

p. 13 of descent, instead of being straight or perpendicular, as in normal biological evolution (and in what is often assumed for the less-known Greek romance), would run back and forth and laterally in many directions, to say nothing of its being broken at many points by the absence of any plausible connection in causality. Nor would the result of our quest for a generative principle be any better if the novel were divided into a number of separate species and an effort made to trace each of them back through intermediate stages of growth to an ancestral form. What about that form? Was it purposely created, as we are maintaining that all forms are, or was it inherited by evolution from the first literary form on earth? The last mentioned could not be the result of evolution, since no literary compositions preceded it; and literature itself, being a man-made thing, cannot, like flesh or inanimate matter, be traced to an origin earlier than man. It did not spring from the oak or the rock. The first literary composition, or its oral equivalent, which constituted at the same time what we call a literary form, was made by a human artist acting deliberately under the guidance of a preconceived purpose. That is something that cannot be denied, and would not be denied by any student of literature; not even by one of those whose habits of thinking in this field have otherwise been damaged by the analogy of biological evolution, and by the equally misleading notion of progress and gradual development toward perfection (perfection of what?).

p. 15 In explaining the appearance of a type of book or composition for which no plausible forerunners can be cited in extant literature, it is customary to assume the loss of a number of ancient writings - or forms of a legend, in cases where literature is confused with folklore - each of which presumably showed an advance beyond its predecessor in the appropriate direction. This is that development, which students under the mere spell of the word so often feel obliged to discover wherever they can, as if it were a necessary clue to the understanding of all literary history, or the same thing as what may be loosely (if not without some danger), called the evolution, i.e., the changing, or flux of literature.