

Art Begets Literature; Literature Begets Art

As April is National Poetry Month, April 15 was National Art Day, and today, April 23, is National Book Day, it seems appropriate this month to look at some works of art that inspired works of literature, and conversely, works of literature that inspired works of art.

Works of Art that Inspired Works of Literature

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) was one of the most respected American poets of the 20th century. His work can be extremely complex, and he is often considered a difficult poet. He is also seen as a provocative thinker and outstanding abstractionist. In 1975 a noted literary critic called him “the best and most representative poet of our time.” His 1937 poem *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, divided into 32 lengthy cantos, has been described as a conversation with the subject of **Pablo Picasso**’s 1903-04 painting, *The Old Guitarist*.



William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) was an American poet (as well as a medical doctor) associated with the Imagist movement and an inspiration to the Beat Generation. His 21-line single stanza poem, *Hunters in the Snow* (1962), essentially turns **Pieter Bruegel's** 1565 painting of the same name into a poem.



Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) is one of American's most respected poets whose career spanned seven decades. Of Rich, the *New York Times Book Review* said that she began as a "polite copyist of Yeats and Auden, wife and mother. She has progressed in life (and in her poems ...) from young widow and disenchanted formalist, to spiritual and rhetorical convalescent, to feminist leader ... and *doyenne* of a newly-defined female literature." Her 1965 poem, *Mourning Picture*, was inspired by the 1890 painting *Mourning Picture* by **Edwin R. Elmer**. The painting depicts Elmer, his wife and daughter, Effie, who had died from appendicitis at the age of nine. In her poem, Rich takes Effie's perspective.



One of the most popular novels published in 1999 was **Tracy Chevalier's** *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. Chevalier (1962-present) is an American-British novelist who has published 10 novels to date. *Girl with a Pearl Earring* has sold more than five million copies. It was inspired by **Johannes Vermeer's** 1665 painting, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. The novel was adapted for a 2003 film starring Scarlett Johansson and Colin Firth.



Susan Vreeland (1946-2017) was an American novelist some of whose novels deal with the relationship between art and fiction. Her novel, *The Passion of Artemisia* (2002), is a fictionalized investigation of some aspects of the life of Artemisia Gentileschi. *The Girl in Hyacinth Blue* (1999) focuses on an imaginary painting by Vermeer. *The Forest Lover* (2004) is a fictionalized account of the life of the Canadian painter, Emily Carr. *Luncheon of the Boating Party* (2007) explores **Auguste Renoir's** 1880/81 painting, *Luncheon of the Boating Party*.



Another relatively recent popular novel, *The Goldfinch* (2013), took as its inspiration the 1654 painting, *The Goldfinch*, by the Golden Age Dutch artist, **Carel Fabritius** (1622-1654). The American author, **Donna Tartt** (1963-present), won the Pulitzer Prize for the novel in 2014. The novel was adapted for film in 2019. Fabritius' painting is only one of a few of the artist's known paintings. A student of Rembrandt, Fabritius was killed in a 1654 explosion at a gunpowder factory next to the artist's home (The Delft Thunderclap).



Art Inspired by Literature

Just as pieces of literature have taken works of art as their inspiration, the reverse is also true, and probably to a greater extent.

The French neoclassical artist, **Jean-Auguste-David Ingres** (1780-1867), painted *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1808). The meeting of the two characters had been portrayed in the **Sophocles** play, *Oedipus Rex* (c. 429 BC). Ingres' painting is part of the Louvre's collection.



Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) was a French artist of the Romantic School. His painting *Hamlet and Horatio in the Cemetery* (1839) took as its inspiration the **Shakespeare** tragedy, *Hamlet* (c. 1599-1601). Shakespeare was very popular during the Romantic period, and Delacroix's painting depicts one of the playwright's more macabre scenes. This painting is also in the Louvre.



Another 19th century artist who was inspired by **Shakespeare's *Hamlet*** was the British painter, **John Everett Millais** (1829-1896). His painting *Ophelia* (1851-1852) is one of the most popular pre-Raphaelite works in London's Tate Museum collection. An interesting aside: Millais placed his model in a filled bathtub in his studio to achieve the best possible realistic effect.



Auguste Rodin (1840-1917) was a French sculptor. He is widely considered to be the father of modern sculpture. His sculptures of the human body are characterized by naturalism and physicality. Rodin's sculpture, *The Gates of Hell* (1880-1907), is a monumental work of art, standing nearly twenty feet tall, thirteen feet wide and over three feet deep. Its 180 figures depict a scene from **Dante's *Inferno***. The bronze cast of this work is on display at the Rodin Museum in Paris. The link provided will allow you to zoom in on individual portions of the sculpture.

<http://www.musee-rodin.fr/en/collections/sculptures/gates-hell>



The Lady of Shallott is an 1888 painting by the British artist, **John Waterhouse** (1849-1917), who, like Millais, was a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. *The Lady of Shallot*, part of the Tate Museum collection, illustrates lines from the 1832 poem of the same name by **Alfred Lord Tennyson**.

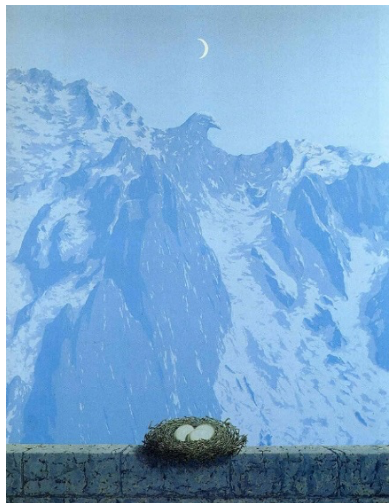
And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance –
With glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.



From Waterhouse, we jump ahead over half a century to **Pablo Picasso** (1881-1973). The Spanish born artist, who spent most of his life in France, was an exceptionally prolific artist, skilled in multiple mediums. A co-founder of the Cubist movement, Picasso created in various styles; his work is frequently categorized into periods (Blue Period, Rose Period, Analytical Cubism, Synthetic Cubism). His 1955 sketch, *Don Quixote*, was featured in the weekly journal, *Les Lettres Françaises*, in celebration of the 350th anniversary of the first part of the **Miguel de Cervantes** novel, *Don Quixote*, published in 1605.



René Magritte (Belgian, 1898-1967) was part of the Surrealist movement, often depicting ordinary objects in an unusual context. His work is known for challenging observers' preconditioned perceptions of reality. Magritte was particularly drawn to the work of **Edgar Allan Poe**. Magritte's 1962 painting, *The Domain of Arnheim*, takes as its inspiration Poe's 1950 short story of the same name. The 1962 painting, shown below, is one of a series of nine paintings based on the short story completed by Magritte between 1938 and 1962.



Finally, there are the Salvador Dalí *Alice in Wonderland* illustrations. **Salvador Dalí** (Spanish, 1904-1989). Undeniably, Dalí is the best known artist of the Surrealist movement (is). Dalí created in multiple mediums: painting, sculpting, printmaking, filmmaking, and performance art.

In 1969, an editor at Random House commissioned Dalí to illustrate a limited edition (2,700 copies) of **Lewis Carroll's** 1865 novel, *Alice in Wonderland*. Dalí created twelve heliogravures for the book, one illustration for each chapter, as well as a four-color etching as the frontispiece. The photo below is of *The Queen's Croquet Ground*. For the 150th anniversary of the book's publication, the Dalí illustrated version was re-released for the mass market (currently \$2.99 for Kindle).

