



Massachusetts (1511), key figures in the Western canon.



Works

Western Canon



The **Western canon** is the body of Western literature, European classical music, philosophy, and works of art that represents the high culture of Europe and North America: "a certain Western intellectual tradition that goes from, say, Socrates to Wittgenstein in philosophy, and from Homer to James Joyce in literature". The word canon is derived from ancient Greek , *kanon*, meaning a measuring rod, or standard. The Bible, a product of ancient Jewish culture, from western Asia, has been a major force in shaping Western culture, and "has inspired some of the great monuments of human thought, literature, and art".

The canon of books has been fairly stable, although it has expanded to include more women and racial minorities, while the canons of music and the visual arts have greatly expanded to cover the Middle Ages and subsequent centuries once largely overlooked. Also during the twentieth century there has been a growing interest in the cultures of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and South America and the former colonies of European countries began to produce major works, both in literature and in the other arts. But some examples of newer media such as cinema have attained a precarious position in the canon.

There has been an ongoing debate over the nature and status of the canon, especially in America, since at least the 1960s, much of which is

rooted in critical theory, feminism, critical race theory, and Marxism. In particular, postmodern studies have argued that the body of scholarship is biased because the traditional main focus of academic studies of Western culture and history has only been on works produced by Western men.

A classic

A classic is a book, or any other work of art, accepted as being exemplary or noteworthy, for example through an imprimatur such as being listed in a list of great books, or through a reader's personal opinion. Although the term is often associated with the Western canon, it can be applied to works of literature, music and art, etc. from all traditions, such as the Chinese classics or the Vedas. A related word is masterpiece or *chef d'oeuvre*, which in modern use refers to a creation that has been given much critical praise, especially one that is considered the greatest work of a person's career or to a work of outstanding creativity, skill, or workmanship. Historically, the word refers to a work of a very high standard produced in order to obtain membership of a Guild or Academy.

The first writer to use the term "classic" was Aulus Gellius, a 2nd-century Roman writer who, in the miscellany *Noctes Atticae* (19, 8, 15), refers to a writer as a *classicus scriptor, non proletarius* ("A distinguished, not a commonplace writer"). Such classification began with the Greeks' *ranking* their cultural works, with the word canon (ancient Greek , kan?n: "measuring rod, standard"). Moreover, early Christian Church Fathers used *canon* to rank the authoritative texts of the New Testament, preserving them, given the expense of vellum and papyrus and mechanical book reproduction, thus, being comprehended in a *canon* ensured a book's preservation as the best way to retain information about a civilization. Contemporarily, the Western canon defines the best of Western culture. In the ancient world, at the Alexandrian Library, scholars coined the Greek term *Hoi enkrithentes* ("the admitted", "the included") to identify the writers in the canon.

Literary canon (mainly)

Classic book

With regard to books, what makes a book "classic" has concerned various authors, from Mark Twain to Italo Calvino, and questions such as "Why Read the Classics?", and "What Is a Classic?" have been

considered by others, including Calvino, T. S. Eliot, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, Michael Dirda, and Ezra Pound.

The terms "classic book" and Western canon are closely related concepts, but are not necessarily synonymous. A "canon" is a list of books considered to be "essential", and it can be published as a collection (such as Great Books of the Western World, Modern Library, Everyman's Library, or Penguin Classics), presented as a list with an academic's imprimatur (such as Harold Bloom's), or be the official reading list of an university.

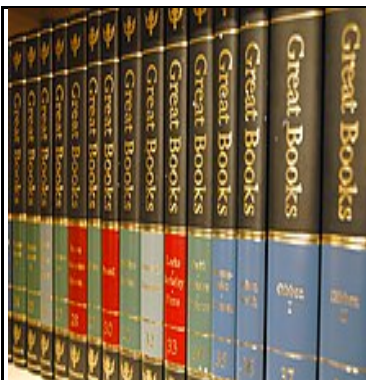
Some of the writers who are generally considered the most important in Western literature are Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Horace, Geoffrey Chaucer, Dante Alighieri, William Shakespeare, François Rabelais, Jean Racine, Molière, Camões, Miguel de Cervantes, Michel de Montaigne, John Milton, Samuel Johnson, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Stendhal, Walt Whitman, Gustave Flaubert, Emily Dickinson, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, George Eliot, Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, Sigmund Freud, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Eça de Queirós, Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Fernando Pessoa, Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett.

Harold Bloom has divided the body of Western Literature into four ages:

- The Theocratic Age (2000 BC - 1321 AD), with five main traditions that influenced the West:
 - The Ancient Near East; e.g. *Gilgamesh*, *The Book of the Dead* and the *Bible*
 - Ancient India; e.g. *Mahabharata*
 - Ancient Greece; e.g. the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer
 - Ancient Rome; e.g. the *Aeneid* (Virgil) and the *Metamorphoses* (Ovid)
 - The Middle Ages; e.g. the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine
- The Aristocratic Age (1321 - 1832), with five major bodies of literature:
 - Italy; e.g. the *Divine Comedy* (Dante), *The Prince* (Machiavelli) and *The Servant of Two Masters* (Carlo Goldoni)
 - France; e.g. *The Misanthrope* (Molière), the *Essays* (Montaigne) and the *Candide* (Voltaire)

- Germany; e.g. *The Robbers* (Friedrich Schiller), *Faust* and the *Italian Journey* (Goethe)
- Spain and Portugal; e.g. *Don Quixote* (Miguel de Cervantes), *The Trickster of Seville* (Tirso de Molina) and *The Lusads* (Luis de Camoens)
- Great Britain & Ireland; e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* (William Shakespeare), *Paradise Lost* (John Milton) and *Gulliver's Travels* (Jonathan Swift)
- The Democratic Age (1832 - 1900), when the strength of American and Russian literature begins
 - Great Britain & Ireland; e.g. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oscar Wilde) and *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (Charles Dickens)
 - Italy; e.g. *The Betrothed* (Alessandro Manzoni) and *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (Carlo Collodi)
 - France; e.g. *The Red and the Black* (Stendhal) and *Les Misérables* (Victor Hugo)
 - Germany; e.g. *The Ring of the Nibelung* (Richard Wagner) and *Children's and Household Tales* (Grimm Brothers)
 - Spain and Portugal; e.g. *Fortunata and Jacinta* (Benito Pérez Galdós) and *La Regenta* (Leopoldo Alas)
 - Russia; e.g. *Crime and Punishment* (Dostoevsky) and *War and Peace* (Leo Tolstoy)
 - United States; e.g. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Mark Twain) and *Moby-Dick* (Herman Melville)
- The Chaotic Age (1900-today), which includes a multitude of countries and authors.

Great Books Program



The *Great Books of*

A university or college Great Books Program is a program inspired by the Great Books movement begun in the United States in the 1920s by Prof. John Erskine of Columbia University, which proposed to improve the higher education system by returning it to the western liberal arts tradition of broad cross-disciplinary learning. These academics and educators included Robert Hutchins, Mortimer

the Western World in Adler, Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchanan, Jacques
60 volumes Barzun, and Alexander Meiklejohn. The view among
them was that the emphasis on narrow specialization in American
colleges had harmed the quality of higher education by failing to
expose students to the important products of Western civilization and
thought.

The essential component of such programs is a high degree of
engagement with primary texts, called the Great Books. The curricula of
Great Books programs often follow a canon of texts considered more or
less essential to a student's education, such as Plato's *Republic*, or
Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Such programs often focus exclusively on
Western culture. Their employment of primary texts dictates an
interdisciplinary approach, as most of the Great Books do not fall neatly
under the prerogative of a single contemporary academic discipline.
Great Books programs often include designated discussion groups as
well as lectures, and have small class sizes. In general students in such
programs receive an abnormally high degree of attention from their
professors, as part of the overall aim of fostering a community of
learning.

Over 100 institutions of higher learning, mostly in the United States, offer
some version of a Great Books Program as an option for students.

Debate

There has been an ongoing debate, especially in the US, over the
nature and status of the canon since at least the 1960s, much of which is
rooted in critical theory, feminism, critical race theory, and Marxism. In
particular, postmodern studies have argued that the body of scholarship
is biased, because the main focus traditionally of the academic studies
of history and Western culture has only been on Europe and men.
American philosopher Jay Stevenson argues:

[In] the postmodern period [...] [t]raditional literature has been found to
have been written by "dead white males" to serve the *ideological* aims
of a conservative and repressive Anglo *hegemony* [...] In an array of
reactions against the race, gender, and class biases found to be woven
into the tradition of Anglo lit, multicultural writers and political literary
theorists have sought to expose, resist, and redress injustices and
prejudices.

Classicist Bernard Knox made direct reference to this topic when he
delivered his 1992 Jefferson Lecture (the U.S. federal government's

highest honor for achievement in the humanities). Knox used the intentionally "provocative" title "The Oldest Dead White European Males" as the title of his lecture and his subsequent book of the same name, in both of which Knox defended the continuing relevance of classical culture to modern society.

Some intellectuals have championed a "high conservative modernism" that insists that universal truths exist, and have opposed approaches that deny the existence of universal truths. Many argued that "natural law" was the repository of timeless truths. Allan Bloom, in his highly influential *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (1987) argues that moral degradation results from ignorance of the great classics that shaped Western culture. Bloom further comments: "But one thing is certain: wherever the Great Books make up a central part of the curriculum, the students are excited and satisfied." His book was widely cited by some intellectuals for its argument that the classics contained universal truths and timeless values which were being ignored by cultural relativists. Yale University Professor of Humanities and famous literary critic Harold Bloom (no relation) has also argued strongly in favor of the canon, in his 1994 book *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, and in general the canon remains as a represented idea in many institutions, though its implications continue to be debated.

Defenders maintain that those who undermine the canon do so out of primarily political interests, and that such criticisms are misguided and/or disingenuous. As John Searle, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, has written:

There is a certain irony in this [i.e., politicized objections to the canon] in that earlier student generations, my own for example, found the critical tradition that runs from Socrates through the *Federalist Papers*, through the writings of Mill and Marx, down to the twentieth century, to be liberating from the stuffy conventions of traditional American politics and pieties. Precisely by inculcating a critical attitude, the "canon" served to demythologize the conventional pieties of the American bourgeoisie and provided the student with a perspective from which to critically analyze American culture and institutions.

Ironically, the same tradition is now regarded as oppressive. The texts once served an unmasking function; now we are told that it is the texts which must be unmasked.

One of the main objections to a canon of literature is the question of authority; who should have the power to determine what works are worth reading? Searle's rebuttal suggests that "one obvious difficulty with it [i.e., arguments against hierarchical ranking of books] is that if it were valid, it would argue against any set of required readings whatever; indeed, any list you care to make about anything automatically creates two categories, those that are on the list and those that are not."

Charles Altieri, of the University of California, Berkeley, states that canons are "an institutional form for exposing people to a range of idealized attitudes." It is according to this notion that work may be removed from the canon over time to reflect the contextual relevance and thoughts of society. American historian Todd M. Compton argues that canons are always communal in nature; that there are limited canons for, say a literature survey class, or an English department reading list, but there is no such thing as one absolute canon of literature. Instead, there are many conflicting canons. He regards Bloom's "Western Canon" as a personal canon only.

The process of defining the boundaries of the canon is endless. The philosopher John Searle has said, "In my experience there never was, in fact, a fixed 'canon'; there was rather a certain set of tentative judgments about what had importance and quality. Such judgments are always subject to revision, and in fact they were constantly being revised." One of the notable attempts at compiling an authoritative canon for literature in the English-speaking world was the Great Books of the Western World program. This program, developed in the middle third of the 20th century, grew out of the curriculum at the University of Chicago. University president Robert Maynard Hutchins and his collaborator Mortimer Adler developed a program that offered reading lists, books, and organizational strategies for reading clubs to the general public. An earlier attempt had been made in 1909 by Harvard University president Charles W. Eliot, with the Harvard Classics, a 51-volume anthology of classic works from world literature. Eliot's view was the same as that of Scottish philosopher and historian Thomas Carlyle: "The true University of these days is a Collection of Books". ("The Hero as Man of Letters",

In the English-speaking world

British renaissance poetry

The canon of Renaissance English poetry of the 16th and early 17th century has always been in some form of flux and towards the end of the 20th century the established canon was criticized, especially by those who wished to expand it to include, for example, more women writers. However, the central figures of the British renaissance canon remain, Edmund Spenser, Sir Philip Sidney, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and John Donne. Spenser, Donne, and Jonson were major influences on 17th-century poetry. However, poet John Dryden condemned aspects of the metaphysical poets in his criticism. In the 18th century Metaphysical poetry fell into further disrepute, while the interest in Elizabethan poetry was rekindled through the scholarship of Thomas Warton and others. However, the canon of Renaissance poetry was formed in the Victorian period with anthologies like Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*.

In the twentieth century T. S. Eliot and Yvor Winters were two literary critics who were especially concerned with revising the canon of renaissance English literature. Eliot, for example, championed poet Sir John Davies in an article in *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1926. During the course of the 1920s, Eliot did much to establish the importance of the metaphysical school, both through his critical writing and by applying their method in his own work. However, by 1961 A. Alvarez was commenting that "it may perhaps be a little late in the day to be writing about the Metaphysicals. The great vogue for Donne passed with the passing of the Anglo-American experimental movement in modern poetry." Two decades later, a hostile view was expressed that emphasis on their importance had been an attempt by Eliot and his followers to impose a 'high Anglican and royalist literary history' on 17th-century English poetry.

The American critic Yvor Winters suggested in 1939 an alternative canon of Elizabethan poetry, which would exclude the famous representatives of the Petrarchan school of poetry, represented by Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. Winters claimed that the Native or Plain Style *anti-Petrarchan* movement had been undervalued and argued that George Gascoigne (1525-1577) "deserves to be ranked [...] among the six or seven greatest lyric poets of the century, and perhaps higher".

Towards the end of the 20th century the established canon was increasingly under fire.

Expansion of the literary canon in the 20th century

In the twentieth century there was a general reassessment of the literary canon, including women's writing, post-colonial literatures, gay and lesbian literature, writing by people of colour, working people's writing, and the cultural productions of historically marginalized groups. This reassessment has resulted in a whole scale expansion of what is considered "literature", and genres hitherto not regarded as "literary", such as children's writing, journals, letters, travel writing, and many others are now the subjects of scholarly interest.

The Western literary canon has also expanded to include the literature of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and South America. Writers from countries like Turkey, China, Egypt, Peru, and Colombia, Japan, etc., have received Nobel prizes since the late 1960s. Writers from Asia and Africa have also been nominated for, and also won, the Booker prize in recent years.

Feminism and the literary canon

The feminist movement produced both feminist fiction and non-fiction and created new interest in women's writing. It also prompted a general reevaluation of women's historical and academic contributions in response to the belief that women's lives and contributions have been underrepresented as areas of scholarly interest.

However, in Britain and America at least women achieved major literary success from the late eighteenth century, and many major nineteenth century British novelists were women, including Jane Austen, the Brontë family, Elizabeth Gaskell, and George Eliot. There were also three major female poets, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson. In the twentieth century there were also many major female writers, including Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Eudora Welty, and Marianne Moore. Notable female writers in France include Colette and Simone de Beauvoir; and in Russia, Anna Akhmatova.

Much of the early period of feminist literary scholarship was given over to the rediscovery and reclamation of texts written by women. Virago Press began to publish its large list of 19th and early 20th century novels in 1975 and became one of the first commercial presses to join in the project of reclamation.

Black authors

In the twentieth century, the Western literary canon started to include black writers not only from black American writers, but also from the wider black diaspora of writers in Britain, France, Latin America, and Africa. This is largely due to the shift in social and political views during the civil rights movement in the United States. The first global recognition came in 1950 when Gwendolyn Brooks was the first black American to win a Pulitzer Prize for Literature. Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* helped draw attention to African literature. Nigerian Wole Soyinka was the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, and American Toni Morrison was the first black woman to win in 1993.

Some early American Black writers were inspired to defy ubiquitous racial prejudice by proving themselves equal to white American authors. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has said, "it is fair to describe the subtext of the history of black letters as this urge to refute the claim that because blacks had no written traditions they were bearers of an inferior culture."

African-American writers were also attempting to subvert the literary and power traditions of the United States. Some scholars assert that writing has traditionally been seen as "something defined by the dominant culture as a white male activity." This means that, in American society, literary acceptance has traditionally been intimately tied in with the very power dynamics which perpetrated such evils as racial discrimination. By borrowing from and incorporating the non-written oral traditions and folk life of the African diaspora, African-American literature broke "the mystique of connection between literary authority and patriarchal power." In producing their own literature, African Americans were able to establish their own literary traditions devoid of the white intellectual filter. This view of African-American literature as a tool in the struggle for Black political and cultural liberation has been stated for decades, most famously by W. E. B. Du Bois.

Asia and Africa

Since the 1960s the Western literary canon has been expanded to include writers from Asia, Africa, the Middle East. This is reflected in the Nobel prizes awarded in literature.

Yasunari Kawabata (1899 - 1972) was a Japanese novelist and short story writer whose spare, lyrical, subtly-shaded prose works won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1968, the first Japanese author to receive

the award. His works have enjoyed broad international appeal and are still widely read.

Naguib Mahfouz (1911 – 2006) was an Egyptian writer who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for Literature. He is regarded as one of the first contemporary writers of Arabic literature, along with Tawfiq el-Hakim, to explore themes of existentialism. He published 34 novels, over 350 short stories, dozens of movie scripts, and five plays over a 70-year career. Many of his works have been made into Egyptian and foreign films.

Kenzaburo Oe (b. 1935) is a Japanese writer and a major figure in contemporary Japanese literature. His novels, short stories, and essays, strongly influenced by French and American literature and literary theory, deal with political, social, and philosophical issues, including nuclear weapons, nuclear power, social non-conformism, and existentialism. Oe was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1994 for creating "an imagined world, where life and myth condense to form a disconcerting picture of the human predicament today".

Guan Moye (b. 1955), better known by the pen name "Mo Yan", is a Chinese novelist and short story writer. Donald Morrison of the U.S. news magazine TIME referred to him as "one of the most famous, oft-banned and widely pirated of all Chinese writers", and Jim Leach called him the Chinese answer to Franz Kafka or Joseph Heller. He is best known to Western readers for his 1987 novel Red Sorghum Clan, of which the *Red Sorghum* and *Sorghum Wine* volumes were later adapted for the film Red Sorghum. In 2012, Mo was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his work as a writer "who with hallucinatory realism merges folk tales, history and the contemporary".

Orhan Pamuk (b. 1952) is a Turkish novelist, screenwriter, academic, and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. One of Turkey's most prominent novelists, his work has sold over thirteen million books in sixty-three languages, making him the country's best-selling writer. Pamuk is the author of novels including The White Castle, The Black Book, The New Life, My Name Is Red, Snow, The Museum of Innocence, and A Strangeness in My Mind. He is the Robert Yik-Fong Tam Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, where he teaches writing and comparative literature. Born in Istanbul, Pamuk is the first Turkish Nobel laureate. He is also the recipient of numerous other literary awards. *My Name Is Red* won the 2002 Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, 2002 Premio Grinzane Cavour, and 2003 International Dublin Literary Award.

Latin America

Octavio Paz Lozano (1914 - 1998) was a Mexican poet and diplomat. For his body of work, he was awarded the 1981 Miguel de Cervantes Prize, the 1982 Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the 1990 Nobel Prize in Literature.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927 - 2014) was a Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter, and journalist. Considered one of the most significant authors of the 20th century and one of the best in the Spanish language, he was awarded the 1972 Neustadt International Prize for Literature and the 1982 Nobel Prize in Literature.

García Márquez started as a journalist, and wrote many acclaimed non-fiction works and short stories, but is best known for his novels, such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), *The Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975), and *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985). His works have achieved significant critical acclaim and widespread commercial success, most notably for popularizing a literary style labeled as magic realism, which uses magical elements and events in otherwise ordinary and realistic situations. Some of his works are set in a fictional village called Macondo (the town mainly inspired by his birthplace Aracataca), and most of them explore the theme of solitude. On his death in April 2014, Juan Manuel Santos, the President of Colombia, described him as "the greatest Colombian who ever lived."

Mario Vargas Llosa, (b. 1936) is a Peruvian writer, politician, journalist, essayist, college professor, and recipient of the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature. Vargas Llosa is one of Latin America's most significant novelists and essayists, and one of the leading writers of his generation. Some critics consider him to have had a larger international impact and worldwide audience than any other writer of the Latin American Boom. Upon announcing the 2010 Nobel Prize in Literature, the Swedish Academy said it had been given to Vargas Llosa "for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt, and defeat".

Canon of Western philosophers

The discussion of the literary canon above, especially with regard to "Great Book" and the "debate" over the canon, is also relevant.

Ancient Greek philosophy has consistently held a prominent place in the canon. Only a relatively small number of works of Greek philosophy have survived, essentially those thought most worth copying in the Middle

Ages. Plato, Aristotle and, indirectly, Socrates are the primary figures. Roman philosophy is included, but regarded as less significant (as it tended to be even by the Romans themselves). The ancient philosophy of other cultures now receives more attention than before the 20th century. The vast body of Christian philosophy is typically represented on reading lists mainly by Saints Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, and the 12th-century Jewish scholar Maimonides is now usually represented, mostly by *The Guide for the Perplexed*. The academic canon of early modern philosophy generally includes Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant, though influential contributions to philosophy were made by many thinkers in this period.

Women have engaged in philosophy throughout the field's history. There were female philosophers since ancient times, notably Hipparchia of Maroneia (active c. 325 BC) and Arete of Cyrene (active 5th-4th century BC), and some were accepted as philosophers during the ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary eras, but almost no female philosophers have entered the philosophical Western canon. In the early 1990s, the Canadian Philosophical Association claimed that there is gender imbalance and gender bias in the academic field of philosophy. In June 2013, a US sociology professor stated that "out of all recent citations in four prestigious philosophy journals, female authors comprise just 3.6 percent of the total. While other areas of the humanities are at or near gender parity, philosophy is actually more overwhelmingly male than even mathematics."

Ancient Greeks

Many philosophers today agree that Greek philosophy has influenced much of Western culture since its inception. Alfred North Whitehead once noted: "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." Clear, unbroken lines of influence lead from ancient Greek and Hellenistic philosophers to Early Islamic philosophy, the European Renaissance, and the Age of Enlightenment. Greek philosophy was probably influenced by the philosophy and mythological cosmogonies of the ancient Near East, as well as Indian Vedanta philosophy, but philosophy, as we understand, it is a Greek creation."

Plato was a philosopher in Classical Greece and the founder of the Academy in Athens, the first institution of higher learning in the Western world. He is widely considered the most pivotal figure in the development of philosophy, especially the Western tradition, unlike

nearly all of his philosophical contemporaries.

Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist. His writings cover many subjects - including physics, biology, zoology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, poetry, theater, music, rhetoric, linguistics, politics and government--and constitute the first comprehensive system of Western philosophy. Aristotle's views on physical science had a profound influence on medieval scholarship. Their influence extended from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages into the Renaissance, and his views were not replaced systematically until the Enlightenment and theories such as classical mechanics. In metaphysics, Aristotelianism profoundly influenced Judeo-Islamic philosophical and theological thought during the Middle Ages and continues to influence Christian theology, especially the Neoplatonism of the Early Church and the scholastic tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. Aristotle was well known among medieval Muslim intellectuals and revered as "The First Teacher" (Arabic:). His ethics, though always influential, gained renewed interest with the modern advent of virtue ethics. All aspects of Aristotle's philosophy continue to be the object of active academic study today.

Indian philosophy

Major Western writers and philosophers have been influenced by Eastern philosophy.

Through his teacher Ammonius Saccas (died c.AD 265, the Greek speaking philosopher Plotinus may have been influenced by Indian thought, because of the similarities between neoplatonism and the Vedanta philosophies of Hinduism.

American modernist poet T S Eliot wrote that the great philosophers of India "make most of the great European philosophers look like schoolboys". Arthur Schopenhauer, in the preface to his book The World As Will And Representation, writes that one who "has also received and assimilated the sacred primitive Indian wisdom, then he is the best of all prepared to hear what I have to say to him" The 19th century American philosophical movement Transcendentalism was also influenced by Indian thought.

Renaissance Philosophy

Major philosophers of the Renaissance include Niccolò Machiavelli, Pico della Mirandola, Nicolas of Cusa, Giordano Bruno and Galileo Galilei.

Seventeenth-century philosophers

The seventeenth century was important for philosophy, and the major figures were Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), René Descartes (1596-1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), John Locke (1632-1704), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), and Isaac Newton (1642- c.1726).

Eighteenth-century philosophers

Major philosophers of the eighteenth century include George Berkeley (1685-1753), David Hume (1711-1776), Adam Smith (1723-1790), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Edmund Burke (1729-1797).

Nineteenth-century philosophers

Important nineteenth century philosophers include Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

Twentieth-century philosophers

Major twentieth century figures are Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). A porous distinction between analytic and continental approaches emerged during this period. The term "continental" is misleading, as many prominent British philosophers such as R. G. Collingwood and Michael Oakeshott were non-analytic, and many non-British European philosophers like Wittgenstein were analytic. Moreover, analytic approaches are dominant in the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, and parts of east-central Europe today. Some argue in English-speaking countries, it is better to distinguish between the dominant approaches of university departments, where Modern Language departments tend to favor continental methods and philosophy department tends to favor analytic ones. However, the humanities/social sciences departments in general such as history, sociology, anthropology, and political science departments in English-speaking countries tend to favor continental methods such as those by Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) and Jürgen Habermas (1929-).

Female philosophers have begun to gain prominence in the last hundred years. Notable female philosophers from the contemporary period include Susanne Langer (1895-1985), Simone de Beauvoir (1908-

Classical music



Johann Sebastian Bach

The term "classical music" did not appear until the early 19th century, in an attempt to distinctly canonize the period from Johann Sebastian Bach to Ludwig van Beethoven as a golden age. In addition to Bach and Beethoven, the other major figures from this period were Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The earliest reference to "classical music" recorded by the Oxford English Dictionary is from about 1836.

In classical music, during the nineteenth century a "canon" developed which focused on what was felt to be the most important works written since 1600, with a great concentration on the later part of this period, termed the Classical period, which is generally taken to begin around 1750. After

Beethoven, the major nineteenth century composers include Robert Schumann, Frédéric Chopin, Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Johannes Brahms, Anton Bruckner, Giuseppe Verdi, Giacomo Puccini, and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

In the 2000s, the standard concert repertoire of professional orchestras, chamber music groups, and choirs tends to focus on works by a relatively small number of mainly 18th and 19th century male composers. Many of the works deemed to be part of the musical canon are from genres regarded as the most *serious*, such as the symphony, concerto, string quartet, and opera. Folk music was already giving art music melodies, and from the late 19th century, in an atmosphere of increasing nationalism, folk music began to influence composers in formal and other ways, before being admitted to some sort of status in the canon itself.

Since the early twentieth century non-Western music has begun to influence Western composers. In particular, direct homages to Javanese gamelan music are found in works for western instruments by Claude Debussy, Béla Bartók, Francis Poulenc, Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, Benjamin Britten, John Cage, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass. Debussy was immensely interested in non-Western music and its approaches to composition. Specifically, he was drawn to the Javanese Gamelan, which

he first heard at the 1889 Paris Exposition. He was not interested in directly quoting his non-Western influences, but instead allowed this non-Western aesthetic to generally influence his own musical work, for example, by frequently using quiet, unresolved dissonances, coupled with the damper pedal, to emulate the "shimmering" effect created by a gamelan ensemble. American composer Philip Glass was not only influenced by the eminent French composition teacher Nadia Boulanger, but also by the Indian musicians Ravi Shankar and Alla Rakha. His distinctive style arose from his work with Shankar and Rakha and their perception of rhythm in Indian music as being entirely additive.

In the latter half of the 20th century the canon expanded to cover the so-called Early music of the pre-classical period, and Baroque music by composers other than Bach and George Frideric Handel, including Antonio Vivaldi, Claudio Monteverdi, Domenico Scarlatti, Alessandro Scarlatti, Henry Purcell, Georg Philipp Telemann, Jean-Baptiste Lully, Jean-Philippe Rameau, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Arcangelo Corelli, François Couperin, Heinrich Schütz, and Dieterich Buxtehude. Earlier composers, such as Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Orlande de Lassus and William Byrd, have also received more attention in the last hundred years.

The absence of female composers from the canon has been debated in the twentieth century, even though there have been female composers throughout the classical music period. Marcia J Citron, for example, has examined "the practices and attitudes that have led to the exclusion of women [sic] composers from the received 'canon' of performed musical works." More recently the music of Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), a German Benedictine abbess, has been rediscovered, and both the Russian Sofia Gubaidulina (1931-) and Finnish Kajja Saariaho (1952-) have achieved international reputations. Saariaho's opera L'amour de loin has been staged in some of the world's major opera houses, including The English National Opera (2009) and in 2016 the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Visual arts

The backbone of traditional Western art history are artworks commissioned by wealthy patrons for private or public enjoyment. Much of this was religious art, mostly Roman Catholic art. The classical art of Greece and Rome has, since the Renaissance, been the fount of the Western tradition.

Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) is the originator of the artistic canon and the originator of many of the concepts it embodies. His *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* covers only artists working in Italy, with a strong pro-Florentine prejudice, and has cast a long shadow over succeeding centuries. Northern European art has arguably never quite caught up to Italy in terms of prestige, and Vasari's placing of Giotto as the founding father of "modern" painting has largely been retained. In painting, the rather vague term of Old master covers painters up to about the time of Goya.

This "canon" remains prominent, as indicated by the selection present in art history textbooks, as well as the prices obtained in the art trade. But there have been considerable swings in what is valued. In the 19th century the Baroque fell into great disfavour, but it was revived from around the 1920s, by which time the art of the 18th and 19th century was largely disregarded. The High Renaissance, which Vasari regarded as the greatest period, has always retained its prestige, including works by Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael, but the succeeding period of Mannerism has fallen in and out of favour.

In the 19th century the beginnings of academic art history, led by German universities, led to much better understanding and appreciation of medieval art, and a more nuanced understanding of classical art, including the realization that many if not most treasured masterpieces of sculpture were late Roman copies rather than Greek originals. The European tradition of art was expanded to include Byzantine art and the new discoveries of archaeology, notably Etruscan art, Celtic art and Upper Paleolithic art.

Since the 20th century there has been an effort to re-define the discipline to be more inclusive of art made by women; vernacular creativity, especially in printed media; and an expansion to include works in the Western tradition produced outside Europe. At the same time there has been a much greater appreciation of non-Western traditions, including their place with Western art in wider global or Eurasian traditions. The decorative arts have traditionally had a much lower critical status than fine art, although often highly valued by collectors, and still tend to be given little prominence in undergraduate studies or popular coverage on television and in print.

Women and art

Women were discriminated against in terms of obtaining the training necessary to be an artist in the mainstream Western traditions. In

addition, since the Renaissance the nude, more often than not female, has had a special position as subject matter. In her 1971 essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?", Linda Nochlin analyzes what she sees as the embedded privilege in the predominantly male Western art world and argues that women's outsider status allowed them a unique viewpoint to not only critique women's position in art, but to additionally examine the discipline's underlying assumptions about gender and ability. Nochlin's essay develops the argument that both formal and social education restricted artistic development to men, preventing women (with rare exception) from honing their talents and gaining entry into the art world.

In the 1970s, feminist art criticism continued this critique of the institutionalized sexism of art history, art museums, and galleries, and questioned which genres of art were deemed museum-worthy. This position is articulated by artist Judy Chicago: "[I]t is crucial to understand that one of the ways in which the importance of male experience is conveyed is through the art objects that are exhibited and preserved in our museums. Whereas men experience presence in our art institutions, women experience primarily absence, except in images that do not necessarily reflect women's own sense of themselves."

English artist and sculptor Barbara Hepworth DBE (1903 - 1975), whose work exemplifies Modernism, and in particular modern sculpture, is one of the few female artists to achieve international prominence. In 2016 the art of American modernist Georgia O'Keefe has been staged at the Tate Modern, in London, and is then moving in December 2016 to Vienna, Austria, before visiting the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada in 2017.

Sources containing canonical lists

English literature

- Modern Library 100 Best Novels - English-language novels of the 20th century
- Library of America, classic American literature

International literature

- ZEIT-Bibliothek der 100 Bücher German Die Zeit list of 100 books
- Bibliothèque de la Pléiade
- Everyman's Library (Modern works)

- [Great Books of the Western World](#)
- The [Harvard Classics](#)*
- [Le Monde's 100 Books of the Century](#) - books of the 20th century
- [The Modern Library](#)
- [Oxford World's Classics](#)
- [Penguin Classics](#)
- [John Cowper Powys: One Hundred Best Books \(1916\)](#): Project Gutenberg [4]
- [Routledge Classics](#)
- Verso Books' [Radical Thinkers](#)

University reading lists

- [Brigham Young University's Honors Program's Great Works List](#)
- [Catholic University of Portugal](#) program in [political science](#)
- [St. John's College Great Books reading list](#) (established by [Scott Buchanan](#) and [Stringfellow Barr](#))
- [Trinity Western University's Great Books Reading List](#)

Contemporary anthologies of renaissance literature

The preface to the [Blackwell](#) anthology of *Renaissance Literature* from 2003 acknowledges the importance of online access to literary texts on the selection of what to include, meaning that the selection can be made on basis of functionality rather than representativity". This anthology has made its selection based on three principles. One is "unabashedly *canonical*", meaning that Sidney, Spenser, Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson have been given the space prospective users would expect. A second principle is "non-canonical", giving female writers such as [Anne Askew](#), [Elizabeth Cary](#), [Emilia Lanier](#), [Martha Moulsworth](#), and [Lady Mary Wroth](#) a representative selection. It also includes texts that may not be representative of the qualitatively best efforts of Renaissance literature, but of the quantitatively most numerous texts, such as homilies and erotica. A third principle has been thematic, so that the anthology aims to include texts that shed light on issues of special interest to contemporary scholars.

The Blackwell anthology is still firmly organised around authors, however. A different strategy has been observed by *The Penguin Book*

of *Renaissance Verse* from 1992. Here the texts are organised according to topic, under the headings *The Public World, Images of Love, Topographies, Friends, Patrons and the Good Life, Church, State and Belief, Elegy and Epitaph, Translation, Writer, Language and Public*. It is arguable that such an approach is more suitable for the interested reader than for the student. While the two anthologies are not directly comparable, since the Blackwell anthology also includes prose and the Penguin anthology goes up to 1659, it is telling that while the larger Blackwell anthology contains work by 48 poets, seven of which are women, the Penguin anthology contains 374 poems by 109 poets, including 13 women and one poet each in Welsh, [Siôn Phylip](#), and Irish, [Eochaidh Ó Heóghusa](#).

German literature

Best German Novels of the Twentieth Century

The [Best German Novels of the Twentieth Century](#) is a list of books compiled in 1999 by [Literaturhaus München](#) and [Bertelsmann](#), in which 99 prominent German authors, literary critics, and scholars of [German](#) ranked the most significant German-language novels of the twentieth century. The group brought together 33 experts from each of the three categories. Each was allowed to name three books as having been the most important of the century. Cited by the group were five titles by both [Franz Kafka](#) and [Arno Schmidt](#), four by [Robert Walser](#), and three by Thomas Mann, [Hermann Broch](#), [Anna Seghers](#), and [Joseph Roth](#).

[Der Kanon](#) or more precisely "Marcel-Reich-Ranickis Kanon" is a large [anthology](#) of exemplary works of German literature.

French literature

See Key texts of [French literature](#)

- [Le Monde's 100 Books of the Century](#)

Canon of Dutch Literature

The [Canon of Dutch Literature](#) comprises a list of 1000 works of [Dutch Literature](#) important to the cultural heritage of the [Low Countries](#), and is published on the [DBNL](#). Several of these works are lists themselves; such as early dictionaries, lists of songs, recipes, biographies, or encyclopedic compilations of information such as mathematical, scientific, medical, or plant reference books. Other items include early translations of literature from other countries, history books, first-hand

diaries, and published correspondence. Notable original works can be found by author name.

Scandinavia

Danish Culture Canon

The Danish Culture Canon consists of 108 works of cultural excellence in eight categories: architecture, visual arts, design and crafts, film, literature, music, performing arts, and children's culture. An initiative of Brian Mikkelsen in 2004, it was developed by a series of committees under the auspices of the Danish Ministry of Culture in 2006-2007 as "a collection and presentation of the greatest, most important works of Denmark's cultural heritage." Each category contains 12 works, although music contains 12 works of score music and 12 of popular music, and the literature section's 12th item is an anthology of 24 works.

Sweden

Världsbiblioteket (*The World Library*) was a Swedish list of the 100 best books in the world, created in 1991 by the Swedish literary magazine Tidningen Boken. The list was compiled through votes from members of the Svenska Akademien, Swedish Crime Writers' Academy, librarians, authors, and others. Approximately 30 of the books were Swedish.

Norway

- Bokklubben World Library.

See also

- Anti-bias curriculum
- Africana philosophy
- Atlantic Canada's 100 Greatest Books
- Censorship
 - List of books banned by governments
- Chinese classics
- Great Conversation
- Identity politics
- List of Nobel laureates in Literature

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3. ^ [a](#) [b](#) [Hicks, Stephen](#). (2004). *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault*. Scholargy Press, p. 18.
4. ^ [Bloom, Harold](#) (1994). *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.
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External links

- ["The English Literary Canon - a work in progress"](#)
- ["Great Books Lists: Lists of Classics, Eastern and Western": this has numerous lists, including Harold Bloom's](#)
- [Compton, "Infinite Canons: A Few Axioms and Questions, and in Addition, a Proposed Definition. A response to Harold Bloom"](#)
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