

**MORALITY AND AESTHETICS IN
ENGLISH LITERATURE
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الدروس الاخلاقية والجمالية في الادب الانكليزي

الملخص

تكمن قيمة الادب في كونه ترجمة للحياة . فالكاتب القدير هو ذلك الكاتب الذي يستطيع ان يسخر اعماله الادبية لترجمة احداث الحياة في العالم الذي يعيش فيه ترجمة واقعية وينقلها الى القارئ بأسلوب اخلاقي شيق وممتع. انه بلا شك انسان يحس بالانطباعات التي تتركها في نفسه هذه الاحداث ويتجاوب معها . فهو أي الاديب يرى الاشياء بوضوح وبعمق اكثر من أي شخص آخر. وعليه تراه يحاول نقل احساسه ومشاعره التي يحصل عليها من خلال مفردات حياته التي يعيشها في عالمه الادبي الجميل الى العالم المادي الذي يعيش فيه الناس العاديون . وهكذا نجد ان اكثر الكتاب والادباء في العالم يركزون في اعمالهم الادبية على امرين مهمين الا وهما الافادة والمتعة وهذه هي فعلا وظيفة الادب والاديب وهي تقديم الموعدة والدروس الاخلاقية ليستفيد منها القارئ بأسلوب جميل وممتع.

تتناول هذه الدراسة الكيفية التي يعتمدها الكتاب والادباء العظام مثل شكسبير ووليام ووردسورث وماثيو آرنولد ودكتور ساميول جونسون وسير فيليب سدني وجورج هيربرت الخ... في تصوير حالة الكفاح التي يعيشها بطل القصة من اجل الكشف عن الحقيقة وهذه هي فعلا المهنة الاخلاقية التي يمتنها هؤلاء الكتاب والادباء من اجل تقديم كل ما هو مفيد وممتع .

يتضمن هذا البحث مقدمة وثلاثة فصول . يتناول الفصل الاول مهمة فن الشعر في طرح الدروس الاخلاقية بصورة جميلة وممتعة . كما يتناول الفصل الثاني الروايات والقصص الخيالية ايضا من اجل اعطاء الدروس الاخلاقية بأسلوب شيق وجميل . اما الفصل الثالث

يتناول فن المسرحية للغرض ذاته . وينتهي البحث ببعض الاستنتاجات التي تتوصل اليها هذه الدراسة .

Abstract

The value of literature lies in the fact that it is an interpretation of life. A great writer is one who interprets life greatly; one who is exquisitely responsive to the most subtle impressions of the outside world. He sees things far more clearly, and he feels them far more deeply, than do men of ordinary stock, and he endeavors to convey this heightened sense of the wonder and glory of the world to our duller and grosser perceptions.

Almost all writers attempt, in their literary works, to concentrate on two important aspects, namely the moral and the aesthetic.

This paper, therefore, posits that literary works by different writers, such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Samuel Johnson, Sidney, George Herbert, etc... show, in their works, the protagonist's pursuit for true morality.

The paper consists of an introduction and three chapters; the first chapter deals with poetry, the second with prose, the third with drama and a conclusion which sums up the findings of the study.

1. Introduction:

The subjects we study at school can be divided roughly into two groups – the sciences and the arts. The sciences include mathematics, geography, chemistry, physics, and so on. Among the arts are drawing, painting, modeling, needlework, drama, poetry, music, literature, etc... The purpose of education is to fit us for life in a civilized community, and it seems to follow from the subjects

we study that the two most important things in civilized life are ART and SCIENCE.

Both the scientist and the artist seek something which they think is real. Their methods are different. The scientist sets his brain to work and, by a slow process of trial and error, after long experiment and enquiry, he finds his answer. In other words the scientist looks for facts, and when he discovers them he makes them public knowledge. These facts cause excitement. The artist is also after facts and the truth as well and when he finds the truth he also makes it public knowledge in various art forms. The artist wants to make something which will produce just that sort of excitement in the minds of other people – the excitement of discovering something new about reality. He may make a picture, a play, a poem, but he wants to make the people who see or hear or read his creation feel very excited and say about his creation, 'That is beautiful.' Beauty, then, could be defined as the quality found in any object which produces in your mind a special kind of excitement. "Beauty truth and truth is beauty."

This paper is concerned with both the moral and the aesthetic aspects in literature; the reader of literature should try to maintain a live interest also in music and painting, sculpture, architecture, film and theatre. All the arts try to perform the same sort of task, differing only in their methods. Music and literature have a great deal in common: they both use the temporal material of sounds. Music uses meaningless sounds as raw material; literature uses those meaningful sounds we call WORDS.

There are two ways of using words, one artistic, one non-artistic. This means that words themselves can be viewed in two different ways. There is, in fact, the meaning that a word has in the dictionary (what is called the lexical meaning or the denotation) and the associations that the word has gained through constant use (the connotations of the word). Take the word 'mother', for instance. The dictionary definition is designed only to make you understand what the word means. 'Mother' means the female parent of an animal. That is the denotation. But the word 'mother', because we first use it in connection with our own mothers, carries many associations – warmth, security, comfort, love. We feel strongly about our mothers. Because of these associations 'mother' is used in connection with other things about which we are expected to feel strongly – our country, our school, our university. We say then that 'mother' is rich in connotations. Connotations, therefore, appeal to the feelings, whereas denotations appeal to the brain. The writer of literature is, therefore, concerned with the connotations. The writer of a science book does not want to appeal to the emotions of the reader, only to his brain, his understanding.

2. Definition of literature:

In fact literature can be defined in many ways but there are four main definitions which may make 'literature' clearer to the reader. These four definitions are: literature is the brain of humanity, literature is the exploitation of words, literature is the record of impressions and finally literature is an interpretation of life.

The value of literature lies in the fact that it is an interpretation of life. A great writer is one who interprets life greatly; one who is exquisitely responsive to the most subtle impressions of the outside world. He sees things far more clearly, and feels them far more deeply, than do men of ordinary stock, and he endeavours to convey this heightened sense of the wonder and glory of the world to our duller and grosser perceptions.

English literature is literature written in English. It is not merely the literature of England or of the British Isles, but a vast and growing body of writings made up of the work of authors who use the English language as a natural medium of communication. In other words, the 'English' or 'English literature' refers not to a nation but to a language. This seems to be an important point. There is a tendency among some people to regard, for instance, American literature as a separate entity, a body of writings distinct from that of the British Isles, and the same attitude is beginning to prevail with regard to the growing literatures of Africa and Australia . Joseph Conrad was a Pole, Demetrios Kapetanakis was a Greek, Ernest Hemingway is an American, Lin Yutang is a Chinese, but English is the medium they have in common, and they all belong – with Chaucer and Shakespeare and Dickens – to English literature. Literature is an art which exploits language; English literature is, therefore, an art which exploits the English language.

3. Forms of literature:

The main forms of literature are: Poetry, Prose, and Drama.

What is poetry? Poetry is a writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm. It expresses or evokes feelings and is addressed to the imagination. Poetry is the language of the heart.

Prose : Prose is any writing that conveys information and is addressed to the intellect.

Drama : Drama is a composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or tell a story through action and dialogue and designed for theatrical performance.

Literature portrays life in any of these literary forms.

4. The Function of Literature:

Literature, in all its forms, according to almost all critics, teaches us, provides us with moral lessons from real life and pleases us at the same time. Let us take, for instance poetry. What does poetry teach us? Poetry is supposed to teach us morality and pleases us as well. Horace, in his *Epodes* says:

The poet should try to blend together
delightful and the useful.

Teaching is Horace's business but teaching with pleasure. Here Horace formulates the sugar-coated-pill theory of poetry. According to Horace the poet should have a definite function: it is both religious and moral.

Sir Phillip Sidney, in his *An Apology for Poetry*, says:

The business of literature is to teach
and delight.

Dr. Samuel Johnson, in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, says:

The end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing.

Matthew Arnold says, in his essay *The Study of Poetry*, that the poet and the critic should be highly serious in teaching morality.

Chapter One

Poetry

5. Morality and pleasure in poetry:

Poetry, then, teaches morality based on facts drawn from real life. But how does it please the reader? The answer to this question is that poetry pleases the reader through certain musical devices such as the regulated rhythm, rime, beautiful images dignified language of the poem; all these devices create music. The rhyme scheme in a poem is a vital means by which the poet makes the poem musical. The rhyme scheme of a Petrarchan Sonnet, for instance, is: abba abba cde cde, whereas the rhyme scheme of the Shakespearean sonnet is: abab cdcd efef gg.

The following sonnet, "London, 1802", by Wordsworth, conveys a great moral lesson to the reader and at the same time pleases him through the musical devices included in it:

Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour
England hath need of thee; she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;
Oh! Raise us up, return to us again;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Although this sonnet, "London, 1802", is named for the place and time of its writing, its theme is really liberty. It was composed on the Poet's return from France, where he had seen the results of Napoleon's rule. He invokes the spirit of Milton to arouse the English people from their indifference in the crisis faced by their neighbours.

Who is Milton? John Milton (1608 – 1674), the greatest Puritan writer, was concerned with religious truth, politics, and freedom. With civil war threatening England, Milton felt he must help the Puritan cause. The times were rough and Milton used his literary weapons well, championing freedom and order in government and the personal rights of men.

Wordsworth's poetry is a protest against 18th Century intellectualism and analytical habits of mind in favors of imagination, and what it can do to unite man with his surrounding nature.

Wordsworth, in this sonnet, "London, 1802", is calling on Milton, in the 17th Century, who was the right hand of Cromwell who was an army leader. Because of the deterioration in England Wordsworth is calling on him for he was very much needed. The poet says that England lost its freshness and dynamic power. He says that when things stand still for a long time they become smelling. The poet tells us about the things which have been missed such as religion, military power, literature, home, possession of inward happiness etc... These things have been lost because the English people were selfish. Wordsworth asks Milton to raise them up from the terrible condition they were in and to give them things which they missed such as manners, personal conduct, virtue, freedom and power.

Milton, however, was a social reformer. He was also a puritan and a great literary figure. England lacked the qualities of

Milton so Wordsworth wanted Milton to return to England. In other words, Wordsworth wanted every English man to be like Milton.

The moral lesson which this sonnet conveys to us is obvious: The English people at that time, because of their selfishness, lost four important qualities, namely altar, sword, pen, and fireside. By altar the poet means the English people lost faith in God, they paid no attention to their religion; by sword, the poet means that they lost the power to fight the enemy in order to be free which means that they lost their freedom; by pen, the poet means that they had no interest in literature; and finally by fireside, the poet means that the family ties were not tight, which means the members of the English family were not united.

The following sonnet, by Shakespeare, also conveys an important moral lesson concerning the attitude of man towards love and friendship:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
Oh, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickles compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

In this sonnet Shakespeare gives a definition of true and constant friendship (marriage of true minds). As the reader will discover during reading and discussing this sonnet, Shakespeare

expresses his idea through a series of metaphor drawn from the marriage service, navigation, the stage and agriculture.

In the first quatrain he tells the reader that the “marriage of true minds”, i.e. strong love between two friends should be like the union of two people in marriage: a union which should admit no obstacles and mind no difficulty. He then defines love or true friendship in negative terms:

“Love is not...”

In the second quatrain he expands the definition of love by using positive terms “love is...” expressed through imagery which is different from that used in the first quatrain.

In the third quatrain he adds to the definition of love three more statements; two in the negative, “Love’s not Time’s fool”, “love alters not...” and one in positive terms “but bears it out...” The negative statements have been used by the poet in order to make the image very effective.

Then the couplet comes to clinch the whole idea in an epigrammatic and bold statement of confidence in his own view of constant love between friends:

If this be error and upon me proved
I never writ, nor no man ever loved

The moral lesson in this Shakespearean sonnet is clear. The poet defines true and constant love or friendship in several subtle images as mentioned above. He advises friends and lovers to be constant in their relationship, as constant as an ever-fixed mark, as constant as a star which does not change its position, does not alter whatsoever. Nowadays true and constant friendship is very rare. Nowadays lovers do not love for love’s sake; so many couples unfortunately seek commercial marriages in order to serve their

purposes. If they fail to get what they are after, their friendship or marriage collapses.

The following poem, "The Pulley", by George Herbert, portrays the relationship between man and God and also the method by which God receives the respect from man by keeping the information of his eternal rest. The poem is religious; the pulley has been metaphorically used by the poet to denote how man's deeds are uplifted to God; it also denotes that in the end man, good or wicked, will be uplifted to God.

The Pulley

By George Herbert

When God at first made man
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
Let us (said He) pour on him all we can:
Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.
So strength first made a way;
Then beauty flowed, then wisdom, honour, pleasure:
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone of all His treasure
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said He)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore My gifts instead of Me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature:
So both should losers be.
Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness:
Let him be rich and weary, that, at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to My breast.

In the poem, the central idea posited by Herbert is that when God made man, He poured all His blessings on him, including strength, beauty, wisdom, honour and pleasure. However, one element remained. We are told that God “made a stay,” that is, He kept “Rest in the bottom.” God is aware that if He were to bestow this “jewel” (i.e. rest) on man as well then man would adore God’s gifts instead of God Himself. God has withheld the gift of rest from man knowing fully well that His other treasures would one day result in a spiritual restlessness and fatigue in man who, having tired of his material gifts would necessarily turn to God in his exhaustion. God, being omniscient and prescient, knows that there is the possibility that even the wicked might not turn to Him, but he knows that eventually mortal man is prone to lethargy; his lassitude, then, would be the leverage He needed to toss man to His breast. In the context of the mechanical operation of a pulley, the kind of leverage and force applied makes the difference for the weight being lifted. Applied to man in this poem, we can say that the withholding of Rest by God is the leverage that will hoist or draw mankind towards God when other means would make that task difficult. However, in the first line of the last stanza, Herbert puns on the word “rest” suggesting that perhaps God will, after all, let man “keep the rest,” but such a reading would seem to diminish the force behind the poem’s conceit.

Chapter Two

Prose

6. Morality in Prose:

Prose as mentioned above is any writing that conveys information and addressed to the intellect. Prose has several forms, namely fiction (novel), short stories, science fiction etc...

But what is the information that prose conveys? To answer this question, we ought to have a look at the theme of a story, any story. The theme of a story is the point that the writer wishes to make, a moral or conceptual distillation of the story often posed as the question or human problem.

In the short story, for instance, the writer attempts to picture life realistically and honestly by introducing to the reader social, economic and moral problems that confront individuals in our complex civilization.

“The Disabled Soldier”, by Oliver Goldsmith, is the best example of prose which introduces to the reader these social, economic and moral problems that may confront man.

In this short story, “The Disabled Soldier”, the writer is trying to tell the reader that one half of the world is ignorant how the other half lives. The writer says that the misfortunes of the great are held up to engage our attention; are enlarged upon in tones of declamation; and the world is called upon to gaze at the noble sufferers: the great, under the pressure of calamity, are conscious of several others sympathizing with their distress; and have at once, the comfort of admiration and pity.

There are people who bear misfortunes with fortitude, men in such circumstances will act bravely even from motives of vanity: but he who, in the vale of obscurity, can brave adversity; who without friends to encourage, acquaintances to pity, or even without hope to alleviate his misfortunes, can behave with tranquility and indifference, is truly great: whether peasant or courtier, he deserves admiration, and should be held up for our imitation and respect.

While the slightest inconveniences of the great are magnified into calamities; while tragedy mouths out their sufferings in all the strains of eloquence, the miseries of the poor are entirely disregarded; and yet some of the lower ranks of people undergo more real hardships in one day, than those of a more exalted station suffer in their whole lives.

The main character in this short story is the disabled soldier. This character marks the best example of the poor who suffer quietly; no one to help them, no one to sympathize with them.

The narrator of the story says that he happened to meet accidentally a poor fellow, whom he knew when a boy, dressed in a sailor's jacket and begging at one of the outlets of the town, with a wooden leg. He knew him to have been honest and industrious when in the country, and was curious to learn what had reduced him to his present situation. Wherefore, after giving him what he thought proper, he desired to know the history of his life and misfortunes, and the manner in which he was reduced to his present distress. The poor soldier explains:

“As for my misfortunes, master, I can't pretend to have gone through any more than other folks; for, except the loss of my limb, and my being obliged to beg, I don't know any reason, thank Heaven,

that I have to complain. There is Bill Tibbs, of our regiment, he has lost both his legs, and an eye to boot; but, thank Heaven, it is not so bad with me yet.”

This soldier, during the war, was wounded in two places: He lost four fingers off the left hand, and his leg was shot off, yet he was not entitled to clothing and maintenance during the rest of his life.

In spite of all these calamities, the soldier was happily content with his present condition. He says:

“One man is born with a silver spoon in his mouth,
and another with a wooden ladle.
However, blessed be God, I enjoy good health,
and will forever love liberty and old
England . Liberty, property, and
old England, forever, huzza! “

The moral lesson in this short story is clear. The soldier, although disabled and obliged to beg, is extremely happy, because he enjoys good health and liberty. His love to his country, England, provides him with power to continue to live happily.

The following fable, “The Fox and the Stork”, by Aesop, introduces morality in a comic way. The theme of this fable is that man should treat people the way he would like to be treated by them.

The Fox and the Stork

By Aesop

A fox one day invited a stork to dinner, and being disposed to amuse himself at the expense of his guest, provided nothing for the entertainment but some thin soup in a shallow dish. This the fox lapped up very easily, while the stork, unable to gain a mouthful with her narrow bill, was as hungry at the end of the dinner as when she began. The fox meanwhile professed his regret at seeing her eat so sparingly, and feared that the dish was not seasoned to her taste. The stork said little, but begged that the fox would do her the honour of returning

her visit; and accordingly he agreed to dine with her on the following day. He arrived true to his appointment, and the dinner was ordered forthwith; but when it was served up, he found to his dismay that it was contained in a narrow-necked vessel, down which the stork readily thrust her long neck and bill, while he was obliged to content himself with licking the neck of the jar. Unable to satisfy his hunger, he retired with as good grace as he could, observing that he could hardly find fault with his entertainer, who had only paid him back in his own coin.

Chapter Three

Drama

7. Morality in Drama:

Drama is no different from poetry and prose. It, also, presents moral lessons obtained from real life. Take for example *Othello*, a tragedy by Shakespeare. This domestic play shows the audiences or the readers the reasons behind the tragic death of Desdemona, Othello's wife, the death of Othello himself, Emilia, Iago's wife, and Iago.

Othello and Desdemona love each other. They get married. This sort of marriage creates problems due to differences in race, colour, and culture. Desdemona is a beautiful white lady, whereas Othello is a black man.

Othello trusts Iago, his servant, to a great extent that he, Othello, asks for Iago's advice in so many subjects even personal matters; he even allows him to contact Desdemona privately during Othello's absence. This awkward triangular relationship leads to the destruction of Desdemona, Othello and many others. Iago is unfaithful to his master, Othello. Due to greed, envy and jealousy, Iago decides to destroy this couple, by poisoning Othello's mind.

Iago succeeds in convincing Othello that innocent Desdemona who is very faithful to her husband betrays him with a white young lieutenant, Cassio. Believing that Iago is loyal to him, and believing that Desdemona betrays him, Othello kills his innocent wife. When Othello finds out that his wife did not actually betray him and it was all fabricated by the villain, Iago. Othello regrets his awful deed; he kills Iago and commits suicide.

Shakespeare, in "Othello", highlighted humanity's faults in pursuing the true meaning of morality in Othello's character. Events that led to Othello's commitment of murder to Desdemona was triggered during his absence for a journey, which had given Iago the chance to develop plans that later took a toll in Othello and Desdemona's future. Shakespeare showed Othello's loss in his pursuit of true morality when he decided to believe Iago's allegations and murder Desdemona in the process without hearing her side of the story. Othello believed that Desdemona's actions had been immoral, believing that she had an affair with Cassio, while all the way it was Othello who had been immoral, and Desdemona and Cassio, the moral ones.

The moral lesson in this tragedy is very clear. One should not make hasty decisions based on groundless reasons; one should not have an absolute confidence in any person especially one who is not trustworthy; one should not allow any other person to interfere with one's private business.

Conclusion

The end of literature, in all its forms, is to instruct by pleasing. Writers, in their literary works, attempt to concentrate on the moral and the aesthetic aspects of life. Poetry, prose and drama should teach morality based on facts drawn from real life.

A poet, in Greek Literature, is considered a preacher or even a prophet, who should teach people morality.

Plato, in his "The Republic", says that a poet should be at least fifty years of age, noble and honest. Poetry, according to Plato, should be nothing but didactic.

Any literary work should consist of two important elements, namely form and content. Form is concerned with the aesthetic aspect, whereas content deals with the moral aspect of life. To instruct by pleasing which is the end of literature in general can, therefore, be achieved by means of these two elements which cannot be separated. If a work or art lacks one of these two elements, that work of art is imperfect.

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