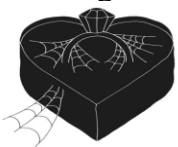


Course I: What is literature?

I. Reading

Storytelling is as old as humanity itself. The tradition of capturing the events and beliefs of communities reaches back to a time when humans first sat by a fire and told tales. History was preserved in the form of legends and mythologies that were passed down from one generation to the next, and offered answers to the mysteries of the universe and its creation. Written accounts emerged at the same time as ancient civilizations, but at first the invention of writing met simple, prosaic functions—for example to record transactions between traders or tally quantities of goods. The thousands of cuneiform clay tablets discovered at Ugarit in Syria reveal the already complex nature of the written form by 1500 BCE. Writing soon evolved from a means of providing trading information, to preserving the oral histories that were integral to every culture and their customs, ideas, morals, and social structures. This led to the first examples of written literature, in the epic stories of Mesopotamia, India, and ancient Greece, and the more philosophical and historical texts of ancient China.

Despite the almost limitless diversions that face readers today, literature continues to satisfy a spiritual or psychological need, and open readers' minds to the world and its extraordinary variety. There are works penned hundreds of years ago that continue to enchant and amuse to this day; complex postmodern texts that can be challenging in the extreme, yet still hold us in their grip; and new novels that feel so fresh that they read as if words have only just been invented.

Defining literature

Although the simple definition of “literature” is “anything that is written down,” the word has become primarily associated with works of fiction, drama, and poetry, and weighted with the impossible

to- quantify distinction of merit and superiority. These values are intrinsic to the canon of literature drawn upon for academic study and appreciation that has been evolving since the middle of the 19th century.

The term “canon” was borrowed from the ecclesiastical canons of authorized religious texts. The literary canon—a collection of works commonly agreed to be of exceptional quality—was formed almost entirely from familiar works of Western European literature.

Since the mid-20th century, cultural and literary theorists have done much to destabilize the canon by disputing the authority of these lists of the works of “dead, white Europeans.” The idea of a perceived canon of “great works” still stands as a useful framework, but rather than the term being used to define the same set of titles, it evolves with each new generation, which reexamines the ideology and power structures that underpin the selections of previous generations, and questions why certain other works were excluded. Arguably, studying how literature is created and testing its place in the canon may help to make us better readers.

The story of literature

Around 4,000 years ago, the first stories to be written down came in the form of poems such as Mesopotamia's *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and India's *Mahabharata*, which were based on oral traditions. Rhyme, rhythm, and meter were essential aids to memory in songs and oral accounts, so it is unsurprising that the first texts made use of familiar poetic devices. Many early written texts were religious, and sacred texts such as the Bible and the Koran tell >> the stories of early histories, and have influenced writing for centuries. The form of literature that became Greek drama used a narrative ballad-like form and introduced characters with individual voices, choruses of commentary, and the distinct categories of comedy and tragedy that continue to be used today. The collections of stories that make up the Arabic *One Thousand and One Nights* have multiple origins, but this prose fiction, written in plain speech, makes use of techniques that eventually became a mainstay in modern novels,

such as framing (which introduces stories within the framework of another story), foreshadowing, and the inclusion of repetitive themes.

Although the vast medieval era was studded with secular highlights such as the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and tales of chivalric romance, it was dominated in the West by religious texts in Latin and Greek. During the Renaissance, the joint energies of new philosophical investigation and sheer invention opened the door to literary innovation. The driving force behind the Renaissance was the production of new translations of ancient Greek and Roman texts which freed scholars from the dogma of the church. A humanist program of education which incorporated philosophy, grammar, history, and languages was built on the wisdom of the ancients. The Bible was translated into vernacular speech, enabling Christians to commune directly with their God. Gutenberg's printing press brought books into the lives of ordinary people, and authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio made everyday life the subject of literature. By the early 17th century, Miguel de Cervantes and Daniel Defoe had given the world what many scholars consider to be the first novels, and the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays was published.

The rise of the novel



Drama and poetry continued to evolve as the novel rose inexorably in importance, and by the end of the 18th century the novel had become a major form of literary expression.

Just as artists are described in terms of movements such as Baroque and Rococo, so literary history is defined by authors united by a particular style, technique, or location. The Romantic Movement, characterized by stories driven by the emotions of idiosyncratic heroes, rather than plot and action, had its roots in the German Sturm und Drang movement. Meanwhile, in England, the Romantic poets testified to the power of nature to heal the human soul, and similar themes were taken up by the New England Transcendentalists.

The word “genre” was increasingly applied to fiction's subsets—for example, novels in the gothic

genre. In the 19th century, Romanticism was superseded by a new form of social realism, played out in the drawing rooms of Jane Austen's English middle and upper classes, and Gustave Flaubert's provincial French towns, but used increasingly to depict the harsh lives of the poor.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky described his novel *Crime and Punishment* as “fantasy realism,” and the dark interior monologues of the murderer Raskolnikov have the elements of a psychological thriller. Over the years, fiction has diversified into multiple genres and subgenres, which today include everything from dystopian novels to fictional autobiography and Holocaust writing.

Alongside the growth of the novel, the vocabulary of literature expanded to describe styles of writing: for example, “epistolary” novels were written in the form of letters; and “Bildungsroman” and “picaresque” denoted coming-of-age tales. The language used within literature was developing too, and novels in the vernacular voice broadened the scope of national literature with writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain capturing the diversity of the people of the US.

In the early 20th century, Western society was revolutionized by industrial and technological advances, new artistic movements, and scientific developments. Within two decades, a generation of young men had been wasted in World War I. A perfect storm of literary experimentation followed, as Modernist writers searched for inventive stylistic features such as stream-of-consciousness writing, and wrote fragmented narratives representing the anguish and alienation of their changing world.

After a brief period of literary optimism and experimentation, the world was again thrown into turmoil as World War II began, and the production of literature slowed as many writers became involved in the war effort, and produced propaganda or reported from the front rather than writing literature.

The global explosion

After two brutal global wars, the world was ready for change, and literature was central to the counterculture in the West of the 1950s and '60s. Postmodernist writers and theorists focused on the artifice of writing, demanding more of the reader than simply engaging with a realist narrative.

Novels now had fractured or nonlinear time spans, unreliable narrators, episodes of magical realism,

and multiple-choice endings. During this period, the West, and in particular writing in English, also loosened its grip on world culture. Postcolonial writing emerged in countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, and India, and authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez helped raise the status of a group of South American writers of extraordinary creativity.

Modern literature now sings with the previously unheard voices of feminists, civil rights campaigners, gay people, black and Native Americans, and immigrants. There is a healthy meritocratic blurring of distinction between classic and popular fiction.

Global publishing, independent and internet publishing, global literature courses, national and international book prizes, and the growing number of works published in translation are bringing Australian, Canadian, South African, Indian, Caribbean, and modern Chinese novels, among others, to a world audience. This vast library of global literature has become both a reminder of shared connections worldwide and a celebration of difference. ■

II. Building Knowledge:

1. What is literature?

Read the passages! Which one is the best definition for literature?

Literature is any written work

Literature can be classified according to whether it is fiction or non-fiction and whether it is poetry or prose.

Literature is the written word that has a deep, lasting effect on those who read it. It is typically rich with symbolism, themes, and high artistic/aesthetic quality

Literature is about form/presentation, and form/presentation is what forces us to perceive the difference between literature and 'non-literature' (i.e. a novel compared to a newspaper, a poem compared to a note left on the kitchen counter, etc)

Literature in its simplest version can be defined as an expression of the culture of the human being and appears in different times and places.

Literature is basically a way to communicate, teach and learn

Literature is stories whose meanings unfold as you live with them. You don't always know literature until you get into it. Literature isn't always obvious. But literature is the story that you keep coming back to; it is us, the us we see with a second look. Everything else is wallpaper.

Literature, in my eyes, has no meaning. Yeah, if you look it up online it'll give you a definition, but do you *really* know what it is? Can anyone solidly give me a definition which covers the vast thing that is literature?
BUT! If I was forced to define it, I'd most likely say something like this:
"A branch of art in which writing (prose or poetry) is used to convey a certain something."

Literature, work of art which employs words as its tool. Truth of life acknowledged and with emotions fabricated. It is a peculiar art where thoughts of human being are statistically presented

In many cultures in the past and for a number of indigenous peoples today, literature has not been captured in written media but has been passed down in a long oral tradition of storytelling.

People often say that literary language is 'special' and that it differs considerably from normal everyday language.

Literature is defined as books and other written works, especially those considered to have creative or artistic merit or lasting value.

2. What are English Literary Studies?

The question "What are English literary studies?" does not look complex at first sight. However, the answer is not as simple as one might imagine. One answer students may obviously give is that English literary studies deal with English literature. Thus,

literary studies differ from other branches of the subject, namely **linguistics**, where the main focus is on the structures and uses of the English language, and **cultural studies** where students learn how the various cultures in English-speaking countries have been constructed over centuries.

And yet, what is English literature? First of all, do we talk about literature written in England or do we take into account other English-speaking countries such as Ireland, Canada, USA, Australia, etc.? And how about the diversity of cultures and literatures within the United Kingdom, e.g., Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish? To make matters even more complicated, a great many authors from former colonial countries in Africa, India, etc., write in English, and literature from immigrant writers in the US, e.g., Chicano literature, has increasingly received interest from literary scholars. In other words: It is very difficult to draw a clear line, and perhaps one cannot and should not delimit the subject area at all, given the diversity of texts written in English today.

3. What is Literary Theory?

Literary theory is understanding the nature, and function of literature and the relation of text to its author, reader, and society. It can be described as the frame that supports literary criticism. Literary theory consists of a variety of scholarly approaches to evaluate a study. In simple terms, they can be described as the different perspectives or angles scholars use to evaluate literature. Some of the major schools of literary theory include:

Formalism – focuses on the structural purposes of a text

Reader-Response approach – focuses on the response of the reader to a text

Structuralism – focuses on the universal underlying structures of a text

Gender/Queer Studies – focuses on the portrayal of gender and gender relations

Post-colonial Studies – focuses on the influence of colonialism on literature

Psychoanalytic approach – focuses on the role of consciousness and unconsciousness in literature

4. What is Literary Criticism?

Literary criticism is the study, analysis, evaluation and interpretation of literature. In other words, it judges the value of a work. In literary criticism, a

particular work or a body of work is evaluated according to its aesthetic value, historical/cultural/social significance of the work, use of language, and insights of the work. These qualities are often mutually dependent or inflective. Literary criticism has a long history and can be traced back to the times of Plato. Literary criticisms are often published in essay or book format.

How to criticize?

Reader Response criticism: it claims that reading of a text is created by each reader's personal interaction with the text. According to this theory, a work has no single correct common meaning since the meaning exists in the readers' minds.

New Criticism: It states that a text makes sense without using outside sources; therefore, historical and bibliographical information is not needed to understand the meaning.

Historical/Biographical Criticism: It is based on the principle that texts are heavily influenced by the events in the authors' lives and by the world they live in. Thus, questions about the text can be solved by analyzing the life of the author or the history or culture in which he lived.

Gender Criticism: It looks at the male and female characters of the story and analyses how their actions, behavior reflect the gender roles in the society.

Postcolonial Criticism: It analyses how Western world views and interprets the third-world countries. This is also associated with stereotypical images of the (former) colonized people encourage repression and domination.

Psychoanalytical Criticism: It analyses the psychological dimensions of the characters and the work itself.

5. What are the functions of literature?

Why we read and study literature?

1. Knowledge sharing

This is the most basic and important function of literature. We can learn many new things about the world with its help; we can fill ourselves with knowledge and become smarter.

2. Upbringing

Literature affects the feelings and outlook of a person. Why do we read fairy tales in childhood? Well, mostly because they clearly distinguish between good and evil, which helps children to

understand what is good and what is bad from early age. Thanks to artistic images, authors convey basic educational principles to the child.

3. Communication

It is the communication between the reader and the author. Very often, we are impressed by some characters and do not like others. We can agree with a point of view of the author and we can disagree with it altogether. Also, a book can be a topic for discussion with your friends and acquaintances.

4. Entertainment

Books can take you anywhere without you even leaving your couch and they can provide you with hours of fun. Shaping the aesthetic taste Literature helps us to form our own vision of beauty, it pleasantly influences us, changing our behavior in society and attitude towards people in general. Literature helps us to notice everything beautiful around us.

5. Self-development

Literature helps us to develop ourselves. Thanks to books, articles, magazines, we have the opportunity to fill ourselves with new knowledge, cultivate good qualities and strive for something more.

6. Development of thought process

People very often reflect on processes, events, knowledge, which they read and discuss various issues with others.

7. Pleasure

We get pleasure every time from reading good verses or beautiful work, or a book with a great plot, or other interesting facts and scientific literature. Literature is something that gives joy.

8. Shaping the speech

The more a person reads, the more words they learn, as well as different designs and options for constructing sentences. People can enrich their vocabulary thanks to literature.

9. Transformation

With the help of literature, we can transform bad memories into something beautiful. Thanks to literature, banal things can be turned into something artistic, poetic and beautiful.

6.Literature and Society

Today, literature is the most symbolic form of expression in society. It is important to keep it alive as it enables us to keep learning about the past which forms the basis of history. Literature furthers our knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live in. If written works did not encourage us to ask questions, how would we continue to learn new things?

1. Literature in society

Reading literary works of any kind helps us develop critical thinking skills. We learn to read in between the lines and find meaning in expressions of symbolism through story characters and depicted themes.

Without books, we have nothing to learn from about history, science, imagination, or speculation. Reading literature empowers us to learn, understand, and appreciate other cultures and belief systems formed by history, anthropology, and religion.

Literature is paramount for the stimulation of our minds and our ability to think further than societal norms. We are able to connect with our inner selves. Literary writers improve their craft by appreciating and reading literature other than their own. This is a prime example of how literature can help us grow in any way, shape, or form.

2. Speaking to the Masses

Books of written works – poetry, novels, prose – is a compilation of a universally understood language that is literature. For people who are afraid to speak out, the use of written words creates a voice that can be heard by many.

For those who have a message to give to the world, words are strung together to make lyrics for music. This is one of many ways which words are used for so much more than dusty old books in the school library.

We are always able to pursue studying new things every day through literature. Written works represent old and new traditions, beliefs, and cultures which we have the privilege of learning about daily. This can be in the form of magazine articles, daily newspapers, scientific journals, reports, or even literary art displays.

3. Embarking on Magical Journeys

Literature provides an escape for many living in society today. Reading gives a whole new level of

experience for people all around the world. They are able to immerse themselves in a completely different reality to their own.

They meet new people in the form of characters of a story. These characters take them on journeys to wonderful places near and far. They follow the characters experiences which in turn make them feel real emotions such as empathy, grief, understanding, and love.

A written story, as a whole, is made up of several elements to develop either; a work of fiction or non-fiction. The essence of literature itself is the creation of written words which manifests into creative poetry, prose, novels, and much more. It is up to us to delve deeper into the different forms of literature to find our escape, the characters we most identify with, and parallel realities we find comfort in. Lastly, let literature continue to teach us new things!

- 6.....How are the orange peel and the flesh differentiated into composite parts of the orange?
- 7.....If the orange peel and the flesh are both part of an “orange,” are they not in fact one and the same thing?

Assignment:
Write a short essay about the relation between literature and other arts (music and dancing, theater, and film making, painting and sculpturing).

III. Activities and assignments

- Activity1:** in a paragraph form write a unified definition of literature use the following key words: written literature- oral literature- form- structure- genres.
- Activity 2:** write a sentence to compare and contrast between literary criticism and literary theory using the conjunction “whereas’

Activity 3: “upon seeing an orange”
Fill the gap with the correct theory from the box.

Gender theory. Social class theory. Formalism.
Reader response theory. Deconstruction.
Structuralism. Postcolonialism

- 1.....What possibilities are available to a woman who eats this orange? to a man?
- 2.....What shape and diameter is the orange?
- 3.....Who owns the orange? Who gets to eat it?
- 4.....Who doesn’t own the orange? Who took the orange away?
- 5.....What does the orange taste like? What does the orange remind us of?

How to organize my essay

My name:	date:
The title:	
General introduction:	
Body:	
Main idea 1 and its supporting details:	
Main idea 1 and its supporting details:	
Main idea 1 and its supporting details:	
Conclusion	