

period; Breytenbach remains one of South Africa's most outspoken and experimental writers. Significant contemporary novelists in Afrikaans, some of whose work is available in English translation, include Karel Schoeman (1939–), Jeanne Goosen (1938–), Eben Venter (1954–), Etienne van Heerden (1954–), and Marlene van Niekerk (1954–), who is author of two critically lauded novels, *Triomf* (1994, translated in 1995), and *Agaat* (2004, published in English in South Africa as *Agaat*, 2006, and in Britain as *The Way of the Women*, 2007).

See also African Literature.

5 Essential Works of South African Literature

The Story of an African Farm (1883), Olive Schreiner.

The Conservationist (1974), Nadine Gordimer.

Mhudi (1930), Solomon T. Plaatje.

Disgrace (1999), J.M. Coetzee.

Agaat (2006), Marlene van Niekerk.

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SOUTHEAST ASIAN LITERATURE

Overview

The nation-state is a relatively modern concept in the history of Southeast Asia. The region now comprising Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, Vietnam, and the Philippines is viewed as a major crossroads of commerce, ideas, and ideals. Early documents describe the area as a “Land of Gold” (Pali, *Suwannabhumi*). Its richness of resources made it a point of convergence for early Indian, Chinese, Arab, and Persian traders. Such interests left a complex of cultural legacies in their wake. Early kingdoms, such as Funan, Dvaravati, and

Srivijaya, transcended the boundaries of modern Southeast Asian nations, representing larger patterns of influence. Scholars often resort to Indian terms to describe these influences, suggesting they existed as overlapping “mandalas.”

In the more recent period, the term “Southeast Asia” came to prominence to describe an area commanded by Lord Mountbatten in World War II. In the 1960s, we came to know this region for its perceived communist threat, focusing largely on the Vietnam War, as well as the locus of “secret wars” in Laos and Cambodia, whose remnants reverberate into the present. While we have tended to refocus on this region due to fluctuating politics, it would be a mistake to characterize its literature as a vehicle of expression at the whims of relative permissiveness or repressiveness. Often entangled in politics, literature ultimately expresses a hope of being disentangled.

Interest in the trade routes and resources of Southeast Asia has continued into the modern era: the British in Burma and the Malaysian Peninsula, the Dutch and the Portuguese in Malaysia and Indonesia, the French in Laos and Vietnam, as well as the Spanish in the Philippines. Thailand, alone, claims to have never been colonized. Especially in postcolonial Southeast Asia, the origins of the people and the integrity of languages and literatures can quickly become a matter of national pride.

The development of literature in Southeast Asia involves elements of this crossroads of influence. We presume that Indian and Chinese influence brought with it Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism; and these major religions dovetailed with certain preexisting beliefs related to animism, the importance of the family, and a sense of “duty,” a recognition of gratitude towards nature (and natural spirits) and one’s lineage. Later on Islam and Christianity were adapted into this mix. The continued ritual recognition of aboriginal beliefs infuses the “drier” teachings and texts of world religions with a lively richness.

In Southeast Asia, literature is not bound by books. Early on, oral traditions, riddles, puns, proverbs, legends, and stories of cosmologies were etched into the minds of listeners. Only later were tales set in the form of stone inscriptions and bas-reliefs. The verses of historical charters or constitutions are often included in the very open definition of literature in Southeast Asia.

The royal court was often the setting for literary invention and reinvention: murals were redone, reconsiderations of texts and commentaries were commissioned, and, of course, court historians drafted grand works

to laud the lives and deeds of members of the court. Such biographies (or hagiographies) became part of the literary canon of Southeast Asian countries.

Early forms of “texts” included etching on palm leaf or bamboo. A sharp knife was used to inscribe the surface, and then dark ashes were rubbed on to make the cuts stand out. Other forms of recording include writing on animal skins and etching on hammered sheets of metal. Because such forms were often subject to the vicissitudes of nature, recopying and reconsideration was an ongoing process. This reconsideration became a license for creativity and revision. Some early scholars characterized Southeast Asian literature as naive and formulaic love stories and heroic epics; but this tends to express a Western bias rather than help us understand the subtleties involved in regional aesthetics. Often the beauty of a tale did not reside in the uniqueness of the theme, but rather in how well it was embellished.

The authorship of most premodern literature was unknown. It was not until modern times that writers became known for creative themes and the personal character of their writings. The advent of printing presses gave rise to ephemeral literary arts magazines, which tended to publish creative writing in serial form. A coveted award for emerging artists is the SEA (Southeast Asian) Write Award.

Various forms of performance also convey a body of literature: volumes can be read in the demeanor and gestures of dancers, in the shadows and silhouettes of leather-cut puppets, and in the lilt of chants, recitations, and commentaries. Clifford Geertz’s suggestion that parts of Southeast Asia can be viewed as a “Theater State” points to the fundamental importance of the link between literature and performance.

The Spirit of Buddhist Mainland Literature

Early influences on Southeast Asian literature in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos can be traced to two main sources: indigenous and Indic. The epic Indian tale of the *Ramayana* captured the imagination of many and had a most pervasive impact. The epic has been modified and localized in a number of Southeast Asian countries and is known by the following names: *Yama Zattdaw* (Burma), *Ramakian* (Thailand), *Ramakerti* (Cambodia), *Phra Lak Phra Lam* (Laos). The influence of this epic is also found farther down the peninsula in the *Hikayat Seri Rama* (Malaysia) and *Serat*

Rama (Java). The tale of the virtuous Rama and Sita is told in shadow-puppet performances and acted out in dance drama.

The canon of Theravada Buddhism traveled to the area via India and Sri Lanka. A popular form of literature from this tradition is the didactic *Jataka Tales*, or so-called Buddhist Birth Stories. These stories, ranging in a sort of karmic succession, portray the natures of animals and humans. The *Jataka Tales* function in ways similar to Aesop's fables, often ending with a moral message. The most famous of these tales is that of the penultimate birth of the Buddha, known as "The (Prince) Vessantara Jataka." This Job-like fable deals with a prince whose fortitude is tested by being banished (like Rama) and having his material wealth and family taken away from him. His constancy in the face of adversity leads to the return of all that was lost. This tale is also performed in annual ceremonies.

Various forms of chronicles play a prominent role in the literature of this region: For example, there are chronicles of royalty and regional areas (Thai, *phongsawadan*; Burmese, *ya-zawin*), Buddhist chronicles (Thai/Lao, *tamnan*; Burmese, *thamaing*), and chronicles with a prophetic dimension (Khmer, *buddh dammay*; Thai, *phuttha-thamnai*). An interest in maps, geomancy, and cosmology is also evident; a prominent example is the Thai *Three Worlds According to King Ruang* (also influential in Cambodia). "The Founding of Angkor Wat" stands as a major piece of Cambodian literature.

The lengthy poetic Thai epic of *Khun Chang Khun Phaen* is another example of shared interests and embellishment; its influence spread to neighboring Burma and Laos. The story deals with the rich and portly Khun Chang and the handsome but poor Khun Phaen, who both vie for the love of the same woman. The tale was recorded in the 18th century from recitations of troubadours and later embellished by King Rama II and King Rama III, as well as poet Sunthorn Phu. Themes range from heroism to ribald comedy and include passages of lyrical beauty still recited by schoolchildren today. There remains a method of recitation still associated with this poem, called *sepha*, employing clacking wooden sticks for emphasis.

The rise of the modern short story involves a shift from Romanticism to social concerns. Thai writer Khamsing Srinawk illustrates, with puns and wordplay, the mixed emotions involved in encountering new forces of cultural change. "Breeding Stock" (1958) explores the persistence of traditional beliefs juxtaposed with rural

development and modernization, the forerunner of globalization. Gifts to the village, rewards from the central authorities in Bangkok, arrive in the form of hybrid chickens the size of vultures and pigs the size of buffaloes. The wife in the story ultimately wonders about the size of the "endowments" of the foreign donors. In a similar vein, "Wednesday *Nan*" (1993), by Burmese author Khin Hnin Yu, recounts how a woman tries to decide the relative merits of her attachment to a car, a symbol of modernization, while searching for answers to her dilemma in astrologically auspicious symbols around her.

From 1973 to 1976, when student unrest and new intellectual ideas turned many hierarchical aspects upside down, Naowarat Phongphaiboon published a landmark modern poem reflecting tradition as well as the mood of this tumultuous time in Thai history. His "Mere Movement" (1974) is carved out of subtle observations of movement in nature, animating a sense of Buddhist impermanence, along with a hope for positive change.

Vietnam

Even though Chinese influence in Southeast Asia has been pervasive, the situation in Vietnam is unique for the region. The Vietnamese have a history of struggling against nature. Floods in low-lying areas surrounding the Red River Delta presented formidable challenges, as did incursions of Chinese neighbors. Chinese influence in Vietnam dates back to over 2,000 years ago, and China began to influence its literature more than 1,000 years ago. The Chinese cultural influence on this region extends to language and education. Sino-Vietnamese was the language of literature and government, employing Chinese characters. The romanized script, called *quoc-ngu*, is a relatively recent invention, becoming established in the 19th century. The early system of education for government officials involved primarily the study of Chinese literature; of secondary nature were documents and forms of communication necessary for future civil servants. The Temple of Literature in Hanoi, founded in 1070, was dedicated to Confucius, but it also stands as a memorial to graduates of this imperial examination system.

The form of Buddhism that reached this region is that of the Northern School of Mahayana and Zen. As in many other parts of Southeast Asia, however, the religion of everyday people is an entanglement of various threads: animism, magic, Taoism,

cults of ancestors, and Confucianism. All of these elements, while influenced by the Chinese, imbue Vietnamese life and literature with a richness of spirit; and these are values they have tenaciously wanted to make their own. There has been, therefore, a perennial tension between Chinese ancestry and a vision for Vietnamese autonomy and integrity.

The Tale of Lady Kieu is considered a masterpiece of Vietnamese literature. It is a lengthy poem about a woman of talent and beauty, which is enhanced by aspects of Chinese tradition and syncretic spiritual beliefs. The protagonist, Kieu, goes through a number of trials related to karma, the nature of duality, and faith in filial piety, as well as the steadfastness of love and devotion to duty and truth. In the past, major portions of this poem were often chanted by roving (blind) troubadours, who would accompany themselves on stringed instruments.

The history of Vietnamese literature is closely linked to the country's ongoing political struggles. Voices and sentiments in literature can cut along regional divisions in Vietnam, ranging from Ho Chi Minh's declaration that the writer should be a soldier for the communist cause, to the post-reunification disappointment of writers in the former South Vietnam. Resistance against French and American forces sets the tone for a good deal of modern literature. In addition, part of the modern literature of Vietnam includes works of writers in exile in France or the United States.

In the early 1930s, Vietnamese literature took a great leap forward, which involved breaking out of the constraints of classical Chinese styles. In 1932, a movement called The New Poetry was born. A reaction against the strict style of Chinese Tang poetry, the New Poetry moved to more open expression and an elastic prose style. Incorporating desirable aspects of a foreign influence, this time French Romanticism, the New Poetry expressed more personal emotion and subjectivity.

Prior to French influence, fiction in Vietnam was largely composed of courtly romances. French influence can also be found in the advent of the short story form. In the early 1930s, debates over ancient versus modern, "art for art's sake," and "art for life" also emerged. About 1935, a strain of Realism emerged in relation to documentary writing, which included features portraying the real lives of rickshaw drivers, prostitutes, and others. Nguyen Cong Hoan (1903–1977), from North Vietnam, was one of the more prolific advocates of critical realism. The pathos of a good deal of Vietnamese

fiction is evident in his portrayal of “Tu Ben the Actor,” in a story about an actor torn between duties to his craft and his (filial) concerns for a passing father.

The birth of the novel in Vietnam also stems from the early 1930s. Themes in novels tend towards three main types: Romantic, socialist-realist, and a more scholarly type that seeks to keep Vietnam’s ancient cultural heritage alive.

The Philippines

The Philippines, a nation of over 7,000 islands, is named after King Philip II, a 16th-century king of Spain. A former colony of Spain and, later, the United States, the Philippines is predominantly Roman Catholic. As David Steinberg has suggested, the Philippines is paradoxically a singular and a plural place, and it is still in search of a character of national literature.

The literature of the Philippines is usually delineated along the lines of three languages: Tagalog, Spanish, and English. As with many other places in Southeast Asia, the poetic tradition of Tagalog literature grew out of proverbs and riddles concerning the human condition and one’s relationship to the environment. In the 17th century, a written Tagalog literature developed a metered style known as *ladino*, with alternating lines of Tagalog and Spanish. Spanish missionaries were some of the first to develop this style, and the Passion of Christ (*pasyon*) was one of the first works in this form. The *pasyon* captures the imagination of Filipino people in a way that is similar to the epic *Ramayana* in other parts of Southeast Asia. People participate with great fervor in an annual public performance of the *pasyon*, which has often been viewed as a metaphor for the suffering of a colonized nation.

Other forms of poetic performance are also experiencing a revitalization. The *sarswela*, composed of dramatic performances in poetic verse adapted from the Spanish *zarzuela*, continues to express the hopes of Filipino people. Similarly, the *balagtasan*, named after the poet Francisco Balagtas (1788–1862), is a combination of entertainment, public debate, and display of wit in poetic verse. Performers demonstrate their skills at weaving stanzas and reciting long verses with flair. The rise of this form has been linked to a reassertion of self and the preservation of Filipino heritage in the face of the former American occupation.

The writer Jose Rizal (1861–1896), who was executed by the Spanish for his revolutionary views, is considered a national hero. His anticolonial writings stand as modern

classics. *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not, 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (The Filibuster, 1891) were originally written in Spanish and enjoyed only a relatively limited audience. When these novels were translated into Tagalog, they became required reading for many students in the 1950s.

The short story arose from American influence but has been crafted into a more meaningful genre in the early 20th century. In “How My Brother Leon Brought Home a Wife” (1940) by Manuel Arguilla, the city is left behind and a colorful picture of the local countryside is painted in this account of bringing a bride home to the family. In addition, Amador Daguio’s “Wedding Dance” (first published in 1953 while he was studying at Stanford) explores cultural participation and gender roles.

In the modern urban setting, a mode of transportation unique to the Philippines, the Jeepney, is often bedecked with proverbs and caricatures from folk epics as ever-present reminders of the journey of literature.

Malaysia

The literature of Malaysia is infused with folk tales, Indian and Javanese influence, and Muslim (Persian-Arab) influence. These influences brought on a dynamic process of selective adaptation resulting in localized literary styles, which include the *hikayat* (grand stories that contain elements of chronicles, romance and epic heroism), *syair*, and *pantun* (four-line poetic verses of a proverbial nature, often used in courtship). The beauty of these forms is meant to be heard, and so such works are recited as well as read. Most early *hikayat* were passed down from anonymous sources.

The *Hikayat Bayan Budiman* is indicative of the kinds of cultural exchanges in this part of the world. It is a Malay adaptation of a Persian story based on Indian Sanskrit sources (some of the tales can be found in *Jataka Tales*, for example). This *hikayat* is based on the Sanskrit *Shuka Saptati* (The Seventy Stories of the Parrot), and it is possible that early versions could have been known to Malays since the time of the Hindu-Buddhist influence in the peninsula. This *hikayat* instructs by means of entertainment. A woman’s pet parrot, by telling a story every evening, delays the woman from going down the wrong path until her husband returns.

One of the earliest works in Malay, dating from the 14th century (c.1350–c.1511), is the *Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*. Dealing with the first Malay-Islamic kingdom of Samudera-Pasai, this *hikayat* explains how the protago-

nist, Merah Silu, meets Muhammad in a dream and the knowledge of Islam is magically transmitted to him via an exchange of saliva.

The *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals, c.1536–c.1612) is of major literary and historical significance. The prominent aim of this work is to laud the greatness of sultans of Malacca and highlight the importance of this major trading crossroads. This work includes valuable information on matters of foreign relations as well as works of literature that were read to the Malay warriors before they went into battle, and suffered defeat at the hands of the Portuguese, in 1511. The work, however, omits portrayals of common, peasant life, a feature that will come to the fore in more modern literature.

The *Hikayat Hang Tuah* (c.1688–c.1710) is considered a high point of classical Malay literature. It is an epic tale of valor, heroic deeds, diplomacy, duels, and the ultimate apotheosis of the protagonist Hang Tuah.

Modern Malay literature is considered to have begun with the works of Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir Munsyi (1797–1856), a Malaccan Malay of Arab and Indian descent. While his style was not very experimental, his descriptions of contemporary life as well as his criticisms of Malay society and sense of individualism make him stand out as a writer ahead of his time. His more autobiographical *Hikayat Abdullah* is deemed a monumental work.

Another major phase of development of modern literature occurred between the 1920s and the advent of World War II. During this time there were an increasing number of novels and short stories dealing with the everyday life of Malay people. The first novel in Malay was published in 1926, *Hikayat Faridah Hanum* by Syed Sheikh Al-Hady, and it is actually an adaptation of an Egyptian work. While the novel follows the love themes of other *hikayat*, it is unique in its portrayal of human beings living in modern society. Abdul Rahm Kajai is viewed as the father of the short story. Kajai, a journalist, followed the style of Syed Shiekh and published many of his works in newspapers.

Even into the modern period the traditional verse forms of the *syair* and *pantun* are still prominent. Newspapers often feature *pantun* competitions, for example. Speeches and auspicious occasions are often spiced up with the inclusion of a *pantun*. It was not until the late 1930s, and especially after the war, that a new, more experimental free-verse form, the *sajak*, broke with traditional forms of verse.

By the 1960s, Malay literature was freeing itself from traditional forms; and in the 1970s there was already a revitalization of

tradition and a turning back to the value of older forms. Muhammad Haji Salleh, for example, wrote a series of poems based on the *Sejarah Melayu* entitled *Sajak-Sajak Sejarah Melayu* (Poems for the Malay Annals, 1981).

Salina (1958), by Samad Said, is deemed the first sizable, international novel. It is a work of Realism portraying the protagonist Salina, a prostitute, and other victims of circumstance residing in a shanty town. The hope of this work involves people changing their destinies. Human renewal is linked to the pain of struggle and the political independence of Malaysia and Singapore, with a portrayal of Malays attempting to seek a new beginning in Singapore.

Indonesia

The area of Indonesia covers over 17,000 islands, 6,000 of which are inhabited. There are hundreds of languages spoken throughout the islands, and thus any literature in Indonesian is, by definition, national literature; there is very little modern literature in any regional language.

The Indonesian national motto is itself an expression of mythological, mystical, and practical dimensions: *bhinneka tunggal ika*—“the many are one” or “unity in diversity.” This motto, expressed in Old Javanese, quotes from a *kekawin*, a form of poetry based on Sanskrit *kavya*.

Kekawin poetry borrows most of its subject matter from Hindu sources. Indian influence is especially clear in Old Javanese, and many Sanskrit-inspired works appeared in this language from the latter part of the first century on. The Hindu epics of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* carry a great deal of importance. Aspects of these epics have been popularized in dance performances, shadow-puppet plays (*wayang*) and poetic recitations of *kekawin* (*mabasan*). The historic 14th-century *kekawin*, the *Nagarakeratagama*, is known as an exceptional example of this form of poetry.

As in many other parts of Southeast Asia, the division between religious and secular texts often is not very clear. The recitation of riddles may serve a religious function or carry a merely profane message. Folk tales derived from Indian influences abound. One example is the “mouse deer” cycle of allegorical tales, which is popular in Indonesia and Malaysia. The mouse deer, a small animal of prey, plays the role of a trickster offering advice about survival.

Indonesia shares a great deal of language overlap, as well as blurred literary genres, with Malaysia. Many of the *hikayat* from

Malaysia are also well known in Indonesia. The *syair* and the *pantun* are also found in Indonesian literature. In 1928, the Malay language was proclaimed the official language of Indonesia, and it was dubbed Bahasa Indonesia.

It is difficult to discuss Indonesian literature without mentioning colonization and various other forces that have been brought to bear on Indonesian society. Modern writers attempt to make valuable aspects of precolonial literature stand in contrast to the models and ideals proposed by colonial forces. The study of literature is marked by “Generations” (*angkatan*) of writers who, in response to particular political pressures, have presented counterarguments to colonial hegemony and challenges to national identity. Some of the styles of these Generations are characterized by experimentation with Romanticism, Realism, and socialism/communism.

Literature is taken very seriously and authors can easily end up in jail. This was especially true after 1965, when an abortive communist coup was suppressed by Suharto; in the wake of his fall in 1998, the literary scene opened up considerably. A prominent example of a writer jailed for his work is Pramoedya Ananta Toer. One of Pramoedya’s most famous works is his novel *This Earth of Mankind* (volume one of his *Buru Quartet*). Written in the late 1970s while he was a prisoner on the island of Buru, Pramoedya’s work is an important discourse on the colonial experience. His protagonist is a young elite Javanese man educated in Dutch schools in Surabaya. First entranced by how this education opens up his world, he soon suffers the restrictions placed on his (and Indonesia’s) autonomy by the same Dutch colonial power. His disillusionment, and impulse toward independence, echoes the life experience of Jose Rizal in the Philippines (and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam), suggesting a certain amount of pan–Southeast Asian solidarity of political consciousness.

Especially during periods of state suppression, literature can often function as thinly disguised critiques of political systems. One example of a short story incorporating traditional themes and genres is “Interview with Ravana” (1982) by Yudhistira Ardi Noegraha (pseudonym, Yudhistira ANM Massardi). Drawing on characters and epic notions of evil from the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *wayang* shadow-puppet theater, the story satirizes modern Indonesia and corruption within the Suharto regime.

5 Essential Works of Southeast Asian Literature

- The Ramayana* (especially in any of its Southeast Asian incarnations).
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SPANISH LITERATURE

The Spanish language, like the French, is a descendant of the popular Latin spoken by soldiers and colonists brought into Spain by the Roman conquest. This conquest, completed by Augustus, changed the language of the country as thoroughly as it changed the customs. During the period of the empire, Spain gave to Rome not a few Latin writers, the greatest of whom were Martial, Quintilian, Lucan, and the Elder and the Younger Seneca. The languages of Germanic origin, introduced into Spain by the barbarian invasions of the fifth century, gradually changed the character of the Latin