A great obstacle to good education is the inordinate passion prevalent for novels, and the
time lost in that reading which should be instructively employed. When this poison
infests the mind, it destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading. Reason and
fact, plain and unadorned, are rejected. Nothing can engage attention unless dressed in all
the figments of fancy, and nothing so bedecked comes amiss. The result is a bloated
imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real businesses of life. The
mass of trash, however, is not without some distinction; some few modeling their
narratives, although fictitious, on the incidents of real life, have been able to make them
interesting and useful vehicles of a sound morality . . . For like reason, too, much poetry
should not be indulged. Some is useful for forming style and taste. Pope, Dryden,
Thompson, Shakespeare, and of the French, Molière, Racine, the Corneilles, may be read
with pleasure and improvement.

(from a letter to Nathaniel Burwell, March 14, 1818, in The Writing of Thomas
Jefferson)