

**UNIT  
7**

**LITERATURE AND IDEAS**

**: STRUCTURE :**

**7.0 Objectives**

**7.1 Introduction**

**7.2 Literature and Ideas**

**7.2.1 Literature – Its Meaning and Relevance**

**7.2.2 Philosophy and Ideas – Conceptual Framework**

**7.3 Relationship between Literature and Ideas**

**7.4 Let Us Sum Up**

**7.5 Key Words**

**7.6 Books Suggested**

**Answers**

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**7.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this unit we shall;

- discuss what is literature,
- understand how a literary piece of work can be interpreted in different ways,
- get the idea of philosophy and ideas.

On completing the unit, you will;

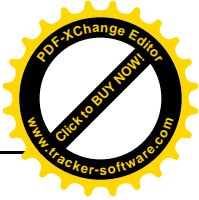
- get an idea about literature, philosophy and ideas,
- be able to know how to interpret a literary piece from philosophical perspective,
- acquire knowledge of appreciating a literary text with its relationship with ideas.

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**7.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit we shall discuss the relationship of literature with philosophy and ideas. Reading literature and philosophy provides new perspectives and insights on issues in the human experience. Literature generally reflects life. Literature aids in making the issues of human experience more alive and personal. Issues of human experience become more alive to challenge and intrigue a person by being presented in both literary and philosophical forms. By understanding the relationship between literature and ideas, one can acquire the knowledge of rational investigation of questions about human existence as well as about ethics.



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## 7.2 LITERATURE AND IDEAS

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### 7.2.1 Literature – Its Meaning and Relevance :

Literature has been commonly used to designate fictional and imaginative writings—poetry, prose fiction, and drama. It designates other writings including philosophy, history, and even scientific works. In larger sense of the term ‘literary’, the philosophical writings of Plato and William James, the historical writings of Edward Gibbon, the scientific essays of Huxley, and the psychoanalytic lectures of Sigmund Freud are included in literature. Etymologically, the word ‘Literature’ is derived from Latin *litteratura* means “learning, a writing, grammar,” it is considered as “writing formed with letters.” Literature can be defined in the strict sense as a written imaginative and literal work with significance and a permanent artistic value. It must be imaginative, it must be written and then it must contain artistic values. R. J Rees defines the term “Literature” as, “a permanent expression in words of some thought or feeling or idea about life and the world” (9).

Literary writings have permanence. Literature should be a mirror of human nature. It should be close to life. This closeness comes out of actual human experience. Again, the quality of this experience is more important than its quantity. As Hudson says, “Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an experience of life through the medium of language.” (Sinha 2)

Literature is writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards life. Literature can only come alive through the creative imagination. There are some qualities which we expect to find in good literature. These qualities are (1) life-likeness, (b) sincerity and (c) suggestiveness. While reading a poem or a novel or a drama we should feel that the feelings or ideas expressed in it corresponds to our own. We feel pleasure in reading a piece of literature, because in it we find the reflection of our own joys and sorrows. A good literature has sincerity to oneself, to one's own experience of life and to the truth of things as one has seen it. A writer, if he wants to live, must write of what lies at his own doors, and must report faithfully only that which he has lived through, seen, thought, felt and known for himself. Without sincerity nothing great can be accomplished in literature. The *Divine Comedy* of Dante still appeals to us because it is the sincere attempt. The tragedies of Shakespeare have their roots deep down in his sorrows and silent struggles. Literature must be suggestive— it should have the power to our emotions and imagination rather than our intellect. Literature has an evaluative as well as descriptive function.

<b>SELF-EVALUATION EXERCISE 1</b>
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1. Give any two definitions of literature and on the basis of these definitions derive your concept about literature.
2. What are the qualities of good literature ?



- 3. Give example of any one epic which shows the qualities of good literature.
- 4. Discuss the suggestive quality of literature in any one of the tragedies written by Shakespeare.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS.**

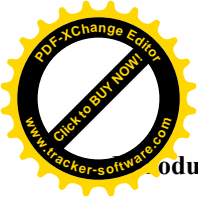
- a. \_\_\_\_\_ writings of Plato are literary writings.
- b. Etymologically, the word 'Literature is derived from \_\_\_\_\_ language.
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ is famous in psychoanalytical writings.
- d. Literature can only come alive through the \_\_\_\_\_ imagination.
- e. The Divine Comedy is written by \_\_\_\_\_

**7.2.2 Philosophy and Ideas – Conceptual Framework :**

Philosophy, in general sense, is a belief or a system of beliefs which are accepted by some group or school. The philosophy of literature deals with the question, "what is art" ? Since ages, the fundamental question that remained preoccupied among the philosophers was the relationship between ideas in the human mind and the world existing outside the mind. Plato displays a strong hostility to the contents of the literary culture of his period, and proposes a strong censorship of popular literature in his utopia.

In philosophy, ideas are usually taken as mental representational images of some object. Ideas can be abstract concepts that do not present as mental images. Many philosophers have considered ideas to be a fundamental ontological category of being. The capacity to create and understand the meaning of ideas is considered to be an essential and defining feature of human beings. In a popular sense, an idea arises in a reflexive, spontaneous manner, even without thinking or serious reflection, for example, when we talk about the idea of a person or a place. A new or original idea can often lead to innovation.

One view on the nature of ideas is that there exist some ideas (called innate ideas) which are so general and abstract that they could not have arisen as a representation of an object of our perception but rather were in some sense always present. Another view holds that we only discover ideas in the same way that we discover the real world, from personal experiences. Humans acquire all or almost all their behavioral traits from nurture (life experiences). Plato, in Ancient Greece, was one of the earliest philosophers to provide a detailed discussion of ideas and of the thinking process. Plato argued in dialogues such as the Phaedo, Symposium, Republic, and Timaeus that there is a realm of ideas or forms, which exist independently of anyone who may have thoughts on these ideas, and it is the ideas which distinguish mere opinion from knowledge, for unlike material things which are transient and liable to contrary properties, ideas are unchanging and nothing but just what they are. Plato seems to assert forcefully that material things can only be the objects of opinion; real knowledge can only be had of unchanging ideas. Material things are seen, but not intellected, while the ideas are intellected but not seen."

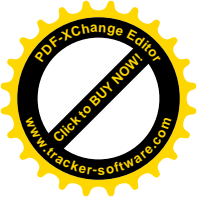


For Descartes knowledge took the form of ideas and philosophical investigation is the deep consideration of ideas. In a Lockean view, there are really two types of ideas : complex and simple. Simple ideas are the building blocks for much more complex ideas, and while the mind is wholly passive in the reception of simple ideas, it is very active in the building of complex ideas. Hume limited idea to the more or less vague mental reconstructions of perceptions, the perceptual process being described as an “impression.” Immanuel Kant defines an idea as opposed to a concept. “Regulative ideas” are ideals that one must tend towards, but by definition may not be completely realized. Liberty, according to Kant, is an idea. Rudolf Steiner sees ideas as “objects of experience” which the mind apprehends, much as the eye apprehends light.

In “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” C. S. Peirce proposed that a clear idea is defined as one, when it is apprehended such as it will be recognized wherever it is met, and no other will be mistaken for it. If it fails of this clearness, it is said to be obscure. G. F. Stout and J. M. Baldwin, in the Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, define idea as “the reproduction with a more or less adequate image, of an object not actually present to the senses.” It should be observed that an idea, in the narrower and generally accepted sense of a mental reproduction, is frequently composite. When a man, for example, has obtained an idea of chairs in general by comparison with which he can say “This is a chair, that is a stool”, he has what is known as an “abstract idea” distinct from the reproduction in his mind of any particular chair. Furthermore, a complex idea may not have any corresponding physical object, though its particular constituent elements may severally be the reproductions of actual perceptions.

Diffusion studies explore the spread of ideas from culture to culture. Some anthropological theories hold that all cultures imitate ideas from one or a few original cultures. Cultures are influenced by one another. In the mid–20th century, social scientists began to study how and why ideas spread from one person or culture to another. Johnson claimed that they are mental images or internal visual pictures. As such, they have no relation to words or the concepts which are designated by verbal names.

An ideology is a collection of normative beliefs and values that an individual or group holds for other than purely epistemic reasons. Ideology must be seen neither as hegemonic nor static. Ideology is accepted as a commonsense view of things presented by the power holder class. In this way the interests of the ruling class is secured. While Althusser, a Marxist critic, names this as an” imaginary consciousness”, Roland Barthes, a post–modernist calls it as “myth”. Both of them agree that this is a weapon of the power holders used to inject the dominant ideology of the society. Another Marxist critic, Terry Eagleton shares the same idea saying that ideology does not only inject its own beliefs but it also “denigrates ideas which might challenge it”, excluding rival forms of thought, “obscuring social reality”. The use of language by the power holders as a weapon to inject the dominant ideology of the society is argued by Lacan and Kristeva.



**SELF EVALUATION EXERCISE 2**

1. What is philosophy ?  
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2. How ideas are conceptualize in philosophy ?  
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3. Discuss views of Descartes Locke and Hume about ideas.  
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4. What is an ideology ?  
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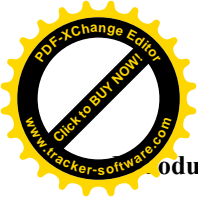
**SAY TRUE OR FALSE.**

- a. Aristotle displays a strong hostility to the contents of the literary culture of his period.
- b. Republic is written by Plato.
- c. Material things are seen, but not intellected, while the ideas are intellected but not seen.”
- d. Liberty, according to Hume, is an idea.
- e. Althusser was a Marxist critic.

**7.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND IDEAS**

Philosophy and literature involves the literary treatment of philosophers and philosophical themes (the literature of philosophy), and the philosophical treatment of issues rose by literature (the philosophy of literature). Many attempts to interpret poetry as a kind of philosophy or philosophy as a kind of poetry or to identify the study of either poetry or philosophy with the history of ideas. Olusegun argues that both literature and philosophy are related on two general notes. He argues that they are both forms of “social consciousness and they are constructions of language.”

The relationship between philosophy and literature is not a thing to be discovered and described once and for all, but rather a question constantly recreated by writers, critics and philosophers responding to new situations. Attempts to define the relationship between philosophy and literature have often been set out as binary oppositions viz. universal versus particular, reason versus imagination, insight versus emotion, argument versus form.

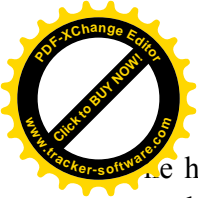


The first level of their relationship is the fact that both literature and philosophy are social phenomena. According to Oladipo, they are social not just in the general sense of being produced by people who make up the society; rather they are social in majorly two ways : both philosophy and Literature are born out of human experiences of an individual or groups and they often treat very abstract matters that arise from a reflective pondering on the phenomena of life. Both are products of culture. Again they are social in another expression. They are both produced for the intellectual and practical needs of the society. From the points above, it is lucid that both disciplines focus on the same object which can be construed as the human person in the various aspects of his experience. They both reflect the quest for the better understanding and the tackling the problems of human existence.

The second broad connection of the two disciplines is the idea that they are both constructions in language. Philosophy develops concepts and clarifies them, while literature engages these words to communicate ideas, figures and moral principles and to enlarge realities. Furthermore, both philosophy and literature mirror the society together with the society's development and state. The philosophy of an era tells of the nature of that age likewise the literature of an epoch tells of the problems and realities of that period. They both reflect the beliefs of men about realities. Hence, through criticism of the ideas we live by, philosophy dishes out norms that should regulate the thinking and behaviour of men in the society. In the same vein, literature has themes that convey morality pedagogically. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Shakespearean's *Hamlet*.

Both, philosophy and literature are systematic presentations. They are not just some zigzagged amalgamation and mishmash of materials. Finally, philosophy and literature interacts in delving into each other's area of discourse. More importantly, philosophy interrogates literature through the device of Literal Criticism. Literal criticism is the philosophical analyses cum judgments of works of art and literature. The Associate Professor of philosophy at Stanford University, Lanier Anderson contributed to this debate of relationship and it is apt to mention it at this juncture. He argues that : "Great Literature is often deeply philosophical and Great Philosophy is often great literature". For literature to take its rightful pace and fulfill its function in the society it has to wear some sorts of philosophy. In fact, some literatures like Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* are widely termed philosophical.

To cast philosophers as the guardians of universality, reason, insight and argument is to strip literature of its ambition to provide knowledge, thought and truth. It is also to ban passion and beauty from philosophy. Often criticism reduces the literary text to an example of a pre-existing theory or philosophy. Literature works 'behind philosophy's back'. Yet its work is not 'outside' philosophy, but 'essential' to it, as if philosophy has to turn around, to look behind itself to find fundamental 'illuminations' it can't find in any other way. By neglecting the turn, or return to literature, philosophy will overlook fundamental insights available only to the philosopher willing to stop, pause, turn back and pick up the pearls strewn on a path he thought



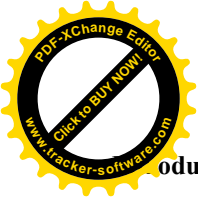
He had already explored. Criticism—the work of reading—is here connected to the idea of stopping, pausing, paying attention and looking more closely. Cavell wants to make a place for literature within philosophy, both because he thinks literature contains illuminations of value to philosophy, and because he thinks that the question of expression and experience lie at the very heart of philosophy. On this view, criticism—the act of accounting for one's experience of a work of art—can be philosophy.

We often begin reading by trying to get at least a general idea of what the work is about, what its major concerns and concepts are. At first, we may only form a hazy idea of the whole. To get a clearer view, we zoom in on key concepts, study the examples, circle back to passages that illuminate them, look for the arguments, the contradictions and the exceptions. In the end, we come out with a workable understanding of the book's concerns. If it really fascinates us, we may engage with it again, maybe revise some of our initial impressions, try to get clear on why it strikes us as important and reflect on what we can use it for in our own work. What can be the role of literature in this context ? Since literature is created to cater to the needs of the powerful class in any existing society, it will pay lip service to the existing power structure. But the subversive nature of literature, especially novel as a genre would not abide by the rules of that society. Seemingly catering to the needs of that society, it questions, challenges and exposes the weakness of the society which is best exemplified in Cervantes's Don Quixote.

Literature exposes the terrible weaknesses of every community and demonstrates how societies through myths try to disguise their serious flaws. Foucault agrees with this view and says “though literature belongs to the great system of constraint” all the same, it has a special place in that system determined to seek quotidian beneath the quotidian itself, to cross boundaries, to ruthlessly or insidiously bring out secrets in the open, to displace rules or codes, to compel the unmentionable to be told, it will thus tend to place itself outside the law, or at least take on the burden of scandal, transgression, or revolt. More than any other form of language it remains the discourse of “infamy” : it has the duty of saying what is most resistant to being said—the worst, the secret, the most insufferable, the shameless” It is this special quality of literature which makes it a unique way of telling the truth.

**SELF EVALUATION EXERCISE 3**

1. What do Philosophy and literature involve ?  
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2. “Literature and philosophy are social phenomena” – Justify.  
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3. "Philosophy and literature are systematic presentations" Elaborate  
 .....  
 .....

4. Discuss Foucault's views about literature and philosophy.  
 .....  
 .....

**FILL IN THE BLANKS.**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ argues that both literature and philosophy are forms of "social consciousness and they are constructions of language."
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ develops concepts and clarifies them.
- c. Philosophy interrogates literature through the device of \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ argues that "Great Literature is often deeply philosophical and Great Philosophy is often great literature".
- e. Cavell \_\_\_\_ thinks literature contains illuminations of value to philosophy.

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**7.4 LET US SUM UP**

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- In this unit you have learnt;
- what is literature,
  - what are the qualities of literature,
  - what is philosophy and ideas,
  - relationship between literature and ideas.

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**7.5 KEY WORDS**

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**Literature** : fictional and imaginative writings—poetry, prose fiction, and drama; a permanent expression in words of some thought or feeling or idea about life and the world

**Qualities of good literature** : (1) life-likeness, (b) sincerity and (c) suggestiveness.

**Philosophy** : a belief or a system of beliefs which are accepted by some group or school.

**Ideas** : mental representational images of some object

**Ideology** : a collection of normative beliefs and values that an individual or group holds for other than purely epistemic reasons; a commonsense view of things presented by the power holder class.

**Literature and Philosophy** : both are social phenomena; both are constructions in language; both are systematic presentations





## 1.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

Crane : R.S. Literature, Philosophy, and the History of Ideas Modern Philology, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Nov., 1954), pp. 73–83 : The University of Chicago Press : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/434715>

Cf. Sartre, “what is Literature”, <http://www.sartreorg/index.html>

Lanier Anderson, “The Relationship between Philosophy and Literature” [www.philosophytalk.org](http://www.philosophytalk.org)

Moramollu, Gulrah : Ideology and Literature. [http://akademikpersonel.kocaeli.edu.tr/gulrah/diger/gulrah04.01.2017\\_13.53.15diger.pdf](http://akademikpersonel.kocaeli.edu.tr/gulrah/diger/gulrah04.01.2017_13.53.15diger.pdf)

Olusegun Oladipo, Dialogue in African Philosophy– monograph Series : Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel

Karl, Frederick., R.A Reader's Guide to The Development of The English Novel in The Eighteenth Century. London : Thames and Hudson, 1974.

Rees, R.J. English Literature : An Introduction for Foreign Readers. New Delhi : Macmillan, 2001.

Sinha, Manindra Nath. A Handbook of the Study of Literature. Bareilly : 1996.

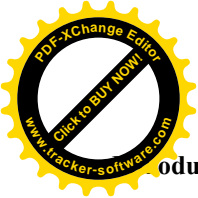
### ANSWERS

#### Self-Evaluation Exercise 1

1. Two definitions of literature are as under.
  - a. Literature is a permanent expression in words of some thought or feeling or idea about life and the world.
  - b. Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspects of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us. It is thus fundamentally an experience of life through the medium of language.

Literature ,can be considered as a written imaginative and literal work with significance and a permanent artistic value. It must be imaginative, it must be written and then it must contain artistic values.

2. There are some qualities of good literature. These qualities are (a) life–likeness,(b) sincerity and (c) suggestiveness. While reading a poem or a novel or a drama we should feel that the feelings or ideas expressed in it corresponds to our own. We feel pleasure in reading a piece of literature, because in it we find the reflection of our own joys and sorrows. A good literature has sincerity to oneself, to one's own experience of life and to the truth of things as one has seen it. A writer, if he wants to live, must write of what lies at his own doors, and must report faithfully only that which he has lived through, seen, thought, felt and known for himself. Without sincerity nothing great can be accomplished in literature.



3. The Mahabharata, The paradise Lost, The Ramayana , The Iliad, The Odyssey etc. are the great epics. They contain qualities of good literature. When we read The Ramayana , we feel life–likeness in it. The incidences happened in it may occur to anyone of us. It is sincere as it depicts the real human situation. It is suggestive that the issues occurred to Rama or Sita or Ravana may occur to us if we are under such circumstances.
4. The tragedies of Shakespeare are universal. Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, all have suggestiveness. Hamlet's procrastination is the real cause of his tragedy. His character suggests us not to commit the mistakes that he committed to avoid any tragic incidence in our life.
5. Fill in the blanks.
 

a. philosophical	b. Latin
c. Sigmund Freud	d. creative
e. Dante	

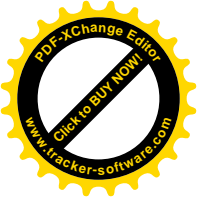
**Self–Evaluation Exercise 2**

1. Philosophy, in general sense, is a belief or a system of beliefs which are accepted by some group or school.
2. Ideas are usually taken as mental representational images of some object. Ideas can be abstract concepts that do not present as mental images. Many philosophers have considered ideas to be a fundamental ontological category of being. The capacity to create and understand the meaning of ideas is considered to be an essential and defining feature of human beings. In a popular sense, an idea arises in a reflexive, spontaneous manner, even without thinking or serious reflection, for example, when we talk about the idea of a person or a place. A new or original idea can often lead to innovation.
3. Philosophers like Descartes, Hume, Kant discuss various views about ideas. According to Descartes knowledge took the form of ideas and philosophical investigation is the deep consideration of ideas. Whereas Hume limited idea to the more or less vague mental reconstructions of perceptions, the perceptual process being described as an “impression.”
4. An ideology is a collection of normative beliefs and values that an individual or group holds for other than purely epistemic reasons. Ideology must be seen neither as hegemonic nor static. Ideology is accepted as a commonsense view of things presented by the power holder class.
5. Say true or false.
 

a. false	b. true	c. true
d. false	e. true	

**Self–Evaluation Exercise 3**

1. Philosophy and literature involves the literary treatment of philosophers and philosophical themes (the literature of philosophy), and the



philosophical treatment of issues raised by literature (the philosophy of literature). What do Philosophy and literature involve ?

- 2. Literature and Philosophy, are both forms of “social consciousness and they are constructions of language.”

According to Oladipo, they are social not just in the general sense of being produced by people who make up the society; rather they are social in majorly two ways : both philosophy and Literature are born out of human experiences of an individual or groups and they often treat very abstract matters that arise from a reflective pondering on the phenomena of life. Both are products of culture. Again they are social in another expression. They are both produced for the intellectual and practical needs of the society. From the points above, it is lucid that both disciplines focus on the same object which can be construed as the human person in the various aspects of his experience. They both reflect the quest for the better understanding and the tackling the problems of human existence.

- 3. Both, philosophy and literature are systematic presentations. They are not just some zigzagged amalgamation and mishmash of materials. Finally, philosophy and literature interacts in delving into each other's area of discourse. More importantly, philosophy interrogates literature through the device of Literal Criticism. Literal criticism is the philosophical analyses cum judgments of works of art and literature. The Associate Professor of philosophy at Stanford University, Lanier Anderson contributed to this debate of relationship and it is apt to mention it at this juncture. He argues that : “Great Literature is often deeply philosophical and Great Philosophy is often great literature”. For literature to take its rightful pace and fulfill its function in the society it has to wear some sorts of philosophy.
- 4. Foucault agrees with the view that literature exposes the terrible weaknesses of every community and demonstrates how societies through myths try to disguise their serious flaws. He says “though literature belongs to the great system of constraint” all the same, it has a special place in that system determined to seek quotidian beneath the quotidian itself, to cross boundaries, to ruthlessly or insidiously bring out secrets in the open, to displace rules or codes, to compel the unmentionable to be told, it will thus tend to place itself outside the law, or at least take on the burden of scandal, transgression, or revolt.
- 5. Fill in the blanks.
  - a. Olusegun
  - b. Philosophy
  - c. Literal Criticism
  - d. Lanier Anderson
  - e. Cavell

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