Different forms of English Literature and their relative importance

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ABSTRACT: English is a universal language which is spoken by almost everyone irrespective of what they are and who they are. The main aim of learning is not to make it difficult but easy, attractive and understandable. What makes it attractive is the understanding of the different forms of English Literature or the different genres of English Literature and its relative importance. Here is a detailed study of the different forms of English Literature, functions of the genres and its relative importance.
Key Words: genres, tone of the writing, **poetry, fiction, drama, prose, non-fiction,** Relative importance

1. Introduction

Literature is the embodiment of not merely art but also holds high the mirror of life as it reflects what we actually learn from the understanding of life. Literature paves new horizons to achieve something that gives a different understanding to each ones work of art. When we peruse through any work of art, it just enables us to broaden our understanding and perspectives

Literature, most generically, is a collection of any written work. More restrictively, literature refers to writing considered to be an art form or writing deemed to have an artistic or intellectual value, and sometimes deploys language in ways that differ from ordinary usage.

It has its roots from Latin that was *literatura/litteratura* (derived itself from littera: that meant letter or handwriting) was used to refer to all written accounts or documents. This concept has changed its meaning over time to include texts that are spoken or sung (oral literature), and non-written verbal art forms. Developments in print technology have allowed an ever-growing distribution and proliferation of written works, culminating into electronic literature. Over the period of time there emerged various definitions on literature: it is a "culturally relative definition".

Literature can be classified into being fiction or non-fiction, and poetry or prose. Fiction can be further distinguished into other major forms such as the novel, short story, or drama; and such works are often categorized according to historical periods or their adherence to certain aesthetic features or genres.

The objective is to make readers and literature lovers understand the different genres of English Literature and understand its relative importance in the present scenario.

Different forms of English Literature/ Genres

Genre is a type of art, literature, or music characterized by a specific form, content or style. For example: literature has four main genres: poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction. All of these genres have

specific features and functions that distinguish them from one another. Hence, it becomes important for the reader to know what he reads and to which genre his interest belongs to in order to understand the message it conveys, as they may have certain expectations prior to the reading concerned.

All of these genres have particular features and functions that differentiate them from one another . A genre is a broad term that translates from the French to mean *kind* or *type*. Literary, or written, works are classified as being part of a particular genre based on a number of things:

● The tone of the writing

● The writing style

● Narrative technique

● Length

● Content – what the written work is about – for example: war, history or romance

Written works that share a lot of the same characteristics are said to be in the same genre. This helps readers understand what to expect when they pick up a written work to read. Function of Genre: Different genres have different roles to play. For example, fiction and dramatic genres help students and writers learn and improve their communication skills. A poetic genre, on the other hand, enhances imaginative and emotional power of the readers. Non-fictional texts and essays help readers develop analytical and persuasive capabilities. However, the major function of genre is to establish a code of behavior between the writers and audience, and keep the readers informed about the topics discussed or the themes presented.

2. **Types of Genres:** There are five types of genres in literature, which include:

A. Poetry

Poetry is the first major literary genre. All types of poetry share specific characteristics. In fact, poetry is a form of text that follows a particular meter and rhythm, with each line and syllable. It is further subdivided into other different genres, such as epic poem, narrative, romantic, dramatic, and lyric. Dramatic poetry includes melodrama, tragedy, and comedy, while other poems include ode, sonnet, elegy, ballad, song, and epic.

A poem can be also called as a collection of spoken or written words that expresses ideas or emotions in a powerfully vivid and imaginative style. In fact, it is a literary technique that is different from prose or ordinary speech, as it is either in metrical pattern or in free verse. Writers or poets express their emotions through this medium more easily, as they face difficulty when expressing through some other medium. It serves the purpose of a light to take the readers towards the right path. Also, sometimes it teaches them a moral lesson through sugar-coated language.

Popular examples of epic poems include *Paradise Lost, by John Milton, The Iliad* and *The Odyssey, by Homer.*

Examples of romantic poems include *Red Red Rose, by Robert Burns.* All these poetic forms share specific features, such as they do not follow paragraphs or sentences; they use stanzas and lines instead. Some forms follow very strict rules of length, and number of stanzas and lines, such as villanelle, sonnet, and haiku. Others may be free-form, like *Feelings, Now,* by Katherine Foreman, which is devoid of any regular

meter and rhyme scheme. Besides that, often poetry uses figurative language, such as metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia, hyperbole, and alliteration to create heightened effect.

Types of poems

- **Sonnet**: A short rhyming poem with 14 lines. The original sonnet form was invented in the 13/14th century by Dante and an Italian philosopher named Francisco Petrarch. The form remained largely unknown until it was found and developed by writers such as Shakespeare. Sonnets use iambic meter in each line and use line-ending rhymes.

For example: "Italian Sonnet" by James DeFord , Shall I compare thee by William Shakespeare

Limerick: A five-line witty poem with a distinctive rhythm. The first, second and fifth lines, the longer lines, rhyme. The third and fourth shorter lines rhyme. (A-A-B-B-A).

For example: *There was an Old Man with a Beard* by Edward Lear, *To Miss Vera Beringer* by Lewis Carroll

Haiku: This ancient form of poem writing is renowned for its small size as well as the precise punctuation and syllables needed on its three lines. It is of ancient Asian origin.

Haiku's are composed of 3 lines, each a phrase. The first line typically has 5 syllables, second line has 7 and the 3rd and last line repeats another 5. In addition there is a seasonal reference included.

For example: *Thirds* by Jeffrey Winke, *To a Leg of Heron* by Basho

Narrative: A narrative poem tells the story of an event in the form of a poem. There is a strong sense of narration, characters, and plot. It may be dramatic, with objectives and diverse characters.

Narrative poetry may be short or long, and the story it relates to may be simple or complex.

For example: The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer,**The Raven** by Edgar Allen Poe,The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Epic: A lengthy narrative poem in grand language celebrating the adventures and accomplishments of a legendary or conventional hero.

For example: The Odyssey by Homer, Iliad by Homer, Metamorphoses by Ovid and so on

Free Verse:A Free Verse Poem does not follow any rules. Their creation is completely in the hands of the author. Rhyming, syllable count, punctuation, number of lines, number of stanzas, and line formation can be done however the author wants in order to convey the idea. There is no right or wrong way to create a Free Verse poem.

For Example: "When I heard the learn'd astronomer" by Walt Whitman, "Mother to Son" By Langston Hughes, "Sloe Gin" By Seamus Heaney "After the Sea-Ship" by Walt Whitmanand so on.

Acrostic: - An acrostic poem is a poem where the one letter in each line spells out a word or phrase vertically that acts as the theme or message of the poem. The word used for the acrostic can be the name of a person you are writing the acrostic about, a message such as happy birthday or a theme such as acceptance, love or hope.

For example:

A Family

F- fiercely loyal to those we love.
A- accepting each for who and what they are.
M- matchless in our hopes and dreams for one another.

I- instilling pride in our hard fought heritage.
L- learning about our past guides us in the future.
Y- you love and cherish the people of your heart.

<u>Cinquain:</u>A cinquain is a 5 line poem that follows a specific format. There are various types of cinquains. Some are created with a number of words or syllables in mind. Another form is created using various parts of speech. For example:

<u>Castle</u>

Castle

Strong, beautiful

Imposing, protecting, watching

Symbolizes wealth and power

Fortress

<u>Concrete:</u>A concrete poem is written in a way that the words create the shape of the subject of the poem.

For example: George Herbert's <u>"Easter Wings"</u>, George Starbuck's <u>"Poem in the Shape of a Potted Christmas Tree"</u>.

<u>Drama</u>

Drama is a mode of fictional representation through <u>dialogue</u> and performance. It is one of the literary genres, which is an imitation of some action. Drama is also a type of a <u>play</u> written for theater, television, radio, and film.

In simple words, a drama is a composition in <u>verse</u> or <u>prose</u> presenting a story in pantomime or dialogue. It contains <u>conflict</u> of characters, particularly the ones who perform in front of <u>audience</u> on the stage. The person who writes drama for stage directions is known as a "dramatist" or "playwright."

It is also called a <u>play</u>. Its written text contains dialogues, and stage directions. This genre has further <u>categories</u> such as comedy, tragedy, and <u>tragicomedy</u>. <u>William Shakespeare</u> is known as the father of English drama. His well-known plays include *Taming of the Shrew, Romeo & Juliet, and* <u>*Hamlet.*</u> Greek playwrights were the pioneers in this field, such as Sophocles' masterpiece *Oedipus Rex,* and *Antigone,* while modern dramas include *Death of a Salesman, by Arthur Miller.*

<u>***Types of Drama:***</u> Let us consider a few popular types of drama:

<u>Comedy</u> – Comedies are lighter in <u>tone</u> than ordinary works, and provide a happy <u>conclusion</u>. The intention of dramatists in comedies is to make their audience laugh. Hence, they use quaint circumstances, unusual characters, and witty remarks.

For example: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

<u>Tragedy</u> – Tragic dramas use darker themes, such as disaster, pain, and death. Protagonists often have a <u>tragic flaw</u> a characteristic that leads them to their downfall.

For example: *Oedipus Rex by Sophocles*

<u>Farce</u> – Generally, a farce is a nonsensical <u>genre</u> of drama, which often overacts or engages slapstick <u>humor</u>.

For example:*The Importance of Being Earnest by Oscar Wilde*

<u>Melodrama</u> – Melodrama is an exaggerated drama, which is sensational and appeals directly to the senses of the audience. Just like the farce, the

characters are of a single dimension and simple, or may be stereotyped.

For example: *The Heiress by Henry James*

Musical Drama – In musical dramas, dramatists not only tell their stories through acting and dialogue, but through dance as well as music. Often the story may be comedic, though it may also involve serious subjects.

For example: "The Patient Observer" by Simeon Strunsky, "Old Fogy" by James Huneker

Prose

This type of written text is different from poetry in that it has complete sentences organized into paragraphs. Unlike poetry, prose focuses on characters and plot, rather than focusing on sounds. It includes short stories and novels, while fiction and non-fiction are its sub genres. Prose is further categorized into essays, speeches, sermons, and interpretations.

While there have been many critical debates over the correct and valid construction of prose, the reason for its adoption can be attributed to its loosely-defined structure, which most writers feel comfortable using when expressing or conveying their ideas and thoughts. It is the standard style of writing used for most spoken dialogues, fictional as well as topical and factual writing, and discourses. It is also the common language used in newspapers, magazines, literature, encyclopedias, broadcasting, philosophy, law, history, the sciences, and many other forms of communication.

Types of prose

Prose in Novels: This is usually written in the form of a narrative, and may be entirely a figment of the author's imagination.

For example *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy

Prose in Speeches: Prose used in speeches often expresses thoughts and ideas of the speaker.

For example: *No Easy Walk to Freedom speech by Nelson Mandela, Equal Rights for Women speech* by U.S. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm

Prose in Plays: Prose written in plays aims to be dramatic and eventful.

For example: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams, *As You Like It* by William Shakespeare

Short Story: Can be read in a single reading, it is simple and organized into a plot. For example: "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry, "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant.

Novel: An extended work of prose fiction that tells a story of a considerable length which also shows characters and their actions in everyday life. For example: Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë, Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen.

Novella: A novella is a work of narrative prose fiction, longer than a short story but shorter than a novel.

For example: "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho, "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens

Essay: An essay is, generally, a piece of writing that gives the author's own argument but the definition is vague, overlapping with those of a paper, an article, a pamphlet, and a short story. For example: "What I believe" by E. M. Forster, "Golden Fruit" by A. A. Milne.

Fiction: Fiction has three categories that are, realistic, non-realistic, and semi-

fiction. Usually, fiction work is not real and therefore, authors can use complex figurative language to touch readers' imaginations. Unlike poetry, it is more structured, follows proper grammatical pattern, and correct mechanics. A fictional work may incorporate fantastical and imaginary ideas from everyday life. It comprises some important elements such as plot exposition, foreshadowing, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Popular examples of literary fiction include, *James Joyce's* novel *A Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man,* Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities,* Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice,* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird.*

Non-Fiction: Non-fiction is a vast category that also has sub-genres; it could be creative like a personal essay, or factual, like a scientific paper. It may also use figurative language, however, not unlike poetry, or fiction has. Sometimes, non-fiction may tell a story, like an autobiography, or sometimes it may convey information to readers.

Other examples of non-fiction include biographies, diaries, memoirs, journals, fantasies, mysteries, and romances. A popular example of non-fiction genre is Michael Pollen's highly celebrated book, *The Omnivore's* Dilemma: *A Natural History of Four Meals, which is an account of the eating habits of Americans.*

Relative importance of the respective genres. Each genre in English Literature has an importance of its own. One cannot just afford to ignore the importance that each form of literature defines in it.

Poetry enables us to write, read, and understand any text. Poetry can give us a healthy outlet for surging emotions. Reading original poetry aloud in class can foster trust and empathy in the classroom community, while also emphasizing speaking and listening skills that are often neglected in high school literature classes. The point of reading a poem is not to try to "solve" it. Still, that quantifiable process of demystification is precisely what teachers are encouraged to teach students, often in lieu of curating a powerful experience through literature.

Like all the arts, drama allows us to communicate with and understand others in new ways. Perhaps more than any other art form, drama also provides training in the very practical aspects of communication so necessary in today's increasingly information-centered world. Participation in dramatic activity requires self-control and discipline that will serve the personal well in all aspects of life. People who enact in dramas will learn to work together, to cooperate, and find the best way for each member of a group to contribute, and also listen to and accept viewpoints and contributions of others. Drama is an important tool for preparing all to live and work in a world that is increasingly team-oriented rather than hierarchical.

Prose adds style, pace, and flow. Think about how boring poems would be if they were continuous run-on sentences or if stories consisted of "Bob did this, and this, and then this, and then..." Good prose engulfs the reader and takes ordinary sentences and makes them into art. Understanding and being able to identify the elements of *prose* can actually help you become a better reader. Knowing the elements of the various kinds of *prose* helps a reader identify

Conclusion

Literature indeed has its richness in its texts, and one certainly will know its richness only when one reads through the

genres that make it rich. Studying the different forms of literature, opens doors into how we organize our world exploring how literature allows us to see how language is intertwined with both describing a view of the world and interacting with others in it.

Literature paves ways into understanding each genre in its unique and simple forms; be it poetry, drama or prose one cannot argue on the fact of which genre is important and which is not. Over the years there evolved various styles of writing and all these genres hold high the not only style but also human values that enshrine sensitivity, sensibility and understanding as one reads through.

Each genre enables us to read and imbibe qualities of uniqueness that makes us aware of the treasure each of them contains in it. Literature is a mirror to life and this is what makes life reflective in which ever form it is.

This assignment has broadened my perspective and approach to literature as each genre sustains its own importance and relevance in studying literature till date.

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