

Theory and Forms of Prose

Prose is a man's usual way of expressing himself in speech or writing. It is basically any written or spoken language that is not poetry. It includes novels, plays, short stories, articles, newspaper stories, essays and every-day conversation. Poetry is chiefly a matter of artificial form. The poet fits his words into a common rhythm or meter. He breaks his poem into lines and often groups the lines into stanzas. The prose writer is also concerned with form, but less so than the poet. His words may have rhythm, but it is generally uneven. "Poetry is creative expression", writes Herbert Read, 'prose is constructive expression.'" It is very difficult to draw a line of demarcation between prose and poetry. Discussing external or material distinction Hebert Read writes, "it defines Poetry as a mode of expression which is strictly related to a regular measure or metre; Prose as a mode of expression which avoids regularity of measure and seeks the utmost variety of rhythm." Thus, Prose is the ordinary form of the written (or spoken) language different from poetry or any other special format such as lists or tables. In writing, it is without special rhythm and is similar to everyday communication that makes the most important distinction with poetry, and also with theatrical works.

The Latin word *prosa* from which the word prose comes means 'straightforward' or 'matter-of-fact'. Prose writing is usually adopted for the description of facts or the discussion of one's thoughts, incorporated into free flowing speech. Good prose writers try to write in a lively and vivid style. But, at the same time, their main purpose is to tell their story straightforwardly in a clear and simple way. The poets, on the other hand, often convey their ideas by suggestion and figures of speech. Prose is generally distinguished from poetry as it has no formal structure, like meter or rhyme. However, a blend of the two forms of literature is known as *prose poetry*.

There are various kinds of prose and they can be classed roughly under narration (story-telling), description, exposition (explanation), and argumentation.

- (i) **Essay**- Essay is a literary composition on some special subject generally in prose. It is usually shorter and less formal than the systematic discussion of facts found in a treatise. Statements are argued less in an essay than in a thesis. The essay is also smaller in its scope than a biography, or history. The term essay in a

strict sense applies to informal writing which strongly reflects the personality of the author. Such essays are sometimes called personal or familiar essays. Much of charm lies in their easy and natural style. But many essays are formal, impersonal and direct. Sometimes philosophical treatise is called essays. The articles in most magazines are really essays. Or developments of the essay form. Authors usually analyze and interpret information in them to prove a point.

- (ii) **Novel-** A novel is a long prose story that is usually imaginary. Its chief purpose is largely to entertain, but its underlying aim is to help readers to understand life. Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers* is mainly a funny story. Leo Tolstoy's great novel, *War and Peace*, not only gives pleasure, but also offers much wisdom. The novel is perhaps the least confined of all literary forms. It may be comparatively short. For example, Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* can be read in less than two hours.

The novel is usually about people, but it is sometimes about animals or fabulous beings, such as those in *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift. There is also much flexibility in action in the novel. The story can take place anywhere, and at any time. The time of a novel may be in the past, the present, or the future. Perhaps the great quality of the novel is the great variety of its subject matter. It may tell of practically unknown adventures.

- (iii) **Short Story-** Short story is a form of fiction writing. People often tell their friends stories about events in their daily lives. They may tell jokes to make their friends laugh, or use anecdotes to help explain what they mean. These forms are closely related to the short-story. But the short story has three important elements that are lacking in the stories told by people. A short story is carefully created, it is compact, and it is unified. All the details in a short story have a purpose, and add to its effect. A short story can be from about 3,000 to about 10,000 words in length. Some magazines specialize in so-called short-stories. Only about 1,000 to 1,500 words long. Longer prose works and sometimes called novelettes or short novels.

- (iv) **Fable-** The word fable comes from the Latin word *fibula*, which once meant any kind of story. It is a short tale about animals or objects that have human powers and faults. They usually have the power to talk and the characters teach

lessons which can be used in everyone's daily life, since their action are so much like those of human beings the reader of the fable usually does not have to figure out for himself what the lesson is. It is often given at the end of the fable under the title of Moral. There are other kinds of stories which are much like the fables but which are not true fables. One of these is the parable, which often appears in the Holy Bible. A parable is a story told to teach a lesson. Another kind of story much like the fable is the beast epic, in which the characters are always animals. The beast epic seldom tries to teach a lesson. Instead, it makes fun of people and the way they behave. Two of the best known beast epics are the story of Reynard the Fox and Chicken Little.

- (v) **Diary-** Diary is a notebook, containing a day-to-day account of personal experiences. Diaries are also known as journals. Keeping a diary is a valuable activity for young persons. It is much helpful to them in expressing their beliefs, their experiences, and their desires. Samuel Pepys, an Englishman, kept a diary over a period of nine years, from 1660 to 1669. Pepys' diary has become one of the most notable ones in the world.
- (vi) **Belles-Letters-** It is an expression occasionally applied to forms of literature that appeal to a person's imagination, emotions or sense of beauty. The term usually includes poetry, drama, novels, short stories, essays and literary criticism. It may also refer to history and other writings when they are exceptional literary merit. Popular fiction, journalistic articles, and academic and scientific papers are not referred to as belles-letters.
- (vii) **Biography-** Biography is the story of a person's life written by someone else. A person's account of his own life is called an autobiography. The word biography comes from two Greek words, *bios*, which means life and *grapheiu*, which means to write. As you read a biography, you may wonder how the writer knows all the things he says. Biographies are the most popular form of non-fiction written to-day. Many biographies appear on best-seller lists, and some are made into motion pictures or television plays.
- (viii) **History-** History is a literary treatment of some period of time past or present, general or national, long or short. To be properly equipped for his task. The

historian should possess knowledge, judgment, and the command of a clear and precise style.

- (ix) **Criticism-** Criticism is the judgment of the merits and faults of the work or actions of an individual or group by another group of writers. The meaning of criticism is the study, evaluation, and interpretation of literature, social movements, film, arts, and similar objects and events. The chief purpose of this type of criticism is to comprehend the work or event more thoroughly.
- (x) **Drama-** Drama is the form of composition which is meant for theatrical performance. In it the actors take the roles of characters, perform the action and utter the dialogue. Drama can be written both in prose and verse.

Besides these major forms autobiography, travelogue, satire, parables nature-writing and fantastic literature are also the forms of literature.