

Preface

When I was encouraged to write a literary survey according to its course description, I found it a difficult job to attempt because the official description of the course includes drama, prose, literary criticism, and perhaps novel, while it excludes many authors and works.

Any writer of a literary survey has to face the problem of giving unity to some discursive subject. Besides, he has to attempt an ordered and analytical treatment of the subject within the limits imposed.

The main intention of this book is to lay emphasis on what our students need: on ideas, tendencies, schools and movements that have to be understood and appreciated, rather than on facts that can be learned by heart. This literary survey aims at dealing with the works of authors more than with their lives; though the approach is eclectic, biographical approach is rarely attempted. A topic has received detailed or scanty treatment according to its significance, and what is blasphemous is ignored. This book's debts are many; its chief creditors are writers whose ideas I have wittingly or unwittingly incorporated in it. Any literary history deals with common knowledge and established facts; it gives its author little opportunity to express his own original views. The originality of such a writer lies in shaping his material in accordance with the need of the students for whom the book is designed. The significance of such a book depends on the number of its creditors.

It seems not proper to cite all the books and articles that have been of some use to me in writing this literary survey. Such a bibliography will definitely be boring and of little use to our undergraduate students. Those interested in a detailed bibliography of individual poets and movements may use the nine volumes of my *Literary History of England*.

When the topic of this survey was proposed by Dr. Abbas-Ali Rezaee of Tabriz University and I accepted it only because I could never say "No" to a sincere

friend whom I have always admired and respected. But one question occupied my mind: “Why should I write a literary survey when hundreds of them are available?” After surveying all literary surveys, I realized that SAMT is right in demanding books that are of great use to our students, because no available literary survey by native speakers can meet the requirement of SAMT. I do not say that my book is what they were looking for. I have only attempted to do what they demanded, hoping that it would achieve the goal.

In this revised and enlarged edition, extra comments and some primary sources are added to take care of what was missing in the first edition. When the text of a poem accompanies its discussion, it can be better understood and the student does not have to waste his/her time looking elsewhere for the text of the poem.

A. Abjadian
Shiraz University
Summer 1388

To the Instructor and the Student

I have done my best to make this literary survey both interesting and useful to our students. The fact that I am satisfied with it does not mean that it is perfect. I have only had the pleasure of writing a book which will hopefully make you more interested in English literature and encourages you to form your judgement of it through your own observation rather than mine. One who reads or teaches a poem functions as a poet, for by studying a poem one creates some meaning that is an experience and a creation different from those of the poet because poetry appeals more to our imagination than to our reason. Besides, any reader, whether teacher or student, who studies literature and comments on it is certainly a critic and as such he or she has the right to agree or disagree with anybody else’s commentary.

A teacher can function as a torch to enlighten his students' passage; he does not ordain their direction; they should struggle to find the seemingly right path in making sense out of a work of art. All that a teacher can do is to advise them not to apply the criteria of one literary type to another, not to judge novels by the principles of, say, Aristotle's Poetics. Yet it is not proper to limit anybody's judgement which has to be free if we expect a lively class discussion.

I am reluctant to offer a guideline for the study of this book because any guideline or methodology even in teaching grammar or composition cannot be taken for granted. In fact, the existence of different kinds of teaching methodology suggests that such guidelines are mere suggestions, which may succeed or fail when applied to different courses.

Methodology makes teaching artificial as well as organized. Any teacher has to appeal to artificial means such as classification, definition, literary periods, and schools to make himself understood and make his lessons organized. We teachers talk about qualities of, say, Middle English literature while we are sure that no single quality can safely be applied to the whole period. We still talk about Shakespearean tragedy while each one of his tragedies is by far different from the rest. We limit the English Renaissance to a certain period while some medieval trends survived the Renaissance period, and poets like Chaucer in the Middle Ages and Matthew Arnold in the Victorian period can be called Renaissance men. We talk about Romanticism and Classicism while no Romantic or Classical poet meets all the requirements demanded by the definitions of such schools. It is the nature of such a broad field of study that makes us organize our teaching by proper and even improper means, but our artificial techniques should by no means reduce the literary significance of a work of art.

It must be understood first that this literary survey is written to facilitate the study of the primary sources. Therefore, any student who studies this book without reading the primary sources is actually defeating the purpose. The materials of

this book fall within three categories, and thus different parts can be approached differently:

1. The background materials, which cover introductions to each age, genre, and literary forms, are better to be studied before reading the primary source. The students of *Beowulf*, *Paradise Lost*, and *The Faerie Queene* need to know the nature of heroic poetry and its different kinds before reading those epics. It is the background materials that clarify the differences and prepare the student to understand those epics. Any student needs to know, say, humanism and the revival of classical learning to avoid judging Shakespeare and Milton by the rules applicable to *Piers Plowman* or *Ormulum*.
2. The main part of this book is related to the literary works that students are required to study and it is supposed to help them understand those poems of which some are printed here. The study of my comment on a certain poem before reading the poem itself is not beneficial because the comment overshadows the reader's ingenuity and originality. The student is advised to read the assigned poem first and try to shape his or her judgement of it and then read the commentary to add, if possible, to his or her own knowledge of the poem.
3. Extra materials are provided for those who desire to know more. The course description does not require all of Chaucer, Milton, or Shakespeare. While commenting on the required poems of these poets, I could not deny our students the extra information that they desire to know and gives unity to my book. Such materials are not there to give you plot summaries; they are there to encourage you to study more, to give you the idea of what is worth reading.

I hope this book may fulfill its primary aim of helping our students to improve their knowledge of English literature.

With the best wishes
A. Abjadian