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Literature in The Past

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A B S T R A C T

This article deals with the literature in the past. Literature existed as soon as ancient Mesopotamians learned to write in the 30th century B.C. This ancient writing was engraved in stone or written on papyrus scrolls, some of which still exist. However, the "earliest surviving, intact European book" is from 700 A.D. This book, called the St. Cuthbert Gospel, is housed in the British Library and is in truly phenomenal condition thanks to massive conservation efforts. The Gospel is pocket size, bound in red goat leather and contains the Gospel of John. Early books such as the St. Cuthbert Gospel were written by hand and typically made for every day study or devotion. However, because books of this early age were so tedious to create, only well-educated, wealthy patrons owned books (or those with religious purposes). All of this seems fairly simple, but it's surprising how quickly you might forget about the inaccessibility of books some 1300 years ago. In fact, until Johannes Gutenberg created the first printing press in 1439, allowing quick and easy printing, books were extremely rare.

A R T I C L E I N F O

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Today, the accessibility of books has been taken to an extreme. Yes, the printing press made it easier to access printed material, but it wasn't until digital books and e-readers were created in the 1990's that access to books became so instantaneous. How then, have these e-readers changed the interactivity between people and their literature?

There are the obvious differences in technology we see when comparing the iPad or Kindle book to a simple paperback book. Those who own e-readers have thousands of books at their fingertips at any given time. You don't have to walk to a library or head to the bookstore to read the latest and greatest, you can simply click a button and download anything directly. Does this instantaneous access to literature change the way we interact with print? Absolutely. Thanks to the Internet, many types of print literature (magazines, newspapers, books) have been thrown to the side as electronic versions pop up. Why bother buying a newspaper when you can log on to Yahoo! and see the day's headlines? Printed text is slowly but surely becoming obsolete, as electronic versions become more popular because of their ease of use. It's far less common to see some riding the bus with a paperback novel in their hand than it is to see someone scrolling away on their iPhone or Kindle on their morning ride.

When it comes to printed books, most are made up of signatures. Signatures are the individual sections of a book that can then be sewn together and into the binding of the book (by machine or by hand) to create a finished product. Signatures were originally created by folding large sheets of paper with various pages of text on them, and then stitching the insides to the binding of the book. This meant that the pages of the book were sealed (this is known as an uncut book or a deckle-edge book). If you've read the Great

Gatsby, you might recall a conversation two characters had in Gatsby's library about his books: "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter…What realism! Knew when to stop, too – didn't cut the pages." Gatsby's library was full of "uncut" books, which tells you that this type of book was still around in the 20's when Fitzgerald wrote Great Gatsby. Can you imagine having to cut the pages of your book when you finally received it? Even in the quite recent 1920's, books were primarily for wealthy, well-educated people. Today, our ease of access to literature means we can interact so much more with our texts, no matter what our social standing.

A final point to make about today's interactivity with literature is our modern-day ability to talk directly about a text as soon as we have read it. If you read a blog or article online you can immediately share your reaction with the rest of the public and view other peoples' opinions on the literature as well. This is an extreme contrast to interaction with literature even just a few decades ago. People didn't have the ability to tell a journalist how they felt directly upon reading an article. They had to send the journalist a letter or just discuss it with others around them who had read the story. This instant interaction between writer, reader and text is just another part of the new way we interact with literature and printed text.

From differences in accessibility to author-reader interaction, the interactivity of books has experienced major shifts in the last few decades. It's hard to imagine a time when reading a book would require wealth, resources and time, but the days of limited access to literature are over, and increased access means a new way to appreciate literature of all kinds. he history of literature is the historical development of writings in prose or poetry that attempt to provide entertainment, enlightenment, or instruction to the reader/listener/observer, as well as the development of the literary techniques used in the communication of these pieces. Not all writings constitute literature. Some recorded materials, such as compilations of data (e.g., a check register) are not considered literature, and this article relates only to the evolution of the works defined above. Literature and writing, though connected, is not synonymous. The very first writings from ancient Sumer by any reasonable definition do not constitute literature—the same is true of some of the early Egyptian hieroglyphics or the thousands of logs from ancient Chinese regimes. Scholars have often disagreed concerning when written record-keeping became more like "literature" than anything else; the definition is largely subjective.

Moreover, given the significance of distance as a cultural isolator in earlier centuries, the historical development of literature did not occur at an even pace across the world. The problems of creating a uniform global history of literature are compounded by the fact that many texts have been lost over the millennia, either deliberately, by accident, or by the total disappearance of the originating culture. Much has been written, for example, about the destruction of the Library of Alexandria in the 1st century BC, and the innumerable key texts which are believed to have been lost forever to the flames. The deliberate suppression of texts (and often their authors) by organizations of either a spiritual or a temporal nature further shrouds the subject.



A stone tablet containing part of the Epic of Gilgamesh

Certain primary texts, however, may be isolated which have a qualifying role as literature's first stirrings. Very early examples include *Epic of Gilgamesh*, in its Sumerian version predating 2000 BC, and

the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, which was written down in the *Papyrus of Ani* in about 1250 BC, but probably dates from about the 18th century BC. Ancient Egyptian literature was not included in early studies of the history of literature because the writings of Ancient Egypt were not translated into European languages until after the Rosetta stone was deciphered in the early 19th century.

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* date to the 8th century BC, and mark the beginning of Classical Antiquity. They also stand in an oral tradition that stretches back to the late Bronze Age. The Classic of Poetry (or Shining) is the oldest existing collection of Chinese poetry, comprising 305 works by anonymous authors dating from the 11th to 7th centuries BC. The Chu Ci anthology (or Songs of Chu) is a volume of poems attributed to or considered to be inspired by Qu Yuan's verse writing. Qu Yuan is the first author of verse in China to have his name associated to his work and is also regarded as one of the most prominent figures of Romanticism in Chinese classical literature.

The first great author on military tactics and strategy was Sun Tzu, whose *The Art of War* remains on the shelves of many modern military officers (and its advice has been applied to the corporate world as well). Philosophy developed far differently in China from the way it did in Greece—rather than presenting extended dialogues, the *Analects* of Confucius and Lao Zi's *Tao Te Ching* presented sayings and proverbs more directly and didactically. The *Zhuangzi* is composed of a large collection of creative anecdotes, allegories, parables, and fables; a masterpiece of both philosophical and literary skill, it has significantly influenced writers and poets for more than 2000 years from the Han dynasty to the present.

Among the earliest Chinese works of narrative history and classical prose is the Zoo, a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* written during the Warring States period. This work and the *Shiji* or *Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Ian, were regarded as the ultimate models by many generations of prose stylists in ancient China. The *Shiji* also served as a model for the *Twenty-Four Histories* that focus on the ruling dynasties in Chinese history from the Western Han until the Ming.

The Northwest Semitic languages are a language group that contains the Aramaic language, as well as the Canaanite languages including Phoenician and Hebrew. A corpus of Canaanite and Aramaic inscriptions (or "Northwest Semitic inscriptions") is the primary extra-Biblical source for the writings of the ancient Phoenicians, Hebrews and Atamans. These inscriptions occur on stone slabs, pottery ostrich, ornaments, and range from simple names to full texts.[1][2][3][4] The older inscriptions form a Canaanite–Aramaic dialect continuum, exemplified by writings which scholars have struggled to fit into either category, such as the *Stele of Zakkur* and the *Deir Alla Inscription*.

The books that constitute the Hebrew Bible developed over roughly a millennium. The oldest texts seem to come from the eleventh or tenth centuries BCE, whilst most of the other texts are somewhat later. They are edited works, being collections of various sources intricately and carefully woven together. The Old Testament was compiled and edited by various authors[5] over a period of centuries, with many scholars concluding that the Hebrew canon was solidified by about the 3rd century BC.[6][7] The works have been subject to various literary evaluations (both secular and religious). Friedrich Nietzsche wrote: "In the Jewish Old Testament, there are men, things and speeches in so grand a style that Greek and Indian literature has nothing to compare to it. One stands with awe and reverence before these tremendous remnants of what man once was... The taste for the Old Testament is a touchstone of 'greatness' and 'smallness

Literature

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