

## Literary/Critical Theory and Orwell's Idea of "A Good Bad Poem": Thoughts on a Beginner's Annotated Poetry Textbook for the Arabian Gulf Students

Jalal Uddin Khan

*Jalal Uddin Khan, PhD (NYU New York), Professor of English/DFL, University of Nizwa, Oman*

**Correspondence Author:** Jalal Uddin Khan, E-mail: E-mail: jukhan@gmail.com

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### ABSTRACT

This article is about what the author argues to be the ideal contents of an annotated poetry textbook for the native Arab students in the Arabian Gulf considering their not so well developed command/proficiency in English, their limited exposure to English, and their conservative society compared with the rest of the world. It suggests that only short, simple, and charming lyrics, containing moral and didactic lessons, about the love of God, country, humanity, pastoral simplicities of nature, religion (any religion), elegiac lament, local culture, and country house traditions would be the ideal contents of a textbook for the young college students in the Arabian Gulf. Poems about revolutionary politics, physical love, and queer sexual orientations being out of line/place with the culture of the region, the article considers the existing textbooks not suitable. The proposed textbook should also consist of what are called "good bad" poems by Orwell. At the same time, the textbook in question to be used during the delivery of a course on introduction to poetry should include some well-known definitions of poetry as well as some simplified basics of modern literary and critical theory

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I

A locally and regionally acceptable poetry textbook is a long overdue material in the Arabian Gulf countries. The educational market in the region needs such an introductory product, to be provided by competent teachers in the field of literature. Furnishing a properly organized poetry textbook based on a set of informed and appropriate selection criteria is going to be worth their effort which young Gulf students in their senior high school and freshman/sophomore college years are sure to immensely benefit from.

That is how the idea of introducing a poetry textbook arose. An English language textbook consisting of short and simple charming and interesting poems by canonically and conventionally famous and popular English/American poets, is expected to be a useful contribution for the non-native (Arab) speakers of English. As their second language, with extremely limited use by them, their English is far from well-developed. While they may struggle to learn the language through their very limited exposure confined to classroom instructions only (as opposed to everyday life-related language tasks and activities outside the classroom), a suitable poetry textbook, to be used as a primary or supplementary item, would significantly help them to improve their English for academic as well as special purposes.

Reading simple and interesting "green and gold" poems and stories would never add to students' existing sense of frustration as some language instructors of different visions and opinions, with no taste for and no understanding of literature, would like to reason. They may argue, wrongly though, that when the students are already struggling with the existing challenges of their language lessons, why to burden them with the extra load of poetry lessons? They have no idea about the unlocking, liberating, and motivating power of poetry in particular and literary texts in general.

Students of any background may sometimes find their English exercises drawn from everyday life boring and monotonous. From my experience of teaching "green and gold" short and simple literary texts to young Arabian Gulf students, I can confidently assert that they, especially the more meritorious ones, look for avenues of enjoyable literary works, both in classrooms and beyond, outside the vicinity of their practical life and the merely myopic, monolithic, and microscopic language teaching/learning. They are fed up with the immediate routine demands. Away from the dull encounters with drab scientific manuals, students find short poems, short stories, short plays, and nursery rhymes fresh, motivating, inspiring, liberating, engaging, and exhilarating.

In his *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), a classic piece of Renaissance literary criticism, Sir Philip Sidney defines poetry (or, broadly speaking, all imaginative literature in general) as a creative art that teaches with delight. It is a definition that was anticipated, two millennia before, by the Greek philosopher Aristotle through his moral and ethical concerns raised in his *Poetics*, which were however more realistic than those of his idealistic teacher-philosopher Plato. Aristotle suggests that poetry, in its creative imitation of the broader and larger nature, not in its (nature's) particulars, be pleasurable in order to offer productive learning about the universal truths of nature. That is precisely what Sidney reproduces when he says:

Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle terms it in his word *mimēsis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth; to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture, with this end,—to teach and delight.

Going further back in time to the Western origins of arts and culture, Sidney's definition of poetry/literature also combined both the Homeric function of pleasure and the Hesiodic function of instruction, both Homer and Hesiod being two of the roughly 7th century BC Greek poets. The former was in the tradition of long epical narrative of heroic actions and adventures as illustrated in his great *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The latter was in the tradition of folk, didactic, and pastoral literature dwelling on seasonal patterns and agricultural/farming arts, as in his *Works and Days*, as he was also in the tradition of pagan (religious) cosmological creation myth, as in his *Theogony*, partly similar to his contemporary Homer and looking forward to Miltonic and Blakean reconstructions of visionary Christian myths in their epics and epical cycles.

Sidney's definition was foreshadowed by the early Roman poet Horace (about five hundred years after Aristotle), who declared the famous maxim, in his *Ars Poetica*, that the primary function of poetry was to combine "pleasure with usefulness." All Platonic, Aristotelian, and Horatian concerns in relation to the morality of truth and honesty were to be further emphasized, in different degrees, by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian, after Horace. Later, English Romantic poet S T Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter XIV), would say that pleasure, not truth, was the "immediate" object of a poem, which would offer/provide "delight from the whole as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part." (For more on Coleridge on this point, see below).

The same concept of what poetry is or should be would also look forward to the nineteenth century English poet and critic Matthew Arnold insisting, in his Oxford University lecture, "The Function of

Criticism at the Present Time" (1865), "that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life." For Arnold, poetry, that is, literature and its criticism are seriously and significantly connected with society and culture, both going hand in hand to play a social and moral role and engage with politics, religion, history, education, philosophy and other areas of interests.

The textbook I would like to see is not, however, a general anthology or a collection of texts drawn from all kinds of genres. It would instead be a textbook of one specific genre, only poetry. Coming from diverse backgrounds such as South Asia, the West, and Southeast Asia, with many years of teaching experience in the Middle Eastern Gulf, I am familiar with the local Arab culture, its beauties and varieties, as well as its strengths and limitations. I have an understanding and empathy for the Arabian Gulf students and their sublime, spiritually powerful, breathtaking and unnerving environment—mostly dry and desert, rough and rocky, barren and stony, deeply and fervently religious, economically prosperous, culturally conservative, and politically stable.

It is this living, throbbing, and exciting state of the Arabian desert that returns me, again and again, to the truth of the following verses in the Qur'an:

002.074 For among rocks there are some from which rivers gush forth; others there are which when split asunder send forth water; and others which sink for fear of God. And God is not unmindful of what ye do.

003.026 Say: "O God! Lord of Power (And Rule), You give power to whom You please, and You strip off power from whom You please: You endow with honor whom You please, and You bring low whom You please: In Your hand is all good. Verily, over all things You have power.

003.027 "You cause the night to gain on the day, and You cause the day to gain on the night; You bring the Living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the Living; and You give sustenance to whom You please, without measure."

A taste of what I mean here has been provided in my book, *Readings in Oriental Literature: Arabian, Indian, and Islamic* (2015), containing chapters on "The Beautiful and the Sublime: William Jones on Ancient Arabian Poetry," "The Arabian Nights: A Modern Introduction," "Wordsworth's 'Arab Dream': My Acquaintance with the Arabian Desert through English Literature and Personal Encounters," "Narrating Shelley's *Ozymandias*: A Case of the Cultural Hybridity of the Eastern Other," and "Reading the Muslim East in English Literature and

Literary Nonfiction: A Survey." My awareness and sensitivity to all the aspects suggested make me a confident instructor to think about the need for a morally and culturally acceptable poetry textbook, which, I believe, would be a noble and worthwhile undertaking by a competent academic in the field.

## II

Language is one of man's most precious possessions. Purity of language and eloquence of speech have been greatly valued since the dawn of human civilization. One of the best and most important uses of language is literature, which, along with music, painting, and cinema, is among the highest and most expressive forms of art invented by humankind. Richard Poirier, in his essay "Venerable Complications" (Raritan: A Quarterly Review, Summer 1984), claims that literature is "one of the great human creations" and that it is the "Olympics of talk and of writing." He says that literature "can productively mine and develop" the resource of language "more effectively than any other media."

The first century Greek literary critic and rhetorician Longinus developed his idea of the sublime through a consideration of the principles of good writing and public speech. Drawing examples from the public addresses by the Homeric characters and the Biblical Genesis, Longinus thought one was able to persuade the readers/audience to one's intended purpose only through effective writing, eloquent oratory, and rhetorical skill with a great impact upon them. However, the means of and to the sublime and its end were to be achieved not necessarily through a complete perfection of rules, Longinus argued, but the rare flames and flashes of genius a piece of good writing or a persuasive speech was likely to contain in its different portions and passages. An ideal textbook of poetry should aspire to this objective by providing students with frequent examples of outstanding, outshining, outweighing, and compelling brilliance.

Apart from the illustrated light reading fun magazines and daily newspapers, one of the best and most effective ways to teach English (for that matter, any language) to non-native speakers is to teach it through literature: an easy and simple poem, a short selection from a longer narrative/descriptive poem, a short story, a folk tale, a fairy tale, a beast/animal fable, the opening chapter of a novel or an excerpt therefrom, the opening scene or a key scene from a play or an one-act play.

As suggested above, literature is an artistic and creative representation of life and its joys and pains. It is a combination of both entertainment and education, which provides both pleasure and

knowledge. It makes one soar in imagination and imaginative reflection and contemplation as it makes one realistically down to earth too with moral, didactic, and practical instruction. Literature imparts certain order and pattern to human life, which consists of both happiness and suffering together with a mix of didactic moralism as well as amoral, aesthetic, and spiritual experience. It is, therefore, a fit medium for young students to engage with and benefit from, especially in terms of the improvement of language, critical thinking, and social observation. Literature in general and poetry in particular provide the young learners with the opportunity to appreciate the power and potential of language at its finest. The essential elements of language—vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, spelling, subject-verb agreement, sequence of tenses, conjugation of verbs, parts of speech, different kinds of sentences (simple, complex, and compound) and clauses (dependent and independent), sentence combining, introductory phrases, nouns as verbs and adjectives, parentheses, appositives, apostrophes (if not expletives), and simple symbolic expressions and personifications—can effectively be learnt and taught through a work of literature, which furnishes interesting and lively examples of the essentials of language and their variations. Examples of idiomatic expressions and memorable quotations from literature easily impress upon the learners and stick in their memory, which motivates them to make progress and advance further on. Unfortunately, this is not so with the often dry, isolated, and lifeless examples drawn from the prosaic sources, however closely related to everyday life.

Literature, of which poetry, folk tales, fairy tales, lullabies, nursery rhymes, and fables are the oldest forms, serves to improve the learner's vocabulary by showing the language as a communicative tool of the collective abstract and psychological dreams and desires of the ordinary masses. In modern times, it also shows the language in its dynamic, literary, and creative use by the educated and professional writers and academics. All this taken together, literature helps students acquire a variety of linguistic skills such as written, verbal, rhetorical, communicative, and interactive and prepares students for the upper and advanced level of reading and learning, thereby potentially leading to the mastering of the language.

A good command of language enables students to think of the issues of life and society critically and constructively. As we all know, language is vital for self-expression and self-awareness, beyond the bounds of the day-to-day business of life. Literary language of description, narration, reflection, and dramatic action (of individual differences) is a wonderful medium to express both intellectual ideas

and emotional feelings in their most powerful and memorable form. By making the learners encounter universal human nature in its countless forms and complexities, literature motivates them to engage with life in a way that is not possible in mundane utilitarian situations. With the end of effective and successful language acquisition through literature in mind, a properly done poetry textbook promises to be one of its kind, useful for the Arabian Gulf students at the level of their senior high school or college education.

### III

Most of the currently available poetry textbooks fall short of being adequately/sufficiently suitable for non-native freshman students encountering poetry for the first time. In the name of so-called variety, diversity, openness, and political correctness, the available textbooks include all kinds of poems, from simple to complex, conventional to unconventional to strange and bizarre, from culturally and/or politically neutral to partisan, at times even repulsive and hurtful to one's religious sentiments. Many poems in the existing textbooks address the issues facing the modern Western society, such as sexuality, sexual orientation, sexual harassment, racial discrimination, rape, murder, suicide, kidnapping, drug addiction, and moral degradation. They also attempt to make a cultural or political statement which cannot be considered appropriate for students in Oman and the Arabian Gulf.

For instance, gender-based or gender-biased poems are sometimes indirectly or explicitly sexual, psycho-sexual, feminist, homoerotic, queer, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, transgender, and transvestite. Poems about love (unless they are purely Platonic or spiritual) tend to become an expression of the libido—physical body, nudity, lust, carnal desire, pleasures of the flesh. Those with political themes are sometimes overtly radical, revolutionary, leveling and equalizing, with an anti-establishment and anti-stability message. Some war poems, though pacifist and anti-war in spirit, are actually a graphic description of blood and violence, from which, as my teaching experience tells me, Arabian Gulf students recoil for the good reason that they are not used to bloodshed and violence (except the recent cases in the greater Middle East outside the Gulf). Some of the poems included in the existing textbooks propagate the messages of atheism and godlessness. Such “ungodly” messages are an anathema to our deeply monotheistic students, who cultivate their religious beliefs and cherish their religious values with great fervor and dignity.

The seven broad categories that, however, lend themselves pretty neatly to the suitability in question, without the risk of discomfort, disconnect, or insensitivity, are probably those poems that are about

(1) love in general (love for the near and dear ones and the humanity, but not physical/sexual love), treated in a lyrical or narrative ballad form; (2) wild or simple pastoral nature and the green and clean environment; (3) elegiac lament about the death of a person or a group of obscure and unknown people, such as Thomas Gray's “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” (not to speak of the longer pastoral elegies by Moschus, Milton, Shelley, Arnold, or Tennyson); (4) the wide and expansive country house traditions as exemplified by the poems of Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, Aemilia Lanyer, and W B Yeats, which, as an extension of the pastoral tradition, describe the landscapes on which estates and manors of wealthy families are/were founded and which serve/d as a seat for the patronage and cultivation of arts and culture; (5) one's loyalty and patriotism for the country; (6) religious subjects, regardless of whatever denomination they may imply; and (7) the morality tale type didactic instruction and edification.

“The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” by Christopher Marlowe and its counter response in Sir Walter Raleigh's “The Nymph's reply to the Shepherd” are two good examples of the late 16th century pastoral or anti-pastoral love poems without any sexual content. Similarly, there are many lyrics, odes, sonnets, and lyrical ballads in every age—medieval, Elizabethan/Renaissance, Romantic, Victorian, and modern—that are free from any suggestions of the physical and the fleshly.

Although nature and weather in the Gulf/Middle East are generally different from the West and the rest of the world, there are many aspects in common. Any nature poem about any kind of landscapes, quiet or stormy (skies, stars, seas, oceans, lakes, flowers, gardens, woods, valleys, mountains, deserts, greenery, flora and fauna, birds or wild animals), is fine, even great for students of all backgrounds. A good majority of shorter English Elizabethan and Romantic poems are a good start for non-native freshman students. A pastoral lyric, that is, a short poem describing beautiful rural landscapes (called “locus amoenus” in Latin) and depicting the agricultural countryside of peasants and farmers remains popular to all, irrespective of national boundaries. Set in the rustic scenes of innocence and simplicity, pastoral poems are those that idealize the shepherd's life in the open fields in the midst of his sheep and goats and cows.

The same is true about the poems having a religious theme or aspect, regardless of the differences between the East and the West. Any poem pertaining to the religious faith (be it Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist or Hindu) can be explained and analyzed to any group of students without hurting their particular cultural ethos and religious impulse.

Similarly, any poem containing varieties of moral, domestic, and didactic lessons can be fruitfully and profitably read by students of any background.

#### IV

The criteria for determining the contents of an ideal introductory poetry textbook for Arabian Gulf students should be based on the following: first, the introductory nature of an academic encounter with poetry as a genre; second, the non-native background and youthful innocence of a culturally and politically different, perhaps somewhat conservative population; and third, the level of language proficiency of students whose exposure to English is very limited in an environment overwhelmingly dominated by their native tongue everywhere in all respects—both at home and outside of home, in the office and outside of the office.

These three factors need to be taken into consideration in order to make the Arabian Gulf students' study of poetry interesting, entertaining, and stimulating rather than intimidating and alienating. The idea of a new poetry textbook should, therefore, originate in a concern about the lack of a suitable introductory textbook of poetry—the oldest and most universal literary genre. By "suitable," I mean something useful and student-friendly, informed by and compatible with socially and culturally acceptable values, nicely annotated, and, if possible, appropriately illustrated, looking sleek and slim rather than unexpectedly thick or voluminous.

Such a textbook may contain dozens of short and simple poems that are supposed to enlighten and instruct the Arab youth with delight. The rightly selected poems would teach and share with the maturing young boys and girls inspiring and uplifting moral lessons with pleasure. The poems are expected to be fun to read and at the same time conducive to the value-laden moral education of the younger generation born and living in a culturally and ideologically different society—not as open as the West or the rest of the East (India, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Indonesia, African continent, so on).

It goes without saying that the Arabian Gulf is a stable, peaceful, and traditional society that prefers to leave many of the existing local and social forces and influences, formative in their own ways, as they are, or at best evolving through a process of quiet and slow reforms without disturbing the status-quo with any noticeable degree of unrest, unease, or violence, let alone any unnecessary radical and revolutionary movement or experiment for overnight change. An ideal textbook for high school or college students of this calm and quiet society, which normally shies

away from a bold and visible exposure to foreign languages or which heavily depends on the native tongue/vernacular of its own, need not contain poems that might prove to be too shocking, jolting, shaking, challenging, taxing, and stressful on young Arab students' otherwise inexperienced and restless minds.

Sometimes instructors tend to forget that such a textbook is to be used for an introductory course intended to introduce young beginners to the genre of poetry (lyric, ballad, sonnet, ode, elegy, and dramatic monologue, among other forms) and its essential literary elements. The objectives here would focus on two key terms: "introductory" and "genre". Such being the case, instructors ought not to choose just any poem/s and then finish their job by explaining the deeper meanings thereof without considering the accessibility and appropriateness for the level in question and without discussing the fundamental elements of poetry first. An ideal instructor might like to get started by drawing attention to the surface beauty of a poem that consists of interesting vocabulary, alliteration, repetition, refrain, form and style, and the diction used.

The instructor may then move on to different figures of speech such as simile, symbol, metaphor, imagery, pictorial quality—all of which, by way of indirection and irony, creates a suggestiveness, a connotation, and a resonance, contributing to the underlying meaning of the poem. In this way, the focus would be the elements that make a poem not only a poem but also an ideal introduction to its young non-native readers, who, on the one hand, strive to improve their language without feeling bored and monotonous and, on the other, are culturally and politically sensitive.

In other words, an introductory course in poetry should consist of poems which are interesting by virtue of being short and simple, yet expressive of warm and universal feelings to which young learners, regardless of their backgrounds within the greater Middle East, can comfortably and cheerfully relate. At times, as in the case of a poem, say, about flowers, birds, domestic animals, lakes, rivers, children, parents, friends, that is, about all those things with which they can easily connect and identify with, they would relate in the way of beautiful self-propagation. At times they would relate by way of sublime self-preservation as in a poem about the awesome aspects of nature such as the endless sky, a vast ocean, a high mountain, death or darkness, that is, about all those things from which they are scared away into their own safety zones due to the emotions of fear, gloom, obscurity and uncertainty. Therefore, the selection would include the kind of poems that deal with the subjects young students can fondly share or are familiar with and that are written in a style that they would find fun and at the same time fairly

challenging too. None of these elements should be beyond them by being difficult, complex and alienating. Such poems can ultimately prove to be rewarding and satisfying rather than daunting and intimidating.

V

As has been said above, the available textbooks are far from being satisfactory in the context of the Arabian Gulf setting. These textbooks include only a few poems that may be useful and interesting to students in view of their cultural and religious background and their relative lack of strength in English. Also, the present textbooks contain little or no explanatory annotations to help them with the poems. My idea of a new textbook has to do with my frustration about the way introductory poetry courses are designed at some local/regional institutions. I strongly feel that Arabian Gulf students deserve to be introduced to poetry through an appropriate and properly designed textbook. I have reservations about the randomly chosen contents by individual instructors, who sometimes seem to overlook the fact that our freshman students are studying poetry for the first time and that they would like to read what they are likely to enjoy reading as an incentive and a necessary motivation. Naturally, they would like to see tangible benefit not only in terms of moral and psychological understanding of the issues facing their life and society, but also significant improvement of their grasp of English as a language.

VI

The methodology of teaching language through literature has been discussed in recent decades. While the use of children's literature, idioms and proverbs, selected chapters from a novel or scenes from a play can be some of the effective language teaching approaches, the textbook I have in mind presents the idea that a well-designed and well-structured introductory course in poetry intended for those who are relatively weak in English and traditionally culture-sensitive could serve a useful purpose. It will include a suitable selection of poems in light of the factors mentioned above. Each poem would be followed by notes or annotations not only about its main theme/s, form and style but also the meaning of its key words and expressions/phrases. Such a simple procedure about what would already be a cluster of interesting and not so difficult poems would motivate students to approach them in a lively and engaging manner and help students find the poems accessible and deal with them in an inviting and enthusiastic manner.

At the level of instruction, instructors would have their own lesson plans according to the level and quality of their students. They may like to start by

first asking students to read a poem aloud and then if and how they liked it. Students should feel free to give their initial response perhaps in a light-hearted manner to get themselves drawn into a preliminary discussion about the simple elements such as the feel of the language, title, memorable lines, opening words, striking phrases, rhyme, tone, poetic persona and the poetic style of personification. At first they can skim over the obvious that is there about the body of the poem and its immediate physical properties. Something of a close reading may follow focusing on the figures of speech and the related aspects such as diction, simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, synecdoche, imagery, irony, ambiguity, tension, paradox, contradiction and the final unity through a sort of reconciliation of opposites. A simplified textual analysis should be attempted to present the poem as if it were a well-wrought urn. As they are further drawn into the poem, students would like to get into the surrounding details (personal, emotional, biographical, historical, political, symbolic, allegorical, psychological) that may lie outside the physical vicinity of the text itself and yet significantly inform its underlying meaning.

In other words, the carefully paced and transitioned but engaging and illuminating interaction between instructor and students will gradually reveal the poem's serious literary, scientific, or academic aspects, which will continue to present themselves to young learners with an enduring and fascinating appeal. As they get along, the instructor will become more involved in explaining both the internal and external mechanism of how a poem functions towards a unified whole. This mechanism will work either through the poem's exclusively textual, linguistic and rhetorical patterns suggesting irony, paradox and ambivalence or its expression of lyric passions, emotions and feelings by its figures of speech. All these together are key to the secret of the success of a poem. Freshman students will enjoy reading a poem when they learn to recognize its basic structural elements as well as the rhetoric of its narrative, descriptive and dramatic devices holding together to support its functional, transactional and communicative premises and principles. They will be able to overcome any stumbling blocks as they discover and understand the beauty of a ballad as a ballad, of a lyric as a lyric, and of a sonnet as a sonnet.

As has been mentioned above, instructors cannot just finish their job by indiscriminately picking any poem of their choice and then discussing its theme and style in a shallow and superficial manner. A traditional biographical or historical criticism should not be the first priority either in introducing a poem to young readers, who must first feel attracted to the melody of its verse, the simplicity of its style, and the



accessibility of its content. Instructors should first focus on the primary creative elements of a poem. In short, a poem should be attractive or made attractive to students by virtue of its own merit, its intrinsic rather than extrinsic qualities, and the instructors' individual teaching style.

I think long narrative poems or poems with colloquialisms and archaisms should be avoided at the introductory level. For example, although Chaucer with his humanist touch and realistic humor is fun to read (with the exceptions of adult elements, of course) and can be highly entertaining to all age groups, the length of his individual Canterbury tales may prove to be a turn-off for the level of students I have in mind. However, some of the individual portraits of his pilgrims in the General Prologue (only rendered in modern English) may not be a bad choice. The same would be true about the Old English/Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, from which only some descriptive/narrative passages of human interest can be chosen. Given the allegorical complexity and dense allusiveness of Spenser's poetry and the stately and sonority of Milton's verse, one needs to completely avoid them except a few carefully chosen sonnets by the latter.

Coleridge also should be avoided except a few of his early lyrics and some selected passages from *The Ancient Mariner*. Teaching as complex a poem as "Kubla Khan," though rightly famous, to the first year Arabian Gulf students is far from what I think is an ideal practice. *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, in my view, are far from a judicious selection in the case of an introductory drama course, which may, however, include *Julius Caesar* instead as an ideal introduction to Shakespeare. Because of ironic indirection and density and multiplicity of meanings, one needs to exercise caution in choosing from the field of modern poetry too.

## VII

Many poets and playwrights defined and defended poetry in their own ways. It is worth quoting some of the definitions for the purpose of the motivation of both the teacher and the student. Towards the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V Scene 1), Shakespeare has his King Theseus compare and contrast a poet, a lover, and a madman and finds them strangely similar, yet distinctly different from each other. He defines and distinguishes them and their imagination as below:

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact.  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—

That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to  
heaven.

And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

Such tricks hath strong imagination,  
That if it would but apprehend some joy,  
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.

Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear! (my emphasis)

In other words, all three are to some extent insane and abnormal with the boundaries obscure and find themselves in a state of overheated and hyperactive imagination, the poet's, of course, being of the highest and noblest form.

In *An Apology for Poetry*, mentioned above, Sidney defended poetry by saying that the poet created another nature by endowing the earth with a variety of pleasant associations and thereby making the "too-much-loved earth more lovely." Lyric poems about nature, natural objects, and natural phenomena—all flower and bird and lake and river poems—bear testimony to Sidney's claim. Selections from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* ("The Sick Rose," "The Sunflower," "The Tyger"), Wordsworth's Lucy poems, "The Solitary Reaper" and "Daffodils" (that is, "I wandered lonely as a cloud"), Keats's "The poetry of earth is never dead," "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale," Shelley's "To a Skylark," "The Cloud," and "To the West Wind," Charles Kingsley's "The Sands of Dee," R L Stevenson's "From a Railway Carriage" and Tennyson's "The Eagle" are good examples of how the poets bestow the earth with beautiful associations and make "too-much-loved earth more lovely."

In addition to their poetical analogies and comparisons (that is, similes, metaphors, and symbols), and their descriptions of birds, lakes, rivers, oceans, mountains, stars, the moon, and the sun, the poets' catalogue of seasonal flowers alone—spring flowers, summer flowers, late summer/autumn flowers, winter flowers, beautiful rainy season flowers (the last being especially in South and South East Asia)—makes a singularly unique difference in generating student interest in poetry. For example, in addition to the above, there is the most wonderful flower scene in all Shakespeare (*The Winter's Tale*, IV. iv); there are the splendid flower verses in Milton's *Lycidas* (Third Movement, ll. 132-151); there is the excellent "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet" stanza in Keats's *Nightingale Ode*, as

there is also his excellent sonnet “To A Friend Who Sent Me Some Roses;” the unforgettable flowers near the beginning of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Al Aaraaf* and the Edenic flowers passage, about ten pp. from the beginning, in Beckford’s Gothic novel *The History of the Caliph Vathek*

Sidney’s defense of poetry is proleptic about many critical ideas that were to be put forward by others long after. It would anticipate the American poet-philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson’s views as expressed in his essay “The Poet,” based on a lecture he gave in 1842. When Emerson called the poet “Namer” and “Language-maker,” he unmistakably hearkened back to Sidney, who also called the poet by the same:

Among the Romans a poet was called vates, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet [...]; so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge [...]. But now let us see how the Greeks named it and how they deemed of it. The Greeks called him “a poet,” which name has, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It comes of this word poiein, which is “to make”; wherein I know not whether by luck or wisdom we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him “a maker.”

When Emerson stated that good poetry was not solely a matter of technical prowess, “for it is not meters, but a meter-making argument, that makes a poem,—a thought so passionate and alive, that, like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing,” he reminded the readers of Sidney’s “It is already said and, as I think truly said, that it is not rhyming and versing that makes poesy. One may be a poet without versing, and [one may be] a versifier without poetry.”

Emerson’s use of the metaphor of architectural aesthetics of beautiful design verbally echoed the same from Sidney. As mentioned towards the beginning of this article, Sidney defined poetry as “a speaking picture” and “a perfect picture,” which “illuminated or figured forth” the general and abstract ideas of other disciplines by clear images and living examples. It was only “the peerless poet,” Sidney thought, who combined the philosopher’s vague precepts and the historian’s factual details into striking and piercing “sight of the soul;” it was he who charmingly synthesized their “bare rules,” “learned definitions,” and “thorny arguments,” into vital and judicial comprehension. Their “wordish descriptions” may “most exquisitely” give one the “shapes, color, bigness, and particular marks” of a beast such as an elephant or a rhinoceros, or an architector may share with others the “full beauties” of “a gorgeous palace,” yet none should satisfy the

hearer’s “inward conceit with being witness to itself of a true lively knowledge” as the poet can do.

Just as the noble faculty of total and complete horsemanship is the ultimate goal of a skilled saddler or soldier, all the “serving sciences” (of the philosopher, historian, astronomer, physician, metaphysician, mathematician, lawyer, logician, rhetorician, geometrician, and arithmetician) are directed to “the highest end of the mistress knowledge, by the Greeks called *architektonikē*, which stands, as I think, in the knowledge of a man’s self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing, and not of well-knowing only.”

Both Emerson and Sidney illustrate their ideas by comparing or contrasting the poet and his poems with other figures, professions, and objects to achieve their vivid rhetorical effect. Emerson draws a similarity between the poet’s patterning his language into his works and the sculptor’s shaping his rocks and marbles into statues, between the poet’s sublime and visionary rapture and the children’s pure and simple, yet wild joy, both touched by a sense of magical buoyancy. He compares the poet’s insight—his “very high sort of seeing”—with true nectar; and his poems’ free survival and propagation with fungus, spores, and mushrooms. He compares the poet with the liberating gods, emancipating the selfish and floundering humanity locked in its own prison of material gains and interests like a shepherd lost and perished in a snowstorm howling not far from his home. The poet winged with his poems of inner and imaginative beauty is also compared to the Olympian bards of immortality fitted with wings of spiritual essence.

Emerson’s views that the thought of a poet “adorns nature with a new thing” (as also quoted above) and that “Nature will not be Buddhist; she resents generalizing, and insults the philosopher in every moment with a million of fresh particulars,” as said in his “Nominalist and Realist” essay, are precisely what Sidney claimed two hundred and fifty years before him:

Only the poet, disdainful to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow, in effect, into another nature, in making things either better than nature brings forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature [...] he goes hand in hand with nature [...] freely ranging within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much-loved earth more lovely; her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden.



Sidney's and Emerson's views would anticipate the Oxford University Professor Francis Turner Palgrave's comments in the Preface to his *Golden Treasury* (of the best Songs and Lyrical Pieces in the English language) in 1861:

Like the fabled fountain of the Azores, but with a more various power, the magic of this Art can confer on each period of life its appropriate blessing: on early years, Experience; on maturity Calm; on age Youthfulness. Poetry gives treasures "more golden than gold," leading us in higher and healthier ways than those of the world, and interpreting to us the lessons of Nature.

The eighteenth century neoclassical and Enlightenment English poet and essayist Samuel Johnson, who was one of Thomas Carlyle's heroes in the field of the men of letters, that is, knowledge and learning, a century later, wrote his most famous and popular work, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia* in 1759. In this imaginative travel writing of Oriental setting (in Africa, India, Persia, Syria, Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt), in the format of a philosophical discussion fable, about the choice of life in a very general way of what proves to be an impossible pursuit of happiness, to be found never and nowhere, Rasselas's friend and companion Imlac the poet, as if he is Johnson's mouthpiece or representative, makes a dissertation upon poetry in Chapter X of the fictional history of the prince. The widely-travelled Imlac describes that:

Wherever I went, I found that poetry was considered as the highest learning, and regarded with a veneration somewhat approaching to that which man would pay to the Angelick Nature... To a poet nothing can be useless. Whatever is beautiful, and whatever is dreadful, must be familiar to his imagination: he must be conversant with all that is awfully vast or elegantly little. The plants of the garden, the animals of the wood, the minerals of the earth, and meteors of the sky, must all concur to store his mind with inexhaustible variety: for every idea is useful for the enforcement or decoration of moral or religious truth; and he, who knows most, will have most power of diversifying his scenes, and of gratifying his reader with remote allusions and unexpected instruction. All the appearances of nature I was therefore careful to study, and every country which I have surveyed has contributed something to my poetical powers.

To Prince Rasselas's curious concern that "In so wide a survey," where there was always something new and different, Imlac "must surely have left much unobserved," the latter (Imlac) replies that what was

important was to watch and observe the general, not the particular:

The business of a poet, said Imlac, is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances: he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest. He is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness. (ibid/op cit).

Agreeing with Rasselas that to be a poet is indeed difficult, Johnson's mouthpiece Imlac stresses that a poet must be acquainted both with life and nature:

But the knowledge of nature is only half the task of a poet; he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life. His character requires that he estimate the happiness and misery of every condition; observe the power of all the passions in all their combinations, and trace the changes of the human mind as they are modified by various institutions and accidental influences of climate or custom, from the sprightliness of infancy to the despondence of decrepitude. He must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same: he must therefore content himself with the slow progress of his name; contemn the applause of his own time, and commit his claims to the justice of posterity. He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place. He must know many languages and many sciences; and, that his style may be worthy of his thoughts, must, by incessant practice, familiarize to himself every delicacy of speech and grace of harmony. (ibid/op cit, my emphasis).

Robert Folkenflik points out that while Johnson may have adopted the idea of the poet as "an interpreter of nature" from Ben Jonson, the younger generation English Romantic poet P B Shelley may have taken the concept of the poet as "an unacknowledged legislator of the world" in his *A Defence of Poetry* (written in 1821, posthumously published in 1840) from Johnson. However, English Romantic poets in general responded to Johnson's beautiful generalizations with their equally beautiful interest in the local, the particular, and the individual. Although, interestingly, as again pointed out by Folkenflik,

there are no tulips in the poetry of the English Romantic poets (except at the beginning of William Blake's Europe where the fairy sitting on a streaked tulip is suspected to be satirically "winking and blinking" Johnson), they numbered "the streaks of the tulip," choosing to lose or miss, so to speak, the forest for the (particularities) of plants and trees and their locale.

The great English Romantic poet William Wordsworth defines poetry, in his Preface to Lyrical Ballads, as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." His friend and contemporary Coleridge, in his Table Talk, gives a brief and homely definition of prose and poetry—"prose,—words in their best order; poetry,—the best words in their best order." In his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge concludes Chapter XIV by defining a poet and the poetical imagination like this:

[Poetry] is a distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself, which sustains and modifies the images, thoughts and emotions of the poet's own mind. The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other [...] He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusive appropriated the name of imagination. This power [...] reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter, and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry [...] Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius; fancy its drapery; motion its life; and imagination the soul that is everywhere [...] and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole (my emphasis).

In a similar way, their younger contemporary Percy Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, says that:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed; it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union, under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things.

In a letter to John Taylor, the youngest of the five or six major English Romantic poets and also the first to die at the age of only twenty-five, John Keats

expresses a few axioms about poetry. One is that "poetry should surprise by a fine excess, and not by singularity; it should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance." The others are as follows:

Its [poetry's] touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless, instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should, like the sun, seem natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what poetry should be, than to write it—And this leads me to another axiom—That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all (my emphasis).

Keats's most well-known axiom is the one that came as his advice to Shelley to cultivate density, discipline, concentration and form consciousness: "You I am sure will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and 'load every rift' of your subject with ore."

Anglo-Irish poet W B Yeats, one of the greatest in modern times, argues that everything since the fall of Adam, including poetry, needs much labor and practice, yet it has to seem normal, natural, and unlabored to be acceptable. So, in "Adam's Curse," he defines the job of a poet writing poetry like this:

A line will take us hours maybe;  
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,  
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught. ...  
For to articulate sweet sounds together  
Is to work harder than all these, and yet  
Be thought an idler by the noisy set  
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen  
The martyrs call the world.

What the Romantic and modern poets have said about poetry as a creative art was said, well before them, by the seventeenth century English Renaissance poet Ben Jonson in his "Still to be neat, still to be dressed" lyric, the word "still" to be taken as "always." However, the poets radically differ in their mode of poetic presentation and their aesthetic and rhetorical stance. For Jonson, whose angle of vision was one of satirical comedy characterized by a unity of creation and balance, both in life and art, there was no discrepancy between perfection in life and perfection in art. Although his above-mentioned poem is outwardly a comic paradox between "art's hid[den] causes" and the "adulteries" of art, on the one hand, and, on the other, the naturalness and unaffectedness of life, its underlying meaning is to pursue the sophistications of art (even if that means hiding something not so sound), yet make life simple

and graceful with a "sweet neglect" reflected in "Robes loosely flowing, hair as free." Ultimately, the message is one of smooth balance, attractive to the eyes and at the same time striking to the heart.

The theme of Yeats's "Adam's Curse" is precisely the same, but treated perhaps on a more pathetic and serious note. This is to work hard at poetry and cultivate it so tirelessly that the finished product should paradoxically seem to be natural and effortless. However, for Yeats, who is caught in tragic doubts and dilemma, the two perfections of life and art, unlike Jonson, are hardly reconcilable, though equally admirable and desirable.

#### VIII

Compared with the current textbooks and other collections of poems available today, my idea of the beginner's annotated poetry textbook for the young Arabian Gulf students is such that it would include as many lyrics or lyrical poems as possible—short, simple, traditionally popular, and yet "best loved"—that have withstood the test of time and have now acquired the status of canonical classics by all standards. The proposed textbook is expected to be our Arabian Gulf students' "golden treasury," as Palgrave made his selection of songs and lyrics for the readers he had in mind. In its first edition (1861), Palgrave's *Treasury*, which kept expanding through succeeding editions into a number of volumes, did not include any poem by any living poet of the time. Its contents, however, start from the 16th century.

The list of poems I would like to see in the textbook of my conception should follow a chronological order, each to be accompanied by brief annotations and a brief gist, summary, or synopsis, not a paraphrase. At the end of such a textbook, there should be an index of the titles arranged or grouped together according to the themes or subjects. Among others, the following poets, both major and minor, should be represented: selected ancient anonymous ballads, Henry Wotton, Thomas Wyatt, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Robert Herrick, George Herbert, James Shirley, Alexander Pope, Oliver Goldsmith, John Scott of Amwell, William Cowper, William Blake, Walter Scott, Robert Southey, William Wordsworth, Walter Savage Landor, Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, John Keats, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Christina Rossetti, Matthew Arnold, Rudyard Kipling, A. E. Housman, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rupert Brooke, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Longfellow, W. B. Yeats, and Robert Frost.

Some of the poems to be selected may fall in the category of what George Orwell, in his 1942 review of *A Choice of Kipling's Verse* edited by T. S. Eliot, called "good bad poetry" on which, three years later, he elaborated his thoughts in an essay called "Good

bad books" (1945), a term he borrowed from G K Chesterton. It is a brand of superficial, doggerel-type, yet popular poetry. This kind of poetry, according to Orwell, may be sentimental and yet "capable of giving true pleasure to people." The merit of a "good bad poem" is that,

[...] however sentimental it may be, its sentiment is a 'true' sentiment in the sense that you are bound to find yourself thinking the thought it expresses sooner or later; and then, if you happen to know the poem, it will come back into your mind and seem better than it did before. Such poems are a kind of rhyming proverb, and it is a fact that definitely popular poetry is usually gnomic or sententious.

Orwell cites, for example, some popular, catchy and proverbial lines or phrases from the "good bad poet" Kipling:

"East is East, and West is West"

"The White Man's Burden."

"What do they know of England who only England know?"

"He travels the fastest who travels alone."

Orwell claims that, in the above, "There is a vulgar thought vigorously expressed. It may not be true, but at any rate it is a thought that everyone thinks [...] there the thought is, ready-made and, as it were, waiting for you. So the chances are that, having once heard this line, you will remember it." He gives more examples of "good bad poetry," such as Thomas Hood's "The Bridge of Sighs," Charles Kingsley's "When all the world is young, lad," Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade," Leigh Hunt's "Jenny Kissed Me," Felicia Hemans' "Casabianca," Kipling's "If" and Arthur Hugh Clough's "Say not the struggle naught availeth" (meaning, "Say not the struggle avails nothing").

These poems should certainly find their way into the textbook I would like to see in front of the students in the context under consideration. "One could fill a fair-sized anthology," Orwell goes on, "with good bad poems, if it were not for the significant fact that good bad poetry is usually too well known to be worth reprinting." He contends that in our age "true" or "good" poetry cannot have any genuine popularity because "it is, and must be, the cult of a very few people, the least tolerated of the arts [...]; in general ours is a civilization in which the very word "poetry" evokes a hostile snigger or a sort of frozen disgust." Reading some of Kipling's verse, according to Orwell, is "almost a shameful pleasure, like the taste for cheap sweets that some people secretly carry into middle life. But even with his best passages one has the same sense of being seduced by something spurious."

However, Orwell says, [...] good bad poetry can get across to the most unpromising audiences if the right atmosphere has been worked up beforehand. [...] The fact that such a thing as good bad poetry can exist is a sign of the emotional overlap between the intellectual and the ordinary man. The intellectual is different from the ordinary man, but only in certain sections of his personality, and even then not all the time. But what is the peculiarity of a good bad poem? A good bad poem is a graceful monument to the obvious. It records in memorable form — for verse is a mnemonic device, among other things — some emotion which very nearly every human being can share.”

It is this kind of poems memorably expressing some moral or practical wisdom that I believe will prove to be useful and interesting in many ways to our young Arabian Gulf students, who are about to initiate themselves into poetry for the first time.

One critic thinks, “Orwell’s ‘good bad’ poetry is ‘bad’ because it is superficial (lacking in aesthetic, intellectual, psychological or moral depth), but ‘good’ because it is skilfully written and enjoyable to read.” This critic distinguishes “good bad poems” from F R Leavis’s “great tradition” (that ran from “from Homer through the classical Greek and Latin writers, through Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton down to Eliot and James”) that “is characterized by aesthetic complexity, intellectual depth, psychological observation, and moral seriousness; or at least it can be interpreted as respecting those goals.”

To conclude, the textbook of my conception, as I believe, is to be well-designed, well-organized, and well-illustrated, containing not only Orwellian good bad poems but also good and great poems (by any consideration), many of which have been mentioned above. With that end in view, this article intends to make the statement that the fictional and imaginative forms of literature of which poetry is indeed a key and major part can be productively used to teach English to those for whom it is not a native tongue. In fact, until recently, teaching English as a subject meant teaching English literature and language through literature. Only recently, with the emergence of linguistics and education as independent fields of study, has the teaching of English become teaching it as mainly a language, in addition to literature, of course; in some instances, even minus the literary component. English has thus unfortunately been somewhat separated from the teaching of it as literature. This development was perhaps prompted by the rolling back of colonialism and imperialism since the nineteen fifties, to be increasingly replaced by cultural and linguistic imperialism, along with the

rise of a new critical awareness under the impact of modern political and economic forces.

Nevertheless, newly emerging ideas in the teaching of language argue for teaching language through literature. This is indeed one of the most effective means to acquire mastery and excel in language. Language and literature can indeed be studied together without being divorced from each other. The language of literature is not just a language of human interactions and social relationships but it is much more than that. Suffused with the elements of culture, politics, religion, psychology, gender, film, media, criminology, and environmental issues, it is one of the best and richest areas from which to tap ideas and reap the means, modes, and manners of expressing them. It is, therefore, a fertile ground to crop and conspire from in learning and studying a language in all its forms and styles, from the obvious to the implied and from the overstated/understated to the subtle and complex and underlying.

## IX

Finally, delivery of a course on Introduction to Poetry/Literature and the textbook on such a course may include some preliminary information about the major trends in modern literary and critical theory. In addition to the historical and biographical criticism of a piece of literature, students are supposed to have a positive and favourable response to the poems and passages demonstrating the aesthetics of the picturesque (after William Gilpin, Claude Lorrain, Uvedale Price, Richard Payne Knight, J M W Turner, and John Constable) and the beautiful and the sublime (after Edmund Burke). They are likely to benefit from an insightful inkling into the simplified notions of modern theory that deals with complex epistemological and hermeneutical matters—methods of investigating and distinguishing between the different approaches to interpretations. A rudimentary knowledge about the same may fruitfully be shared with the young students throughout the term.

Starting with the earliest concept of literature/poetry as a product of inspiration, not of knowledge, which is, therefore, arguably unreliable and irrational and, therefore, unable to depict truth and teach morality (as Socrates/Plato thought), there may follow a discussion of poetry/literature as a mimetic art (as suggested by Aristotle/Horace/Longinus) that represents life and society as a mirror faithfully reflects nature and external reality. The instructor may then proceed with poetry/literature as a didactic art that provides a source of knowledge, wisdom, and morality, and then as an expressive art (“lamp” rather than “mirror,” in the view of the famous critic M H Abrams), which suggests that literature/poetry is an imaginative outlet not only to the author’s inner soul

and internal reality, but also for the poet to the outside reality. Abrams synthesizes all these theories in his award-winning books, such as *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, and *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays on English Romanticism*.

While some of the following ideas may be challenging to but not beyond the students of this level and region/locality, those who are smart and intelligent may still be motivated by a basic or elementary knowledge of these literary and critical ideas. There is an understanding of poetry/literature as poetics, in the sense of the American Formalist Criticism (as practiced by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren), followed by the similar New Criticism (as put forward by Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom, among others. Formalist criticism is probably the most basic of all critical approaches to literature. In their book titled, *Theory of Literature* (1942), Wellek and Warren argue that “the natural and sensible starting point for work in literary scholarship is the interpretation and analysis of the works of literature themselves” (Charters, p. 1098). Anticipating New Criticism, they believe that the content of a work of literature can be understood by its form and the intrinsic nature of its form, without referring to the life of its author or its historical times.

Both Formalist and New Critics “would concentrate on analysing how the various elements of a literary work are integrated into the complex and unique structure of a self-contained aesthetic work” (Charters, p. 1098). Foregrounding the “poeticity” or “literariness” of poetic effects through tropes and figures, New Critics also would find biographical and historical references irrelevant to the appreciation of a text. This means that the poetic devices of metaphor, alliteration, assonance, paradox, irony, ambiguity, and rhythm and rhyme worked together to render a poem a unified whole. It is as if a poem, as Brooks thought, was like a well-wrought urn, having nothing to do with the personal life of the poet and the external social and political reality.

This view of poetry/literature, separated from and independent of authorial intentions, has a partial similarity with the French (Roland Barthes's) view of structuralism based on the conventions of form and formalist/objective interpretations. This view of Barthes later transitioned to his completely different idea of what was post-structuralism that focused on the primacy of the text and its arbitrariness in part or whole. Barthes' idea of the death of the author (1968) matched Michel Foucault's idea of the death of literature, both paving the way for many other

modern theories to sprout and come to fore. Directly challenging the traditional biographical, historical, and formalist interpretations of a text, psychological criticism, reader-response criticism, gender criticism, cultural criticism, New Historicism, and deconstructionist criticism—all these approaches focus on the underlying instability and uncertainty of human language and its multiple and sometimes self-contradictory and irreconcilable meanings making it impossible for a text to make a fixed and final meaning.

The instructor of an introductory poetry course may therefore like to acquaint students with a glimpse of one of the most resonant and controversial theories—Walter Jackson Bate's and Harold Bloom's psychologically-rooted theory of misreading and the anxiety of poetic influence, according to which a poet deliberately tries to misread his predecessors to avoid the burden/influence of the past to make his own way—an original way. Stephen Greenblatt's *New Historicism* challenges the traditional ideological readings by pointing to the fact that sometimes historical moments, elements, and evidences are erased and occluded from a literary text, only to allow them to reassert by virtue of their very absence or suppression and thereby give a new meaning to the text that is otherwise withheld from the commonly understood idealized meanings.

While it may not be easy to share any thought about the post-structuralist signs and semiology that led to Jacques Derrida's and Paul de Man's theory of Deconstruction, partly akin to New Criticism, the instructor may still like to shed some deconstructionist light on language and meaning as being unstable and indeterminate, different from what is commonly taken for granted. The dismantling of the fixed, inherited, and ideological meanings by way of allegorical readings and by foregrounding what is in the background is the business of deconstruction. It is completely different from the New Critical concept of coherent, unified, and finished product but somewhat similar to New Critical divorce of the text from the outside reality or authorial assertion and authority. Students may briefly be talked into the modern idea of literature as social discourse or social text, which (in view of Michel Foucault and Michael Bakhtin) reflects everyday social life, cultural studies, cultural materialism, power of class, race, gender, and professions and their pluralities (in a way harking back to old mimetic, didactic and expressive theories combined).

The theory of the postmodern embraces those multiplicities, just as the rise of nationalisms and nationalistic freedoms in the Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries (as they became independent from their old colonial masters that

governed through a divide of the social, political and cultural constructs of “we” and “other,” and “us” and “they”) transpire into the notions of postcolonialism and orientalism.

One modern interesting criticism of literature is the study of literature in connection with the concept of environmental tradition and ecological balance, as distinguished from pastoralism in literature. The examination of the relationship between literature and the biological physical world (in economic, religious, and endangered species sense, for instance) is variously called ecocriticism, ecopoetry, ecotheory, ecopoetics, green writing, green studies, and environmental criticism. A demonstration of how “ecology, sustainable design, bio-politics, environmental history, and environmentalism” inform the works of literature in an interdisciplinary way of cultural, scientific, religious, naturalist, or environmentalist destruction, degradation, desertification, motivation, regeneration and revitalization falls under this category as established and expounded, among others, by Jonathan Bate, Karl Kroeber, James McKusick, and Timothy Morton.

In the very last leg, literature may be presented as a written utterance, as Stanley Fish does, of an infinite plurality of meanings. This plurality is brought to the text by the subjectivity of individual readers in and outside the classroom situations, away from both the assumed and intended meanings insisted/asserted by the reader and the author respectively. Triggered by a reaction to M H Abrams’ challenge of the “wilful readers” overriding the “literal or normative meanings,” the “textuality” of a text, according to Fish, again divorced from the formalist and objective interpretations, and established set of criteria, depends not on the text as an object but on the creative relationship between the text and the reader, the latter’s response to the text being determined by her/his “linguistic competence” in terms of the authority of across-the-disciplines “interpretive communities” s/he is a native of and familiar with. In this reader-response theory/criticism, meaning unfolds/emerges as the reader creatively wrestles/struggles with the language of the text in question and becomes engaged in the act of reading itself, not necessarily with the text as an object of its own set of forms and structures.

X

If a conclusion is a brief restatement of the introductory materials or a summation of the arguments made throughout, this article is about what may be said as the ideal contents of an annotated poetry textbook for the native students in the Arabian Gulf in the context of their not so well developed command or proficiency in English, their limited exposure to English, and their religiously

conservative society compared with the rest of the world. It suggests that only short, simple, and charming lyrics, containing moral and didactic lessons about the love of God, country, humanity, pastoral simplicities of nature, religion (any religion), elegiac lament, local culture, and country house traditions would be the ideal contents of a textbook for the young college students in the Arabian Gulf. Poems about the rebellious uprisings, revolutionary politics, lusty/lustful love, and queer sexual orientations being out of line with the culture of the region, the article considers the existing textbooks not suitable. The proposed textbook should also consist of what are called “good bad” poems by Orwell. At the same time, the textbook in question to be used during the delivery of a course on the introduction to poetry should include some classic and widely regarded definitions of poetry as well as some simplified basics of modern literary and critical theory as mentioned above.

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