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Literature

Literature is an art in which language or words have a most significant function. Art includes, besides literature, many other things such as music, painting, designing, modelling. etc. The artists who want to create a beautiful work of art: a painting, a symphony, a house, a garden... must have their special tools or instruments. The painter needs a box of colors and a brush, the musician must have a musical instrument and so on. In literature, to create beautiful works of art, such as a poem, a novel, a short story or a play, the artist works by words.

Literature has different branches, the most important of which are: poetry, novel and drama. Whatever is the form, if it is written in words that are effective, well-chosen, strong in their emotional, imaginative or intellectual appeal, the result will be good literature.

Poetry

Poetry (ancient Greek: ποιεω (poieo) = I create) is an art form in which human language is used for its aesthetic qualities in addition to, or instead of, its notional and semantic content. It consists largely of oral or literary works in which language is used in a manner that is felt by its user and audience to differ from ordinary prose.

It may use condensed or compressed form to convey emotion or ideas to the reader's or listener's mind or ear; it may also use devices such as assonance and repetition to achieve musical or incantatory effects. Poems frequently rely for their effect on imagery, word association, and the musical qualities of the language used. The interactive layering of all these effects to generate meaning is what marks poetry.

Because of its nature of emphasising linguistic form rather than using language purely for its content, poetry is notoriously difficult to translate from one language into another: a possible

exception to this might be the Hebrew Psalms, where the beauty is found more in the balance of ideas than in specific vocabulary. In most poetry, it is the connotations and the "baggage" that words carry (the weight of words) that are most important. These shades and nuances of meaning can be difficult to interpret and can cause different readers to "hear" a particular piece of poetry differently. While there are reasonable interpretations, there can never be a definitive interpretation.

The essentials of poetry:

Language:

Language is one of the most essential features of poetry. Poems are made of words. The selection of words in a poem is called diction.

In considering the language of a poem we have to distinguish between the meaning that the word has in the dictionary (what is called denotation) and the more hidden meaning of the word, implying attitudes and values (what is called connotation)

Another aspect of language is the use of symbols (symbolic language), hence, the cross is a symbol of Christianity a flag is a symbol of a nation and a flower is a symbol of love. Symbols are of two kinds: the public or conventional symbol (the cross, the flag...) which is easily understood by readers, and the private symbol, which is created by the poet himself and is difficult to grasp unless an explanation is provided.

Besides symbols, the use of imagery is vital in poetry. Imagery is the art of producing pictures in the mind of the reader (mental pictures). An image is (any concrete representation of a sense impression or idea). It is a representation of some subject (which is unnamed and which may or may not be implied).

Another important features of language is the use of figures of speech (figurative language). Figures of speech are varied but they all deal with something by relating it to something else. The most common ones in English poetry are: simile, metaphor and personification.

- A- Simile is an obvious explicit comparison using 'like' and 'as' between different kinds of things.
- B- Metaphor is an implied or stated comparison between two unconnected subjects without the use of 'like' and 'as'
- C- Personification means to describe inanimate objects in terms of people and animals, as if the inanimate objects had minds or feelings.

Another aspect of language is the use of sound devices. The most frequent sound devices in English poetry are: rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance and onomatopoeia.

- A- Rhyme is one of the first elements of form in poetry. Lines of a poem are said to have rhyme when the ends of their final words have identical sounds.
- B- Alliteration is the repetition of initial letters or consonants in a line of poetry. It creates a beautiful effects in poem and creates music, and it can also enrich meaning.
- C- Assonance is the repetition of a vowel sounds in the same line of poetry.
- D- Consonance is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line of poetry.
- E- Onomatopoeia is the use of words in which the sound suggests the sense as in buzz, murmur, bang, hiss etc.

Rhythm and Metre:

Rhythm is an essential quality of poetry. It is the pulse of poetry, as the pulse of hearts beats to give life. The word rhythm is derived from the Greek, it means 'motion' or 'flow'. In poetry, rhythm is marked by accents or stresses placed on certain syllables which need to be emphasized.

The terms rhythm and metre are often used interchangeably. Metre is an organized rhythm, i.e. when rhythm follows a definite pattern, so that the number of syllables between accents are regular, we have metre. In other words, rhythm is the larger, metre is the smaller. Metre means 'measure' and it applies mainly to poetry. In English poetry, metre is made up of recurring patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables.

The main types of poetry:

Poetry may be divided into three types: lyric poetry, narrative poetry and dramatic poetry. If the poet is expressing, in musical language, his own feelings, moods or ideas, the poem belongs to lyrical poetry. If the poet is telling a story in an objective manner, the poem belongs to narrative poetry. If the poet combines these two forms telling the story objectively but embodying the emotional experiences of the characters and relating the story in their words by means of a dialogue, the poem belongs to dramatic poetry.

Prose

It is the ordinary language of men in speaking or writing. It is also a literary form that is not in verse as it has greater irregularity, variety of rhythm and aims at clarity of expression.

Types of prose:

Prose can be divided into two essential kinds: fiction and non-fiction.

Fiction is that kind of writing which is invented or imagined not factual. Nowadays fiction is used to describe imaginative literature such as novels and short stories. The language of this kind of writing is usually connotative i.e. the words used have secondary meanings, they suggest and imply rather than mean something.

Fictional prose has many types:

- 1- Narrative: This kind of prose tells a story true or invented such as novels. Example: Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*
- 2- Dramatic: This is the kind of prose which is found in drama. Example: Arthur Miller's *Death of a salesman*.
- 3- Satirical: Prose in this instance tries to ridicule vice and folly, it usually has moral purpose. Example: Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.

No-fiction, on the other hand, is the kind of writing which aims at meaning exactly what is said. The language of this kind of writing is usually denotative or referential because it states and

expresses what it says. It is the language of simple, exact and neutral description, such as that which is used in books of history or biography.

Non-fictional prose has many types:

- 1- Informative: Sometimes prose is used to give information, such as in school textbooks.
- 2- Critical: This kind of prose that is used to evaluate or explain literary works.
- 3- Argumentative: Prose here is to persuade the reader to believe something or it may be a discussion of a problem making us think about it intelligently.
- 4- Reflective or Contemplative: This is an exercise in contemplation on any given subject. It shows the ability of the writer to think and describe.

The Essay

The essay nowadays has come to mean a moderately short prose composition or discussion on any subject which tries to please or persuade the reader to adopt a particular attitude towards that subject.

The essay is divided into two types:

- 1- The informal or personal essay: Here the personality of the author plays the larger role to express his own attitude.
- 2- The formal essay: The writer here is more interested in the needs of his purpose, his subject. His focus is on the subject rather than his own personality.

The short story

The short story is a narrative prose that usually ranges between a thousand to twelve thousand words. It should be capable of being read at one sitting.

The elements of the short story are:

- 1- Theme
- 2- Plot
- 3- Character
- 4- Style

Differences between the novel and short story:

- 1- The novel is longer, it has great deal of details that the short story must ignore
- 2- In the novel there are subplots which is usually part of the main plot, while the short story deals with one main incident.
- 3- The novel permits development of characters, while there is usually no change in the character of a short story because it concentrates on one incident.
- 4- The novel permits description of setting, while the short story does not give long description and sometimes there is no description at all.
- 5- The novel's narrative task is elaboration, whereas the short story's is limitation and compression.
- 6- The novel may make a multitude of impressions upon the reader. The sort story, on the other hand, makes a single impression on the reader.

Drama

In the everyday use of the word drama, the element of conflict is often given prominence. This particularly emerges from the way it is seen in the mass media. The dramatic is any situation which creates a sense of the unexpected or the abnormal. At other times, the dramatic is limited to that which involves action in the sense of demonstration. For instance, a teacher may be said to be dramatic if he injects life into his teaching by acting out situations and experiences that he is describing.

For our purpose, a broader and more universal understanding of the dramatic is needed. For a start, you should recognize the fact that drama involves some components which no informed examination can overlook. These components are ACTION, DIALOGUE and CONFLICT.

Drama brings all these together to make a meaningful whole. We shall take a closer look at these aspects of drama in a moment. However, we must immediately admit that the ultimate experience of drama is the presentation on stage before an audience. This implies that it has a message to communicate and has some relevance to human experience. This is probably why the concept of MIMESIS or imitation is often emphasized in relation to drama. To say that drama is MIMETIC implies that it is imitative of reality. The mimetic impulse of drama is one feature that

makes it appeal to people. In other words, it is the quality that makes it relevant. Let us for a moment consider the components of drama that we earlier identified.

Action

This is what keeps the plot of a play moving. The play emerges from the enactment of actions before an audience. Acting generally generates other actions. Conflict evolves in the process until there is a climax under which the plot is finally terminated through the resolution or denouncement.

Character

Drama is impossible without people. People who are allotted roles in a play are called characters. Character is an important component of drama as is Dialogue.

DIALOGUE.

The verbal exchanges among characters in a play help to realize the intention of a playwright. Just as a novelist narrates his story, the playwright depends on the interaction of characters to expand his ideas.

Characters are made to speak in such a way that the situations desired by the writer will be created. Even though the writer often supplies relevant background information, the characters always play out the writer's intentions in their action and verbal exchanges - with the exception of MIME that does not use dialogue, most forms of drama depend largely on dialogue. At times, some characters also embark on an extensive revelation of their minds to the audience; such bursts are called soliloquies. It is normal that characters be assigned the language that is appropriate to their social status in the drama.

Conflict

Conflict is another aspect of drama you will need to recognize. It naturally grows out of interaction of the characters. It is a product of the contending forces in a drama. The conflicting actions and tendencies manifest when the play reaches the climax. The conflict is eventually resolved at the end and is known as DENOUEMENT.

A- Elements of Drama

Dramatic literature, you will soon discover, is very rich. Your enjoyment of it will be determined by your ability to recognize some of its components. In this section of the unit, we shall endeavor to take a look at some of them. If a few of the concepts examined in the previous chapter are discussed once again, it is because they are so important that we must keep on referring to them.

Plot

The plot refers to the story that a play tells. Normally, the events are arranged sequentially. This does not happen all the time. Some of the plays distort the sequence of events. What you do is to reconstruct the play. The fact that the plot of a play is not sequential or chronological does not necessarily suggest that you will have any difficulty understanding it.

Setting

Setting generally refers to the location of a literary work. The setting is a reference to the placement of a work in both time and place. The locale or environment in which a play is set will determine a lot about it. The setting is often related to the focus or concern of the play.

Theme

Each play makes a statement about the social world. This may emerge from an exploration of the entire play. The theme is the central message of a play. It is however possible to have sub-themes along with major dramatists who seek to make statements that have universal validity in their works. Generally, plays that treat common human problems make statements that have timeless relevance and consequently have more appeal as they speak to people of all ages and at all places.

Characterization

In the last unit you learnt that a play cannot be successful without people. This is not all that you need to know. Characters do not just occur in a play. Playwrights take care to create the right kind of characters to serve their purpose.

In the first place a playwright creates characters in line with his purpose; most of the time the characters are types. Typical characters are meant to represent certain categories of people in society.

In almost every play, there are characters that act prominent roles. These are called major characters. The others are called minor characters. The most prominent characters in a play is called the protagonist. It is possible to further describe characters in a play by finding out whether they are flat. Flat characters are those that embody certain qualities. They are not capable of growing (i.e. changing). They simply personify some values e.g. faithfulness, goodness etc. The individual identities of these characters are not established. They are found in didactic plays, a good example of which is *Everyman*. Round characters, on the other hand, are

those that have individual identities. They can change in the course of a play. From all that we have said about characterization, it should be easy for you to guess what characterization is all about. It means the pattern adapted in the creation of characters in a work. This includes roles and tendencies assigned to particular characters.

B- Dramatic Techniques

This may be a convenient point to draw attention to some techniques that are commonly used in dramatic works. You will discover these techniques in the texts you are to study throughout the courses.

Suspense

Suspense is a technique by which the playwright keeps the reader/audience in anxious expectation of what will happen next. It is a good way of sustaining their interest in the play. It is a common strategy in drama.

Comic Relief

This is a moment of light or seemingly unserious action which is marked by laughter after some serious or tragic action. As the name suggests, it is intended to create some atmosphere of relief in a play. The comic relief is often provided by clowns (characters that are meant to entertain others) in the plays of Shakespeare. They crack jokes or do some other funny things that will make the audience laugh and thereby get rid of the tension that might have been created earlier by a serious action or experience.

Flashback

The flashback technique enables the playwright to bring an experience in the past to the present to illuminate a problem or our understanding of a matter.

Foreshadowing

This is a technique which enables a playwright to an experience in the future. It creates anxiety and anticipation of the experience.

Dramatic Irony

This occurs when an event or situation is seen in a particular way by a character in a play whereas the audience and some other characters have a proper outlook on it. It creates anxiety when it intensifies a tragic experience.

TYPES OF DRAMA

1. TRAGEDY

Scholars seem to have agreed that the roots of tragedy must be traced to the Greece of the fifth century BC. Aristotle's theory of tragedy was formulated in the fourth century BC. Many people believed that Aristotle simply prescribed rules with which tragedy should be judged. On the contrary, his outlook seems to have been shaped by his familiarity with classical tragedies that had been performed. His theory may then be seen as an attempt to describe what he had carefully observed. Even though tragedy, as a dramatic form, is generally believed to have originated from Greece, it has evolved over the ages, incorporating changes and modifications of principle and practice in modern times.

Classical Tragedy: The Aristotelian Tradition

Aristotle's *Poetics* remains a good guide to the Greek tradition of tragedy which is commonly referred to as classical drama. As earlier stated, his ideas must have been shaped by his exposure to tragedies that were staged in his own days. It is however apparent that his outlook on tragedy was largely shaped by Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which also serves as his favourite example.

Aristotle defined tragedy as:

A representation of an action that is worth serious attention, complete in itself, and some amplified; in a language enriched by a variety of artistic devices appropriate to the several parts of the play; presented in the form of action, not narration; by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of emotion? (cited in English: 473).

It is necessary to analyse the elements of Aristotelian theory of tragedy as noted as in the quotation, for a proper understanding. They help us to understand the classical principles of tragedy.

(a) The Tragedy Hero or Tragic Hero

The hero in classical tragedy was expected to be a man of noble birth. The nobility of the character is essential to make his fall tragic. This simply implies that the fall of an ordinary man was not considered remarkable enough to provoke dramatic interest. This explains why tragic heroes in most of these plays are either kings or other highly placed persons.

(b) Elevated Language

The language of tragedy, in the classical tradition, was also expected to be elevated. The ideal language for this form of drama was therefore seen as verse. It is reasonable to conclude that only elevated language would be suitable for the class of people that were the object of tragedy. Language was certainly seen as a reflection of the status of character and the seriousness of the subject of tragic plays.

(c) The Three Unities

Time, place, action: The Aristotelian principles also recognised the need to ensure that the action of the play is shaped by what have come to be known as the three unities. One of the principles is that the action of the play should not extend beyond a day. The unity of place has to do with the concentration of the action to a locale. The unity of action implies that only one action should be seen on the stage at any time. In addition, there should be only one plot. This equally extends to the purity of genre, implying that there should not be any digression. The plot must be so tight that it will not make any room for a comic relief.

(d) Hubris - The Hero's Tragedy Flaw or Tragic Flaw

One other feature of classical tragedy, as clarified by Aristotle, has to do with the weakness of the tragic hero. The tragic hero was expected to have a weakness in his character which will make his fall possible.

(e) Catharsis - Purgation of Emotion

The last element of classical tragedy has nothing to do with the play or the hero. It is directly related to the effect of the fall on the audience. The fall of the tragic hero is expected to elicit the purgation of emotion (what Aristotle called catharsis) due to the relief that the hero will cause.

2- COMEDY AND TRAGICOMEDY

The Nature of Comedy

Comedy comes from the Greek word *Komos* which means "a revel" and its origin is traced to activities surrounding ritual performances in honour of the Greek god of fertility and wine called Dionysus. Comedy is a form of drama often considered as the exact opposite of tragedy. It is remarkable that the popular emblem of drama, a pair of masks, appears to confirm this relationship between comedy and tragedy. While the sorrowful one is representing tragedy, the one smiling designates comedy.

Apparently, comedy is generally characterized by an element of the comic. But while a whole play may be described as comic, an aspect of a play may just constitute the comic element. This means that you may find the comic element in a play, even when it is not a comedy.

Another principle which is used in judging whether a play is a comedy or not is whether it ends on a happy note. A tragedy is often seen as ending on a sad note, often with the death of the hero.

A third principle that we may apply to identify a comedy also emphasizes its differences from the tragedy. It suggests that a tragedy appeals to our emotion while a comedy appeals to our reason. In other words, comedy makes us think due to the issues it raises.

Origin of Comedy

Comedy, just like Tragedy, is believed to have originated in Greece. Aristotle saw it as inferior and thus detracts from the importance of its subject. Aristophanes (448-385 BC) is believed to have contributed a lot to the making of the form. He made comedy a medium for the correction of social ills. Interestingly, the leaders of Athens were not spared. If satire was the main concern of Aristophanes' comedy, Menander, was identified with a different tradition of comedy, one that focused primarily on love. There have also been significant contributions to the development of comedy in various places, including Italy, France and England. Moliere promoted a tradition of comedy in France in the seventeenth century. Shakespeare has also written a number of comedies which, expectedly, have defined an identity for his comedy.

Shakespeare's comedies draw extensively on various sources and are often set in outlandish places. Most of his comedies are concerned with love; music is employed to enliven the unique world that they represent. One of the best known of his comedies is *The Merchant of Venice*.

Forms of Comedy

Comedy is broadly divided into two forms: high comedy and low Comedy. High comedy is that type of comedy that elicits a form of laughter that is thoughtful. It is friendly while trying to correct man. Examples of high comedy are comedy of festivities, comedy of manners and situational comedy.

Low comedy, on the other hand, is unsparing in ridiculing man. This is also reflected in the form of laughter it provokes. Examples of low comedy are Comedy of Marionette, slapstick comedy and farce.

Tragicomedy

We have examined two main forms of drama - tragedy and comedy. You will be right if you wonder whether there is a form that stands in between the two. The form in this case blends the attributes of tragedy and comedy. The form is called Tragicomedy. It elicits both tragic and comic feelings. A tragicomedy normally has two plots that must eventually merge.

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