

EUROPEAN LITERATURE AND ITS FORMATION

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Western literature, also known as European literature, is the literature written in the context of Western culture in the languages of Europe, as well as several geographically or historically related languages such as Basque and Hungarian, and is shaped by the periods in which they were conceived, with each period containing prominent western authors, poets, and pieces of literature.

The best of Western literature is considered to be the Western canon. The list of works in the Western canon varies according to the critic's opinions on Western culture and the relative importance of its defining characteristics. Different literary periods held great influence on the literature of Western and European countries, with movements and political changes impacting the prose and poetry of the period. The 16th Century is known for the creation of Renaissance literature, while the 17th century was influenced by both Baroque and Jacobean forms. The 18th century progressed into a period known as the Enlightenment Era for many western countries. This period of military and political advancement influenced the style of literature created by French, Russian and Spanish literary figures. The 19th century was known as the Romantic era, in which the style of writing was influence by the political issues of the century, and differed from the previous classicist form.

American literature is literature written or produced in the United States of America and in the colonies that preceded it. The American literary tradition thus is part of the broader tradition of English-language literature, but also includes literature of other traditions produced in the United States and in other immigrant languages. Furthermore, a rich tradition of oral storytelling exists amongst Native American tribes.

The American Revolutionary Period (1775–83) is notable for the political writings of Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Paine, and Thomas

Jefferson. An early novel is William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* published in 1791. Writer and critic John Neal in the early-mid nineteenth century helped advance America's progress toward a unique literature and culture, by criticizing predecessors like Washington Irving for imitating their British counterparts and influencing others like Edgar Allan Poe. Edgar Allan Poe took American poetry and short fiction in new directions. Ralph Waldo Emerson pioneered the influential Transcendentalism movement; Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden*, was influenced by this movement. The conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired the writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and by slave narratives, such as those by Frederic Douglass. Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) explored the dark side of American history, as did Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851). Major American poets of the nineteenth century include Walt Whitman, Melville, and Emily Dickinson. Mark Twain was the first major American writer to be born away from the East Coast. Henry James achieved international recognition with novels like *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881).

Following World War I, modernist literature rejected nineteenth century forms and values. F. Scott Fitzgerald captured the carefree mood of the 1920s, but John Dos Passos and Ernest Hemingway, who became famous with *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, and William Faulkner adopted experimental forms. American modernist poets included diverse figures: Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, and E. E. Cummings. Depression era writers included John Steinbeck, author of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). America's involvement in World War II influenced works such as Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.'s *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). Prominent playwrights of these years include Eugene O'Neill, who won a Nobel Prize. In the mid-twentieth century, drama was dominated by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, as well as the musical theater.

In late 20th century and early 21st century there has been increased popular and academic acceptance of the literature written by immigrant, ethnic, Native

American, and LGBT writers, and of writings in other languages than English. Examples of pioneers in these areas include Asian American authors such as Maxine Hong Kingston, the Native American Louise Erdrich, and African Americans Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and 1993 Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison. The folk-rock songwriter Bob Dylan won the 2016 Nobel Prize in Literature, as well.

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