


Raymond Williams

Keywords

*A vocabulary
of culture and society*

 Fontana Press
An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers

primarily legal and administrative, as in the discharge of a debt or exemption from military service. This connects with the restricted use of *liberty* (cf. LIBERAL), as leave, permission or *franchise* (itself a legal immunity or privilege from C14, extended as *elective franchise* from C18). The positive senses of *liberty* and *liberation* were known from Latin, and *liberty* and *liberator* have the political sense from mC17; *liberation* was less common, but has an occasional political sense from C16, becoming more common in mC19 and especially in mC20 (specifically, here, as the name for movements of resistance to Fascism in the occupied countries, notably France, and then for the armed overthrow of occupying powers or forces). The British army which landed in France in 1944 was officially known as the *British Liberation Army*. The word was then widely adopted, as in Algeria and Vietnam, for movements of resistance to occupying colonial powers, especially from the 1950s.

A **liberationist**, in mC19 England, was still primarily a supporter of church disestablishment. **Libertarian**, which had been used from IC18 for a believer in *free will* (itself in English from C13 as a translation of *liberum arbitrium*, L), came to have its modern political meaning from IC19. There has of course been a parallel development, in English, of words derived from the Latin *liber* and the Teutonic *freo*, oE. In each case the meaning depended on an opposing term; in Latin *servus* – slave; in the Teutonic languages those outside the household, again in practice slaves. The root sense of the *free* words is *dear*, as applied within the *free* household or family. The extended political senses have developed mainly around the Latin group, as indeed in Latin itself, though in *Free State*, *freedom fighter*, *free world*, *free enterprise* and so on there has been extensive C20 use of the alternative group.

The use of **liberation** (and then of **liberationist** and the adjective **liberated**) by the women's movement – shortened to *Lib* in the late 1960s – was by association with the political movements from 1940. The common earlier word had been *emancipation*, in English from C17, at first following the sense from *emancipo*, L, which in Roman law meant to release (usually a child but sometimes a wife) from the *patria potestas*, the legal powers of the *pater familias*; the person thus *emancipated* could act *sui juris* – in his/her own right. (The Latin word was formed from *e* or *ex* – from, out of, and *mancipium* – a legal purchase or contract, from *manus* and *capio*,

thus literally a taking by the hand to make a bargain.) There was some early metaphorical extension, as in Bacon's 'Humane Nature . . . fit to be emancipate' (1605), and there was a political application in Donne, 'to emancipate them from the Tyrant' (1625). But from C18 the term became heavily specialized to the act of freeing from slavery, and this culminated in the *Emancipation Day* of 1863 in USA. In Britain the term was also specialized, for a period, to the *emancipation* of Catholics (1829) from civil disabilities. Yet in the course of C19 the word was more and more widely applied to the removal of the legal and political disabilities of women (an in context unfavourable use of *emancipatress* is recorded from 1882), and was common in Britain and USA in C20. It was also applied to or used by the labour movement, as in 'emancipation of the working class', where there was already an association through the phrase *wage-slavery*.

The subsequent shift from *emancipation* to **liberation** seems to mark a shift from ideas of the removal of disabilities or the granting of *privileges* (cf. UNDERPRIVILEGED) to more active ideas of winning *freedom* and *self-determination*. *Self-determination*, which had referred to ideas of 'free will' from C17, acquired a political sense from mC19 ('a free, self-determining political aggregate', Grote, 1853) and was especially common after 1918 ('the right of nations to self-determination'). Some recent uses seem to unite the personal and the political senses.

See FAMILY, LIBERAL, SEX, UNDERPRIVILEGED

LITERATURE

Literature is a difficult word, in part because its conventional contemporary meaning appears, at first sight, so simple. There is no apparent difficulty in phrases like **English literature** or **contemporary literature**, until we find occasion to ask whether all books and writing are **literature** (and if they are not, which kinds are excluded and by what criteria) or until, to take a significant example, we come across a distinction between **literature** and *drama* on the

grounds, apparently, that drama is a form primarily written for spoken performance (though often also to be read). It is not easy to understand what is at stake in these often confused distinctions until we look at the history of the word.

Literature came into English, from C14, in the sense of polite learning through reading. Its fw, *littérature*, F, *litteratura*, L, had the same general sense. The rw is *littera*, L – letter (of the alphabet). Thus a man of **literature**, or of *letters*, meant what we would now describe as a man of wide reading. Thus: ‘hes nocht sufficient literatur to undirstand the scripture’ (1581); ‘learned in all literature and erudition, divine and humane’ (Bacon, 1605). It can be seen from the Bacon example that the noun of condition – being well-read – is at times close to the objective noun – the books in which a man is well-read. But the main sense can be seen from the normal adjective, which was **literate**, from C15, rather than **literary**, which appeared first in C17 as a simple alternative to **literate** and only acquired its more general meaning in C18, though cf. Cave’s Latin title *Historia Literaria*, 1688. As late as Johnson’s *Life of Milton*, the earlier usage was still normal: ‘he had probably more than common literature, as his son addresses him in one of his most elaborate Latin poems’ (1780).

Literature, that is to say, corresponded mainly to the modern meanings of **literacy**, which, probably because the older meaning had then gone, was a new word from IC19. It meant both an ability to read and a condition of being well-read. This can be confirmed from the negatives. **Illiterate** usually meant poorly-read or ill-educated: ‘Judgis illitturate’ (1586); ‘my illeterate and rude stile’ (1597); and as late as Chesterfield (1748): ‘the word *illiterate*, in its common acceptance, means a man who is ignorant of those two languages’ (Greek and Latin). Even more clearly there was the now obsolete **illiterature**, from IC16: ‘the cause . . . ignorance . . . and . . . illiterature’ (1592). By contrast, from eC17, the *litterati* were the highly-educated.

But the general sense of ‘polite learning’, firmly attached to the idea of printed books, was laying the basis for the later specialization. Colet, in C16, distinguished between **literature** and what he called **blotterature**; here the sense of inability to write clear letters is extended to a kind of book which was below the standards of polite learning. But the first certain signs of a general change in meaning are from C18. **Literary** was extended beyond its equivalence to

literate: probably first in the general sense of well-read but from mC18 to refer to the practice and profession of writing: ‘literary merit’ (Goldsmith, 1759); ‘literary reputation’ (Johnson, 1773). This appears to be closely connected with the heightened self-consciousness of the profession of authorship, in the period of transition from patronage to the bookselling market. Where Johnson had used **literature** in the sense of being highly literate in his *Life of Milton*, in his *Life of Cowley* he wrote, in the newly objective sense: ‘an author whose pregnancy of imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him high in the ranks of literature’. (His *Dictionary* definition was ‘learning, skill in letters’.) Yet **literature** and **literary**, in these new senses, still referred to the whole body of books and writing; or if distinction was made it was in terms of falling below the level of polite learning rather than of particular kinds of writing. A philosopher such as Hume quite naturally described his ‘Love of literary Fame’ as his ‘ruling passion’. All works within the orbit of polite learning came to be described as **literature** and all such interests and practices as **literary**. Thus Hazlitt, in *Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen* (Winterslow, II), reports: ‘Ayrton said, “I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr Locke”’ (c. 1825).

That now common phrase, **English literature**, is itself part of a crucial development. The idea of a *Nationallitteratur* developed in Germany from the 1770s, and the following can be recorded: *Über die neuere deutsche Litteratur* (Herder, 1767); *Les Siècles de littérature française* (1772); *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1772). **English literature** appears to have followed these, though it is implicit in Johnson. The sense of ‘a nation’ having ‘a literature’ is a crucial social and cultural, probably also political, development.

What has then to be traced is the attempted and often successful specialization of **literature** to certain kinds of writing. This is difficult just because it is incomplete; a **literary editor** or a **literary supplement** still deals generally with all kinds of books. But there has been a specialization to a sense which is sometimes emphasized (because of the remaining uncertainty) in phrases like **creative literature** and **imaginative literature** (cf. CREATIVE and IMAGINATIVE as descriptions of kinds of writing; cf. also FICTION). In relation to the past, **literature** is still a relatively general word:

Carlyle and Ruskin, for example, who did not write novels or poems or plays, belong to **English literature**. But there has been a steady distinction and separation of other kinds of writing – philosophy, essays, history, and so on – which may or may not possess **literary merit** or be of **literary interest** (meaning that ‘in addition to’ their intrinsic interest as philosophy or history or whatever they are ‘well written’) but which are not now normally described as **literature**, which may be understood as well-written books but which is even more clearly understood as well-written books of an *imaginative* or *creative* kind. The teaching of English, especially in universities, is understood as the teaching of **literature**, meaning mainly poems and plays and novels; other kinds of ‘serious’ writing are described as *general* or *discursive*. Or there is **literary criticism** – judgment of how a (*creative* or *imaginative*) work is written – as distinct, often, from discussion of ‘ideas’ or ‘history’ or ‘general subject-matter’. At the same time many, even most poems and plays and novels are not seen as **literature**; they fall below its level, in a sense related to the old distinction of *polite learning*; they are not ‘substantial’ or ‘important’ enough to be called **works of literature**. A new category of **popular literature** or the **sub-literary** has then to be instituted, to describe works which may be *fiction* but which are not *imaginative* or *creative*, which are therefore devoid of AESTHETIC (q.v.) interest, and which are not ART (q.v.).

Clearly the major shift represented by the modern complex of **literature**, *art*, *aesthetic*, *creative* and *imaginative* is a matter of social and cultural history. **Literature** itself must be seen as a late medieval and Renaissance isolation of the skills of reading and of the qualities of the book; this was much emphasized by the development of printing. But the sense of *learning* was still inherent, and there were also the active arts of *grammar* and *rhetoric*. Steadily, with the predominance of print, *writing* and *books* became virtually synonymous; hence the subsequent confusion about *drama*, which was writing for speech (but then Shakespeare is obviously **literature**, though with the *text* proving this). Then **literature** was specialized towards *imaginative writing*, within the basic assumptions of Romanicism. It is interesting to see what word did service for this before the specialization. It was, primarily, *poetry*, defined in 1586 as ‘the arte of making: which word as it hath alwaies beene especially used of the best of our English Poets, to expresse the very faculty of speaking or

writing Poetically’ (note the inclusion of *speaking*). Sidney wrote in 1581: ‘verse being but an ornament and no cause to Poetry: sith there have been many most excellent Poets, that never versified’. The specialization of *poetry* to metrical composition is evident from mC17, though this was still contested by Wordsworth: ‘I here use the word “Poetry” (though against my own judgment) as opposed to the word “Prose”, and synonymous with metrical composition’ (1798). It is probable that this specialization of *poetry* to verse, together with the increasing importance of prose forms such as the NOVEL (q.v.), made **literature** the most available general word. It had behind it the Renaissance sense of *litterae humanae*, mainly then for secular as distinct from religious writing, and a generalizing use of *letters* had followed from this. *Belles lettres* was developed in French from mC17; it was too narrow when *literature* was eventually established. *Poetry* had been the high skills of writing and speaking in the special context of high imagination; the word could be moved in either direction. **Literature**, in its C19 sense, repeated this, though excluding speaking. But it is then problematic, not only because of the further specialization to *imaginative* and *creative* subject-matter (as distinct from *imaginative* and *creative* writing) but also because of the new importance of many forms of writing for speech (*broadcasting* as well as *drama*) which the specialization to books seemed by definition to exclude.

Significantly in recent years **literature** and **literary**, though they still have effective currency in post-C18 senses, have been increasingly challenged, on what is conventionally their own ground, by concepts of *writing* and *communication* which seek to recover the most active and general senses which the extreme specialization had seemed to exclude. Moreover, in relation to this reaction, **literary** has acquired two unfavourable senses, as belonging to the printed book or to past literature rather than to active contemporary writing and speech; or as (unreliable) evidence from books rather than ‘factual inquiry’. This latter sense touches the whole difficult complex of the relations between *literature* (*poetry*, *fiction*, *imaginative* writing) and *real* or actual experience. Also, of course, *literary* has been a term of disparagement in discussion of certain other arts, notably painting and music, where the work in its own medium is seen as insufficiently autonomous, and as dependent on ‘external’ meanings of a ‘literary’ kind. This sense is also found in discussion of

film. Meanwhile **literacy** and **illiteracy** have become key social concepts, in a much wider perspective than in the pre-C19 sense. **Illiteracy** was extended, from C18, to indicate general inability to read and write, and **literacy**, from LC19, was a new word invented to express the achievement and possession of what were increasingly seen as general and necessary skills.

See AESTHETIC, ART, CREATIVE, FICTION, IMAGE, MYTH, NATIONALIST, NOVEL

M

MAN

There is an important and interesting use of **Man**, in the singular and with a capital letter, to describe the whole human race, the human species or **mankind**. The identity of **man** (human) with **man** (male) has persisted in English longer than in most European languages. The abstract use in English is interesting in that it has no article (cf. *l'homme, der Mensch*): 'the anatomy of man and the ape'. In descriptions of the physical species, **Man** presents few problems; only the sexual specialization is difficult in some contexts (cf. a recent title *The Descent of Woman*). Sexual specialization has also made the word problematic in some general social and philosophical theory (cf. Paine's *Rights of Man* (human) and Wollstonecraft's *Rights of Woman* (feminine)). But it is the singular use, apart from sexual specialization, that is most interesting in other than physical contexts. There are some obvious applied and extended uses, as in 'the future of man on this planet', which raise no real problems. But in some other uses the singular raises, and as often conceals, problems. It was simpler when **Man** was a generalization distin-

guished from *God*, as in 'man purposith and god disposith' (1450); the one singular depended on the other, and the creation and control of **Man** (**Man-kind**) by *God* was assumed. What is interesting is that this assumed common condition – spiritual and metaphysical – continued to be expressed in the same singular form when universal moral and social qualities were being described, as in the Enlightenment. The singular universal then stood on its own. The use continued, moreover, even into periods when the emphasis was on human self-development (*Man Makes Himself*) and was remarkably common even within a deliberate historical and cultural relativism. It is then very difficult to distinguish generic assumptions from what are really social and cultural propositions, as in the range from 'Man has invented the wheel, the compass and the internal combustion engine' to 'Man is naturally a hunter' and 'Man has now entered the critical period of industrial civilization'. All these uses are possible, but it is usually important to be aware of the implications of the capitalized singular (with its assumptions of universality), and indeed of the often similar implications of the abstract **Men** used in the same sense. If the uses were confined to metaphysical, universalist or historically unilinear contexts, the problem would be smaller; but the habits of these assumptions are now embedded in the language, so that there is persistence even when actual historical and cultural variation is being stressed. The uses in Marxism, where there was an original and significant and perhaps unresolved difficulty about the concept of 'species-being', require special attention for just this reason.

See HUMANITY, SEX

MANAGEMENT

When we now speak of negotiations between **management** and *men*, we are expressing, in both terms, a particular version of social and economic relationships. The word **manage** seems to have come into English directly from *maneggiare*, It – to handle and especially to handle or train horses. Its earliest English uses were in this context.