University of 8 Mai 1945  **Mrs. BRAHMIA L**

Department of English

First Year/ Gs 4, 5, 6

**Introduction to Literature**

**What Is Literature?**

Definitions of literature have varied through time. In ancient times, literature has been passed down in a long **oral tradition of storytelling, myths, ritual speeches, etc**.  Over so many centuries, literature was handed down by **oral tradition**. The term ‘literature’ was originally defined as **‘all what is written’** regardless of its subjects, language, style, and thematic concerns. In the Romantic Age, literature became **imaginative**. From the nineteenth century on, literature becomes more like the literature we know nowadays. It emphasizes the **aesthetic side of language**.

**Literature: A More Modern Definition**

Though the term “literature” is **generally** used to refer to “all what is written”, it is **specifically** applied to include all writings of **art form** including **prose**, **poetry**, and **drama**. Literature differs from other forms of writing because of **four major characteristics**: **Fiction**, **specialized language**, **ambiguity**, and, **lack of pragmatic function.**

**Fiction**

One characteristic feature of literary texts is arguably the fact that they are **fictional.** People usually agree that literary texts, even if they attempt to represent reality in some form or another, are ultimately products of a **writer’s imagination** and that at least the **characters and their conversations are fictitious**.

**Specialized Language**

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

**Lack of Pragmatic Function**

A cookery book, a newspaper or an encyclopedia of garden plants, for example, have a definite **pragmatic function**, i.e., they are written and used for a specific purpose, e.g., to assist with the cooking or gardening or, generally, to inform the reader. A piece of literary writing, on the other hand, **need not have been intended by the author for any specific purpose**

**Ambiguity**

People generally accept the view that literary texts are far more **ambiguous** and thus often **more complicated** than non-literary texts. If one reads a recipe, for example, or a time-table or an instruction manual, the meaning expressed in these texts is presumed to be more or less fixed and not open to interpretation. As classroom discussions show, different students can come up with rather **different interpretations** of what **a specific literary text ‘means’** or what it tries to convey.

**Why Study Literature**

**Studying literature is important:**

Literature teaches us what is happening around us in the world. It familiarizes readers with the **histories and cultures** of other countries in **entertaining ways**.

Literature is a **mirror of society**; it exposes **truths, realities, and social problems**. More important, it tries to **solve those problems and to correct the ills of society**.

Literature **sharpens our critical responses and increases our ability to ague.**

Reading literature improves the **reading skill**, and helps in **enriching our language**.

**Debating Literature:**

We may discover meaning in the literature by looking at **what the author writes or says**, and **how he or she says it**. We may **interpret** and **debate** an author's message by examining the **words he/she chooses** in a given novel or work or observing which **character or voice serves as the connection to the reader**.

This decoding of the text is often carried out through the use of **literary theory** using mythological, sociological, psychological, historical, or other approaches to better understand the context and depth of a work.

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