CHAPTER II

ENGLISH LITERATURE

2.1 WHAT’S ENGLISH LITERATURE?

To answer this question, you should first know the meaning of *literature*. There are a lot of definitions of *literature*. Some short explanation on it would be useful for you. Very often it simply means anything that is written: time tables, dialogues, textbooks, travel brochures and so on. If you are thinking of buying a bicycle or a motorcycle or a washing machine, you will probably want to see the literature about it. If you are medical student, you will have to read the literature about surgery. An advertisement for soap is as much literature as Shakespeare’s plays or Dickens’s novels. So, we may conclude all written materials, like this general grouping: historical books, magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, novels, catalogues, plays, short stories, encyclopedias, etc. We can divide this large mass of material into two different groups. The first one mainly presents information and the next mainly gives some entertainment.

In English we use the word in at least two different ways: *informative literature* and *imaginative literature*. Informative literature tells us about facts, explanations, history, real ‘great’ life figure, etc. It tells us the world, for instance, the life of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, The story of Malcolm-X, etc. Its main purpose is to offer knowledge.

Hence, there is also imaginative literature that aims to arouse thoughts and feelings. Its author expresses his ideas, his feelings, his attitude, he may talks of things; people, etc. He wants to communicate feelings, not facts; emotion, not information only. Imaginative literature according to many men of letters and writers has fuller and deeper sense than informative literature. Now when we use the term of literature in this book, we will be talking about written material that deals with thought and feelings in imaginative or ‘serious’ literature. This kind of literature we will discuss, the one that appeals to the imagination rather than to the intellect; to
the emotion rather than to the reason of the reader. Rees defines this kind of literature is writing which expresses and communicate thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life.

In addition, there is a little note for the definition of literature. Many of the things we now call literature began to live without being written at all. Long time ago before we can read the printed forms of their literary works, there were narrators who moved from place to place to tell stories. Even today we find folks songs and comic verses passing from person to person by word of mouth. In English literature we see the word ‘ballad’, a simple, spirited poem in short stanzas, narrating some popular story, there were old songs, legends, folk stories, or folk tales handed down from mouth to mouth since people had not known alphabets. Thus, we see what is called oral literature. Some epics were told, several lyrics were presented orally, even they were sometimes “sung” or accompanied with certain musical instruments to attract audience. Plays were prepared and performed from place to place.

Literature is generally divided into three groups, respectively prose, drama, and poetry. Prose uses language not in verse form, e.g., novels, short stories, novellas, etc. Drama is play with its act(s) and its scenes in dialogues, conversations, comedies, tragedies, tragic-comedies, etc. Poetry is the art of poets; poems, in verse form, e.g. ballads, epics, lyrical poetry, etc. There will be further discussions in details on each group above.

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<th>What is Literature?</th>
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<td>* It is sometimes defined as ‘anything written’.</td>
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<td>* However we can surely distinguish between literature in the sense of any writing and literature in the sense of verbal works of art.</td>
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<td>* Robert Frost said,” Literature is a performance in words”</td>
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<td>* Another view holds that literature has in it, a sense of entertaining display and provides pleasure in addition to the element of ‘truth’ involved</td>
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2.2 WHAT’S GOOD LITERATURE?

First, we have to combat a kind of argument in which some people do not like literature because they think it is not true, just made up, not real life. They would say science and history are true; they deal with life; they are real. Therefore, they would say there are no good literature, except that of science and history. It is NOT TRUE!
We must see the very important difference between truth and fact. A fact is a statement of a thing done or existing. If you drop a stone, it will (Insya-Allah =If Allah wished it 😊) fall to the ground. No matter where you are on earth, if Allah gives permission it always happens. That a man will die is a fact. That animals need food to live is a fact. A truth is a little more difficult to be fine. Loosely speaking, a truth is something people agree on as being so. We live by truths, and truths vary. What may be true for one person may not be true for another. One simple example: one group of people may believe that suicide is wrong, dishonorable; this is their belief, their truth. Another group of people may believe that is right, honorable; this is their truth. Truths are what men live by, and to live, men may change their truths or beliefs from time to time. Truth is what some people believe, whether you agree or not. Facts are true for everyone. What may be a truth to you may be a fact to someone else. Certainly, truths govern our behavior, then, for if we think something to be so, we tend to behave accordingly.

In literature an author will cause his characters to behave in a certain way because he accepts truths and knows certain facts and he is always concerned about how truth and fact relate to each other. The writer of literature does not differ from each. He will select from the facts of the world or make up certain facts so that he can present a truth or human nature. The author has arranged facts in order to present us with a picture that makes us think and feel. We accept the facts for the time being and read the story. We do not bother whether we will find the island the author speaks of or not if we look for it.

On the basis of how a writer selects his facts and how he arranges his facts, we may judge whether his work is good or not. Even if the writer makes up facts, they have to seem real to us. Made-up facts have to fit plausibly with the real facts. The good writer will let the facts speak for themselves. He will not tell the reader the “answers”. If a writer is telling a war story, he doesn’t have to tell us that killing is bad, that war is evil. If he arranges his materials right and present it well, we will be able to see that war is one of the evils of mankind.

Good literature must seem real. People who read a lot recognize good literature, and they are the ones who keep good literature alive. People still read Shakespeare’s plays because they realize that the plays are still meaningful. Good literatures live also because it gives pleasure. It lives not only because of the way in which the thought and feeling expressed, but also because
of the way in which the thought and feeling are expressed—the style. In other words, we are now talking about technical skill or craftsmanship. Writing literature is not only a matter of ideas and inspiration; but also a lot of practice and technique. A poet reminds us in a couplet that “True ease in writing comes from Art, not Chance;/ As those move easiest who have learned to dance.” But the author’s all technical skills must be accompanied by his creative imagination. Without this it will be useless. In short, technical skill or craftsmanship—the art of the ‘the right word in the right place’ is something we expect to find in most good literature is made by technique alone.

Another quality one may expect to find in good literature is originality. Of course no work of art can be original through and through. To find an original subject for a novel, for example, would be an almost impossible task, since writers have already dealt in one way or another with almost every imaginable human story or situation; but the novelist may nevertheless see an old story or an old idea in some quiet new light. None of Shakespeare’s plays was original in the sense that the stories and the character were created, so to speak, out of nothing. Hamlet and Macbeth were real historical characters; Othello was in all probability a character invented by an Italian novel writer; but the plays Shakespeare made out of these figures were truly original in the sense that they showed old characters and stories and situations in a new and fascinating light.

It must be remembered that the central themes of all literature—life, truth, justice and love are in themselves unchanging; so are most of our ideas about these great subjects. However, writers continue to discover new ways of looking at them, and will continue to do so as long as mankind exists. Most of good literature is traditional and original at the same time. Originality, then, consists not of inventing new themes, but of seeing and expressing the old unalterable themes in a new way, with the author’s own words and with his own ways.

Another, and very important feature which must be found in almost all-good literature is ‘moral consciousness’. By this, it is a feeling on the part of the writer, and conveyed by him to the reader, that the words ‘good’ and ‘evil’ have a real meaning—a meaning that lies beyond the ideas of right and wrong that happen to be accepted at one particular time or place. It doesn’t mean that great writers ever intend to moralize, or to impress upon us their own ideas
of right and wrong. What is stressed here is that their works continually remind us that good and evil are real and that we cannot be neutral towards them. Sophocles, Dante, Milton, Goethe, Henrik Ibsen and Thomas Hardy at once spring to mind as writers strongly conscious of the everlasting war of good against evil. Indeed it is impossible to see how serious literature could exist at all without this moral consciousness.

Good literature should (to use Hamlet’s phrase) “hold the mirror up to nature”. It is reflecting some thought or feeling which we immediately recognize as being ‘true to life’. It should be ‘life-enhancing’ or (as Matthew Arnold said of poetry) ‘a criticism of life’. Andre Harjana said that “Sastra berurusan dengan kebangkitan kesadaran jiwa dan penghidupan suara hati nurani, karena yang dijawabnya adalah proses perkembangan dan perubahan” (Hardjana, 1985:22). This means that appreciating a literary work has also the same significance and meaning as understanding human’s existence along with all of his mental and inner-self problem.

We expect a writer, whether he is a poet, novelist or dramatist, passing on to us some feeling or idea that at once recognized as being, either actually or potentially, a part of our experience. We see truths, facts or realities in life of human kind or those things in various objects in certain circumstances, certain places, and certain times. We may expect those writers to moralize or criticize or advise our life directly our (mostly) indirectly so that we may lead a good or better behavior of life. The kind of closeness to life is one of the distinguishing qualities of good literature. It follows that good writing can only come out of actual human experience that counts. But, what counts is the quality of the experience, it strength and vitality, form which good writing comes. We have the belief that literature has a moral purpose.

2.3 SOME THEORIES OF LITERATURE

Most theories of literature in the world can be put into these three classifications which can be called “imitative”, “expressive”, and ‘affective.”
2.3.1 THE IMITATIVE OR ‘MIMETIC’ THEORY

This theory holds that art is an imitation of something. In his *Poetics*, a Greek figure, Aristotle (382-322 B.C) says, for example, that a tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious and complete. Since imitation now has pejorative associations, it is well to think of Aristotle’s ‘mimesis’ as not only “imitation” but also “re-creation” or “re-presentation”. In an artistic imitation, Aristotle holds a form is presented in a substance not natural to it. Thus, Michelangelo imitated Moses in stone; Shakespeare imitated Caesar in an actor’s words and gestures. Aristotle says that this natural tendency to imitate is combined with a tendency toward rhythm or pattern, and the result can be a work of art. He says that art is superior to history because where history sticks to the facts, art refines nature, showing what should have happened in a world free from accident. In short, the artist doesn’t imitate a hundred percents; he recreated reality and presents it to us in a fashion in which we see its essence more clearly. It is imaginative and interpretative; it reflects a special view of reality.

The imitative theory often includes the notion that art gives us not only pleasure but knowledge, insight into the nature of reality. The happenings in the novel or on the stage not only seem to resemble to things in real life, but they also clarify real life, making us say; “yes, people are like that, but I hadn’t noticed it before”.

* Aristotle – Art is an imitation of something – thing, person or event, in our world
* Re-creation or re-presentation in a form not natural to it.
* Imitative instinct innate in humans, coupled with rhythm, harmony & pattern, it forms art.
* Art draws only on the perfect example and not the imperfect aspects of nature – “Artist refines nature”
* Art is imaginative and interpretive; representation is, as the artist perceives it.
* Blind imitation? No, creativity is in artist’s outlook.
* Art – insight into reality?
2.3.2 THE EXPRESSIVE THEORY

This theory holds that the artist is not essentially an imitator but a man who expresses his feelings. Two quotations from William Wordsworth will make this theory clearer. “Poetry”, he said, “is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”; the poet’s job is to treat things not as they are.... But as they seem to exist to the senses, and the passion.”

The artist’s vision, the theory holds, is more inward than outward; the work of art is not an imitation of the external world but an expression of the internal world, the embodiment of an emotion. What value does expressive writing have? One can reply it is valuable for the writer: “If I don’t write to empty my mind,” Byron said, “I go mad”. But if this relief from pressure is its only value, the writer works might just as well be left lying on the writer’s desk. Most expressions of emotions, after all, are valueless to everyone but the person expressing them—our laughter, mumblings, and cries of despair are all very expressive. They afford us a relief, but who would call them works of art that are of value to other people? Not all expressions of emotion, clearly, are works of art. And conversely, if work of art is an expression of emotion, it must be a very special kind of expression.

Advocates of the expressive theory, however, have yet another argument, this one stronger: by showing us how he sees and feels something, the writer may pluck the blindfold from our eyes and melt the ice around our heart. Through his work(s) he try to widen the area of our sensibilities. The author’s view of something may force upon us to aware that our own views are narrow. An awareness of how other people feel is, after all, a way of expanding and enriching one’s own personality.

Wordsworth:
"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings“…
the poet’s job is "to treat of things not as they are...but as they seem to exist to the senses, and the passions."
* The artist does not imitate the external world, but expresses the world within him.
* The sincerity of the emotion being expressed is indicative of the "trueness" of the work.
* This theory holds that a piece of art ought to arouse some emotion or at least affect the perceiver in some way
In Alexander Pope’s words, the role of the artist:
“Gives my heart a thousand pains,
Can make  me feel each passion that he feigns
Enrage, compose, with more than magic of art
With pity and with terror tear my heart
And snatch me o’er the earth or through the air
To  Thebes, to Athens, when he will, and where “
TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

From the movie, Dead Poets Society:

“We don’t read and write poetry because it’s cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. In other side, poetry, morality and beauty. These are what we stay alive for. “

2.3.3 THE AFFECTIVE THEORY

This theory holds that a work of art ought to arouse a particular emotion, or affect in (the psychological term) the perceiver. This theory is often close related to the expressive theory; the artist allegedly expresses his emotion, embodying it in a work of art. This work evokes in the perceiver a similar or identical emotion. Presumably by describing certain things in a certain way, the writer can then evoke the proper response. The most famous presentation of this theory is Tolstoy’s “What is art”, a sentence of which is here quoted:

Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that others are infected by these feelings, and also experience them.

Affective theory hold that the stimulation of certain emotions is, for some reason, good: we need an occasional release (a good cry), or we need to have our emotions organized onto a pleasant pattern (as a child needs his mother’s smile, to induce his good spirits). That some readers seek emotional stimulus from books is beyond doubt. Often the lady who asks the rental librarian to recommend a good novel is asking for a book that will allow her fully to identify herself with the heroine, experiencing burst of love, sorrow, and forth. But a good work of art neither invites this identification nor triggers stereotyped emotions. It shows deep genuine humane interests, so deep it is that the reader may see the depth of related values, conflicts, dilemmas the hero faces and also the sweetness he tastes in a much bigger and weightier scope, not it is just touching our emotion superficially.

Usually the affective theory insists that the aim is not to induce a temporary emotional state, but to induce an emotional state that will lead to action. Such a theory might hold, for
example, that the artist is to stimulate in people an awareness of the horror of war that they will go out and do something about stopping wars. Tolstoy, who held such a view, regarded the evocation of emotion as an end but as a means. Alexander Pope, too, holds that the aim of art is to reform those whom it touches.

* These theories also hold that stimulation of certain emotions is good.
* Most readers seek emotional stimulus from books and they want to identify themselves with the central character.
* It also insists that the main aim is not to induce a temporary emotional state, but to induce an emotional state that will lead to some kind of action.

Back to the opening question: *What is Literature?*

The simple truth is that there is no satisfactory answer!

But it is possible for us to say that works of art:

* Give an insight into reality (as the imitative theory holds)
* Broaden our awareness of possibilities of experience (as the expressive theory holds)
* They valuably affect our nervous system (as the affective theory holds). However, all of these theories need not hold for a piece of art. They just contribute to a deeper and a more conscious awareness of what is valuable in the works we read.