

University of Anbar / College of Arts / Department of English

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Subject: Introduction to Literature / First class

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.

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