

Introductory Lecture

University of Djelfa

Level: Master 1

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Module: Teaching Literary Texts

Lecture 01: Introductory Lecture

What is Literature?

Though there are many definitions of the term literature, a need to find a working definition is still a concern for many scholars. As a starting point for discussion, read these definitions and select the one that suits your own thoughts about the term.

- 1- Literature is the expression of thought in language (New-man)
- 2- Literature is the expression of national mind in writing (Channing)
- 3- Literature is the study of human morality (John Morley)
- 4- Literature is the denunciation of the times in which one lives (Camilo Jose Cela)
- 5- Literature is imaginative or creative writing, especially of recognized artistic value
(The American Heritage Dictionary)

Based on a reading of these definitions, one can say that literature is an umbrella term that covers artistic as well as individualistic representation of reality. Mainly represented through language, literature gives insights into the psychology of human being by reflecting on the inner and outer conflicts of personality. Literature further reveals different facets of the society problems and portrays individuals' struggles with socio-economic and cultural realities.

As a teacher of literature, it is worth noting that an understanding of the multiplicity of the meanings of literature opens up varieties of interpretations as well as the utilization of different approaches that could help teachers and students approach the meaning of literary text.

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What distinguishes literature from mere writing?

Students often fail to distinguish between literary and non-literary texts. Scholars have identified three main areas that could be of use to signal the differences between the two types of text.

1- Fictionality:

Fictionality can be a main area of difference between the literary and non-literary texts. J.A. Cuddon comments on the fictionality of literary text and states that fictionality “implies that the work in question has superior qualities, that is well above the ordinary run of written works”. Here fictionality entails giving the reader distinctive and often fictional settings that builds up the whole narrative.

2- Specialized Language

Another important difference between literary and non-literary text is that literary text utilizes a very distinctive language. The language often attracts the curiosity of readers and helps them enjoy the narrative without feeling a necessity to finish reading the text which is a feature of non-literary text.

3- Ambiguity

Gillian Lazar summarizes three considerations when measuring the ambiguity of literary text.

For Lazar, Ambiguity of literary text can be seen in

- a- The quality of being open to multiple interpretations.
- b- Allows room for doubt and complexity.
- c- Should not be confused with vagueness, which is generally a sign of poor writing.

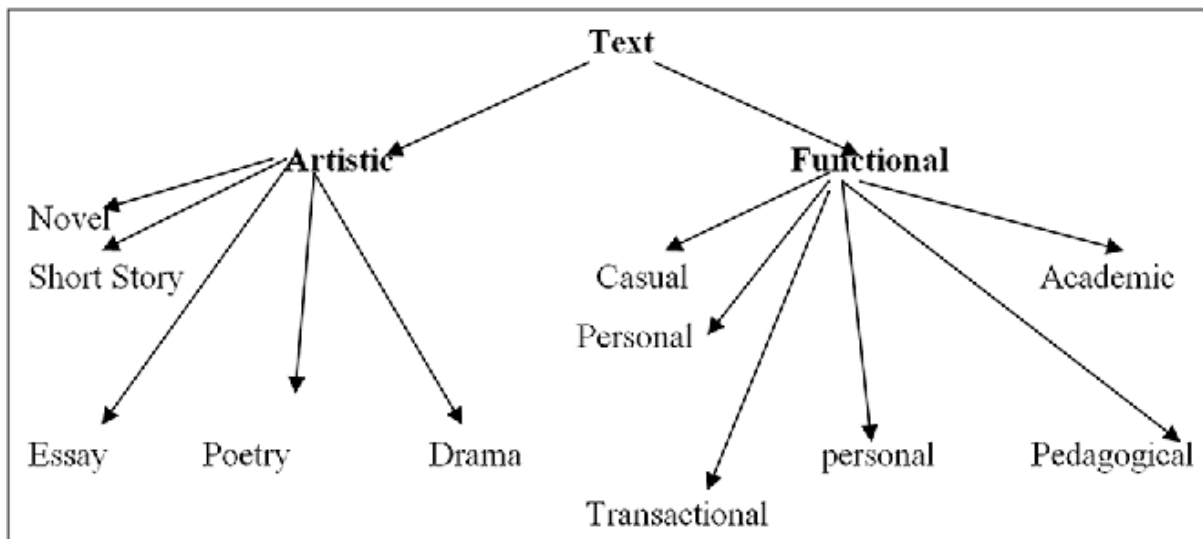


Figure 1. Lucas Classification of Literary Texts

Why Teach Literature?

