

Comparative literature 2 / lecture 4 & 5

Chapter 8

Literature for the Unlettered

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The difference between Unlettered and illiterate Oral literature serves the same purpose as written literature does for readers and writers. This kind of literature is directed to those who habitually don't read or write. It includes old tales, songs, myths, legends, rituals, and orations. All these types were concerned with issues of common interest. They offered instruction and entertainment.

There are many factors which encouraged the evolution of oral literature among primitive people.

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- *The need for relief from boredom; the long hours of night around the campfire in war and peace; the long days and weeks of voyages. For those people nothing was more satisfactory than the telling of stories.

- *All people enjoy tales which make them laugh. A person from the elite is brought down to the level of ordinary mortal or disgraced.

- *People everywhere have been interested in exaggerated stories.

- *People's interest in hearing about the past, in learning of the world around them and speculating the mysterious powers that govern life.

- *primitive people have infinite leisure and patience. A tale telling may last for days. Unlettered people feel

that the good story is the one which lasts long and succeeds in putting the audience to sleep.

A tale is told under very strict rules. What are they?

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Some peoples find their lives ordered by seasons of the years and by the succession of day and night. Some groups of stories are not told in the summer, sometimes not in the winter. There are stories suitable for daytime and for night; stories that only men can tell or women; finally, stories that belong to the ceremonial life of the people and accompany religious observances.

There are coming characteristics of oral tales.

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Oral literature is told by someone who has learned what he is telling from someone else. Faithfulness is the most valued of all qualities in the tale-teller. This requires strong memory. They are ineffective unless they are remembered exactly. Besides, there is a large amount of repetition.

How could you make a comparison between a form of oral literature and a written one.

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You have to look at the purpose of folk literature and juxtapose it with those of written literature. You have to see the points of similarity and those of difference which is the main function of comparative studies.

You should select two works which have the same subject-matter such as war, love or social affairs. You have to examine how each work of art presents its

theme. If that literary work is a play or a story you have to look at the dialogue and the description through studying the words which dramatize the situations and reflects the characters. Through analysing the text and the use of words you will be able to recognize how a story or a play operates to deliver its message.

Similarly, if you want to study a folksong, you have to study its words and see how they function together. A song has images, figures o speech, and metaphors in addition to music and rhythm. The main tools in a song are much music and few words.

In the same way we can make a comparative study of the classical epics of Homer (both the oral form and the written one). Oral literature depends upon musical tools as rhythm , rhyme and sound devices.

*Oral epic: we study the potential of the spoken words and association.

*Written epic: we have to highlight the text as a combination of words which function semantically and vocally.