

FOREWORD

This book is designed for first - year students in the Departments of English in the Iraqi universities. It has been prepared in response to the students' need for a simple book to provide them with basic information about English Literature. Its plan is based on the wish to combine in one volume the study of : poetry , prose and drama -- each of which is given a separate treatment . The book is not meant for advanced students who have learnt to read with a critical eye . It is for beginners to help them become familiar with English Literature and encourage them to develop a taste for it .

The First Section of the book is devoted to poetry . It is divided into three parts. Part I is a general introduction to the meaning of poetry, its uses , why read poetry , what is a poet , how to read a poem , the difference between prose and poetry and between poetry and verse. This is followed by a discussion of the essentials of poetry : language form and types , illustrated by examples . Part II is concerned with the types of poetry , namely , lyric , Narrative and Dramatic. A discussion of each is given with examples . Part III includes a brief survey , tracing the background and development of English poetry , from the Anglo - Saxon period to the present . The examples used for illustration have been chosen with the intention of giving the students the opportunity not only to study but also to enjoy poetry.

The second section of book is devoted to prose. It aims at introducing students to English prose in general . Its purpose is not to teach them how to write prose but rather to familiarize them with the various types of prose that English (and American)writers have used in their works and the kinds of prose these students are going to encounter during their studies. It also tries to make them appreciate literature in the English language .

It begins with a generalized definition of prose , followed by a discussion of the two types of prose : fiction and non - fiction delineating their nature , characteristics and qualities.

Students will also be familiarized with the various functions of prose (informative , critical , argumentative , reflective or contemplative narrative , dramatic and satirical, etc.) . Explanations will also be given

about the kind of language used in prose works (both connotative and denotative), as well as the style of prose (both subjective and objective) .

After this introductory section , a more detailed focus is to be made upon the two most important genres of prose in this book : the essay and the short story . The essay in both its types , formal and informal will be dealt with thoroughly together with a brief account of its development and students will be given a choice of ten essays to study with notes , comments and questions for practical work .

The same procedure is to be applied to the short story where again the subject will be dealt with in detail with a brief account of its development and students will be given a choice of ten short stories to study with notes , comments and questions for practical work

The third section of the book is devoted to Drama . The first part of this section is an introduction to drama in general and English drama in particular . It provides an explanation of the meaning , types and elements of drama . This part also gives a brief historical sketch of the development of drama since its early beginnings.

The second part includes extracts from representative dramatic works, in the choice of these extracts there is an attempt to introduce the student to various types of plays from various periods . Each extract is accompanied with useful information about the dramatist , the plot and some suggestive notes and points for discussion . This allows the student to employ the theoretical information of the first part for practical dramatic analyses .

At the end of the book a glossary of the most common literary terms pertaining to Poetry, Prose and Drama is given .

What is 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.

Words are used for both literary and non-literary or scientific works. Both the artist and the scientist use words. The first uses them to create beauty, the second, to speak of facts. Literary works are those which appeal to the imagination, the sensations, the feelings - as well as to the intellect. In literary works the business of the artist is to create beauty both in its physical and spiritual meanings. It is his business to explore universal truths concerning nature and human nature, using for his purpose the power and magic of words. Non-literary works are those which appeal more strongly to the mind, the reason.

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 would be good literature. If, on the contrary, the choice of the words is ineffective and the emotions are false, the result would be bad literature. Good literature is undoubtedly very enriching. It educates the minds and hearts and exposes the reader to lofty ideas and ideals. It opens one's eyes to the subtle and hidden meanings of life. Reading good literature is therefore highly recommended.

Section One

An Introduction To Poetry

What is Poetry

It is difficult to give an exact or definite meaning of poetry because poetry could mean different things to different people. There have been many theories about poetry and definitions. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines poetry as "the elevated expression of elevated thought or feeling in metrical form". Many writers and poets themselves have described poetry in various ways. "poetry is not the thing said, but a way of saying it" (A. E. Housman). "poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions" (William Hazlitt). "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (William Wordsworth). "poetry is vital, fresh and suprising language" (James Reeves). "poetry is the art by which feeling is conveyed by author to reader in metrical language" (James H. Smith). poetry is friend "to soothe the cares, and lift the thoughts of man" (John Keats), "poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." (P. B. Shelley)

These theories or abstractions are beautifully said but we do not learn much about poetry from them. To know what poetry means we have to experience it as we experience any event. We have to feel it in our hearts and minds. We need to know its principles to see how it works, and the more we read of it, the better we understand and appreciate it. It is like looking at a finished work of art. We are impressed by its beauty; we admire the person who made it, but unless we know the process and the details that went into its making and completion, our appreciation of it would be superficial. So it is with poetry. poetry is beautiful, we say; we admire the person who writes it, the poet, but unless we go through the process and the details of the poem itself, observing every word, every beautiful phrase or term, every device of rhyme or rhythm, sound or colour, our understanding and appreciation of poetry would be superficial.

The poet

What is a poet? who is a poet? In the midst of a crowd can we point to one and say: he is a poet? Does a poet look different from other men? Does he have special features or characteristics? Is he born a poet, or does he become one? Does he need to study to become a poet, as an

engineer who studies engineering or a doctor, medicine? It is difficult to say in clear terms what a poet is since he is a human being like other human beings, possessing many of their qualities; but a poet, more than others, is distinguished by certain qualifications.

The Poet, says Wordsworth, "is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without external excitement.... He is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind". To Shelley, "A poet is more delicately organized than other men, and sensible to pain and pleasure, both his own and that of others, unknown to them... poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". In other words, the poet has a wide experience which enables him to speak of his and other people's experiences as well. He has a very sensitive mind that makes him see and feel things that an average person does not see or feel. Unlike other men, a poet has one highly developed characteristic, "the faculty to create and use language".¹ He has a fine sense for music and form, selecting the proper pattern for his thought. Above all, the poet has a powerful imagination which helps him to create new experiences and give new meanings to old ideas. Like a painter or a musician, the poet arranges his words in such a way as to create a beautiful picture or a harmonious piece of music. To do so, it is not enough for the poet to know the rules of writing poetry. He needs an inner impulse, he needs inspiration, and he must himself be a devoted reader of poetry.

For a poet to produce good poetry, he must be sincere, treating his subject matter with depth and vitality. He must be natural, as Keats says: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to tree, it had not come at all". In other words, his poetry must not appear laboured. "It should seem rather the most natural thing that he could have said under the circumstances".² To avoid being artificial or sentimental, a good poet avoids false emotions and over-colourful kind of language. Neither would he limit himself to personal experiences, or else his poetry would lose its validity and interest for people. His poems should have universal appeal. Such a poet lives for all times, as Chaucer, Shakespeare or Milton have lived through the ages.

Why do we read Poetry

Often a student may ask the question: why do we read poetry? Is it important? Does it have any function in life? Of course, people read poetry for different reasons. In general we read poetry for enjoyment because it is a beautiful type of literature. We may read it for the music it contains or the thoughts it communicates and because it makes us see things around us differently, hence enriching our experiences of life, of nature and of human beings. We read poetry that we may become wiser from the richness of another's imagination.

Through poetry we experience the feelings of other human beings, learn to love and value things more because poetry increases and deepens our reaction towards many things in life, such as beauty, love, sorrow, death, nature etc. Wordsworth, for instance, deepens in us the love of nature and makes us see meaning even in its smallest aspects. "O there is blessing in this gentle breeze/ A visitant that while it fans my cheek/ Both seem half-conscious of the joy it brings". For many of us the breeze might come and go without leaving any impression. Byron makes us see the value of liberty. Keats deepens in us the love of Beauty. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever". Tennyson intensifies in us the need for spiritual values. Shelley shows us how Love is a basic principle in life. Hopkins opens our eyes to the Glory of God in his Creation: "Glory be to God for Dappled things". Poetry then makes us think and act; encourages us to be creative. Above all, poetry teaches us how to use language intelligently and effectively, with force and intensity, as in this effective line: "Oh thou art fairer than the evening air/Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars".

Poetry and Prose

Poetry shares many qualities with other forms of writing, but it also has its own distinctive characteristics. Poetry is more concrete and specific than prose; it is more compressed and intense. In poetry, the poet may omit many details which would be necessary in prose. Poetry is expressed in a regularly recurring rhythm. There is rhythm in prose too, but in poetry it is essential. Poetry is composed to be sung, and written to be read aloud. It is like music on paper, printed melody which has rhythm.

