

Literature: epic poetry and ancient china assignment

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The Epic of Gilgamesh is one of the earliest known literary works. This Babylonian epic poem arises from stories in the Sumerian language. Although the Sumerian stories are older (probably dating to at least 2100 B.C.), it was probably composed around 1900 BC. The epic deals with themes of heroism, friendship, loss, and the quest for eternal life. Different historical periods are reflected in literature. National and tribal sagas, accounts of the origin of the world and of customs, and myths which sometimes carry moral or spiritual messages predominate in the early eras.

The epics of Homer, dating from the early to middle Iron Age, and the great Indian epics of a slightly later period, have more evidence of deliberate literary authorship, surviving like the older myths through oral tradition for long periods before being written down. As a more urban culture developed, academies provided a means of transmission for speculative and philosophical literature in early civilizations, resulting in the prevalence of literature in Ancient China, Ancient India, Persia and Ancient Greece and Rome.

Many works of earlier periods, even in narrative form, had a moral or didactic purpose, such as the Sanskrit Panchatantra or the Metamorphoses of Ovid. Drama and satire also developed as urban culture provided a larger public audience, and later readership, for literary production. Lyric poetry (as opposed to epic poetry) was often the specialist of courts and aristocratic circles, particularly in East Asia where songs were collected by the Chinese aristocracy as poems, the most notable being the Shijing or Book of Songs.

Over a long period, the poetry of popular pre-literate balladry and song interpenetrated and eventually influenced poetry in the literary medium. In ancient China, early literature was primarily focused on philosophy, historiography, military science, agriculture, and poetry. China, the origin of modern paper making and woodblock printing, produced one of the world's first print cultures. [1] Much of Chinese literature originates with the Hundred Schools of Thought period that occurred during the Eastern Chou Dynasty (769-269 BCC).

The most important of these include the Classics of Confucianism, of Taoism, of Mohism, of Legalism, as well as works of military science (e. G. Sun Tzu's The Art of War) and Chinese history (e. G. Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian). Ancient Chinese literature had a heavy emphasis on historiography, with often very detailed court records. An exemplary piece of narrative history of ancient China was the Ouzo Chuan, which was compiled no later than 389 BCC, and attributed to the blind 5th century BCC historian Ouzo Cuming.

In ancient India, literature originated from stories that were originally orally transmitted. Early genres included drama, fables, sutras and epic poetry. Sanskrit literature begins with the Veda, dating back to 1500-1000 BCC, and continues with the Sanskrit Epics of Iron Age India. The Veda are among the oldest sacred texts. The Scimitars (Vivid collections) date to roughly 1500-1000 BCC, and the "circus-Vivid" texts, as well as the redaction of the Scimitars, date to c. 000-500 BCC, resulting in a Vivid period, spanning the mid 2nd to mid 1st millennium BCC, or the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age.

[2] The period between approximately the 6th to 1st centuries BC saw the composition and redaction of the two most influential Indian epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In ancient Greece, the epics of Homer, who wrote the Iliad and the Odyssey, and Hesiod, who wrote Works and Days and Theogony, are some of the earliest, and most influential, of Ancient Greek literature.

Classical Greek genres included philosophy, poetry, historiography, comedies and dramas. Plato and Aristotle authored philosophical texts that are the foundation of Western philosophy, Sappho and Pindar were influential lyrical poets, and Herodotus and Thucydides were early Greek historians. Although drama was popular in Ancient Greece, of the hundreds of tragedies written and performed during the classical age, only a limited number of plays by three authors still exist: Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

The plays of Aristophanes provide the only real examples of a genre of comic drama known as Old Comedy, the earliest form of Greek Comedy, and are in fact used to define the genre. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer and author of the Faust books Roman histories and biographies anticipated the extensive mediaeval literature of lives of saints and miraculous chronicles, but the most characteristic form of the Middle Ages was the romance, an adventurous and sometimes magical narrative with strong popular appeal.

Controversial, religious, political and instructional literature reemerged during the Renaissance as a result of the invention of printing, while the mediaeval romance developed into a more character-based and psychological form of narrative, the novel, of which early and important

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examples are the Chinese Monkey and the German Faust books. In the Age of Reason philosophical tracts and speculations on history and human nature integrated literature with social and political developments.

The inevitable reaction was the explosion of Romanticism in the later 18th century which reclaimed the imaginative and fantastical bias of old nuances and folk-literature and asserted the primacy of individual experience and emotion. But as the 19th-century went on, European fiction evolved towards realism and naturalism, the meticulous documentation of real life and social trends.

Much of the output of naturalism was implicitly polemical, and influenced social and political change, but 20th century fiction and drama moved back towards the subjective, emphasizing unconscious motivations and social and environmental pressures on the individual. Writers such as Proust, Eliot, Joyce, Kafka and Faulkner exemplify the trend of documenting internal rather than external realities.

Genre fiction also showed it could question reality in its 20th century forms, in spite of its fixed formulas, through the enquiries of the skeptical detective and the alternative realities of science fiction. The separation of “mainstream” and “genre” forms (including journalism) continued to blur during the period up to our own times. William Burroughs, in his early works, and Hunter S. Thompson expanded documentary reporting into strong subjective statements after the second World War, and post-modern critics have disparaged the idea of objective realism in general.