



*University of Basrah*  
*College of Arts*  
*Dept. of Translation/ First Stage*

- ▶ **Introduction To English Literature**
  - ▶ **Lecture 1**
    - ▶ **Instructor :Dr.Mugdad**
- ▶ **Reference : A Guide To Literary Study By Leon T. Dickerson**

# What is literature?

- ▶ **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 excellence of their execution. Literature may be classified according to a variety of systems, including language, national origin, historical period, genre, and subject matter.**

- ▶ **For historical treatment of various literatures within geographical regions, *see* such articles as African literature; African theatre; Oceanic literature; Western literature; Central Asian arts; South Asian arts; and Southeast Asian arts. Some literatures are treated separately by language, by nation, or by special subject (e.g., Arabic literature, Celtic literature, Latin literature, French literature, Japanese literature, and biblical literature).**

# Definitions

- ▶ 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 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 belonging to a given language or people; then it is individual pieces of writing.

► Most theories of literary criticism base themselves on an analysis of poetry, because the aesthetic problems of literature are there presented in their simplest and purest form. Poetry that fails as literature is not called poetry at all but verse. Many novels—certainly all the world's great novels—are literature, but there are thousands that are not so considered.