Ancient Greece Poets & Greek Poetry – Classical Literature

Ancient Greek society placed considerable [**emphasis on literature**](https://ancient-literature.com/) and, according to many, the whole**Western literary** tradition **began** there, with the **epic poems of**[**Homer**](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_homer.html).

In addition to the **invention** of the**epic and lyric forms** of poetry, though, the Greeks were also essentially responsible for the **invention of drama**, and they produced masterpieces of both tragedy and comedy that are still reckoned among the crowning achievements of drama to this day.

Indeed, there is scarcely an idea discussed today that has not already been debated and embroidered on by the writers of ancient Greece.

The epic poems attributed to[**Homer**](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_homer.html) are usually considered the first extant work of Western literature, and they remain giants in the literary canon for their skillful and vivid depictions of war and peace, honor and disgrace, love and hatred.

[***Hesiod***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_hesiod.html) was another very early Greek poet and his didactic poems give us a **systematic account of Greek mythology**, the creation myths and the gods, as well as an insight into the day-to-day lives of Greek farmers of the time.

The fables of [***Aesop***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_aesop.html)represent a separate genre of literature, unrelated to any other, and probably **developed out of an oral tradition** going back many centuries.

[***Sappho***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_sappho.html) and, later, [***Pindar***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_pindar.html), represent, in their different ways, the**apotheosis of Greek lyric poetry**.

The **earliest known Greek dramatist** was **Thespis**, the winner of the first theatrical contest held at Athens in the 6th Century BCE. Choerilus, Pratinas and Phrynichus were also early Greek tragedians, each credited with different innovations in the field.

[***Aeschylus***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_aeschylus.html), however, is usually considered the **first of the great Greek playwrights**, and essentially invented what we think of as drama in the 5th Century BCE(thereby changing Western literature forever) with his introduction of dialogue and interacting characters into play-writing.

[***Sophocles***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_sophocles.html) is credited with **skillfully developing irony as a literary technique**, and extended what was considered allowable in drama.

[***Euripides***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_euripides.html), on the other hand, used his plays to **challenge the societal norms and mores of the period** (a hallmark of much of Western literature for the next 2 millennia), introduced even greater flexibility in dramatic structure and was the first playwright to develop female characters to any extent.

[***Aristophanes***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_aristophanes.html)defined and shaped our idea of what is known as **Old Comedy**, while, almost a century later, [***Menander***](https://ancient-literature.com/greece_menander.html) carried on the mantle and **dominated the genre of Athenian New Comedy**.