

Introduction to Literature



- Literature, in its broadest sense, is everything that has ever been written. It includes children's magazines and pamphlets on road safety, as well as the novel of Leo Tolstoy and the plays of William Shakespeare.
- Literature may be broadly divided into poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction. Fiction includes the novel, short stories, and fairy-tale.

- **Enjoying Literature**

- **Why we read Literature.** We all read for a variety of reasons. These reasons change with our age, our interests, and the literature we read. Our basic reason for reading is probably pleasure. We read literature because we enjoy it. Reading for pleasure may take various forms. We may read just to pass the time. Or, we may want to escape the four walls that usually surround us. Reading may help us to experience the worlds of other people.

- **How to read “Creatively”**. No work of literature has wisdom or beauty in itself. The greatest poem ever written is only a printed sheet of paper until a reader reacts to it. Writing, to become literature, requires a reader. The reader helps to create literature by responding to writer’s thoughts, emotions, and beliefs.
- A creative reader considers both *what* the writer wants to say and *how* he says it. The creative reader brings his own experiences of life and language to the experiences that the writer presents on the printed page. He measures the honesty of the writer’s approach by his own ideas of truth. Creative reading leads to the deepest enjoyment of literature.

- **Appreciating Literature.**

- Reading is such a personal activity that there can be no final rules for evaluating a piece of writing. The taste and fashion of the times often enter into critical judgments. For example, a work considered a masterpiece by one generation of readers may be regarded as an inferior work by the next generation. Some books become best-sellers overnight. But their popularity does not necessarily mean that they are great works of literature. Other works continue to be important for non-literary reasons. Many students once read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its historical interest; while today teens find pleasure by reading *Harry Potter* for its imaginative or amusement interest.

• **The Elements of Literature**

- Almost every literary work includes four elements:

- (1) characterizations,

- (2) plot;

- (3) theme, or statement; and

- (4) style.

- Fiction and drama give special emphasis to characterization and plot. A good writer tries to balance these elements in order to create a unified work of art.

• **Kinds of Discourse**

- The word discourse refers to communication. In literature, it means the way in which a writer tells his readers what he wants them to know. A writer may use four kinds of discourse:
 - (1) exposition,
 - (2) argument,
 - (3) description, and
 - (4) narration. The writer's purpose determines which kind he uses.

• **The World of the Writer**

- **The Writer's Outer World.** No author writes in a vacuum. The period and the society in which he lives, and the writers who wrote before him, all influence what he says and how he says it.
- **The Writer's Inner World** includes his background and interest, and his physical assets and handicaps. It also includes his relationship with his home and family and his friends and enemies.
- **The Writer's Attitude.** The terms most often used in describing a writer's attitude are *romantic* and *realistic*.

- **Forms of Literature**

- **The Novel** is a long work of fiction that tells about events in the lives of real or imaginary people. There are many kinds of novels, dealing with a great variety of subjects.
- **The short story** is a short work of fiction that usually revolves round a single incident. Because of its shorter length, the characters and situation are fewer and less complicated than those of a novel.
- **Drama** is a story written to be presented by actors on a stage. A drama takes the forms of dialogue (conversation) between two people or more. The two major forms of drama are tragedy and comedy.
- **Poetry** usually has metre and rhyme. A poet uses metre when he arranges words in a pattern with a definite rhythm.

• **Literary Criticism**

- The critic or criticism can be said as to evaluate or to judge. This practice refers to describing, interpreting, and evaluating the work of literature. Theoretical criticism (Morner, K & Rausch, R. 1997) identifies general principles of literary excellence and establishes theories and methods for studying literature. Practical criticism—also called applied criticism—puts such insight, theories, and methods to use in the analysis and evaluation of individual work.
- Among the methods of classifying the many types of critical theories and practices, the most basic and illuminating is a four-part scheme proposed by M.H. Abrams, that distinguishes critical approaches “according to whether, in explaining and judging a work of literature

they refer the work primarily to the outer world, or to the reader, or to the author, or else look upon the work as an entity in itself.

- Mimetic criticism judges a literary work in terms of the “truth” of its representation of the reality of the world and of human life and character.
- Pragmatic criticism focuses on a literary work as something designed to produce emotional or moral responses in the reader and on how those effects are produced
- Expressive criticism views a literary work as an expression of the individuality of its author
- Objective criticism focuses on the intrinsic qualities of the literary work, treating it as an object of art that can be studied and evaluated without reference to author or reader.

- **History**

The Earliest Literature may have been written by the ancient Sumerians, who lived in what is now Iraq. Scholars estimate that (world encyclopedia in literature, 1966) the Sumerians kept simple records in writing as early as 5,000 years ago. By the end of the 3000s B.C., they were writing literature.

Other early peoples of the eastern Mediterranean area, such as the Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Hebrews, also produced literature. Their writings include fable, epics, histories, hymns, love-songs, myths, and philosophical essays.

- **The Middle Ages** lasted from about the A.D. 400s to the 1400s. The tribes that invaded the Roman Empire brought their own traditions. Epic poetry became an important form for recording legends that had been handed down by word of mouth for hundreds of years. The old English epic *Beowulf* appeared in about 700. The French song of Roland was written in about 1100, and the German *song of the Nibelungs* appeared in about 1200. Many Scandinavian sagas (long epic tales) were recorded during the 1200s.
- **The Renaissance**, which spread throughout Europe during the 1400s, 1500s, and 1600s, brought a rebirth of learning. Scholars rediscovered Greek and Roman classics. Philosophers became curious about the nature of man's knowledge. Writers developed new literary forms to express the vitality of the times. The re-awakening began in Italy.

- **The Age of Reason.** The Greek and Roman classics gained new importance in the 1600s and 1700s. Artists, writers, and scholars modeled their works after those of the ancients. They tried to achieve the clarity, simplicity, and restraint of classical art. The neo-classicists (new classicists) rejected the authority of religious tradition that had governed society since the Middle Ages. They turned to reason, or orderly thought, and believed that obedience to reason would hold society together. Such writers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Sir Isaac Newton expressed the spirit of the Age of Reason. They demonstrated the importance of logical thinking, and laid the foundations of the political and social sciences.

- In England, the civil war that began in 1642 had an effect on literature. Both the Cavaliers, who defended the King, and the Puritans, who defended Parliament, produced prose and poetry reflecting their attitudes. The greatest poet of the Puritans was John Milton. But his work does not truly represent the Age of Reason. He has properly been called the “last Renaissance man”. The writing of John Dryden, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison, and Alexander Pope, of the period 1680 to 1740, are clear expression of the “reasonable man”.

- **Romanticism** arose as a reaction against the Age of Reason. It dominated European literature from the second half of the 1700s to the mid-1800s. The romantics praised man's natural instincts and wrote vividly about their own emotions and sentiments. Jean Jacques Rousseau of France represented, probably more than any other writer, the spirit of rebellion against the neo-classic world. Rousseau condemned the evils of civilization, and regarded primitive man as a "noble savage (wild and severe)". He also emphasized the rights of the individual. European thought in almost every sphere was deeply influenced by the writers of French *Encyclopedie*. These writers ruthlessly attacked the traditional ideas in religion, philosophy, economics, and literature, and prepared the way for the American and French revolutions.

- **Realism.** The second half of the 1800s brought a reaction against romanticism. A new group of writers called realists turned against the exaggerated feelings stressed by the romantics. Truth and accuracy became the goal of the realists. The novel and the drama were their best means of expression. The great novelists of realism include Stendhal and Gustave Flaubert of France; George Eliot of England; and Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and Leo Tolstoy of Russia. Realism was mixed with romanticism in the writings of English author Charles Dickens. Emile Zola of France led the naturalist movement in literature. His writings sharply criticized the most sordid (dirty, unpleasant morally unpleasant) aspects of society. The naturalist and realist treated their character as mouthpieces (DISAPPROVING a person or a newspaper that only expresses the opinions) for their ideas on social reform. Such playwrights as Hendrik Ibsen of Norway, August Strindberg, and George Bernard Shaw of Ireland used this approach.

• **Some Literary Criticism Theories**

1. **Affective Fallacy.** A term introduced by W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley (in Morner, K & Rausch, R, 1997: 3) to describe the critical approach of evaluating a work of literature by the emotional effect it produces in the reader.
2. **Analytical criticism.** A type of **OBJECTIVE CRITICISM** that employs detailed verbal analysis (**EXPLICATION**, or “close reading”) of a work, its elements, and their relationship, in order to clarify the author’s meaning.
3. **Archetypal criticism.** A critical approach that describes, interprets, or evaluates a work in terms of its relationship to all other works centered on a basic situation (such as coming of age), **CHARACTER** type (the jealous husband), **PLOT** pattern (boy meets girl—girls resists—boy wins girl),

4. Aristotelian criticism. The type of inductive, analytical LITERARY CRITICISM originated by Aristotle in his *poetics*. Plato had charged that POETRY (by which he meant all types of LITERATURE) lacked value because it was not true, and that it was harmful because, instead of appealing to people's reason, it excited their passions.
5. Computational stylistics. The analysis of measurable aspects of an author's STYLE—such as sentence length and structure, or the frequency of use of certain words or phrases—usually with the goal of revealing the unconscious stylistic choices and preoccupations of the author.
6. Deconstruction. A mode of analytical reading based on the radically skeptical assumption that the language of written DISCOURSE is inherently unreliable. The goal of deconstruction is thus to search out the contradictions in a given text and prove that the text lacks both UNITY and COHERENCE.

7. Dramatism. The system for analyzing LITERATURE proposed by Kenneth Burke, an American critic and author, based on his view that the active sentence provides the fundamental pattern of all literature:

Somebody	is always doing	something	to somebody else
(subject)	(verb)	[object]	[indirect object]

Thus, according to Burke, all works of literature are made up of five elements (his “pentad”): Act (what happened), Scene (where it happened), Agent (who performed the act), Agency (how it was performed), and Purpose (why it was performed).

8. Exegesis. Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage.

9. Existential criticism. A modern school of literary criticism, identified especially with Jean-Paul Satre, that rejects traditional critical questions and concerns and instead examines literature in the light of existentialism, a philosophical theory that emphasizes existence over essence, free will and the attendant responsibility for making choices, anxiety in the face of a meaningless world.

10. Expressive criticism. An approach to literary criticism that focuses on a literary work as an expression of the individuality of the writer, rather than focusing on the work as an art object or on its effect on a reader.

11. Feminist criticism. Scholarly and critical literary studies growing out of the 1970s feminist movement. Such studies are aimed at recovering and reassessing works by women authors, evaluating the female image as portrayed by male authors, analyzing sexism and gender privilege in language, evaluating critical methods devised by males, and developing a body of literary criticism from the point of view of feminine consciousness.

And there are 32 others that can be studied along with these 10 criticisms.