gutenberg press nearly 3500 years later.

800

Homer's Odyssey written.The most popular text from the ancient era, and the 11th most popular text overall (45CX). Note the vast differential (~1300 years) between Gilgamesh and Homer: though we tend to think of them as being at the same epoch, the distance between them is as great as the modern day is to the Roman Empire.

375

Plato's Republic written. In a trend that will continue for many years to come, the most popular texts from the ancient era on the AC are either nonfiction, drama, or epic poetry with a particular emphasis placed on philosophy, history, science, mathematics, and religion, with religion and fictional text especially quite seamlessly combined.

48

The accidental destruction of the Library at Alexandria by Julius Caesar during the Roman Civil War resulted in the destruction of an untold number of manuscripts. We may only speculate how different the canon may have appeared had these documents survived until present day.

1-12

8

Ovid's Metamorphoses written. Continuing the trend of reusing mythology with religious belief with history, Ovid is a seminal example of the literary culture of the building Roman Empire, which dominated around this time period.The new religion of Christianity was beginning to gather adherents, and in ones theology would proliferate texts for years to come. Most texts from this era are focused, much like Classical Greece, on philosophy and science, with a particular emphasis placed on the works of Seneca, the Marcus Aurelius. Literary output would remain relatively low for almost 1200 years.

476

Although the Holy Roman Empire continued to exist until the early nineteenth century, the "classical" or Western Roman empire fell in 476, ending almost 1200 years of Roman dominance in the Western part of Europe. The subsequent descent into the "dark ages" of feudalism stunted literary output, and with only a few exceptions, this trend continued for almost 800 years. These first twelve centuries CE are grouped together because of the extremely low number of additions to the AC. Perhaps the most important text to arise from the time period after the fall of Rome was St.Augustine's (Augustine of Hippo) Confessions, which discussed the new religion of Christianity as it found footing within the Holy Roman Empire of the East.

13-15

1320

After a relatively quiet 13th century, the 14th began with a bang with Dante's Divine Comedy. In a remarkable act of appeal to a broad audience, Dante chose to write his epic poem in the vernacular Italian rather than Latin, the more "scholarly" Latin. This religious text, and Dante's understanding of his audience, may have done more to spread the Christian religion than would the King James Bible, written over the course of several centuries earlier, and finally "published" in 1611.The Divine Comedy is the 8th most popular text on the AC, with 48CR.

1346-53

The Black Death (bubonic plague) rips through Europe at an unprecedented pace, exacerbating horrid conditions: cause of the Hundred Years' War, a famine (due to global drought) and extreme poverty.This two hundred year epoch was the lowest of European civilization, and offers the fewest texts of any era to date, even if the frequency of texts is higher than that found in the 1st 1.5k centuries.

1390

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales written.Marking a dramatic shift in the consolidation of language (from Old English, which descended from German and Norse) to Chaucer's native Middle English, this is the most popular text written in the Middle verse of the time, and is the fourth most popular text on the entire AC. Even despite granting long conditions, inspiration abounds.

1440

Johannes Gutenberg, building on the technology of Chinese and Indian print makers which pioneered the technology of movable type, invents the Gutenberg Printing Press, a new mass communication technology which increased the speed and reproductive capacity of text to new heights. Europe was just beginning to exit the dark ages of the late medieval period, and Gutenberg's invention was a sign of things to come with the Early Renaissance in a century's time.The press marked the end of the written epoch of communication, and ushered in the Print Age, an era which would last until the middle of the twentieth century.

16th

1532

Machiavelli's The Prince published.Although a draft copy was circulated nearly fifteen years earlier, the "official" publication of the document did not occur until 1532, five years after Machiavelli's death.This text continues the pattern of philosophy, religion, politics, and nonfiction set by the classical Greeks, but that trend was soon to be interrupted in a very powerful way.We may say that with Machiavelli's text, the "golden age" of AC nonfiction comes to an end, and from this point forward, fiction is the dominant form.

1591

The 16th century was extremely quiet, mimicking the century before, until the very end brought with it the most prolific author of the entire AC:William Shakespeare's 1591 is the date for the publication of his earliest works.The two Gentlemen of Verona(~1589) and The Taming of the Shrew (1591). Although Hamlet is published in Shakespeare's own canon, The Taming of the Shrew reached the 81st position on the AC with 19CR.

17th

1611

Although popular for many centuries before, the King James Bible is "officially" published in 1611,solidifying an edited and redacted version of the text.Although the Bible is the most published book of all time, it is not the most canonized, reaching number 39 on the AC with 28CR.

1623

Much like the century before it, the 17th century was utterly dominated by Shakespeare.It is from this era, the close of Elizabethan England and the dawn of Jacobian England, that most of Shakespeare's fame was made. Hamlet,The Tempest, Othello, and other plays were all part of his posthumous First Folio (published ~1623).

1667

The first version of Milton's Paradise Lost published.With a second edition appearing in 1674, the version we know today (arranging the text into twelve books) Milton seamlessly connected the Classical era tenets of epic poetry,theology and philosophy into a single tasteful text. Paradise Lost is number 27 on the AC, with 32CR.

18th

1719

Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe published.Arguably the first novel ever (with many contending Cervantes's Don Quixote de la Mancha (1605) did not),Crusoe's popularity is recognized by many as the first English language novel ever written.This text would go on to absolutely dominate the humor on the AC, accounting for 45.51% of all texts on the list. Robinson Crusoe lands at number 61, with 23CR.

1726

Swift's Gulliver's Travels published. The highest-scoring text from this century, Swift's text is also the highest-scoring satire on the AC, and set the bar for years to come. Note the speed at which texts are beginning to be adopted onto the AC, and how much faster it is during the Renaissance than the era before. Even this acceleration, however, is about to absolutely dwarfed by the next century.

1776

The American War for Independence. Although some American authors (like Washington Irving, for example) were publishing before America officially existed, the creation of America signaled the start of a new series of contributions to the AC, one which, as currently constituted, has added more texts to the AC from a single region than any other.

1760-90

The dawn of a new era comes in the late 1700s, with many pinpointing its beginning as 1760, and others over the course of the next thirty-odd years: the British Industrial Revolution.The advances made in everything from medicine to power to literacy improved the quality of life in Britain so dramatically that authors (and readers) were suddenly afforded the opportunity to write (and read) for pleasure.Almost two hundred years after the Age of Reason and the Renaissance, gave rise to the greatest canonical expansion in human history by a factor of ten.

19th

1813

Austen's Pride and Prejudice published.The number one text on the AC, Austen's classic work is just a taste of what is to come within the following century and, arguably, set the tone for literature for nearly a hundred years.At this point in literary history, the novel is well-established and becoming more refined, the Gothic and Romantic genres are both quite popular, and the outpouring of contributions is about to begin.Austen followed this success with Emma in 1815 and Northanger Abbey in 1818 (which, like Pride and Prejudice, had originally been preceded her most popular published in 1811).

1818

Less than five years after the most popular text of all time, Mary Shelley writes the most important text of all time in Frankenstein (inventing the literary figure of the vampire) was also published one year later, in 1819.

1843-50

Edgar Allan Poe's most popular work, the Tell-Tale Heart, appears in 1843. Poe would continue to produce texts throughout most of the 1840s, solidifying American Gothic (specifically, Southern Gothic) as a genre.

1847-67

The floodgates open. E. Bronte's Wathering Heights and C. Bronte's Jane Eyre are published the same year, 1847.The former, Poe writes in 1849, Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter is published in 1850, while Melville's Moby Dick came a year after that in 1851. Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin is published in 1852. Thoreau's transcendentalist masterpiece Walden arrives in 1854. Whitman publishes Leaves of Grass in 1855. 1856 sees Flaubert publish Madame Bovary. Dickens' highest scoring work, A Tale of Two Cities, is published in 1859, the same year Darwin's On the Origin of Species is published. Dickens' Great Expectations and Collins's Woman in White arrive in Wonderland in 1865. Dostoevsky adds Crime and Punishment in 1866. Tolstoy produces War and Peace in 1867. In a single twenty-year span, over 300CR are added to the AC, but the century is still far from over.

1870-1899

The end of the American Civil War introduces a new generation of authors to the mix, while established authors continue to produce. The Gothic genre sees a resurgence, the newly-established speculative fiction genre (arguably created by Shelley's Frankenstein) begins to populate, and toward the end of the century, the new trend of modernism begins to take over. George Eliot creates Middlemarch in 1871. 1876 sees Mark Twain put The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. Tolstoy adds Anna Karenina in 1878. Bram Stoker's A Dull's House in 1879, the same year as Dostoevsky's Brothers Karamazov. Twain returns in 1884 with his highest-scoring text, the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Rousseau writes the Documentum in 1886. Oscar Wilde produces The Picture of Dorian Gray in 1891.A year later in 1892 we get Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles. 1895 has Wilde producing The Importance of Being Earnest, leader drafts the novel Count Arnaud Vampire Hunter, and Wells writes The Time Machine. Kipling produces The Jungle Book in 1894-99. An additional 300CR have been added to the canon, and its size has increased exponentially.The century produces even more texts that the 19th,but literature at the volume and level was heretofore unseen in the entirety of human history.

20th

1900-13

The 20-year literary explosion continues from the end of the 19th century into the new millennium, with authors like James Joyce, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald pushing modernist movement. Franz Kafka,Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway, amongst others, add another massive collection of ACs to the canon, which by now has ballooned to almost 400% of its pre-19th century size.

1914-17

World War One commences with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, igniting a powder keg of European tensions created by trade and defense agreements left in place a hundred years earlier after the Napoleonic Wars and French dominance. Although little is published during this time, the war has a profound influence on the literature that would come after it,proving a popular setting for many an author.

1920-39

The Interwar Period.During this time the modernist genre began to plunge away in favor of historical fiction, and, increasingly, speculative fiction.Although they would not publish until almost twenty years later,authors like Vonnegut and Philip K. Dick were influenced by the events of the coming conflict in WWII, which would officially begin in 1939 with the Nazi invasion of Poland. Not a great deal of texts from this era appear at high levels on the canon, as the Great Depression stifled economic output worldwide, but especially in the United States.As a repeating pattern through history, as life becomes more difficult, focus on literature and the arts wanes in favor of more pressing pragmatic concerns. The most popular texts from this time period is Huxley's Brave New World (1932) and Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men (1937) and The Grapes of Wrath (1939).

1939-45

WWII.Again, although publishing and output is relatively small during this time, the setting of the war, the embodiment of evil represented by the Nazi regime, and technological breakthroughs envisioned by the dawn of the nuclear age, and myriad contexts of both literary and political gamesmanship,provided seemingly endless material for authors of future works to write upon.

1945-75

The height of the Cold War,and the American Civil Rights movement. Numerous authors published during this time,of extreme prominence, especially in the US, which was not rebuilding after the destruction of WWII.This era sees the aforementioned Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-5 (1969), Heller's Catch-22 (1961), Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye (1951), Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, and Orwell's 1984 (1949). Note the proliferation of texts related to Civil Rights, and political and governmental discontent.

1983

The creation of the Internet.Although the computer came many decades before, in a number of different forms and iterations, it wasn't until the invention of the Internet in the early 1980s at CERN that the Print epoch came to a close and the Digital epoch, in which we currently reside, began, texts from this era respond to the new technological boom, as well as continuing civil rights battles and the Cold War,all of which dominate consciousness.

1988-99

Interestingly, as a perhaps unforeseen twist, the rate of textual adoption on the AC considerably slows at this point in time, and little new text makes a mark in the early 21st century rolls around. Only a few texts are added to the canon, each of which dealt with the aforementioned political and social concepts of the previous half-century.The most popular text of the era is Morrison's Beloved (1987).

2001

21st

2022

Only two texts are added to the AC in the twenty-first century,which, as presently constituted, in 21 years long.This slow rate of adoption mirrors that of the end of the twentieth century, and is a rate far, far slower than any century since the 15th.I have no explanation for this (although a few guesses may be made within the chapter). The two twenty-first century texts are Saladi's Austerlatz (2001) and Pi.Carthy's The Road (2006).

Present Day, as this timeline is composed.The diagnosis of the canon continues, and its obliteration is also in play.What the future holds for this list is likely beyond anyone's firm grasp.