WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM LITERATURE?

Hartono
Dosen FKIP UMM

It is quite evident that most of us are indifferent to literature. To illustrate, let me just quote some people's comments on the works. "I do not understand what the importance of literature to our life is.

For me, personally, literature does not have any influence on my life," said a pharmacist. An electrical engineer once said, "Reading literary novels? Just wasting time. Such books are just the works of daydreamers." And this is the worst: "Literature? What kind of animal is it? In our course we have never been taught the definition of that; however I might be able to say that literary works contain complicated ideas poured from the writer's mind," said a student of English Department of an outstanding university. And I believe it is not too difficult to have many other similar comments.

The Nature of Literature

Literature is an amusement. Good work of literature is able to give a feeling of satisfaction and happiness to the readers. It gives fascination, makes the readers so absorbed in reading it that they forget their passing time. It never makes the readers bored, and the readers never have such kind of feeling of "being forced to read". They feel free and happy in bringing themselves into the work. It is true that some works of literature are hard to understand. But this does not mean that it is always the works that cause confusion, rather it may be the readers themselves who do not have sufficient background knowledge.

Good work of literature constitutes the interpretation of life. A good work of literature is appreciated because of its success in leading the readers to know the new aspects of everyday life. In this respect, literature has a close integrated relation to the Nature. The author tries to give values on every day life so that after reading his/her work, the readers will be able to return to their every day life with new perspective and attitude toward their daily life.

Good work of literature is an innovation. An author is considered as a great one so long as he/she is successful in bringing positive innovation. His/her brilliant ideas will be able to change and give improvements on the work. And this will, in turn, give some kind of input to the readers of better perspective toward a better life.

Contribution of Literature

Some fiction writers suggest there are several contributions of literature to our life. They are as follows:

- The great work of literature gives the readers awareness of the truth of life. From literature the readers can obtain the deep knowledge and understanding about human beings, the world and the life.
The great work of literature gives the readers the feeling of amusement and satisfaction. This kind of entertainment is intellectual and spiritual. And this will bring the readers to have actual happiness. In my opinion, this kind of contribution of literature is essential for our life in this present time.

The great work of literature is immortal. It is different from other kinds of writing. Newspapers and magazines will be outdated when they are read a week after. This is so because they just give reports on daily happenings that often constitute immediate appeal. Great work of literature, however, does not have such kind of characteristic. The great work of literature such as Mahabharata that was written in long long time ago is still worth reading in today's time. Great work of literature has characteristics of immortality because it contains messages that are of real truth.

The great work of literature is not restricted in nationality. Even though a work of literature is written on the basis of a certain situation and of a certain period of time and a certain place, it still shows the general truth, so that people from different nationality can appreciate it. The problems of humanity in England in the 18th century, for example, will also become our problems in this present time. This shows that literature helps us in understanding people of their cultures.

The great work of literature constitutes a work of art. It is a beautiful masterpiece. It can fulfil human's needs of beauty. The need of beauty itself is the will of God to us. Art in general and literature in specific constitute a masterpiece of culture created and needed by human beings. We know that physical needs can be accomplished through science, technology and economics, while spiritual needs are fulfilled through religion and art.

The great work of literature is able to give us deep understanding of what we know. The knowledge we obtain from the Nature is just a kind of reasoning, and it will "come into a life" in literature. To give an example, we know that to kill is cruel and inhuman, however this knowledge will come lively into our feeling and we feel that the murder is very terrible when we read literature on such case. With this kind of literature we are led to an understanding that killing is immoral and should be avoided.

Reading great work of literature can also help the readers be cultured beings who are responsive toward any kind of goodness in this life. Such human beings always try to find out the values of truth, the beauty, and the goodness in his every day life. One of the ways to find out the values is through involving ourselves with the work of art, including the work of literature. The habit and the feeling of happiness to associate with the works of art and literature for cultured human beings will make themselves thoughtful and noble. This is so because the works of art and literature give such kind of feeling and thinking. Those cultured human beings are hoped to be kind, wise and free, but having the ability to control themselves wisely.

In brief, it can be generalized that literature has at least two important kinds of function: social function and aesthetic function. The former deals with the involvement of literature in social, economic, politic, ethic, and religious living. Whereas the later concerns with the performance of work of literature that can give a feeling of fascination and beauty for its readers. In general the two functions of literature are well integrated.