- Level: 1st Year L **Defining Literature**  Sept,26th

- Module: Literature

- Teacher: Mh

**L**iterature refers to writing considered to have artistic merit, or "published on a particular subject: the literature on environmental epidemiology".

Its Latin root *literatura* (derived itself from *littera*: *letter* or *handwriting*) was used to refer to all written accounts. The concept has changed meaning over time to include texts that are spoken or sung ([oral literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_literature" \o "Oral literature)), and non-written verbal art forms. [Developments in print technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_printing" \o "History of printing)have allowed an ever-growing distribution and proliferation of written works, culminating in **[electronic literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_literature" \o "Electronic literature)**.

Literature is classified according to whether it is**[fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiction" \o "Fiction)** o**r [non-fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-fiction" \o "Non-fiction)**, and whether it is **[poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry" \o "Poetry)**or **[prose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose" \o "Prose)**. It can be further distinguished according to **major forms** such as the **[novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novel" \o "Novel), [short story](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_story" \o "Short story) or [drama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drama" \o "Drama)**; and works are often **categorized** according to **historica**l **periods** or their adherence to certain**[aesthetic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetics" \o "Aesthetics)** features or expectations **([genre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre" \o "Genre)**).

* **Definitions of literature** have varied over time: it is a "culturally relative definition".
* In [Western Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Europe" \o "Western Europe) prior to the 18th century, literature denoted all books and writing.
* A more restricted sense of the term emerged during the [Romantic period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanticism" \o "Romanticism), in which it began to demarcate "imaginative" writing.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature" \l "cite_note-Ross,_The_Emergence_of_Literature:_Making_and_Reading_the_English_Canon_in_the_Eighteenth_Century,_406-4)[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature" \l "cite_note-FOOTNOTEEagleton200816-5) Contemporary debates over what constitutes literature can be seen as returning to older, more inclusive notions.
* [Cultural studies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_studies" \o "Cultural studies), for instance, takes as its subject of analysis both popular and minority genres, in addition to [canonical works](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_canon" \o "Western canon).

The [value judgment](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value_judgment" \o "Value judgment) definition of literature considers it to cover exclusively those writings that possess high quality or distinction, forming part of the so-called *[belles-lettres](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belles-lettres" \o "Belles-lettres)* ('fine writing')

**Back in Ancient Greece**; literature was divided into two main categories: Tragedy and Comedy. But nowadays we can identify five basic genres of literature: Poetry, Drama, Prose, Non-fiction, and Media.

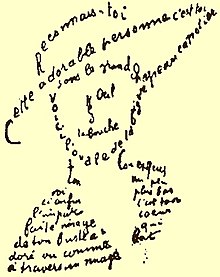
1. **Poetry:** considered the oldest form of literature. Before writing was invented, ORAL STORIES WERE COMMONLY PUT INTO SOME SORT OF POETIC FORM to make them easier to remember and recite. Poetry today is written down; but is still sometimes performed. Poems are heavy in image and metaphor, and and are made up of fragments and phrases rather than complete, grammatically correct sentences. Edgar Allen Poe’s ***The Raven*** (1845). There are also the classical poems of **Shakespeare's** time, such as the **blank verse** and the **sonnet**, and there are the ancient epic poems transcribed from oral stories, these long complex poems resemble novels, such as l’iliade or The Odyssey. Bt Homere (8century), characters : Ulysses, zeus, Penelope.....)
2. **Prose:** Once you know what poetry is, it is easy to define prose. Prose can be defined as any kind of written text that isn’t poetry (which means drama) The most typical **varieties of prose** are **novels** and **short stories**, while other types include **letters**, **diaries**, **journals**, and **non-fiction**. Prose is written in complete sentences and organised in paragraphs. Instead of focusing on sound, prose tends to focus on **plot** and **characters**. **Egg**, **JANE EYRE.**by charlotte Bronte (1847)
3. **Drama:** Any text meant to be performed rather than read can be considred drama. Dramas are usually called plays. Egg SHAKESPEARE’S **Romeo and Juliet**. Older greek play **Antigone** by Sophocles, **modern play** such as Arthur Miller’s **Death of a Salesman.(**1949) a play)

* **Types of literature:**
* Some of the popular categories of books and stories in literature.

1. **An autobiography**: is the story of a person’s life written or told by that person. Eg ; Bill Peet an autobiography
2. **A biography**: is the story of a person’s life written or told by another person. Ag, Eleanor ; by Barbara Cooney.
3. **A fable:** a story that teaches a moral or a lesson. It often has animal characters. **Eg**; the Tortoise and the Hare.
4. **Fantasy:** Novels are often set in worlds much different from our own and usually include magic, sorcery and mythical creatures.**eg**; The Harry Potter series by **J. k .ROWLING.**
5. **A folktale** is a story that has been passed down, usually orally, within a culture. It may be based on superstition and feature supernatural characters. Folktales include fairytales, tall tales and other stories passed down over generations. **Eg**, **Hansel and Gretel.**
6. **A legend:** is a story that has been handed down over generations and is believed to be based on history; though it typically mixes fact and fiction. The hero of a legend is usually a human. **Eg**, King Arthur and the Round table.
7. **A myth**: is a traditional story that a particular culture or group once accepted as sacred and true. It may center on a god or supernatural being and explain how something came to be. Egg, the Greek story of the Titan Prometheus bringing fire to human kind.
8. **Science fiction**: Stories examine how science and technology affect the world. The books often involve fantasy inventions that may be reality in the future. Egg, The Left hand of Darkness; by Ursula Le Guin.

Tradition. This sort of definition is that used in the *[Encyclopædia Britannica](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica_Eleventh_Edition" \o "Encyclopædia Britannica Eleventh Edition)*[Eleventh Edition](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica_Eleventh_Edition" \o "Encyclopædia Britannica Eleventh Edition) (1910–

11) When it classifies literature as "**the best expression of the best thought reduced to writing**."

* Problematic in this view is that there is no objective definition of what constitutes "literature": anything can be literature, and anything which is universally regarded as literature has the potential to be excluded, since value judgments can change over time.
* **The [formalist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Formalism_(literature)" \o "Formalism (literature)) definition** is that "literature" foregrounds poetic effects; it is the "literariness" or "poetic" of literature that distinguishes it from ordinary speech or other kinds of writing (e.g., [journalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalism" \o "Journalism)).
* [](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Calligramme.jpg) Jim Meyer considers this a useful characteristic in explaining the use of the term to mean published material in a particular field (e.g., "[scientific literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_literature" \o "Scientific literature)"), as such writing must use language according to particular standards. The problem with the formalist definition is that in order to say that literature deviates from ordinary uses of language, those uses must first be identified; this is difficult because "[ordinary language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordinary_language" \o "Ordinary language)" is an unstable category, differing according to social categories and across history.
* [Etymologically](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etymology" \o "Etymology), the term derives from [Latin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_language" \o "Latin language) *literatura/litteratura* "learning, writing, grammar," originally "writing formed with letters," from *litera/littera* "letter". In spite of this, the term has also been applied to [spoken or sung texts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_literature" \o "Oral literature).

### Genres

[Literary genre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_genre" \o "Literary genre) is a mode of categorizing literature. A French term for "a literary type or class". However, such classes are subject to change, and have been used in different ways in different periods and traditions.

## Poetry :

## A [calligram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calligram" \o "Calligram) by [Guillaume Apollinaire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillaume_Apollinaire" \o "Guillaume Apollinaire): These are a type of poem in which the written words are arranged in such a way to produce a visual image.

Poetry is a form of literary art which uses [aesthetic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aesthetics" \o "Aesthetics) and [rhythmic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhythm" \o "Rhythm) qualities of language to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, [prosaic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose" \o "Prose) ostensible meaning. Poetry has traditionally been distinguished from [prose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose" \o "Prose) by its being set in [verse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verse_(poetry)" \o "Verse (poetry));[]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literature" \l "cite_note-43) prose is cast in [sentences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sentence_(linguistics)" \o "Sentence (linguistics)), poetry in [lines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Line_(poetry)" \o "Line (poetry)); the [syntax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntax" \o "Syntax) of prose is dictated by meaning, whereas that of poetry is held across meter or the visual aspects of the poem.

 Prior to the 19th century, poetry was commonly understood to be something set in metrical lines; accordingly, in 1658 a definition of poetry is "any kind of subject consisting of Rhythm or Verses". Possibly as a result of [Aristotle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle" \o "Aristotle)'s influence (his *[Poetics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetics_(Aristotle)" \o "Poetics (Aristotle))*), "poetry" before the 19th century was usually less a technical designation for verse than a normative category of fictive or rhetorical art. As a form it may pre-date [literacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literacy" \o "Literacy), with the earliest works being composed within and sustained by an oral tradition;[hence it constitutes the earliest example of literature.

* **[Prose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose" \o "Prose) and [Literary fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_fiction" \o "Literary fiction)**

Prose is a form of [language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language" \o "Language) that possesses ordinary [syntax](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syntax" \o "Syntax) and [natural speech](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_speech" \o "Natural speech), rather than a regular [metre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metre_(poetry)" \o "Metre (poetry)); in which regard, along with its presentation in sentences rather than lines, it differs from most poetry. However, developments in modern literature, including [free verse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_verse" \o "Free verse) and [prose poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prose_poetry" \o "Prose poetry) have tended to blur any differences, and American poet [T. S. Eliot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._S._Eliot" \o "T. S. Eliot) suggested that while: "the distinction between [verse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verse_(poetry)" \o "Verse (poetry)) and prose is clear, the distinction between [poetry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry" \o "Poetry) and prose is obscure".

On the historical development of prose, Richard Graff notes that "[In the case of [Ancient Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece" \o "Ancient Greece)] recent scholarship has emphasized the fact that formal prose was a comparatively late development, an "invention" properly associated with the [classical period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity" \o "Classical antiquity)".

Philosophical, historical, journalistic, and scientific writings are traditionally ranked as literature. They offer some of the oldest prose writings in existence; novels and prose stories earned the names "fiction" to distinguish them from factual writing or nonfiction, which writers historically have crafted in prose.

### Fiction:

#### [Novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novel" \o "Novel) :

A long [fictional](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fictional" \o "Fictional) prose narrative, in English, the term emerged from the [Romance languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romance_language" \o "Romance language) in the late 15th century, with the meaning of "news"; it came to indicate something new, without a distinction between facts or fiction.The romance is a closely related long prose narrative. [Walter Scott](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Scott" \o "Walter Scott) defined it as "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents", whereas in the novel "the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society". Other European languages do not distinguish between romance and novel: "a novel is *le roman*, *der Roman*, *il romanzo*", indicates the proximity of the forms.

Although there are many historical prototypes, so-called "novels before the novel", the modern novel form emerges late in cultural history - roughly during the **eighteenth century.** Initially subject to much criticism, the novel has acquired a dominant position amongst literary forms, both popularly and critically.

#### [Novella](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novella" \o "Novella) :

In purely quantitative terms, the novella exists between the novel and short story; the publisher [Melville House](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melville_House_Publishing" \o "Melville House Publishing) classifies it as "too short to be a novel, too long to be a short story". There is no precise definition in terms of word or page count. [Literary prizes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_prize" \o "Literary prize) and [publishing houses](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publishing" \o "Publishing) often have their own arbitrary limits, which vary according to their particular intentions. Summarizing the variable definitions of the novella, William Giraldi concludes "[it is a form] whose identity seems destined to be disputed into perpetuity". It has been suggested that the size restriction of the form produces various stylistic results, both some that are shared with the novel or short story, and others unique to the form.

#### [Short story](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_story" \o "Short story)

A dilemma in defining the "short story" as a literary form is how to, or whether one should, distinguish it from any short narrative; hence it also has a contested origin, variably suggested as the earliest short narratives (e.g. the [Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible" \o "Bible)), early short story writers (e.g. [Edgar Allan Poe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Allan_Poe" \o "Edgar Allan Poe)), or the clearly modern short story writers (e.g. [Anton Chekhov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Chekhov" \o "Anton Chekhov)). Apart from its distinct size, various theorists have suggested that the short story has a characteristic subject matter or structure; these discussions often position the form in some relation to the novel.

### Essays

An [essay](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essay" \o "Essay) consists of a discussion of a topic from an author's personal point of view, exemplified by works by [Michel de Montaigne](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_de_Montaigne" \o "Michel de Montaigne) or by [Charles Lamb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Lamb_(writer)" \o "Charles Lamb (writer)). Genres related to the essay may include the [memoir](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memoir" \o "Memoir) and the [epistle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle" \o "Epistle).

### Natural science

As advances and specialization have made new scientific research inaccessible to most audiences, the "literary" nature of science writing has become less pronounced over the last two centuries. Now, science appears mostly in [journals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_journal" \o "Scientific journal). Scientific works of [Aristotle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle" \o "Aristotle), [Copernicus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaus_Copernicus" \o "Nicolaus Copernicus), and [Newton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton" \o "Isaac Newton) still exhibit great value, but since the science in them has largely become outdated, they no longer serve for scientific instruction. Yet, they remain too technical to sit well in most programs of literary study. Outside of "[history of science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_science" \o "History of science)" programs, students rarely read such works.

### Philosophy

Philosophy has become an increasingly academic discipline. More of its practitioners lament this situation than occurs with the sciences; nonetheless most new philosophical work appears in [academicjournals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academic_publishing" \o "Academic publishing).Major philosophers through history:[Plato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato" \o "Plato), [Aristotle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle" \o "Aristotle), [Socrates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socrates" \o "Socrates), [Augustine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo" \o "Augustine of Hippo), [Descartes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9_Descartes" \o "René Descartes), [Kierkegaard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%B8ren_Kierkegaard" \o "Søren Kierkegaard), [Nietzsche](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche" \o "Friedrich Nietzsche) have become as canonical as any writers. Some recent philosophy works are argued to merit the title "literature", but much of it does not, and some areas, such as [logic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Logic" \o "Logic), have become extremely technical to a degree similar to that of [mathematics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematics" \o "Mathematics).

### History

A significant portion of historical writing ranks as literature, particularly the genre known as [creative nonfiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_nonfiction" \o "Creative nonfiction), as can a great deal of journalism, such as [literary journalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_journalism" \o "Literary journalism). However, these areas have become extremely large, and often have a primarily utilitarian purpose: to record data or convey immediate information. As a result, the writing in these fields often lacks a literary quality, although it often(and in its better moments)has that quality. Major "literary" historians include [Herodotus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herodotus" \o "Herodotus), [Thucydides](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thucydides" \o "Thucydides) and [Procopius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Procopius" \o "Procopius), all of whom count as canonical literary figures.

### Law

[Law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law" \o "Law) offers more ambiguity. Some writings of [Plato](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plato" \o "Plato) and [Aristotle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristotle" \o "Aristotle), the law tables of [Hammurabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hammurabi" \o "Hammurabi) of [Babylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon" \o "Babylon), or even the early parts of the [Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible" \o "Bible) could be seen as legal literature. [Roman civil law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_law" \o "Roman law) as codified in the *[Corpus Juris Civilis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpus_Juris_Civilis" \o "Corpus Juris Civilis)* during the reign of [Justinian I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justinian_I" \o "Justinian I) of the [Byzantine Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire" \o "Byzantine Empire) has a reputation as significant literature. The founding documents of many countries, including [Constitutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution" \o "Constitution) and [Law Codes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law_Code" \o "Law Code), can count as literature.

## Drama

Drama is literature intended for [performance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance" \o "Performance).The form is often combined with music and dance, as in [opera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opera" \o "Opera) and [musical theater](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musical_theatre" \o "Musical theatre). A [play](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Play_(theatre)" \o "Play (theatre)) is a subset of this form, referring to the written dramatic work of a [playwright](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playwright" \o "Playwright) that is intended for performance in a theater; it comprises chiefly [dialogue](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dialogue" \o "Dialogue) between [characters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fictional_character" \o "Fictional character), and usually aims at dramatic or theatrical performance rather than at reading. A [closet drama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Closet_drama" \o "Closet drama), by contrast, refers to a play written to be read rather than to be performed; hence, it is intended that the meaning of such a work can be realized fully on the page. Nearly all drama took verse form until comparatively recently.

**[Greek drama](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_theatre" \o "Greek theatre)**

Exemplifies the earliest form of drama of which we have substantial knowledge. [Tragedy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy" \o "Tragedy), as a dramatic [genre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genre" \o "Genre), developed as a performance associated with [religious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion" \o "Religion)and civic [festivals](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festival" \o "Festival), typically enacting or developing upon well-known [historical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History" \o "History) or [mythological](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythology" \o "Mythology) themes. Tragedies generally presented very serious [themes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theme_(literature)" \o "Theme (literature)). With the advent of newer technologies, scripts written for non-stage media have been added to this form. [War of the Worlds (radio)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Worlds_(radio)" \o "War of the Worlds (radio)) in 1938 saw the advent of literature written for radio broadcast, and many works of Drama have been adapted for film or television. Conversely, television, film, and radio literature have been adapted to printed or electronic media.

## Other narrative forms

* [Electronic literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electronic_literature" \o "Electronic literature) is a literary genre consisting of works that originate in digital environments.
* [Films](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Film" \o "Film), videos and broadcast [soap operas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soap_opera" \o "Soap opera) have carved out a niche which often parallels the functionality of prose fiction.
* [Graphic novels](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graphic_novel" \o "Graphic novel) and [comic books](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comic_book" \o "Comic book) present stories told in a combination of sequential artwork, dialogue and text.

## Literary techniques

* **[list of narrative techniques](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_narrative_techniques" \o "List of narrative techniques)**

Literary technique and **literary device** are used by authors to produce specific effects.

Literary techniques encompass a wide range of approaches: examples for fiction are, whether a work is narrated in [first-person](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammatical_person" \o "Grammatical person), or from another perspective; whether a traditional linear narrative or a [nonlinear narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonlinear_narrative" \o "Nonlinear narrative) is used; the [literary genre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_genre" \o "Literary genre) that is chosen.

Literary devices involve specific elements within the work that make it effective. Examples include [metaphor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor" \o "Metaphor), [simile](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simile" \o "Simile), [ellipsis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellipsis" \o "Ellipsis), narrative [motifs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motif_(narrative)" \o "Motif (narrative)), and [allegory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allegory" \o "Allegory). Even simple [word play](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_play" \o "Word play)functions as a literary device. In fiction [stream-of-consciousness narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stream-of-consciousness_narrative" \o "Stream-of-consciousness narrative) is a literary device.

Literary works have been protected by copyright law from unauthorized reproduction since at least 1710. Literary works are defined by copyright law to mean *any work, other than a dramatic or musical work, which is written, spoken or sung, and accordingly includes (a) a table or compilation (other than a database), (b) a computer program, (c) preparatory design material for a computer program, and (d) a database.*

Literary works are not limited to works of literature, but include all works expressed in print or writing (other than dramatic or musical works).

**Literature**, a body of written works. The name has traditionally been applied to those imaginative works of poetry and prose distinguished by the intentions of their authors and the perceived [aesthetic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aesthetic) excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified according to a variety of systems, including [language](https://www.britannica.com/topic/language), national origin, historical period, [genre](https://www.britannica.com/art/genre-literature), and subject matter.

For historical treatment of various literatures within geographical regions, see such articles as [African literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/African-literature); [African theatre](https://www.britannica.com/art/African-theatre-art); [Oceanic literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Oceanic-literature); [Western literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Western-literature); [Central Asian arts](https://www.britannica.com/art/Central-Asian-arts); [South Asian arts](https://www.britannica.com/art/South-Asian-arts" \l "ref65160); and [Southeast Asian arts](https://www.britannica.com/art/Southeast-Asian-arts/Literature" \l "ref29464). Some literatures are treated separately by language, by nation, or by special subject (e.g., [Arabic literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Arabic-literature), [Celtic literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Celtic-literature), [Latin literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Latin-literature), [French literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/French-literature), [Japanese literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Japanese-literature), and [biblical literature](https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature)).

Definitions of the word **literature**tend to be circular. The 11th edition of Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary considers literature to be “writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.” The 19th-century critic [Walter Pater](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walter-Pater)referred to “the matter of imaginative or artistic literature” as a “transcript, not of mere fact, but of fact in its infinitely varied forms.” But such definitions assume that the reader already knows what literature is. And indeed its central meaning, at least, is clear enough. Deriving from the Latin littera, “a letter of the alphabet,” literature is first and foremost humankind’s entire body of writing; after that it is the body of [writing](https://www.britannica.com/topic/writing) belonging to a given language or people; then it is individual pieces of writing.

But already it is necessary to qualify these statements. To use the word writing when describing literature is itself misleading, for one may speak of “oral literature” or “the literature of preliterate peoples.” The art of literature is not reducible to the words on the page; they are there solely because of the craft of writing. As an art, literature might be described as the organization of words to give pleasure. Yet through words literature elevates and transforms experience beyond “mere” pleasure. Literature also functions more broadly in society as a means of both criticizing and affirming cultural values.

## Literary language

In some literatures (notably classical Chinese, Old Norse, Old Irish), the language employed is quite different from that spoken or used in ordinary writing. This marks off the reading of literature as a special experience. In the Western tradition, it is only in comparatively modern times that literature has been written in the common speech of cultivated men. The Elizabethans did not talk like Shakespeare nor 18th-century people in the stately prose of [Samuel Johnson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Johnson) or [Edward Gibbon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Gibbon) (the so-called [Augustan](https://www.britannica.com/art/Augustan-Age-English-literature) plain style in literature became popular in the late 17th century and flourished throughout the 18th, but it was really a special form of [rhetoric](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetoric) with [antecedent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antecedent) models in Greek and Latin). The first person to write major works of literature in the [ordinary](https://www.britannica.com/topic/vernacular)[English language](https://www.britannica.com/topic/English-language) of the educated man was [Daniel Defoe](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Daniel-Defoe) (1660–1731), and it is remarkable how little the language has changed since. *[Robinson Crusoe](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Robinson-Crusoe-novel)* (1719) is much more contemporary in tone than the elaborate prose of 19th-century writers like [Thomas De Quincey](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-De-Quincey) or Walter Pater. (Defoe’s language is not, in fact, so very simple: simplicity is itself one form of artifice.)

## [Ambiguity](https://www.britannica.com/topic/ambiguity)

Other writers have sought to use language for its most subtle and complex effects and have deliberately cultivated the [ambiguity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ambiguity) [inherent](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inherent)in the multiple or shaded meanings of words. Between the two world wars, “ambiguity” became very fashionable in [English](https://www.britannica.com/art/English-literature) and [American](https://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature)poetry and the ferreting out of ambiguities-from even the simplest poem-was a favourite critical sport. [T.S. Eliot](https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-S-Eliot) in his literary essays is usually considered the founder of this movement. Actually, the platform of his critical attitudes is largely [moral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/moral), but his two [disciples](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disciples), [I.A. Richards](https://www.britannica.com/biography/I-A-Richards)in Principles of Literary Criticism (1924) and [William Empson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Empson) in Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930), carried his method to extreme lengths. The basic document of the movement is [C.K. Ogden](https://www.britannica.com/biography/C-K-Ogden) and I.A. Richards’ *[The Meaning of Meaning](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Meaning-of-Meaning)* (1923), a work of enormous importance in its time. Only a generation later, however, their ideas were somewhat at a discount. However, ambiguity remained a principal shaping tool for the writer and a primary focus in literary criticism.

## Content of literature :

## The word as [symbol](https://www.britannica.com/topic/symbolism)

The content of literature is as limitless as the desire of human beings to communicate with one another. The thousands of years, perhaps hundreds of thousands, since the human species first developed speech have seen built up the almost infinite systems of relationships called [languages](https://www.britannica.com/topic/language). A language is not just a collection of words in an unabridged dictionary but the individual and social possession of living human beings, an inexhaustible system of equivalents, of sounds to objects and to one another. Its most primitive elements are those [words](https://www.britannica.com/topic/word) that express direct experiences of objective reality, and its most sophisticated are concepts on a high level of abstraction. Words are not only equivalent to things; they have varying degrees of equivalence to one another. A symbol, says the dictionary, is something that stands for something else or a sign used to represent something, “as the lion is the symbol of courage, the cross the symbol of Christianity.” In this sense all words can be called symbols, but the examples given-the lion and the cross-are really [metaphors](https://www.britannica.com/art/metaphor): that is, symbols that represent a complex of other symbols, and which are generally negotiable in a given society (just as money is a symbol for goods or labour). Eventually a language comes to be, among other things, a huge sea of [implicit](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/implicit) [metaphors](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphors), an endless web of interrelated symbols. As literature, especially poetry, grows more and more sophisticated, it begins to manipulate this field of suspended metaphors as a material in itself, often as an end in itself. Thus, there emerge forms of poetry (and prose, too) with endless ramifications of reference, as in [Japanese](https://www.britannica.com/art/Japanese-literature) [waka](https://www.britannica.com/art/waka-Japanese-poetry) and haiku, some ancient Irish and Norse verse, and much of the poetry written in western Europe since the time of Baudelaire that is called modernist. It might be supposed that, at its most extreme, this development would be objective, constructive-aligning it with the critical theories stemming from Aristotle’s Poetics. On the contrary, it is [romantic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/romantic), subjective art, primarily because the writer handles such material instinctively and subjectively, approaches it as the “[collective unconscious](https://www.britannica.com/science/collective-unconscious),” to use the term of the psychologist [Carl Jung](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carl-Jung), rather than with deliberate rationality.

## Themes and their sources

By the time literature appears in the development of a [culture](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture), the society has already come to share a whole system of [stereotypes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotypes) and [archetypes](https://www.britannica.com/topic/archetype): major symbols standing for the fundamental realities of the human condition, including the kind of symbolic realities that are enshrined in [religion](https://www.britannica.com/topic/religion) and [myth](https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth). Literature may use such symbols directly, but all great works of literary art are, as it were, original and unique [myths](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myths). The world’s great classics evoke and organize the [archetypes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/archetypes) of universal human experience. This does not mean, however, that all literature is an endless repetition of a few myths and motives, endlessly retelling the first stories of civilized man, repeating the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh or Sophocles’ Oedipus the King. The subject matter of literature is as wide as human experience itself. Myths, [legends](https://www.britannica.com/art/legend-literature), and [folktales](https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-literature) lie at the beginning of literature, and their plots, situations, and allegorical (metaphorical narrative) judgments of life represent a constant source of literary inspiration that never fails. This is so because mankind is constant—people share a common physiology. Even social structures, after the development of cities, remain much alike. Whole civilizations have a life pattern that repeats itself through history. Jung’s term “collective unconscious” really means that mankind is one species, with a common fund of general experience. Egyptian scribes, Japanese [bureaucrats](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bureaucrats), and junior executives in [New York City](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-York-City) live and respond to life in the same ways; the lives of farmers or miners or hunters vary only within narrow limits. Love is love and death is death, for a southern African hunter-gatherer and a French [Surrealist](https://www.britannica.com/art/Surrealism) alike. So the themes of literature have at once an infinite variety and an [abiding](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abiding)constancy. They can be taken from [myth](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/myth), from history, or from contemporary occurrence, or they can be pure invention (but even if they are invented, they are nonetheless constructed from the constant materials of real experience, no matter how fantastic the invention).

## The writer’s personal involvement

As time goes on, literature tends to concern itself more and more with the interior meanings of its narrative, with problems of human personality and human relationships. Many novels are fictional, psychological biographies which tell of the slowly achieved [integration](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integration) of the hero’s personality or of his disintegration, of the conflict between self-realization and the flow of events and the demands of other people. This can be presented explicitly, where the characters talk about what is going on in their heads, either ambiguously and with reserve, as in the novels of Henry James, or overtly, as in those of Dostoevsky. Alternatively, it can be presented by a careful arrangement of objective facts, where [psychological development](https://www.britannica.com/science/psychological-development) is described purely in terms of behaviour and where the reader’s subjective response is elicited by the minute descriptions of physical reality, as in the novels of Stendhal and the greatest Chinese novels like the Dream of the Red Chamber, which convince the reader that through the novel he is seeing reality itself, rather than an artfully contrived semblance of reality.

Literature, however, is not solely concerned with the concrete, with objective reality, with [individual psychology](https://www.britannica.com/science/individual-psychology), or with subjective emotion. Some deal with abstract ideas or philosophical [conceptions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conceptions). Much purely abstract writing is considered literature only in the widest sense of the term, and the philosophical works that are ranked as great literature are usually presented with more or less of a sensuous garment. Thus, Plato’s *[Dialogues](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dialogues-works-by-Plato)* rank as great literature because the philosophical material is presented in dramatic form, as the dialectical outcome of the interchange of ideas between clearly drawn, vital personalities, and because the descriptive passages are of great lyric beauty. [Karl Marx](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Karl-Marx)’s *[Das Kapital](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Das-Kapital)* (1867–95) approaches great literature in certain passages in which he expresses the social passion he shares with the Hebrew prophets of the [Old Testament](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Old-Testament). [Euclid](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Euclid-Greek-mathematician)’s Elements and [St. Thomas Aquinas](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Thomas-Aquinas)’ Summa theologica give literary, aesthetic satisfaction to some people because of their purity of style and beauty of architectonic construction. In short, most philosophical works that rank as great literature do so because they are intensely human. The reader responds to [Blaise Pascal](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Blaise-Pascal)’s Pensées, to [Michel de Montaigne](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michel-de-Montaigne)’s Essays, and to [Marcus Aurelius](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcus-Aurelius-Roman-emperor)’ Meditations as he would to living men. Sometimes the pretense of purely abstract [intellectual](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectual) rigour is in fact a literary device. The writings of the 20th-century philosopher [Ludwig Wittgenstein](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ludwig-Wittgenstein), for example, owe much of their impact to this approach, while the poetry of [Paul Valéry](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paul-Valery) borrows the language of philosophy and science for its [rhetorical](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhetorical) and [evocative](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/evocative) power.

## Relation of form to content

Throughout literary history, many great critics have pointed out that it is artificial to make a distinction between form and content, except for purposes of analytical discussion. Form determines content. Content determines form. The issue is, indeed, usually only raised at all by those critics who are more interested in politics, religion, or [ideology](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideology) than in literature; thus, they object to writers who they feel sacrifice ideological orthodoxy for formal perfection, message for [style](https://www.britannica.com/art/style-art).

## Style

style cannot really be said to exist on paper at all; it is the way the mind of the [author](https://www.britannica.com/art/author) expresses itself in words. Since words represent ideas, there cannot be abstract literature unless a collection of nonsense syllables can be admitted as literature. Even the most avant-garde writers associated with the Cubist or nonobjective painters used language, and language is [meaning](https://www.britannica.com/topic/meaning), though the meaning may be incomprehensible. [Oscar Wilde](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oscar-Wilde) and [Walter Pater](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walter-Pater), the great 19th-century exponents of “[art for art’s sake](https://www.britannica.com/topic/art-for-arts-sake),” were in fact tireless propagandists for their views, which dominate their most flowery prose. It is true that great style depends on the perfect matching of content and form, so that the literary expression perfectly reflects the writer’s intention; “poor style” reveals the inability of a writer to match the two-in other words, reveals his inability to express himself. This is why we say that “style expresses the man.” The veiled style of [Henry James](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-James-American-writer), with its subtleties, equivocations, and qualifications, perfectly reflects his complicated and subtle mind and his abiding awareness of ambiguity in human motives. At the other extreme, the style of the early 20th-century American novelist [Theodore Dreiser](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theodore-Dreiser)-bumbling, clumsy, dogged, troubled-perfectly embodies his own attitudes toward life and is, in fact, his constant judgment of his subject matter. Sometimes an author, under the impression that he is simply polishing his style, may completely alter his content. As Flaubert worked over the drafts of *[Madame Bovary](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Madame-Bovary-novel)*, seeking always the apposite word that would precisely convey his meaning, he lifted his novel from a level of sentimental [romance](https://www.britannica.com/art/romance-literature-and-performance) to make it one of the great [ironic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ironic) tragedies of literature. Yet, to judge from his correspondence, he seems never to have been completely aware of what he had done, of the severity of his own [irony](https://www.britannica.com/art/irony).

Literature may be an art, but writing is a **craft**, and a craft must be learned. Talent, special ability in the arts, may appear at an early age; the special personality called genius may indeed be born, not made. But skill in matching intention and expression comes with practice. Naïve writers, “naturals” like the 17th-century English diarist [Samuel Pepys](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Pepys), the late 18th-century French naïf [Restif de la Bretonne](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicolas-Edme-Restif), the 20th-century American novelist [Henry Miller](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Miller), are all deservedly called stylists, although their styles are far removed from the deliberate, painstaking practice of a Flaubert or a [Turgenev](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ivan-Sergeyevich-Turgenev). They wrote spontaneously whatever came into their heads; but they wrote constantly, voluminously, and were, by their own standards, skilled practitioners.

## Objective-subjective Expression

There are certain forms of literature that do not permit such highly personal behaviour—for instance, formal lyric poetry and classic drama. In these cases the word “form” is used to mean a predetermined structure within whose mold the content must be fitted. These structures are, however, quite simple and so cannot be said to determine the content. [Jean Racine](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Racine) and [Pierre Corneille](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Corneille) were contemporaries; both were Neoclassic French dramatists; both [abided](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abided) by all the artificial rules-usually observing the “unities” and following the same strict rules of prosody. Yet their plays, and the poetry in which they are written, differ completely. Corneille is intellectually and emotionally a Neo classicist-clear and hard, a true objectivist, sure of both his verse and the motivations of his characters. Racine was a great romantic long before the age of Romanticism. His characters are confused and tortured; his verse throbs like the heartbeats of his desperate heroines. He is a great sentimentalist in the best and deepest meaning of that word. His later influence on poets like Baudelaire and [Paul Valéry](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Paul-Valery) is due to his mastery of sentimental expression, not, as they supposed, to his mastery of neoclassic form.

Verse on any subject matter can of course be written purely according to formula. The 18th century in England saw all sorts of prose treatises cast in rhyme and metre, but this was simply applied patterning. (Works such as **The Botanic Garden** [2 vol., 1794–95] by [Erasmus Darwin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Erasmus-Darwin) which should be sharply distinguished from [James Thomson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Thomson-Scottish-poet-1700-1748)’s **The Seasons** [1726–30], which is true poetry, not versified natural history-just as [Virgil](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Virgil)’s Georgics is not an agricultural handbook.) [Neoclassicism](https://www.britannica.com/art/Neoclassicism), especially in its 18th-century developments, confused-for ordinary minds, at any rate-formula with form and so led to the revolt called [Romanticism](https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism). The leading theorists of that revolt, the poets **[William Wordsworth](https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Wordsworth)** and**[Samuel Taylor Coleridge](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Samuel-Taylor-Coleridge)**, in the “Preface” (1800) to**Lyrical Ballads**urged the observance of a few simple rules basic to all great poetry and demanded a return to the [integrity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integrity) of expressive form. A similar revolution in taste was taking place all over Europe and also in China (where the narrow pursuit of formula had almost destroyed poetry). The Romantic taste could enjoy the “formlessness” of William Blake’s prophetic books, or [Walt](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Whitman)

[Whitman](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Whitman)’s **Leaves of Grass**, or the loose imagination of Shelley-but careful study reveals that these writers were not formless at all. Each had his own personal form.

Time passes and the pendulum of taste swings. In the mid-20th century, Paul Valéry, T.S. Eliot, and [Yvor Winters](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Yvor-Winters) would attack what the latter called “the fallacy of expressive form,” but this is itself a fallacy. All form in literature is expressive. All expression has its own form, even when the form is a deliberate quest of formlessness. (The [automatic writing](https://www.britannica.com/topic/automatic-writing)cultivated by the surrealists, for instance, suffers from the excessive formalism of the unconscious mind and is far more [stereotyped](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotyped) than the poetry of the [Neoclassicist](https://www.britannica.com/art/Neoclassicism)[Alexander Pope](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Alexander-Pope-English-author).) Form simply refers to organization, and critics who attack form do not seem always to remember that a writer organizes more than words. He organizes experience. Thus, his organization stretches far back in his mental process. Form is the other face of content, the outward, visible sign of inner spiritual reality.

## Literature and its audience

## [Folk](https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-literature) and elite literatures

In preliterate societies [oral literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/oral-literature) was widely shared; it saturated the society and was as much a part of living as food, clothing, shelter, or religion. Many tribal societies remained primarily oral cultures until the 19th century. In early societies the [minstrel](https://www.britannica.com/art/minstrel) might be a courtier of the king or chieftain, and the poet who composed liturgies might be a priest. But the oral performance itself was accessible to the whole [community](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community). As society evolved its various social layers, or [classes](https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-class), an “elite” literature began to be distinguishable from the “folk” literature of the people. With the invention of writing this separation was accelerated until finally literature was being experienced individually by the elite (reading a book), while [folklore](https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-literature) and [folk song](https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-music) were experienced orally and more or less collectively by the illiterate common people.

Elite literature continuously refreshes itself with materials drawn from the popular. Almost all poetic revivals, for instance, include in their programs a new appreciation of folk song, together with a demand for greater objectivity. On the other hand folk literature borrows themes and, very rarely, patterns from elite literature. Many of the English and Scottish ballads that date from the end of the Middle Ages and have been preserved by oral tradition share plots and even turns of phrase with written literature. A very large percentage of these ballads contain elements that are common to folk ballads from all over western Europe; central themes of folklore, indeed, are found all over the world. Whether these common elements are the result of [diffusion](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diffusion) is a matter for dispute. They do, however, represent great psychological constants, archetypes of experience common to the human species, and so these constants are used again and again by elite literature as it discovers them in folklore.

## Modern [Popular literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/popular-literature)

There is a marked difference between true popular literature, that of folklore and folk song, and the popular literature of modern times. Popular literature today is produced either to be read by a literate audience or to be enacted on television or in the cinema; it is produced by writers who are members, however lowly, of an elite corps of professional literates. Thus, popular literature no longer springs from the people; it is handed to them. Their role is passive. At the best they are permitted a limited selectivity as consumers.

Certain theorists once believed that folk songs and even long, narrative ballads were produced collectively, as has been said in mockery “by the tribe sitting around the fire and grunting in unison.” This idea is very much out of date. Folk songs and folk tales began somewhere in one human mind. They were developed and shaped into the forms in which they are now found by hundreds of other minds as they were passed down through the centuries. Only in this sense were they “collectively” produced. During the 20th century, folklore and folk speech had a great influence on elite literature-on writers as different as [Franz Kafka](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franz-Kafka) and [Carl Sandburg](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Carl-Sandburg), [Selma Lagerlöf](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Selma-Lagerlof) and [Kawabata Yasunari](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kawabata-Yasunari), [Martin Buber](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Buber-German-religious-philosopher)and [Isaac Bashevis Singer](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Isaac-Bashevis-Singer). Folk song has always been [popular](https://www.britannica.com/art/popular-music) with bohemian [intellectuals](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intellectuals), especially political radicals (who certainly are elite). Since [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II) the influence of folk song upon popular song has not just been great; it has been determinative. Almost all “hit” songs since the mid-20th century have been [imitation](https://www.britannica.com/art/mimesis) folk songs; and some authentic folk singers attract immense audiences.

**Popular fiction** and **drama**, westerns and **detective stories**, **films** and **television serials**, all deal with the same great archetypal themes as folktales and ballads, though this is seldom due to direct influence; these are simply the limits within which the human mind works. The number of people who have elevated the formulas of popular fiction to a higher literary level is surprisingly small. Examples are [H.G. Wells](https://www.britannica.com/biography/H-G-Wells)’s early [science fiction](https://www.britannica.com/art/science-fiction), the western stories of Gordon Young and Ernest Haycox, the detective stories of [Sir](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Conan-Doyle)

**[Arthur Conan Doyle](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arthur-Conan-Doyle)**, **[Georges Simenon](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Simenon)**, and**[Raymond Chandler](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Raymond-Chandler)**.

The latter half of the 20th century witnessed an even greater change in popular literature. Writing is a static medium: that is to say, a book is read by one person at a time; it permits recollection and anticipation; the reader can go back to check a point or move ahead to find out how the story ends. In [radio](https://www.britannica.com/topic/radio), television, and the cinema the medium is fluent; the audience is a collectivity and is at the mercy of time. It cannot pause to reflect or to understand more fully without missing another part of the action, nor can it go back or forward. [Marshall McLuhan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marshall-McLuhan) in his book Understanding Media (1964) became famous for erecting a whole structure of aesthetic, sociological, and philosophical theory upon this fact. But it remains to be seen whether the new, fluent materials of communication are going to make so very many changes in civilization, let alone in the human mind-mankind has, after all, been influenced for thousands of years by the popular, fluent arts of music and drama. Even the most transitory television [serial](https://www.britannica.com/art/serial-narrative-format) was written down before it was performed, and the [script](https://www.britannica.com/art/script-literature) can be consulted in the files. Before the invention of writing, all literature was fluent because it was contained in people’s memory. In a sense it was more fluent than music, because it was harder to remember. Man in [mass society](https://www.britannica.com/topic/mass-society) becomes increasingly a creature of the moment, but the reasons for this are undoubtedly more fundamental than his forms of entertainment.

## Literature and its environment

## Social and economic conditions

Literature, like all other human activities, necessarily reflects current social and economic conditions. Class stratification was reflected in literature as soon as it had appeared in life. Among the [American Indians](https://www.britannica.com/art/Native-American-literature), for instance, the chants of the shaman, or [medicine man](https://www.britannica.com/topic/medicine-man), differ from the secret, personal songs of the individual, and these likewise differ from the group songs of ritual or entertainment sung in community. In the Heroic Age, the [epic](https://www.britannica.com/art/epic) tales of kings and chiefs that were sung or told in their barbaric courts differed from the folktales that were told in peasant cottages.

The more [cohesive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cohesive) a society, the more the elements-and even attitudes-evolved in the different class strata are interchangeable at all levels. In the tight clan organization that existed in late [medieval](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/medieval) times at the Scottish border, for example, heroic ballads telling of the deeds of lords and ladies were preserved in the songs of the common people. But where class divisions are unbridgeable, elite literature is liable to be totally separated from popular culture. An extreme example is the [Classical literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/classical-literature) of the Roman Empire. Its forms and its sources were largely Greek-it even adopted its laws of verse patterning from Greek models, even though these were antagonistic to the natural patterns of the [Latin](https://www.britannica.com/art/Latin-literature) language-and most of the sophisticated works of the major Latin authors were completely closed to the overwhelming majority of people of the Roman Empire.

[Printing](https://www.britannica.com/topic/printing-publishing) has made all the difference in the negotiability of ideas. The writings of the 18th-century French writers [Voltaire](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Voltaire), Rousseau, and Diderot were produced from and for almost as narrow a caste as the Roman elite, but they were printed. Within a generation they had penetrated the entire society and were of vital importance in revolutionizing it.

Class distinctions in the literature of modern times exist more in the works themselves than in their audience. Although Henry James wrote about the upper classes and [Émile Zola](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Emile-Zola) about workingmen, both were, in fact, members of an elite and were read by members of an elite-moreover, in their day, those who read Zola certainly considered themselves more of an elite than did the readers of Henry James. The ordinary people, if they read at all, preferred sentimental romances and “penny dreadfuls.” Popular literature had already become commercially produced entertainment literature, a type which today is also provided by television scripts.

The elite who read serious literature are not necessarily members of a social or economic upper class. It has been said of the most [ethereal](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethereal) French poet, **[Stéphane Mallarmé](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stephane-Mallarme)** that in every French small town there was a youth who carried his poems in his heart. These poems are perhaps the most “elite” product of western European civilization, but the “youths” referred to were hardly the sons of dukes or millionaires. (It is a curious phenomenon that, since the middle of the 18th century in Europe and in the United States, the majority of readers of serious literature-as well as of entertainment literature-has been [women](https://www.britannica.com/topic/women). The extent of the influence that this audience has exerted on literature itself must be immense.)

## National and group literature

[Hippolyte Taine](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hippolyte-Taine), the 19th-century French critic, evolved an ecological theory of literature. He looked first and foremost to the national characteristics of western European literatures, and he found the source of these characteristics in the climate and soil of each respective nation. His *[History of English Literature](https://www.britannica.com/topic/History-of-English-Literature)* (5 vol., 1863–69) is an extensive elaboration of these ideas. It is doubtful that anyone today would agree with the simplistic terms in which Taine states his thesis. It is obvious that [Russian literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/Russian-literature) differs from English or French from German. English books are written by Englishmen, their scenes are commonly laid in England, they are usually about Englishmen and they are designed to be read by Englishmen-at least in the first instance. But modern civilization becomes more and more a world civilization, wherein works of all peoples flow into a general fund of literature. It is not unusual to read a novel by a Japanese author one week and one by a black writer from [West Africa](https://www.britannica.com/place/western-Africa) the next. Writers are themselves affected by this cross-fertilization. Certainly, the work of the great 19th-century Russian novelists had more influence on 20th-century American writers than had the work of their own literary ancestors. Poetry does not circulate so readily, because catching its true significance in translation is so very difficult to accomplish. Nevertheless, through the mid-20th century, the influence of French poetry was not just important; it was preeminent. The [tendentious](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tendentious) elements of literature-propaganda for race, nation, or religion-have been more and more eroded in this process of wholesale cultural exchange.

Popular literature is habitually tendentious both deliberately and unconsciously. It reflects and stimulates the [prejudices](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/prejudices) and parochialism of its audience. Most of the literary conflicts that seized the totalitarian countries during the 20th century stemmed directly from relentless efforts by the state to reduce elite literature to the level of the popular. The great [proletarian novels](https://www.britannica.com/art/proletarian-novel) of our time have been produced not by Russians but by African Americans, Japanese, Germans, and- most proletarian of all-a German-American living in Mexico, [B. Traven](https://www.britannica.com/biography/B-Traven). Government control and [censorship](https://www.britannica.com/topic/censorship) can [inhibit](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inhibit) literary development, perhaps deform it a little, and can destroy authors outright; but, whether in the France of [Louis XIV](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Louis-XIV-king-of-France) or in the [Soviet Union](https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union) of the 20th century, it cannot be said to have a fundamental effect upon the course of literature.

## The writer’s position in society

A distinguishing characteristic of modern literature is the peculiar elite which it has itself evolved. In earlier cultures the artist, though he may have felt himself alienated at times, thought of himself as part of his society and shared its values and attitudes. Usually the clerkly caste played a personal, important role in society. In the modern industrial civilization, however, “scribes” became simply a category of skilled hired hands. The writer shared few of the values of the merchant or the [entrepreneur](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entrepreneur) or manager. And so the literary and artistic world came to have a subculture of its own. The antagonism between the two resultant sets of values is the source of what we call alienation-among the intellectuals at least (the alienation of the common man in urban, industrial civilization from his work, from himself, and from his fellows is another matter, although its results are reflected and intensified in the [alienation](https://www.britannica.com/topic/alienation-society) of the elite). For about 200 years now, the artistic [environment](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environment)of the writer has not usually been shared with the general populace.

The subculture known as Bohemia and the literary and artistic movements generated in its little special society have often been more important-at least in the minds of many writers-than the historical, social, and economic movements of the culture as a whole. Even massive historical change is translated into these terms-the Russian Revolution, for instance, into Communist-Futurism, Constructivism, [and Socialist Realism](https://www.britannica.com/art/Socialist-Realism). Western European literature could be viewed as a parade of movements-Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, [Futurism](https://www.britannica.com/art/Futurism), [Structuralism](https://www.britannica.com/science/structuralism-linguistics), and so on indefinitely. Some of the more journalistic critics, indeed, have delighted to regard it in such a way. But after the [manifestos](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manifestos) have been swept away, the meetings adjourned, the literary cafés of the moment lost their popularity, the turmoil is seen not to have made so very much difference. The Romantic [Théophile Gautier](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Theophile-Gautier) and the Naturalist Émile Zola have more in common than they have differences, and their differences are rather because of changes in society as a whole than because of conflicting literary principles.

At first, changes in literary values are appreciated only at the upper [levels](https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-class) of the literary elite itself, but often, within a generation, works once thought [esoteric](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/esoteric) are being taught as part of a school [syllabus](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syllabus). Most cultivated people once thought [James Joyce](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Joyce)’s *[Ulysses](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ulysses-novel-by-Joyce)* incomprehensible or, where it was not, obscene. Today his methods and subject matter are commonplace in the commercial fiction of the mass culture. A few writers remain confined to the elite. Mallarmé is a good example-but he would have been just as ethereal had he written in the simplest French of direct communication. His subtleties are ultimately grounded in his personality.

## Literature and the other arts

Literature has an obvious kinship with the other arts. Presented, a play is drama; read, a play is literature. Most important [films](https://www.britannica.com/art/motion-picture) have been based upon written literature, usually novels, although all the great epics and most of the great plays have been filmed at some time and thus have stimulated the younger medium’s growth. Conversely, the techniques required in writing for film have influenced many writers in structuring their novels and have affected their style. Most popular fiction is written with “movie rights” in mind, and these are certainly a consideration with most modern publishers. Literature provides the libretto for operas, the theme for [tone poems](https://www.britannica.com/art/symphonic-poem)-even so anomalous a form as [Friedrich Nietzsche](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Friedrich-Nietzsche)’s Thus Spake Zarathustra was interpreted in music by [Richard Strauss](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Richard-Strauss)-and of course it provides the lyrics of songs. Many ballets and modern [dances](https://www.britannica.com/art/dance) are based on stories or poems. Sometimes, music and [dance](https://www.britannica.com/art/dance) are accompanied by a text read by a speaker or chanted by a chorus. The mid-19th century was the heyday of literary, historical, and [anecdotal](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anecdotal) [painting](https://www.britannica.com/art/painting), though, aside from the Surrealists, this sort of thing died out in the 20th century. Cross-fertilization of literature and the arts now takes place more subtly, mostly in the use of parallel techniques-the rational dissociation of the Cubists or the spontaneous action painting of the [Abstract Expressionists](https://www.britannica.com/art/Abstract-Expressionism), for example, which flourished at the same time as the free-flowing uncorrected narratives of some novelists in the 1950s and ’60s.

## Literature as a collection of [genres](https://www.britannica.com/art/genre-literature)

Critics have invented a variety of systems for treating literature as a collection of [genres](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genres). Often these genres are artificial, invented after the fact with the aim of making literature less sprawling, more tidy. Theories of literature must be based upon direct experience of the living texts and so be flexible enough to contain their individuality and variety. Perhaps the best approach is historical, or genetic. What actually happened, and in what way did literature evolve up to the present day?

There is a surprising variety of [oral literature](https://www.britannica.com/art/oral-literature) among surviving preliterate peoples, and, as the written word emerges in history, the indications are that the important literary genres all existed at the beginning of civilized societies: heroic epic; songs in praise of priests and kings; stories of mystery and the supernatural; love lyrics; personal songs (the result of intense meditation); love stories; tales of adventure and heroism (of common peoples, as distinct from the heroic [epics](https://www.britannica.com/art/epic) of the upper classes); satire (which was dreaded by barbaric chieftains); satirical combats (in which two poets or two personifications abused one another and praised themselves); [ballads](https://www.britannica.com/art/ballad) and [folktales](https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-tale) of tragedy and murder; [folk stories](https://www.britannica.com/art/folk-literature), such as the tale of the clever boy who performs impossible tasks, outwits all his adversaries, and usually wins the hand of the king’s daughter; animal fables like those attributed to [Aesop](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aesop) (the special delight of Black Africa and Indian America); riddles, proverbs, and philosophical observations; hymns, incantations, and mysterious songs of priests; and finally actual mythology-stories of the origin of the world and the [human race](https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-being), of the great dead, and of the gods and demigods.

## [Epic](https://www.britannica.com/art/epic)

The true heroic epic never evolved far from its preliterate origins, and it arose only in the Heroic Age which preceded a settled civilization. The conditions reflected in, say, the Iliad and Odyssey are much the same as those of the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf, the German Nibelungenlied, or the Irish stories of [Cú Chulainn](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Cu-Chulainn). The literary epic is another matter altogether. Virgil’s Aeneid, for instance, or [John Milton](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Milton)’s Paradise Lost are products of highly sophisticated literary cultures. Many long poems sometimes classified as epic literature are no such thing-[Dante](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Dante-Alighieri)’s La divina commedia (*[The Divine Comedy](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Divine-Comedy)*), for example, is a long theological, philosophical, political, moral, and mystical poem. Dante considered it to be a kind of drama which obeyed the rules of Aristotle’s Poetics. [Goethe](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Johann-Wolfgang-von-Goethe)’s *[Faust](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Faust-play)* is in dramatic form and is sometimes even staged-but it is really a philosophical poetic novel. Modern critics have described long poems such as [T.S. Eliot’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/T-S-Eliot) *[Waste Land](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Waste-Land)* and Ezra Pound’s *[Cantos](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Cantos)* as “philosophical epics.” There is nothing epic about them; they are reveries, more or less philosophical.

## Lyric poetry

Lyric poetry never gets far from its origins, except that some of its finest examples-Medieval Latin, Provençal, Middle High German, Middle French, Renaissance-which today are only read, were actually written to be sung. In the 20th century, however, popular songs of great literary merit became increasingly common-for example, the songs of [Bertolt Brecht](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bertolt-Brecht) and [Kurt Weill](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kurt-Weill) in German, of [Georges Brassens](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Georges-Brassens) and Anne Sylvestre in French, and of [Leonard Cohen](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leonard-Cohen), [Bob Dylan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bob-Dylan-American-musician), and [Joni Mitchell](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Joni-Mitchell). It is interesting to note that, in periods when the culture values artificiality, the [lyric](https://www.britannica.com/art/lyric) becomes stereotyped. Then, after a while, the poets’ revolt and, usually turning to folk origins, restore to lyric poetry at least the appearance of naturalness and spontaneity.

## [Satire](https://www.britannica.com/art/satire)

The forms of satire are as manifold as those of literature itself—from those of the mock epic to the biting [epigram](https://www.britannica.com/art/epigram). A great many social and political novels of today would have been regarded as satire by the ancients. Many of the great works of all time are satires, but in each case they have risen far above their immediate satirical objectives. The 16th-century medieval satire on civilization, the *[Gargantua and Pantagruel](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gargantua-and-Pantagruel)* of [François Rabelais](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francois-Rabelais), grew under the hand of its author into a great archetypal myth of the lust for life. Cervantes’ *[Don Quixote](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Don-Quixote-novel)*, often called the greatest work of prose fiction in the West, is superficially a satire of the sentimental romance of knightly adventure. But, again, it is an archetypal myth, telling the adventures of the soul of man-of the individual-in the long struggle with what is called the human condition. *[The Tale of Genji](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Tale-of-Genji)* by [Murasaki Shikibu](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shikibu-Murasaki) has sometimes been considered by [obtuse](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/obtuse) critics as no more than a satire on the sexual promiscuity of the Heian court. In fact, it is a profoundly philosophical, religious, and mystical novel.

## Prose [fiction](https://www.britannica.com/art/prose-fiction)

Extended prose fiction is the latest of the literary forms to develop. We have romances from Classical Greek times that are as long as short novels; but they are really tales of adventure-vastly extended [anecdotes](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anecdotes). The first prose fiction of any psychological depth is the *[Satyricon](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Satyricon)*, almost certainly attributed to [Petronius Arbiter](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gaius-Petronius-Arbiter) (died AD 65/66). Though it survives only in fragments, supposedly one-eleventh of the whole, even these would indicate that it is one of the greatest [picaresque](https://www.britannica.com/art/picaresque-novel) novels, composed of loosely connected episodes of [robust](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/robust) and often erotic adventure. The other great surviving fiction of Classical times is the Metamorphoses (known as *[The Golden Ass](https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Golden-Ass)*) by [Apuleius](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lucius-Apuleius) (2nd century AD). In addition to being a picaresque adventure story, it is a criticism of Roman society, a celebration of the religion of Isis, and an [allegory](https://www.britannica.com/art/allegory-art-and-literature) of the progress of the soul. It contains the justly celebrated story of Cupid and Psyche, a myth retold with psychological subtlety. Style has much to do with the value and hence the survival of these two works. They are written in prose of extraordinary beauty, although it is by no means of “Classical” purity. The prose romances of the Middle Ages are closely related to earlier heroic literature. Some, like [Sir Thomas Malory](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Malory)’s 15th-century *[Le Morte Darthur](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Le-Morte-Darthur)*, are retellings of heroic [legend](https://www.britannica.com/art/legend-literature) in terms of the romantic [chivalry](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/chivalry) of the early Renaissance, a combination of barbaric, medieval, and Renaissance sensibility which, in the tales of Tristram and Iseult and Launcelot and Guinevere, produced something not unlike modern novels of tragic love.

The Western novel is a product of modern civilization, although in East Asia novels began a separate development as early as the 10th century. Extended prose works of complex interpersonal relations and motivations begin in 17th-century France with ***[The Princess of Cleves](https://www.britannica.com/topic/La-Princesse-de-Cleves)***(1678) by [Madame de La Fayette](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marie-Madeleine-Pioche-de-la-Vergne-comtesse-de-La-Fayette). Eighteenth-century [France](https://www.britannica.com/art/French-literature) produced an immense number of novels dealing with love analysis but none to compare with Madame de La Fayette’s until [Pierre Choderlos de Laclos](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Choderlos-de-Laclos)wrote***[Les Liaisons dangereuses](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dangerous-Liaisons-novel-by-Laclos)*** (1782). This was, in form, an exchange of letters between two corrupters of youth; but, in intent, it was a savage satire of the **ancien régime** and a heart-rending psychological study. The English novel of the 18th century was less subtle, more robust-vulgar in the best sense-and is exemplified by [Henry Fielding](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Fielding)’s **Tom Jones** (1749) and Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy. The 19th century was the golden age of the novel. It became ever more profound, complex, and subtle (or, on the other hand, more popular, eventful, and sentimental). By the beginning of the 20th century it had become the most common form of thoughtful reading matter and had replaced, for most educated people, religious, philosophical, and scientific works as a medium for the interpretation of life.

## Drama

Like lyric poetry, drama has been an exceptionally stable literary form. Given a little leeway, most plays written by the beginning of the 20th century could be adjusted to the rules of Aristotle’s Poetics. Before [World War I](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-I), however, all traditional art forms, led by painting, began to disintegrate, and new forms evolved to take their place. In drama the most radical innovator was [August Strindberg](https://www.britannica.com/biography/August-Strindberg) (1849–1912), and from that day to this, drama (forced to compete with the cinema) has become ever more experimental, constantly striving for new methods, materials, and, especially, ways to establish a close relationship with the audience. All this activity has profoundly modified [drama](https://www.britannica.com/art/dramatic-literature) as literature.

## Future developments

In the 20th century the methods of poetry also changed drastically, although the “innovator” here might be said to have been Baudelaire. The disassociation and recombination of ideas of the Cubists, the free [association of ideas](https://www.britannica.com/science/association-psychology) of the Surrealists, dreams, trance states, the poetry of preliterate people-all have been absorbed into the practice of modern poetry. This proliferation of form is not likely to end. Effort that once was applied to perfecting a single pattern in a single form may in the future be more and more directed toward the elaboration of entirely new “multimedia” forms, employing the resources of all the established arts. At the same time, writers may prefer to simplify and polish the forms of the past with a rigorous, Neoclassicist [discipline](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discipline). In a worldwide urban civilization, which has taken to itself the styles and discoveries of all cultures past and present, the future of literature is quite impossible to determine.

Importance of literature
 Literature is the foundation of life, it laced on
emphasis on many topics from human
tragedies ...Types of literature
 Two types of literature are:
1) Applied literature
2) pure literature
 Basic genres of literature
 Poetry
 Drama
 Novel
 Short story
 Fiction
 Essay
 Relation between literature
and society
 Literature is intimately related to society.The
relation between literature and ...Literature in fifteenth century
Chaucer
Important work of Chaucer is
Canterbury tales.
 Literature in sixteenth century
 William Shakespeare
 Shakespeare tragedies
 Hamlet
 King Lear
 Othello
 Macbeth
 

R.J. Rees, R.A. Scott-James, Terry
Eagleton, Marjorie Garber, Mario
Vargas Llosa
And others.
What is Literature?
 

Do you agree with this definition?
 Lit is … creative writing of recognized artistic
value
 Written works, esp. those co...

 Is any writing, literature?
 Is use of language and words literature???
 What about colours, stones, music?
 Is liter...Bertolt Brecht & Franz Kafka
 R A Scott James – The Making of
Literature
 It is with literature as an art that I am concerned
in this book, and at the ...Knowledge and power
 How to draw line in between?
 Thomas DeQuiency:
 Literature of knowledge = Didactic – to teach
 L... Terry Eagleton: Literary Theory:An
Introduction
 „Imaginative writing in the sense of fiction‟ – writing
which is not lit...Advertisement… is it literature?
 Then, can we call……. Ad, literature?
 Why?
 Why not?
 Is Graphic novel or comics boo...

Literature is creative and imaginative:
 Does this mean that Philosophy, History, Natural
Sciences are uncreative and uni...The Use and Abuse of Literature:
 By Marjorie Garber
 “The Use and Abuse of Literature,” the latest book by
the prolific...Why study literature?
 Understanding social milieu
 Understanding culture
 Understanding human nature & behavior
 Deve...Does it really happen?
 Do we really enjoy ‘reading’ literature?
 What does the history of civilization prove?
 Have we...

R.J. Rees:
 Literature may be good, bad or indifferent; but
good literature will have same, if not all, of the
following ...

The Use and Abuse of Literature:
 By Marjorie Garber
 “The Use and Abuse of Literature,” the latest book by
the prolific...

Why study literature?
 By studying good literature we learn more about
human problems and difficulties
 Universality of ...

# 

 A book has an Author –
 A book has Genre –
 A book has central theme / subject matter -
 A book has characters –
 A ...Sources:
 Garber, Marjorie. The Use and Abuse of
Literature.
 Eagleton, Terry.
 Scott-James, R.A. The Making of Literat...