

Forms of Literature

Poetry- Poetry is a form of literature that is composed in a determined, lyrical arrangement of words that may have various functions- conveying a thought, describing a scene or telling a story. Poems can be structured, with rhyming lines and meter. The rhythm and emphasis of a line is based on its syllabic beats (metrical structure). Poems can also be in free verse which follows no formal structure.

A poem can be further divided into stanzas, which are the basic building blocks of a poem. A stanza is a grouping of lines, similar to a paragraph in prose. A stanza can be subdivided further into smaller units based on the number of lines it contains. For example, a couplet is a stanza with two lines, a quatrain contains 4 lines, etc.

A poem maybe rhyming or non-rhyming. The repetition of end sounds of two consecutive lines is called rhyming. It adds a musical quality to a poem. In poetry, imagery is the use of figurative language to evoke a sensory experience in the reader. When a poet employs imagery in its poem, it provides the reader with a sight that can be felt as real as it is seen.

Poems can be of the following types-

- **Blank verse.** Blank verse is poetry written with iambic pentameter that does not rhyme. It was popularized in early modern drama and in the plays of Shakespeare.
- **Rhymed poetry.** Rhymed poems rhyme by definition, although their scheme varies. If lines of iambic pentameter rhyme, they are known as “heroic couplets”.
- **Free verse.** Free verse poetry is poetry that lacks a consistent rhyme scheme, metrical pattern, or musical form.

- **Epics.** An epic poem is a lengthy, narrative form of poetry based on grand themes, characters and ideals. These long poems typically detail extraordinary feats and adventures of characters from a distant past. Epics have certain standards that must add to the grandeur of its theme & style.
- **Narrative poetry.** A narrative poem tells a story. It narrates a tale as if a story was being told in verse e.g Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".
- **Ode.** An ode is a tribute to its subject, although the subject need not be dead—or even responsive, as in John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn". Odes are tributes to the given subject. In ancient Greek literature, they were written in the form of poems composed in 3 stanzas- strophe, antistrophe and epode.
- **Sonnet.** A sonnet is a 14 line lyrical poem, typically (but not exclusively) concerning the topic of love. It originated in Italy and was later popularized in the whole of Europe. It has three popular forms- Petrarchan (ABBAABBA CDCDCD/CDECDE/CDCDCD); English (ABABCD CDEFEF GG) and Spenserian (ABABB CBCCDCD EE).
- **Pastoral poetry.** A pastoral poem is one that concerns the natural world, rural life, and landscapes. These poems were popular in ancient Greece, e.g. Pastoral poetry by Theocritus, and ancient Rome, e.g. *Bucolics* by Virgil. Elizabethan poets employed this genre greatly e.g. *The Shepherdes Calender* by Edmund Spenser. Pastoral poetry idealizes the natural world and depicts it in its pure glory & blissful life.
- **8. Elegies.** An elegy is a poem that is written upon someone's death, that usually reflects upon death or loss. Traditionally, it contains themes of mourning, loss, and reflection. However, it can also explore themes of redemption and consolation.
- **Pastoral elegy-** a subgenre of pastoral poetry an elegy. It meditate on death in the setting of an idyllic rural life. Often, the pastoral elegy features shepherds. This form of poetry has several key features, like praise of the dead, the invocation of

the Muse, expression of grief and the poet's simultaneous acceptance of death's inevitability and hope for immortality. It also features procession of mourners and rhetorical questions. In pastoral elegies, the deceased is often recast as a shepherd and is surrounded by classical mythology figures, such as nymphs, fairies, angels etc.

- **Lyric poetry.** Lyric poetry refers to the broad category of poetry that concerns feelings and emotion. It expresses the innermost feelings and emotions of the poet. This distinguishes it from two other poetic categories: epic and dramatic. It has a musical quality to it or a tune that is suggestive to a song. In modern English poetry, it was put into use in the form of sonnet by William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser, etc. but it was best put into use by Romantic poets.
- **Ballad.** A ballad is a form of narrative verse that can be either poetic or musical. It typically follows a pattern of rhymed quatrains. Poets like John Keats & Samuel Taylor Coleridge utilized it greatly in their poems. It is written in the rhyme scheme of ABCB with alternating four-stress and three-stress lines. Ballads were originally folk narrative songs in the oral culture of story-telling that tell out a story in the form of songs. They generally described some form of a dramatic event like a tragic story, a love story, a war, etc. They were later adapted as a form of poetry.
- **Dramatic Monologue-** A poem in which an imagined speaker addresses a silent listener, usually not the reader. The poem is narrative as it tells a tale and reveals something of the personality of the speaker. These became highly popular in the Victorian age by such writers as Robert Browning etc.
- **Limerick.** A limerick is a five-line poem that consists of a single stanza, an AABBA rhyme scheme, and whose subject is a short, concise tale or description. It is humorous poetry of low comedy. It is written in 5 lines of anapaestic trimeter- a line of 3 metrical feet; 2 unstressed syllables followed by a stressed

syllable in a foot. Its origin is attributed to “Will You Come up To Limerick”, an Irish soldiers song of 18th century.

- **Haiku.** A haiku is a three-line poetic form originating in Japan. The first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables, and the third line again has five syllables. Haikus were highly imagist and were characteristic features of the Modern Age.
- **Acrostic Poetry-** a form of poem in which the first letters of each line form a separate word.
- **Villanelle.** A nineteen-line French poem consisting of five tercets and a quatrain (5x3 + 4) with a highly specified internal rhyme scheme. The first and third lines of the first stanza repeat alternately in the following stanzas. These two lines form the final couplet in the quatrain. Originally a variation on a pastoral, the villanelle has evolved to describe obsessions and other intense subject matters. E.g. Sylvia Plath's "Mad Girl's Love Song".

Drama- The term "drama" comes from a Greek word "draō" meaning "to do / to act". It is a form of literature that is as old as poetry, though it was initially developed to be performed only. The enactment of drama is in theatre; it is performed by actors on a stage before an audience. It centres on action. In ancient Greek society, Drama was performed in only 2 genres- comedy & tragedy. Dramatic literature is dramatic form written down so that it can be read.

It is believed to be centuries old. In English literature, it began as a form of dramatization of biblical events to attract Christians to churches on Sunday mass. Later, it went out of church and into playhouses where Biblical or Christian themes were performed. In the medieval ages (5th-15th century AD), it is found in 3 forms- Miracle, Mystery and Morality.

- **Miracle plays** were based on lives of saints. They were developed in 10th-11th centuries. Also called Saint's plays because they describe the life or martyrdom of a saint. They were performed at public festivals to enhance their experience. Almost all surviving miracle plays center on either the Virgin Mary or St. Nicholas, a 4th-century bishop. They employed *deus ex machine* as a trope to depict the saving powers of the holy figures.
- **Mystery plays** were based on biblical events performed by trade professionals. Often they were performed together in cycles which could last for days. The mystery play developed into a series of plays dealing with all the major events in the Christian calendar, from the Creation to the Day of Judgment. By the end of the 15th century, the practice of acting these plays in cycles on festival days was established in several parts of Europe. These plays were performed on a decorated pageant cart that moved about the city. Mystery plays had 4 known cycles- York (48), N-Town (42), Chester (25) & Wakefield (32).

- **Morality plays** were based on Christian themes such as Patience, Mercy, etc. They were allegorical plays that were didactic in nature e.g. *Everyman & Mankind*.

In the Age of Revival (1400-1550), drama went through major transformation in its form and content. Now it became largely secular with common themes. Transition drama includes-

- **Interludes**- a short dramatic piece, especially of a light or farcical in nature. It was formerly introduced between the parts or acts of miracle and morality plays or given as part of other entertainments. In the Age of Revival, it became a form of standalone drama.
- **Farce**- It is a boisterous comic dramatic play that uses highly improbable comic situations, stereotyped characters, extravagant exaggeration, and violent horseplay.

Modern form of literature began in the Elizabethan Era in England with the great dramatists like Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare. Today, some recognized forms of drama are the following-

- **Tragedy**- Tragedy is a branch of drama that addresses the sorrowful downfall of a protagonist in a serious manner. The protagonist in a tragedy is a tragic hero of exalted social status whose own character flaw (Hamartia) combines with fate to bring about his ruin. The tragic form was first developed by the ancient Greeks as a dramatic art. Playwrights like Sophocles and Euripides wrote tragic dramas. These plays resulted in catharsis.
- **Comedy**- It is the opposite of Tragedy; it deals with light matter of non-serious concern. In it the characters fuss over petty issues and it invokes laughter and amusement in the audience.
- **Romantic Comedy**- It is a type of comedy that is based on themes of love. In it a hero & heroine overcome challenges to unite in the end and get married. The play ends with nuptial

celebrations. These were popularized in the times of Shakespeare.

- **Restoration Comedy**- It became popular in the Restoration Age (1660-1700). It focused on social trends and gossips with repartee scenes. They were highly unsentimental. These plays appealed to the middle class. Also known as “Comedy of Manners”.
- **Mime**- Mime is a theatrical performance where the action of a story is told through the movement of the body, without the use of speech. It has its sources back in Ancient Greece, wherein a single masked dancer called *Pantomimus*, performed solo. They are also known as “Dumbshows”. Today, they are generally performed in black dress and white face.
- **Opera**- it is a form of drama in which music is a fundamental component and dramatic roles are taken by singers. It is composed in collaboration between a composer and a librettist, the writer of the text. It incorporates acting, costumes, dance and ballet. The performance is accompanied by an orchestra or smaller musical ensemble, which since the early 19th century has been led by a conductor.
- **Masque**- It is also called masquerade. It began as a form of courtly entertainment with elements of music, dance, costumes, revelry, etc. participants used to wear flamboyant costumes & masks. Masque plays are a form of drama which became popular in Shakespearean times but was mastered by Ben Jonson during the Jacobean Era. They involved allegorical or mythical characters in a scenic setting. Dialogues are in rhymed verse with musical notes accompanied by songs and dance performances. E.g. ‘Comus’ by John Milton, ‘The Masque of Beauty’ by Ben Jonson, etc.
- **Closet Drama**- It is meant to be read only & not performed.
- **Melodrama**- Whereas regular plays focus on action, a melodrama is a dramatic work in which the plot revolves around a strong emotional appeal; emotionality & sentimentality takes precedence over action &

characterization. Characters are primarily flat rather than round. They developed in the 18th century French romance dramas & were later popularized in English dramas as well. They revolved around ethical & moral codes in a family, society or around an individual.

- **Epic Theatre-** It is a type of theatrical movement that popularized in the early to mid-20th century. It was given birth by the theories of a number of theatre practitioners who responded to the political climate of the time through the conception of political dramas. Epic theatre emphasizes the audience's perspective and reaction to the piece through a variety of techniques that deliberately cause them to individually engage in a different way. The purpose of epic theatre is not to encourage an audience to suspend their disbelief, but rather to force them to see their world as it is.

Novel- A novel is a long narrative work of prose fiction. It narrates a story about specific human experiences. It is different from epic poetry in being prose, although both are narrative tales. It is different from a short story in being quite lengthy, though both tell a story. The first specimen of novel in the world is *The Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu, a Japanese noblewoman. It is considered the world's first classic novel and the pinnacle of Japanese literature. Written to entertain Japanese aristocratic women, the novel contains many of the structural elements found in modern novel—a central character, minor characters, narrative events, parallel plots, and conflict. In English literature, the trend of novels began in the 18th century in Augustan Age. Some important characteristics of a novel are-

- It must be written in prose, as opposed to verse.
- It must have a central character as the protagonist, and other side characters. Overall it should have many characters.
- It must have a well-specified plot, which is a unique sequence of events.
- Narration differs based on the different degrees of knowledge that the narrator possesses or the or different points of view that the narrator presents- First person narrator, Third Person Omniscient narrator, etc.
- Of considerable length/word count. There is no specific word count that automatically makes a work a novel, but in general, a short novel would be considered a novella, and even shorter than that would be short fiction.
- A novel is usually divided into individual “chapters” or episodes”, that help to give a better form and ease of understanding to the entire plot.
- A novel must possess fictional content; though it could be semi-fictionalized novels e.g. historical works inspired by true events or person. Remember, a work of pure non-fiction would not be classified as a novel.

Irrespective of the time frame or the length of the novel, a novel's plot primarily follows the three-act structure-

- The opening chapters will be introductory (Act 1). They will be concerned with acquainting readers with the main cast of characters and the world and setting of the story, before a specific incident, usually referred to as the "inciting incident," shakes up the status quo and launches the "real" story.
- Now begins Act 2. From this point, the story will enter a series of complications as the protagonist pursues some goal, encountering obstacles and smaller goals along the way.
- At the midpoint of the story, there will often be some major shift that would be ultimately leading up to the emotional and narrative climax towards the end of the novel.
- "Act 3" concerns itself with this finale and the fallout.

Novels have many sub-genres. They are-

- **Sentimental novel-** A sentimental novel or the "novel of sensibility" is the pioneer form of novels. It is an 18th-century literary genre which celebrates the emotionality, the sentimentality & sensibility. Sentimentalism can be read as a reaction to the overt rationalism of the Augustan Age. These kinds of novels primarily relied on the emotional response of the reader as well as the characters. It features scenes of distress and tenderness to cater to the soft-spots of the heart. E.g. *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson.
- **Realist novel-** Realist novel is a form of fiction that shuns "the abstract" and focus on narrating things, events and stories as they take place in the world as we know it. The primary concern of such novels focus is to truthfully represent the truth as it is, without over romanticization of facts. This type of fiction was the prime feature of the Victorian Age (19th century). Hence, it can be read as a reaction to the over

sentimentality of the preceding age's fiction. Some of the best-known realist authors are Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Mark Twain, Honoré de Balzac, Fyodor Dostoevsky, etc.

- **Historical Novel-** Just like its name suggests, historical fiction is simply a fictional story that takes place at some real, past time in human history. Some instances of historical fiction involve fictional (or semi-fictional) stories about actual historical figures, while others insert wholly original characters into real-life events. Most famous works of historical fiction are *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Gone with the Wind*, etc.
- **Gothic or Horror Novel-** These novels comprise of elements of horror and romanticism along with such supernatural elements like ghosts, spirits, dragons, draculas, etc. It began in 19th century with *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole (1765). Its setting is romantic at a far off location like a medieval fort, castle, ruin or monastery with dark and gloomy setting. E.g. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley & *Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe, etc.
- **Thriller novel-** These are occasionally combined with other genres, most often with mystery or science fiction. The defining characteristic is that these novels are often designed to induce a sense of fear, suspense, or psychological horror in the reader.
- **Mystery or Crime Novel-** Mystery novels revolve around a crime that must be solved, often a murder but not always. Its stereotypical format constitutes of a detective—either professional or amateur—as the protagonist, surrounded by a group of characters who are generally the suspects. Over the course of the plot, the detective will go through each evidence, testimony & alibi to solve the case. Some of the best-known examples are Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* novels, Agatha Christie's novels, *Nancy Drew* series, etc.

- **Science Fiction-** Also known as Sci-Fi. It tends to imagine a world that's different because of technology. Early science fiction included the works of Jules Verne and continued on through George Orwell's seminal classics such as *1984*. In contemporary times, science fiction is a highly popular genre.
- **Fantasy Novel-** Just like sci-fi imagines a world different because of technology, it imagines a world made different due to magic or fantastic elements. Some of the best-known novels include the *Harry Potter* series and *The Lord of the Rings* series.
- **Romance Fiction-** Romance novels have similar themes as the Romances that existed in the medieval French poetry- the theme of love at the centre, a beautiful lass, a pining lover, intense emotions, scenic settings, lofty dialogues, etc. These novels tell a tale of love with a couple at the center. Today's romances are more often than not "required" to have an optimistic or "happy" ending.

Other important forms of fiction are-

Novella- A novella is a narrative prose fiction that has length shorter than that of a novel, but longer than most short stories'. The word derives from the Italian word *novella* which means a short story related to true or apparently true events. The novella as a literary genre began in the early Renaissance Italy, predominantly from the work of Boccaccio (*The Decameron* 1353). This structure was then imitated by succeeding authors, notably the French queen Marguerite de Navarre, whose *Heptaméron* (1559) included 72 original French tales.

Short Story- A short story is a brief fictional prose narrative that is shorter than a novel and a novella. It is usually concerned with a single event conveyed in only one or a few episodes with only a few characters. It observes economy of setting, concise narrative, and the omission of a complex plot. But despite its relatively limited scope, it is able to provide a "complete" or satisfying treatment of its characters and subject.

Biography- It is an account of a person's life given by another writer. If one's life account is written by oneself, then it is called autobiography. Various other literary forms can have biographical elements, even if they're not entirely biographies. They give out objective portrayal of a person's life. Generally, Biographies are written with the motive to inspire and motivate.

Essay- An essay is a piece of prose that can be analytical, interpretative, descriptive, critical, etc. The point of view of the narrative is personal and often limited to a certain perspective. Essays became highly popular in the 18th century in English literature. Hence, that age is known as Age of Prose.

Fable- Fable is a literary form that constitutes of such varied characters as animals, birds, legendary characters, natural

phenomenon, etc. These non-human entities are given human characteristics to bring home a moral or meaning. Fables are didactic in nature and can be either prose or verse.

Folk tales- Folk stories or tales are about a person like a saint or a king or an event. It belongs to a particular geographical region and is native of it. It can be viewed as a part of oral tradition of storytelling. It may involve supernatural & larger than life characters.

Myth- A myth is a folk narrative of unknown origin. It belongs to the oral tradition of storytelling. It has both- fictional and non-fictional elements. It is generally based on religious or heroic events or characters. It relies heavily on symbolism.

Parable- It is the same as fable with the only difference that while fable has non-human characters, Parable has human characters. It is didactic in nature as well. Its first examples can be seen in The Bible in the Parables of Jesus. It can be in both forms- Prose or Verse. It is short in length and often passes on through both oral & written traditions.