

Literature, n.

Etymology: < classical Latin *litterātūra* (also *literātūra*) use of letters, writing, system of letters, alphabet, instruction in reading and writing, writings, scholarship <*litterātus* LITERATE *adj.* + *-ūra* -URE *suffix*¹. The semantic development of the English word was probably influenced by the senses of French *littérature*: ‘knowledge acquired from reading or studying books, learning, erudition’ (1467 in Middle French as *litterature*; already in this sense in first half of the 12th cent. in Anglo-Norman (as *literature*) in an isolated attestation), ‘writers or authors collectively’ (1680), ‘works of fiction considered collectively’ (a1740), ‘(a body of) non-fictional books and writings published on a particular subject’ (1758). Compare Spanish *literatura* (1487), Italian *letteratura* (a1667; < French). The Latin word was also borrowed into other Germanic languages; compare Dutch *literatuur* (1676), German *Literatur* (16th cent. as †*Litteratur*), Swedish *litteratur* (1768; 1686 as †*literatur*), Danish *litteratur* (second half of the 18th cent.). Compare earlier LETTER *n.*¹, LETTRURE *n.*

1. Familiarity with letters or books; knowledge acquired from reading or studying books, esp. the principal classical texts associated with humane learning literary culture; learning, scholarship. Also: this as a branch of study.
2. The action or process of writing a book or literary work; literary ability or output; the activity or profession of an author or scholar; the realm of letters or books.
- 3 a. The result or product of literary activity; written works considered collectively; a body of literary works produced in a particular country or period, or of a particular genre. Also: such a body of works as a subject of study or examination (freq. with modifying word specifying the language, period, etc., of literature studied).
- 3 b. Without defining word: written work valued for superior or lasting artistic merit.
4. (A body of) non-fictional books and writings published on a particular subject.
5. Printed matter of any kind; *esp.* leaflets, brochures, etc., used to advertise products or provide information and advice.

What is a film

What is a film? What is film? If you have picked up this book, even to glance at it, you will have certain meanings in mind and not others. You probably are not thinking, for example, of cataracts on the eyes or, more generally, in the words of *Weber's Dictionary*, of 'a thin skin; a haze' or 'mist', or the transparent wrapping material that in England is called 'cling film'. A very short introduction to any of these things might make a fine book, but it almost certainly isn't what you're expecting. Nor are you thinking most immediately, I would guess, of what another dictionary calls 'an extremely thin pellicle or lamina of any material', although one form of such a lamina, the strip of coated material which receives and stores moving images, does get us closer to our goal.

A film is a roll of such material that can be run through a projector in order to throw moving images, or images of movement, on a screen. And it is also, of course, a name for what is projected on the screen as well as the art and industry of making such images. It is in this sense that we understand the word in phrases like 'film star' or 'film fan' or 'film critic' - although the sense here, broad in one aspect, is narrow in another. Film stars don't usually act in documentary films or home movies, and fans love to confuse actors with their fictional roles. A film, when not otherwise specified, is often taken to be a feature film of a certain length, telling a detailed story of imaginary people, the movie cousin of a play or a novel, and offered for public consumption. Scholars tell us that statistically such works do not form anywhere near a majority of the films that have been made or are being made; but the usage is still in place and perfectly intelligible.

Here are two of the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definitions:

A cinematographic representation of a story, drama, episode, event, etc.; a cinema performance; pl. the cinema, the pictures, the movies.

Film-making considered as an art-form.

I would want to amplify the notion of film-making, and its attendant activity of film-watching. Taken together, these practices constitute something more than an art-form, and something more than a variety of entertainment. Let's call it for the moment an institution: an enterprise and a cultural ritual all rolled, or reeled, into one.

And I shall have one further sense of film in mind throughout the book: film as footage, a set of images of movement of any kind, actual or imaginary, short or long, produced by anyone or any film technology whatsoever - that is, even when the spatial dimension of the term 'footage' has vanished. This is not my main subject, which is film in its chief or basic usage, but I'd like the reader to think the term *alexzys* means footage, whatever else it may also richly mean. As Hollis Frampton says, 'Films are made out of footage, not out of the world at large.' A film in this acceptance simply stores and shows movement, and is treasured (or hated or banned) for this reason if for no other: The films of the Lumiere Brothers meet this criterion, of course, and so do the films of Georges Melies; between them, they begin to define it. But so do newsreels, every feature film ever made, all documentary films, all art installations involving film, all visual records of surveillance, all music videos, all clips of film shown on television, all television programmes not broadcast live, every amateur moving picture of baby's first smile, and all glimpses of political demonstrations or riots taken on mobile phones and emailed to the world. Such footage pictures the past, whether very old or very recent, as still alive and in motion. It pictures a time and a place not (usually) immediately accessible to the viewer but often unbearably real in the effect their contents create. Our relation to film as footage is a part of our relation to film as film.

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