

# Design for **Wow** 3 – Literature

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## **Introduction**

This article is the third in a series, which aims to explore the ‘wow’ phenomenon in different subject areas. The first article (Reference 1) looked at ‘wow’ in general, while the second (Reference 2) shifted to the more specific area of music. In this one, literature is the focus of study. This preliminary research set out to identify memorable books or moments in books with a view to understanding what patterns or principles, if any, make these ‘wow’ moments stick in people’s minds more than others.

Our methodology is explained, the resultant findings laid out, key conclusions presented and recommendations for taking this study further are made.

## **Initial thinking and methodology**

We recognised before embarking on this study that emotional context would play an important role in determining people’s ‘wow’ moments in literature, and potentially much more so than was found to be the case in music. A reader may experience an emotional ‘wow’ with a book because it “speaks” to them in some way. For example, it may strike a chord with how they felt in a similar situation. This certain something may speak to them only in that moment, i.e. is linked to their mindset at the time they were reading the book, or it may be more enduring. The same book without this personal, emotive context may have no impact at all on another reader. In addition, it may not always be clear why a book or a moment in a book “speaks” to the reader. Perhaps it taps into something personal in their subconscious mind or more likely, it creates in the reader a strong empathy for the character and the situation confronting them. The reader’s emotions may be stirred by the humanity in a piece of writing and as a result, they feel for or even feel with the character.

Of course, achieving this emotive state is at the heart of good fiction writing. Creative writing courses teach the principle of the fictive dream, something the writer creates by the power of suggestion, taking the reader to a state of altered consciousness. This fictive dream state is achieved by the writer using vivid detail to involve the reader emotionally with the characters and their plight. This involvement arises from the writer gaining the reader's sympathy, getting them to identify with the character and most important of all, ensuring the reader empathises sufficiently with the character to feel what they are feeling.

We also recognised that the way people read books would have an impact on the study. Unlike music where the listener returns to an album or track time and again, books or chapters in books tend not to be frequently re-read. Furthermore, people read in different ways and for different reasons. Some speed read, as a means of preparing for sleep for example, and are happy just to get the gist of the story. Other readers, however are more committed, devoting time and concentration to take in and understand every word. Memory therefore can play a role in a person's ability to recall with precision a book or moment in a book they felt had the 'wow' factor, quite apart from being able to define why it had this effect on them.

Bearing these factors in mind, we concluded that drawing data from a large number of people would be key to the robustness of the research. This study then should be seen as just the start of a much wider piece of research. Let us begin by explaining the primary research that forms the basis of the work carried out so far. Over twenty-five people contributed to the research carried out largely by e-mail during the period September to December 2005. Participants were asked two basic questions:

- what books or moments in books (e.g. a chapter, scene, paragraph or it might even be just a sentence or a word) are particularly memorable for you or to use a buzz phrase, create an emotional 'wow' for you?
- what is it about the book or moment in the book that makes it so memorable or creates that 'wow' effect?

The following section is a collation of the findings of this research.

### **The research findings**

The table below identifies the title and author of the book, any specific moments identified as being memorable and the reason why the book or moment in the book was memorable for the reader, if specified. The table is in alphabetical order by title.

<b>Book</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>‘Wow’ moment (if specified)</b>	<b>Reason why book/moment memorable (if specified)</b>	<b>Conflict &amp; Inventive Principle (if any)</b>
1. Alice in Wonderland and 2. Alice Through the Looking Glass	Lewis Carroll	The moment when Alice shrinks so she is small enough to enter the garden with the little golden key.  The point where Alice becomes a piece on the chess board.  The white queen who cries before she is hurt and keeps running to stay still.	The ‘wow’ factor for the reader associated with these moments lies with the sheer imagination involved in creating such unexpected and intriguing situations.	A book full of surreal moments where our expectations are continuously confounded. The examples cited here represent instances of Principles 35 (Parameter change), 17 (Another dimension) and 13 (The other way around).
3. The Bear and the Dragon	Tom Clancy	Around two thirds of the way through the book.	The ‘wow’ occurs when a myriad of seemingly unconnected story strands come together, just at the point when you are starting to wonder where on earth it is all heading.	Apparently unconnected threads turn out to be connected after all. Clear application of Principle 5 (Merging).
4. The Beiderbecke Tapes	Alan Plater	The opening line: ‘It was the best of terms, it was the worst of terms’.	For the pun on the Dickens classic opening, that – because the two main characters are teachers – turns out to be wholly appropriate as well as witty.	Principle 26 (Copying) in action ... but in a good way!
5. The Bell Jar	Sylvia Plath	Opening sentence: ‘It was a queer sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn’t know what I was doing in New York.’	The reader was struck by the strange combination of the innocuous and the sinister, and how it somehow turns out to be emblematic of the overall theme of the book.	The unexpected start and particularly the juxtaposition of images, makes this a clear example of Principle 37 (Relative Change).

6. Birdsong	Sebastian Faulks	The description of the night before the final push.	We share the suspense and fears of the soldiers in a very emotionally charged piece of writing.	Here the writing causes the reader to experience the same 'live-or-die' emotions as the soldiers. As such we are reading the appearance of a conflict rather than its resolution. The tension will eventually be released (Principle 12) when the order to go over the top is given.
7. Bliss	Peter Carey	The start of the novel where the soul of the recently departed rises from the body and sails over the beautifully tended lawns and yacht clubs etc of the dead man's perfect and well manicured life.	A highly visual moment, which captured the reader's imagination.	We don't expect a soul to rise in such a physical way from its body or to be given a bird's eye view of what that soul is seeing as it departs this earth. Another example of Principle 35 (Parameter change).
8. Cloud Atlas	David Mitchell	The overall structure of the book – specifically the interweaving of stories from the past, present and future	The 'wow' factor for the reader was associated with the unique inter-twining of several different story lines.	An example of Principle 7 ('Nesting').
9. Coming Through Slaughter	Michael Ondaatje	The reader described the setting and atmosphere created in this book as amazing. From page one the reader was immediately transported to the world of turn of the 19th century New Orleans.	The writer's use of language was described as clinical and atmospheric, his style strange, the sentences sometimes having no verbs and the use of adjectives sparse.	The sparse language and the omission of verbs in particular give this book an unexpected feel. An example of Principle 2 (Taking Out).
10. Coming Up for Air	George Orwell	The early stages, which paint an impossibly painful picture of being a wage slave in London.	The reader remembers an excellent description of marital boredom and forgetting to rinse the soap off properly in the morning.	In the soap scene, we have a tiny unexpected moment that somehow manages to say an awful lot about the situation of the main character. Like a lot of insightful writing, this is a moment that

				can be identified almost universally – ‘I do that too’. As such this is an example of Principle 6 (Universality).
11. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time	Mark Haddon	The unusual and unique main character; a potentially unreliable narrator in the form of an autistic boy.	Cited by several readers. We see the world through the eyes of someone who sees what we see but interprets it literally and therefore differently.	Telling the story through a character that is different to the reader represents a clear example of Principle 35 (Parameter Change).
12. Enduring Love	Ian McEwan	The opening scene where the balloon is escaping and assorted individuals are trying to bring it back down to earth.	One of the two readers citing this book emphasized the incongruity of seeing people hanging from the guy ropes of a huge hot air balloon, each desperate not to be the first to let go.	Another ‘unexpected’ opening, aimed at forming an immediate visual conflict. As such we can see this as an example of Principle 12 (Remove Tension) in reverse.
13. An Equal Music	Vikram Seth	"Go then with the breathing tide and do not make a scene, and learn wisdom of the little dog who visits from elsewhere, and who knows that what is, is, and, O harder knowledge, that what is not is not."	The reader has always been affected by passages in books that evoke a sense of loss because it is something of which she remembers being poignantly aware as a young child. This particular moment brings a weighty feeling to her chest because the words sum up for her the sadness of the human condition. It is described beautifully by the writer using a strange combination of the prosaic and the poetic to express the profound.	A moment of empathy for a particular individual. Difficult therefore to generalise this, except to say that the author has achieved a strong unexpected resonance with this reader and thus is an example of Principle 18.
14. Family Matters	Rohinton Mistry	The description of an Indian man taking his own life by leaping out of a window. The reason for this extreme act is the unbearable pain of the bed bugs eating at his flesh beneath a plaster cast.	The ‘wow’ factor of this moment is associated with the graphic illumination of something beyond the reader’s personal experience.	Very unexpected resolution to a painful situation we think we can imagine, but then, given the outcome, obviously cannot. An example of Principle 38 (Enriched Atmosphere).

15. Filth	Irvine Welsh	The moment you realize the character is a transvestite.	Given the build up and some of the things the character has done earlier in the book, this revelation came as a total surprise to the reader.	Resolution of one of the main conflicts of the book, using Principle 13 ('The Other Way Around').
16. Finding Myself	Toby Litt	The novel takes the form of an edited proof of the book the main character is writing. The writer's editor is a character in the book and her crossings out, comments etc appear handwritten in blue ink at various stages of the book.	What made this book memorable to the reader were the editorial notes, which were integral to the story.	By giving us the unique insight into the editor-writer relationship, Litt finds an unexpected overall structure. A good example of a Nesting strategy (Principle 7).
17. Five on a Hike Together	Enid Blyton	The famous five are sleeping in a barn and they hear the bells of the local prison ring to alert people to an escape. Later they see the face of the prisoner peering through the barn windows.	The reader said that this image terrified her at a young and impressionable age and has remained with her ever since.	Another moment of empathy for a particular individual. Difficult therefore to generalise this, except to say that the author has achieved a strong unexpected resonance with this reader (Principle 18).
18. The God of Small Things	Arundhati Roy	Lots of 'wow' moments associated with the beauty of the prose, the most notable being 'viable, dieable death'	The reader described this book as having lots of lovely sentences and wonderful phrasing.	Many unexpected fragments in both the choice of words and their phrasing. An example therefore of Principle 40 (Composite Structures).
19. The Grapes of Wrath	John Steinbeck	The moment at the end where the woman breast feeds a starving man.	The reader emphasised the sense of hope in adversity communicated by this moment, and the generosity of spirit that comes even in the darkest moments.	Another example of Principle 35 (Parameter change).

20. The Heart of Darkness	Joseph Conrad	The death of Mr Kurtz.	No specific reason given with respect to this one moment. However, it is the style of writing in the whole of this strange book that made it memorable for the reader.	Principle 35 again for pushing the bounds of the readers perception of how sinisterly dark events can become.
21. The Hours	Michael Cunningham	The moment at the end of the book when you realize that there is another link between the three stories other than Woolf's novel 'Mrs Dalloway'.	The reader was surprised and moved on discovering the identity of the man dying of AIDS and hence his link to one of the other stories.	The emergence of an unexpected link between the three stories is an example of Principle 5 (Merging).
22. Jane Eyre	Charlotte Bronte	The whole book.  The moment when Mr Rochester dresses up as a gypsy woman.  The appearance of the mad wife Bertha Mason in the middle of the night and the terrible chilling scream.	The first reader citing Jane Eyre said that apart from being a good story, the 'wow' effect stems from the characterisation of Mr Rochester and Jane.  Another reader cited this moment from the book, an unexpected and rather bizarre scene, which shouldn't work – on some level it isn't entirely believable - but does.  Two further readers remarked on the unexpected gothic horror lent to this book by the character of Mr Rochester's first wife.	The overall 'will they-won't they' tension along with the mystery surrounding the presence in the attic, represents the dominant conflict of the book. The building of the conflict is as, if not more important than the eventual resolution. This is another clear example of Principle 12 (Remove tension).  The Rochester-as-gypsy woman scene is an early gender-swap example in literature and thus reflects Principle 13 ('The other way around').  The unexpected scream is an example of Principle 38 (Enriched atmosphere).

23. Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell	Susanna Clarke	The sad disappearance of Jonathan's wife and the fact he was too busy with his magic to notice.	The reader emphasized the sense of loss she felt reading this and how believable it was even in a magical context.	The conflict here involves the contrast between the emotional reaction we would expect and the one given by Jonathan. The contrast somehow makes the disappearance even more poignant. This is an example of Principle 37 (Relative Change).
24. Kafka on the Shore	Haruki Murakami	The beginning of chapter 6, when the old "dumb" man Nakata is talking to a cat and the cat, after a while, replies in a baffled way.	The reader suggested that this scene turns the concept of fairytales where humans are baffled by speaking animals totally upside down.	Another example of Principle 13 ('The other way around').
25. Letter from America [autobiography]	Alistair Cooke	Certain phrases: 'eyes as blue as gas jets'; 'English language was a green pasture to romp in'; 'At 19 he descended on journalism with a whoop.'	The reader liked the simplicity yet evocative nature of the writer's phrases.	Multiple uses of unexpected and unusual metaphors, is another example of Principle 35 (Parameter change) in action.
26. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe	C S Lewis	The initial disappearance through the wardrobe.	Described by the reader as exciting. It changed the way as a child she viewed this simple piece of furniture.	The 'wow' here involves the connection made between the fantasy worlds that exists behind the mundane. Moreover, by using a wardrobe – something found in almost every child's bedroom – the author makes the connection work for lots of young readers. An example of Principles 6 (Universality) and 13 ('The other way around').

27. Long Walk to Freedom [autobiography]	Nelson Mandela	The scene where Mandela chooses to delay his departure from prison when he is told he can leave after 27 years inside.	Described by the reader as a 'wow' moment because you just can't imagine yourself saying no to freedom for one more day after being imprisoned for so long. The reader explained that it is at this point you realize you haven't really been able to put yourself in this man's shoes at all.	Another Principle 13 ('The other way around') example.
28. The Lovely Bones	Alice Sebold	The rape scene.	The whole book is memorable not least because the narrative voice is that of a dead girl speaking from and at times describing life in heaven.  Both readers citing this book spoke of this scene being so evocatively written you could smell and feel the atmosphere in that small den dug into the earth.	The use of a dead person as narrator (Principle 13 again) has been used by several writers. What is unexpected here is the interspersing of the life in heaven scenes. In doing this the author makes an intriguing combination of Principle 7 ('Nesting') and Principle 37 (Relative Change).  The perceived realism of the rape scene and the 'wow' this instills comes from the concentration of detail - Principle 35 (Parameter change) again - and the way the text involves the use of multiple senses in the reader. An example of Principle 28 (Another Sense).

29. The Magician's Nephew	C S Lewis	The description of the wood between the worlds.	The reader emphasized the beauty of the writing, such that she cannot walk into a birch forest without thinking of it.	The 'wow' here comes through the use of the wood as an intermediary between the two worlds. This is an example of Principle 24 (Intermediary). In addition, the 'wow' factor is achieved by connecting with the disorienting experience we all feel when walking through a wood or forest. In this regard, the author is finding a resonance with a common human emotion - Principle 6 again (Universality).
30. Manon des Sources	Marcel Pagnol	The moment where Ugolin sews the ribbon from Manon's hair to his chest.	Described by one of the two readers as a brutal, unexpected and inhuman act which brilliantly demonstrates how painful love can be.	Totally unexpected and extreme action. Another example of Principle 38 (Enriched Atmosphere).
31. Memoirs of a Geisha	Arthur Golden	The whole book.	The reader remarked on the beauty of the prose and the way the writer puts you in a place little known or understood by the western world.	Seeing life from an unusual and different perspective. Principle 35 (Parameter change) in action once again.
32. A Million Little Pieces	James Frey	The protagonist's visit to the dentist.	The 'wow' factor for the reader lies in the graphic nature of this scene and many others in the book. The general rawness grabbed her. The book brought about a 'car crash' effect – she read on out of morbid curiosity, despite not wanting to because it was so disturbing. She remarked that this scene is the only time she has nearly fainted reading a book.	A beyond our worst imagining description of an encounter most people anticipate with dread. An example of Principle 38, (Enriched Atmosphere).

33. Mill on the Floss	George Elliot	The hair cutting scene.	A moment described by the reader as evoking the tantrum feeling she remembers from her own childhood.	Another personal resonance (Principle 18).
34. The Ninth Life of Louis Drax	Liz Jensen	<p>The moment where the thoughts of the boy in the coma are communicated to the doctor while the doctor is asleep.</p> <p>The moment you realize what actually happened on top of the cliff and the terrifying psychological role the mother had to play in Louis' 'fall'.</p>	<p>The fact that the narrator for most of the book is a strange and actually rather unlikeable boy, was emphasised by both readers citing this book.</p> <p>One of the readers remarked on how unexpected this was and written in such a way as to make it utterly convincing.</p> <p>Again, the revelation was unexpected and yet highly believable.</p>	<p>The unusual narrator perspective is an example of Principle 17 (Another Dimension).</p> <p>A clear Principle 35 (Parameter Change) example.</p> <p>The dominant conflict resolution of the book. We won't spoil the surprise other than to say it represents an example of a Principle 17 (Another dimension) twist.</p>
35. Of Human Bondage	Somerset Maugham	Multiple scenes.	The reader explained that the 'wow' moments in this book stem from the progression of a number of heart-stopping moments, where the protagonist is badly treated, suffers hardship, cruelty, setbacks, and yet despite all this, still manages to keep going.	Each time the protagonist bounces back can be seen as an example of Principle 8 (Counterweight), but it is also the number of bounce-backs - Principle 20 (Continuity of Useful Action) - that is a striking feature.
36. Personality	Andrew O'Hagan	Overall concept.	The 'wow' factor for the reader in this book relates to the ingenious idea of putting real and well-known people into fictitious situations.	A number of intriguing juxtaposition effects, which reflect Principles 7 (Nesting?) and 37 (Relative Change).

37. Portrait of the Artist	James Joyce	The moment when Stephen looks across towards Howth and realises the 'call to his soul'	No specific reason given.	Another personal resonance (Principle 18) example we believe.
38. A Prayer for Owen Meany	John Irving	The ending of the book.	<p>The first reader to cite this book said the reason the ending stands out as memorable is because this is when you realise why it was so important for Owen Meany to put the basketball in the net in the quickest time possible. At times the book is weird and sad, and still sends shivers down the reader's spine.</p> <p>The second reader citing this book also felt the ending had the 'wow' factor. All through the book run unexplained events. The strange life of a spectacular person comes together at this point at the end; his whole existence you realize has been a rehearsal for the moment when he is called upon to save the Vietnamese children.</p>	This is an example of Principle 5 (Merging) when the reader finally works out why an apparently small detail turns out to be the piece that completes the jigsaw.
39. Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen	<p>Multiple moments cited:</p> <p>The moment where Elizabeth says she would not marry Darcy if he was the last man on Earth.</p> <p>The moment when she realizes she has judged him wrongly.</p> <p>The moment when Elizabeth is approached by Darcy as she plays the piano and she says "my</p>	The main conflict resolution occurs in the book when two people who it seems from the outset are unlikely to get together, and, as a result of a series of circumstances, become even less likely to get together, but then ultimately they do.	In many ways this novel represents an early forerunner of the classic 'boy-gets-girl' plot-line. The conflict resolution still works, however, thanks to the elegant way in which the reader only realizes how Darcy has been misunderstood at the same time as Elizabeth. The shift in Elizabeth's perception is a clear

		courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me.”		example of a Principle 13 (‘The other way around’) conflict resolution.
40. The Remains of the Day	Kazuo Ishiguro	The moment in the story when the butler is on duty at a big event, unable to let himself relinquish his professional responsibilities, despite knowing that his father is dying in another part of the house.	For the reader this contributed to the overall feeling of the missed opportunities throughout the main character’s life, all because he wouldn’t give up on duty (or his interpretation of duty).	The amazing beyond-the call of duty rigour of the butler that occurs throughout the book (he also loses the potential love of his life) is considerably outside the expectations of any reader. The contrast between what we would do and what the butler does is the overriding conflict driver. This is a Principle 37 (Relative Change) strategy. In the story itself, the romantic and political tensions are never really resolved – except to say that the boy doesn’t get the girl.
41. Return of the Soldier	Rebecca West	The moment when she describes Margaret with her 'seamed, floury hands.'	Described by the reader as being very lyrical and an impossibly moving moment.	The unexpected poignancy of this moment is an example of Principle 35 (Parameter change).
42. Romeo And Juliet	William Shakespeare	The final scene.	Romeo kills himself because he does not know what the reader knows. Then a double-whammy when Juliet awakes as per plan and realises that her plan has not worked.	The whole story builds to this climax. The ‘boy-meets-girl, boy-loses-girl’ story line ends with the tragic loss of both lives. The ending offers examples of Principle 12 (Remove tension) - where the tension is set up because we know what Romeo does not - Principles 13 (‘The other way around’) and 10 (Prior action).

43. Silence Of The Lambs	Thomas Harris	Multiple horrific scenes.	The reader described an overall failure to imagine that a character so erudite and intelligent could do such horrific things.	It is the contrast that is most unexpected, and as such this book features multiple examples of Principle 37 (Relative Change).
44. Small Island	Andrea Levy	The moment where the heroine attempts to walk out of a job interview that hasn't gone well, only to find herself in a cupboard.	The reader loved this vivid picture, one of many in the book that make it stand out in her mind.	Unexpected action at the end of the scene represents a Principle 17 (Another dimension) direction. The scene works thanks to the connection we can all make in our own lives to an interview or meeting that has gone badly. Therefore it is the resonance - Principle 6 (Universality) again - that occurs when we make this connection, which makes this scene so effective.
45. Staring At The Sun	Julian Barnes	The beautiful opening passage	The WW2 pilot experiences two sunrises.	An unusual technical resolution to the apparent paradox of experiencing two sunrises due to a change in altitude. This is another example of Principle 17 (Another dimension).
46. The Subtle Knife	Philip Pullman	The discovery that the purpose of the knife is to cut windows through which the characters can escape to other worlds.	For the reader the use of the knife for such a task was unexpected and highly imaginative.	Unexpected switch of function for an object familiar to the user. This is an example of Principle 35 (Parameter change).
47. A Tale Of Two Cities	Charles Dickens	The opening line: 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity'.	Immediate intrigue created by explicitly stating a trio of paradoxes.	Three conflicts in one opening sentence is an example of Principle 5 (Merging). And for the very early creation of a sense of intrigue in the reader, Principle 10, (Prior Action or 'Do

				it in Advance’).
48. Tax Inspector	Peter Carey	The description of the collection of mildewed costume dolls in condensated glass cases in the grandmother’s dirty, dank and deteriorating flat above the family garage.	This epitomised for the reader the life of the grandmother and the family and how their lives had been slowly falling apart for decades.	The elegant depiction of decades’ worth of decay in a tiny detail represents an elegant example of Principle 3 (Local Quality).
49. The Time Traveler’s Wife	Audrey Niffenegger	The book in general.  The episode of the child meeting his grown-up self and learning techniques he would need to survive as a time traveler. The first of these takes place at night in a natural history museum.	All three readers citing this book linked the ‘wow’ factor to the ingenious way the writer played with time, sending the reader back and forth in time with the protagonist. This method was used effectively to create suspense.  Described by one reader as unexpected and thought-provoking in the sense that doing this is a human impossibility.	The time-shifting ‘wows’ are clear examples of Principle 10 (Prior Action).  The contradiction here is the important feature.
50. Toast	Nigel Slater	For the evoked memories of Butterscotch Angel Delight, and parents saying that eating in the street is common.	For the reader the description of all the foods and attitudes towards food were evocative of her own childhood. Remembering some of these forgotten things made her laugh out loud.	Another personal resonance, but this time one that probably works with many readers of a certain age growing up in the UK. This strategy of finding tiny details that evoke big memories is a Principle 18 (Resonance) strategy frequently used in comedy as well as literature.
51. To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee	The end of the trial of Tom Robinson with the speech which begins “Stand up, Miss Finch, your father’s passing...”	The reader (a teacher) remarked on being unable to read this passage out loud to her class without her voice breaking and tears welling in her eyes.	The polar-opposite action to the expected one is a clear example of Principle 13 (‘The other way around’).

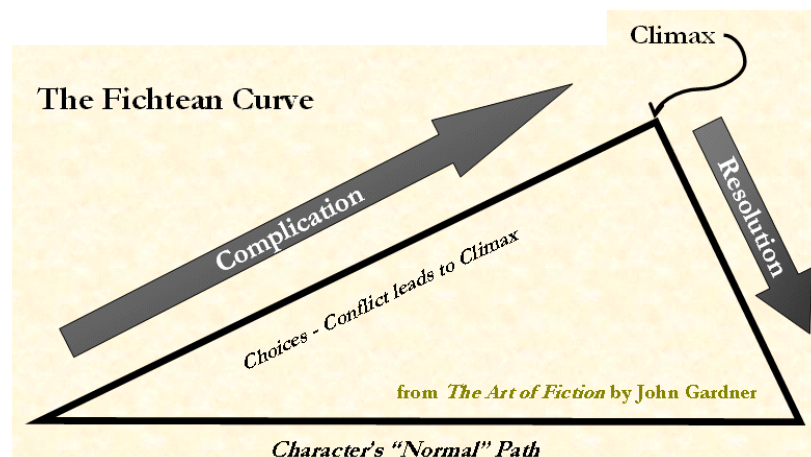
			For her it shows the dignity, generosity and graciousness of the black people in the courthouse gallery, despite the patent injustice and racism of the jury's verdict.	
52. Under Milkwood	Dylan Thomas	The opening paragraph.	'Star-less and bible-black', and then 'sloeblack, slow, black, crowblack fishing-boat bobbing sea.'	The unexpected combination of nouns and adjectives exemplifies Principle 5 (Merging). The repeated evocation of 'black' reflects Principle 20 (Continuity of a useful action)
53. Under the Skin	Michel Faber	The moment you realize that this is no ordinary woman picking up hitchhikers.	The reader described the great skill of the writer at constantly surprising you. The book begins as a contemporary novel and what appears to be a woman exacting revenge on male hitchhikers. It then moves seamlessly and unexpectedly into the sci-fi genre.	An elegant Principle 35 (Parameter change) time and space shift.
54. Vernon God Little	D B C Pierre	Overall use of language throughout the book.	Both readers citing this book remarked on the humour, humanity and the unusual use of language. You are required to get in tune with the language of the book in order to be able to enjoy reading it. The humour comes from the increasingly preposterous, often farcical situations in which the protagonist finds himself.	Multiple examples – both in the language and in the plot – of Principle 35 (Parameter change) in action.
55. Walking On Glass	Iain Banks	The overall structure.	The reader selected this book because of the way the author manages to connect three totally different stories, or so they seem, into a valid ending.	A clear example of the Principle 5 (Merging) plot strategy – three things that feel as if they cannot be connected actually turn out to be.

56. Watership Down	Richard Adams	The death of Hazel.	Particularly memorable for the reader who read it as a child when she had a pet rabbit.	Another personal resonance, and thus another example of Principle 18 (Resonance).
57. We Need to Talk about Kevin	Lionel Shriver	The build-up of tension around the question, where is Franklin?	Both readers citing this book remarked on how successful the writer is at making you wonder where Franklin is. The tension builds as the novel draws to a close. The 'wow' effect comes when what you are led to believe has happened to Franklin is completely wrong and the reality is much more gruesome than you could ever have imagined.	Here again, it is the tension emerging from the conflict that is more important than the resolution. The actual resolution – again, best not to give the game away - is a striking example of a Principle 38 (Enriched atmosphere) type shock.
58. Why Don't You Dance? (short story from the 'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love' collection)	Raymond Carver	Opening line: 'In the kitchen he poured another drink and looked at the bedroom suite in his front yard', and then the whole story that follows.	Carver is the master at setting up a story from an apparently innocuous but nevertheless unexpected detail; we don't expect bedroom suites to be in the front yard.	We quickly learn why the bedroom suite is in the front yard. The main conflict and resolution of the story arises from a young couple buying a bed at the yard sale, being given a record player and then later relaying the story to their friends. Again, unfair to give the story away, but an example of a Principle 7 ('Nesting') strategy.

59. The Woman in Black	Susan Hill	The first description of crossing the causeway.	The reader emphasised the creepiness of the prose in this book, especially in the moment specified.	Principle 35 (Parameter change) once again in action.
60. The World's Wife [poetry collection]	Carol Ann Duffy	The Mrs Darwin and Ms Midas poems	This poetry collection was described by the reader as a very funny rewriting of well-known tales and fables from a female perspective. Great use of language.	Another example of Principle 13 ('The other way around').
61. Wuthering Heights	Emily Bronte	The description of Cathy's love for Heathcliff ending 'I am Heathcliff.'  The moment describing the clutch of the little ice-cold hand of the dead Catherine Linton and her desperate cry "let me in, let me in."  The final chapter talking about the 'unquiet spirits' of Cathy and Heathcliff.	No specific reason given.  A second reader remarked on the chilling and moving nature of these moments which have remained with her to this day.	Archetypal 'boy-meets-girl' story in which the tension is more intriguing than the eventual resolution. This novel has a classic Principle 13 ('The other way around') twist at the climax.
62. The Virgin and the Gypsy	D H Lawrence	The sexual symbolism of the dam breaking/river overflowing.	This painted a vivid and apt picture for the reader, who also commented on the general brooding sensuality between the virgin and the gypsy.	Unexpected and evocative metaphor for the release of sexual tension Lawrence has built up to that point in the story. Another example of Principle 35 (Parameter change).
63. Virgin Suicides	Jeffrey Eugenides	The description of the decor of the house and the sisters' last night on earth sitting on worn furniture in a forlorn house.	For the reader this description was a physical representation of the neglect suffered at the hands of the sisters' parents, written in a way that in part explains why these young girls would want collectively to commit suicide.	The book works thanks to the ongoing tension between what appears on the surface and what actually exists underneath. As such, we can see this as an example of Principle 17 (Another Dimension).

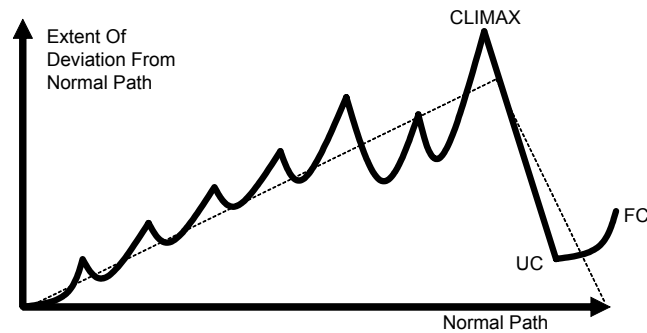
## Some Theory

In a parallel article to this one (Reference 3), we discuss the idea that there are only a relatively small number of possible literary plots. What this Reference 3 article tries to demonstrate is that although there are a finite and manageable number of different plots, the literary community's assessment that there are variously one-plot, three, seven, 20, 36 or 37 plots (Reference 4), is both naïve and incomplete. The 'only one plot' theory, however, is an interesting one, and indeed is potentially very important to the 'wow' research conducted for this article. Among the 'one-plot' perspective holders are people like E.M.Forster, William Foster-Harris (Reference 5) and, perhaps most significantly, John Gardner (Reference 6). All three come to the conclusion that all literature is about the emergence and resolution of a conflict. While this might not strike us immediately as a 'plot' as such, it is quite significant from a systematic innovation (SI) perspective. Gardner talks in the most detail about the significance of conflict resolution. In particular he introduces the idea of the Fichtean Curve. Figure 1 reproduces this curve. This picture is also a diagrammatic representation of what evokes a 'wow' reaction in people when they hear a joke or see a piece of great design or hear a great piece of music (Reference 1, 2 respectively) – that is, someone expects one thing (the 'normal' path) which turns out to be different from the place the designer or composer or joke-teller takes them. Then, when the conflict is resolved – after a 'climax' to use the expression found in the Fichtean Curve figure – that is when the 'wow' moment is experienced.



*Figure 1: Theoretical Fichtean Curve According To Gardner*

We can (and ought to) take this point further by picking out another aspect of this curve described by Gardner: The Fichtean Curve shown in Figure 1 represents the basic 'plot' of a book. In reality, however, authors or screenplay writers often introduce a multitude of conflicts. Whether consciously or not, what writers are doing when they do this is trying to increase the curiosity of the reader or viewer. As an audience, we appear to be naturally drawn to surprising and unexpected things. This probably goes a long way to explain why it has been possible to correlate 'wow' and conflict resolution in other disciplines. We appear to be inherently drawn to things that are not as we expect them to be. Figure 2 illustrates how writers frequently exploit this tendency.



**Figure 2: Fichtean Curve For A Typical Novel Or Film**

What we observe here is the use of multiple mini-conflicts. The function of these mini-conflicts is to keep the reader interested throughout the book. Whether you are a fan or not, the current book phenomenon that is Dan Brown's 'The Da Vinci Code' represents a great example of this plot device in action. In the book, the main character is forced to find and resolve a series of mini-conflict clues in order to make progress towards the ultimate prize. Also worth noting in Figure 2 are the UC and FC points. While these aren't always present, they do reflect common archetypes that are consistent with the overall Fichtean Curve premise. 'UC' can be thought of as the unfinished conflict resolution. We see this in many films and books in the 1970s and 80s where the denouement only partially resolves the main conflict. As readers or viewers we experience this unfinished resolution as a doubt. The unfinished conflict may thus be viewed as a device to keep the reader thinking about the book after they have put it down, and ideally to have any 'wow' effect continue after the book has been returned to the book shelf. FC, on the other hand is a device to set up the premise for a sequel and is used to great effect by the film industry. FC is a mini final-conflict that is introduced after the denouement and then deliberately left unresolved: did the baddy really die? Did the monster leave behind the seeds of another? And so on.

### **Analysis Of Literature Study Results**

In all, the survey identified and described 'wows' from 63 different books. Some of the books were selected by multiple readers, occasionally for different reasons. Where the same 'wows' were repeated by multiple readers, we have only included them once in our analysis. Where readers identified different 'wows' within the same book, we have included those as separate entries in our analysis. In all the analysis contains 81 'wow' examples.

One of the first things we can say about the results of the survey presented in the table is that in every case it has been possible to make a clear connection between the 'wow' experienced by the reader and some kind of a conflict. There are a number of similarities between this study and the results of our findings from the analysis of 'wow' in music (Reference 2). First and foremost, is an observation that the 'wow's occur at three distinct levels: some at what we might describe in SI as the 'system level' – i.e. the 'wow' emerged from the overall plot or story-line – some at a higher 'super-system' level – i.e.

an invention related to the genre or structure of book – and some (the largest number in fact) at the ‘sub-system’ level. These sub-system level ‘wows’ varied in size and scope from an individual phrase (‘starless and bible-black’) to particularly effective sentences to longer passages. The breakdown between these three different levels is as follows:

Sub-system	System	Super-system
53	26	2

Looking more closely at the 81 different ‘wow’s, we can observe that all can be clearly correlated to the existing 40 Inventive Principles found in SI. In descending order of frequency, the Principles observed were as follows:

- 15 Examples – Principle 35 (Parameter change)
- 12 Examples – Principle 13 (‘The other way around’)
- 6 Examples – Principles 5 (Merging), 17 (Another dimension), 18 Resonance), 37 (Relative change)
- 5 Examples – Principles 7 (‘Nesting’), 38 (Enriched atmosphere)
- 4 Examples – Principle 6 (Universality), 12 (Remove tension)
- 3 Examples – Principle 10 (Prior action)
- 2 Examples – Principle 20 (Continuity of a useful action)
- 1 Example – Principles 2 (Taking out), 3 (Local quality), 8 (Counterweight), 24 (Intermediary), 26 (Copying), 28 ((Another sense), 40 (Composite structures)

Thus, in all, we were able to identify examples of 19 of the 40 different Principles. Of course, the small sample size makes it impossible to say anything meaningful about the relevance or otherwise of the other 21 Principles. Likewise it is difficult to comment meaningfully on the frequency with which the 19 identified Principles are used. Looking at the most frequently used Principles – 35 (Parameter change) and 13 (The other way around) – we can, however, say that there is a strong correlation here between what has been observed in our analysis of ‘wow’ in literature and what has been seen elsewhere. Namely, on average, these two Principles are consistently in the Top 5 most commonly used conflict resolvers across all other analysed disciplines (e.g. Reference 7, 8). On the basis of the findings of this study we can now include literature among them.

The relatively high frequency of Principle 18 (Resonance) examples is due to the fact that we chose not to exclude ‘wow’s that occurred because of a particular and personal resonance between a writer, the characters and situations they create and an individual reader. This represents a change from the strategy we applied in earlier analyses. We made the change in part because of the smaller sample size, in part due to our inability to get different readers to review and discuss in detail the findings of other readers (something we were able to do in our analysis of ‘wow’ in music), but mainly because we think there is something different about ‘wow’s in literature compared to other media, i.e. the emotional context referred to in the initial thinking section at the start of this article.

Although the survey has clearly demonstrated the potent link between ‘wow’ and conflict, one thing we notice that is different between ‘wow’ in literature and ‘wow’ in other fields is that it is frequently the case (in around 12 of the 63 presented examples) that it is the conflict itself rather than the resolution of the conflict that creates the ‘wow’

effect. A classic example of this is Jane Austen's 'Pride & Prejudice.' Although difficult to generalize totally, the enduring attraction of the book seems to be far more closely linked to the 'will-they-won't they' tension between the two main characters as it does from the actual resolution and denouement. It is not the resolution or even method of resolving the conflict that creates the 'wow' effect – they end up together after Elizabeth realizes she has misunderstood Darcy's actions; big deal – but rather the fact that the tension caused by the conflict is maintained (and indeed intensifies) over the course of the novel. This "wow" arising from the conflict itself feature is something we will be looking for in other media from now on.

## Conclusions

As in other disciplines, we have shown there to be a very strong correlation between conflict and conflict resolution and the creation of a 'wow' effect. Every one of our 63 examples fits this model. Likewise every one of the 81 conflict resolution examples also fit the existing SI Inventive Principle structure. This is not to say that for literature to succeed in being memorable to readers, it requires the presence or resolution of a conflict. However, all the signs point to the idea that each plays an important role.

The question now remains whether we can (or ought!) to turn these analytical findings around the other way and begin to apply them pro-actively in the creation of new literature. It is often said that the easiest way to kill peoples' enjoyment of something is to analyse it and therefore 'take the mystery out of it'. Alas trends show that, whether we like it or not, someone sooner or later will inevitably do this. In References 4 through 6 and then Reference 9, we can see that there have already been several attempts at creating prescriptive 'here's how to write a best-selling book' guides. Rather than seeing such an act as destructive, however, the reason why the analysis happens – and why we have done it here – is that it ultimately opens the door to new ways of thinking. It is our hope that what we have presented here in this article unlocks the door through which others can now walk, using the findings to create new, inventive and exciting writing.

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