

Exploring Philippine Literary Forms, Genres, Elements, and Traditions

Philippine literature is as rich and diverse as the 7500 plus islands that make up our archipelago. This is not surprising considering that we have 183 living languages (ethnologue.com) across 17 regions comprised of 82 provinces. One can only imagine the many forms of artistic communication (oral or written) that have been passed on to and through generations, communities, and groups. Then and now, literature in the Philippines have come in various genres (forms) and have been appreciated and analyzed for their forms, elements, structures, and traditions.

The origin of Philippine literature can only be traced by exploring its evolution from pre-colonial up to the present. Thus, studying the past becomes imperative in understanding the literature of the present. Different genres that appeared from each period seem to reflect the place, language, culture, social and ethnic dimensions of literature produced. The nature and essence of literature has evolved over time. Traditionally, literature was strictly viewed as any form of written works especially during the 18th century. Today, its definition and scope can be considered more restrictive for there are certain standards set by some critiques before a work can be considered as a body of literature. Among the common words used by scholars and other sources that are associated to literature are excellence, expression, experience, artistry, and imagination. Its connection to human life and experiences, wherein audience can easily relate with, is the major characteristic of literature. Emerging habitually into quality literary works will help us gain better understanding of people, society, and culture.

The term **literature** is derived from the Latin word "littera" which means "a letter of the alphabet". According to the website Britannica, literature is traditionally defined as body of written works associated to imaginative and creative works of poetry and prose and can be classified according to variety of systems such as language, national origin, historical period, genre and subject matter.

Literature can either be in oral or written form. The oral literature handed down from one generation to another, then later on transformed into written form. The products of written literature are called **literary text**. A text can be considered literary if it has the elements of psychological characterization and chronology. Also, literature uses literary devices such as metaphor and symbolism. Reading for entertainment and learning is the most common reason why people read literature.

Simply, the best way to describe the characteristics of literary text is that (1) it narrates a story; (2) it expresses feelings, thoughts, and ideas which can either be based from the imagination or real life

experiences of the author or other people; and (3) it delivers significant information and crosses boundaries of time, places, cultures and languages.

Also, literature contains specific structure. **Literary structure** refers to the organizational method used in literature in which the most common type is the narrative. Parts of the narrative structure (or plot) are the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (denouement). In a much broader context, literary structure is not only limited to content and form but this may also refer to "the general features or characteristic of genre, style, a specific literary trend, literature as an art form, and finally, art as a whole" (The Great Soviet Encyclopedia). For Murphy (n.d.), literary structure may involve arrangement of various elements according to purpose, style, and genre to effectively convey the intended meaning for the audience.

Two Major Forms of Literature

1. Poetry. This literary type is usually written in lines and is characterized by having the element of rhythm, sound, imagery, and form. Its main purpose is to express feelings, thoughts, and ideas. It can be divided into three types: narrative, dramatic, and lyrical poetry.

a. Narrative Poetry. This poetry tells a story and has the elements of a narrative such as characters, setting, conflict, etc.

b. Dramatic Poetry. This is an emotionally appealing drama written in verse that tells a story and is intended to be recited or sung in front of the audience by a character speaking in poetry.

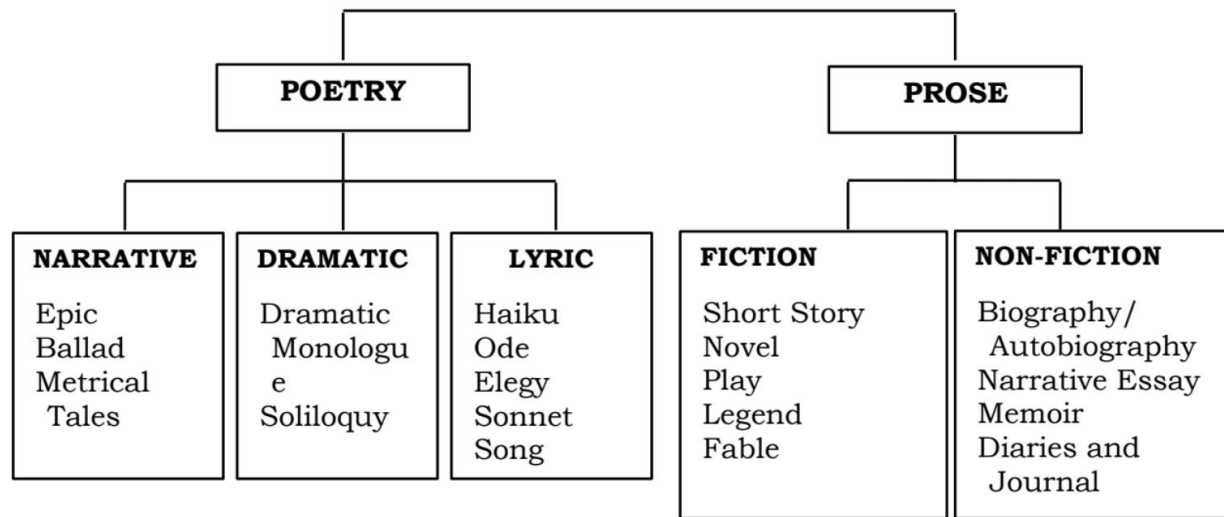
c. Lyric Poetry. It is the most common type of poetry that focuses on expressing feelings rather than telling a story.

2. Prose. In contrast to poetry, this literary piece applies a natural flow of speech and grammatical structures which are mainly consisting of complete sentences arranged logically and sequentially in a paragraph form.

a. Fiction. This serves as a product of the writer's wild imagination and creative thinking where the characters react to the conflict and various issues central to the main idea of a literary work. Its three types are: short story, novel, and novella. The main genres are crime, fantasy, romance, science fiction, western, inspirational, historical fiction and horror.

b. Non-fiction. These are stories inspired by real events where the writers aim to present, interpret, or describe experiences based on facts. The judgments, opinions, and commentaries of the writers may be presented in the form of essays, journals, diaries, feature articles, editorials, and the like.

Some Examples of Major Forms of Literature



Genre refers to the forms of literature. The general ones are oral and written. The main types are prose and poetry. There are many other forms that have sprung through the years. Specifically, it is defined in the curriculum guide as something that “may be determined by literary technique, tone, content, or even (as in the case of fiction) length. The distinctions between genres and categories are flexible and loosely defined, often with subgroups. The most general genres in literature are (in loose chronological order) epic, tragedy, comedy, and creative nonfiction. They can all be in the form of prose or poetry. Additionally, a genre such as satire, allegory or pastoral might appear in any of the above, not only as a sub-genre, but as a mixture of genres. Finally, they are defined by the general cultural movement of the historical period in which they were composed. Genre should not be confused with age categories, by which literature may be classified as either adult, young-adult, or children’s. They also must not be confused with format, such as graphic novel or picture book.” (Glossary, Curriculum Guide)

Literary elements refer “to particular identifiable characteristics of a whole text. They are not “used,” per se, by authors; they represent the elements of storytelling which are common to all literary and narrative forms. For example, every story has a theme, a setting, a conflict, and has a particular point-of-view, etc. In order to be discussed legitimately as part of a textual analysis, literary elements must be specifically identified for that particular text.” (Glossary, Curriculum Guide). The common elements of a story **are setting, character, conflict, theme, point of view, and plot**. Plot also has its own elements such as **exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution or denouement** /,der'nu:mɒ/. In poetry, there are four essential elements: **form, imagery, rhythm, and sound**. Poetry comes in different forms such as whether it is free verse, couplet, limerick, etc. Imagery on the other hand is the reason why we see pictures in words and it adds color in any types of literature especially in poetry. Rhythms and sounds are somehow similar. In fact, rhythm falls under the broad category sound. While sound deals with the common use of rhymes and other literary devices such as repetition (repeating of words, phrases, or lines), alliteration (repeating same consonant sounds), assonance (repeating same vowel sounds), and onomatopoeia (the use of the actual sound to represent someone or something), rhythm is more

concerned with the flow of the beat such as whether it is fast or slow. In general, both sounds and rhythms are the key ingredients that give poetry a musical effect (Encyclopedia Britannica).

The term "**Traditions**" refers to the specific traits of literary works that define a generation or period in history. A literary tradition "is a collection of works that have an underlying interconnectedness and coherence that makes them more than simply a group of works sharing geography or group. Irish poetry and drama, for example, extend over several centuries, involving writers with a range of voices and preoccupations; and yet it is often thought that they are distinctively "Irish." This means that you can have someone who doesn't come from Ireland, perhaps doesn't even have Irish ancestors, but they can write in the Irish Literary Tradition because they will draw on the same references, structure, mythology, focal points for cultural meanings and historical moments." (Glossary, Curriculum Guide)