

Open Learning

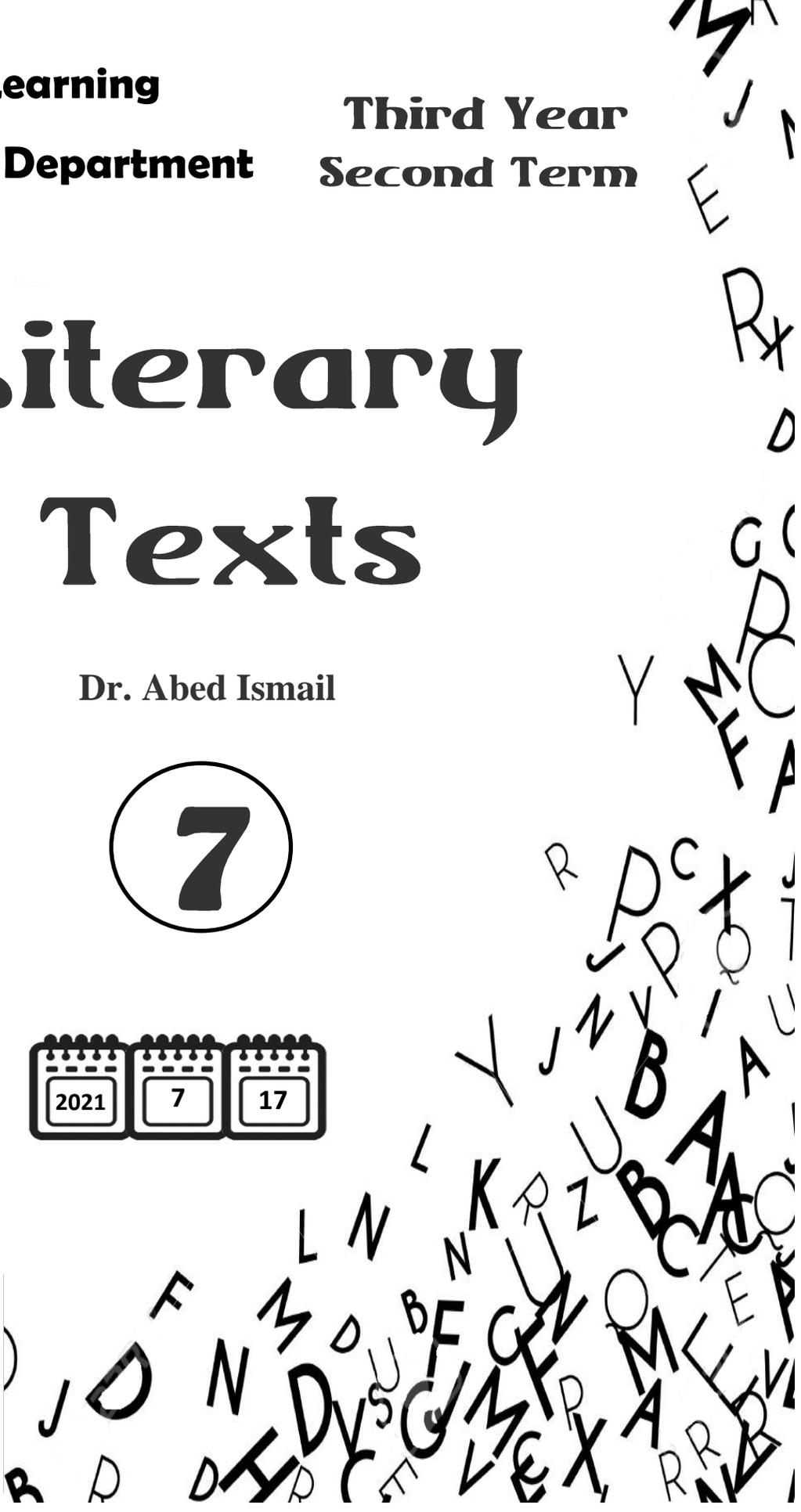
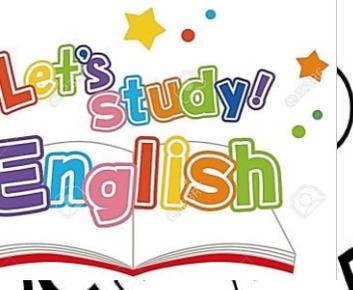
Translation Department

Third Year
Second Term

Literary Texts

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Good morning!

The First Confession

Today, we will talk about the story “*First Confession*” by *Frank O’Connor*; have you read it? It is about a journey from innocence to maturity (من البراءة إلى البلوغ), from childhood to adulthood (من الطفولة إلى الرشد). The main character in the story is a child who is seven years old; his name is *Jackie*. *Jackie* plays a double role; he is both a narrator and a character (يلعب دور الراوي وشخصية في الرواية). He is narrating his own story. The theme is a first confession (الاعتراف الأول): the first time he would go to church and tell the priest his secrets. It is like a tradition where he should go to the church, sit down with the priest and tell his secrets. Before he goes to the church, he attended classes about how to make a confession.

The second character is *Jackie’s* sister *Nora*; she is different from her brother because she is portrayed as being greedy (طماعة), selfish (أنانية), and self-centered. She is unlike *Jackie*, and this is why they are always fighting. The story begins with introducing *Jackie’s* grandmother, who is a woman from countryside, and *Jackie* never liked the way she talks and moves. The story begins with a conflict between *Jackie* who is a child and his grandmother who is an old lady. Here, we have a generational conflict between young and old.

تبدأ القصة بصراع بين جاكى وجدته القروية التي لطالما كره أسلوبها وكلامها، هذا ما يسمى بصراع الأجيال.

Another conflict is between *Jackie* and his sister.

The third character is *Ms. Ryan* who is *Jackie’s* teacher of religion. She is a little bit conservative (متحفظة) and very serious (جدية). Unlike the fourth character who is the nameless priest to whom *Jackie* would come and confess. This man is also a man of religion, but he is funny, tolerant, honest, and open minded unlike *Ryan*. These are the main characters; *Jackie*, his sister *Nora*, his teacher *Ryan*, and the priest. Those are the characters we see and hear, while the minor characters *Jackie* tells us about them.

Minor characters or figures are:

1. *Jackie's* grandmother: the story opens with her coming to live at his parent's house.
2. *Jackie's* friend *Bill*.
3. *Jackie's* parents.

Jackie, after the confession, is not the same before the confession. The author is trying to make fun of certain rituals in religion. Notice that the idea here is that we are born as children who have nothing to do with religion and we do not even choose our own religion. Your religion is chosen for you by the power of traditions.

At the beginning, *Jackie* was overcome by fear, so his life can be divided into two stages. Fear before the confession, and after the confession he feels comfortable and happy particularly when he knew that he made a good confession which means he told the truth.

يمكننا اعتبار أن حياة جاكى منقسمة إلى قسمين: الخوف قبل الاعتراف، والراحة بعد الاعتراف.

When he was under the mercy of *Mrs. Ryan*, he felt fear because of her. So, we have two versions of religion as far as *Jackie* is concerned; one is good and the other is bad. The author criticizes *Mrs. Ryan's* attitude towards religion which causes fear among children. She begins her lecture by talking about hell not heaven, this means that religion for her is punishment.

الكاتب ينتقد الأنسة ريان بسبب أسلوبها الخاطيء في تعليم الدين الذي يسبب الخوف للأطفال، تستمر بالكلام عن الجحيم.

For the priest, religion is reward and this is why at the confession, he gave *Jackie* a gift because he told the truth. The priest is young and *Mrs. Ryan* is old. She likes to speak about punishment, sins, and hell; while religion for the priest is happiness. That is why at the end *Jackie* is rewarded because he told the truth. The only one who is punished is *Mrs. Ryan* because she was interested in money.

We are going to read passages from it.

All the trouble began when my grandfather died

This voice is Jackie's voice, and he is using the first point of view of what we call narrative technique which is the "I" and it is subjective. We said that subjective point of view is intimate and inconsistent, but in Jackie's case, he is very consistent and does not change his mind.

All the trouble began when my grandfather died and my grandmother - my father's mother - came to live with us. Relations in the one house are a strain at the best of times, but, to make matters worse, my grandmother was a real old countrywoman and quite unsuited to the life in town. She had a fat, wrinkled old face, and, to Mother's great indignation, went round the house in bare feet-the boots had her crippled, she said. For dinner she had a jug of porter and a pot of potatoes with-some-times-a bit of salt fish, and she poured out the potatoes on the table and ate them slowly, with great relish, using her fingers by way of a fork.

The first paragraph is introducing Jackie's grandmother. As we know, plot should be based on conflict, so that it can move forward.

my grandmother was a real old countrywoman and quite unsuited to the life in town.

Notice he uses characterization in introducing his grandmother, he describes here from outside and inside.

She had a fat, wrinkled old face,

He is describing her body; external.

went round the house in bare feet-the boots had her crippled,

she does not wear shoes.

and she poured out the potatoes on the table and ate them slowly, with great relish, using her fingers by way of a fork.

She ate with her hands instead of a fork or a spoon.

Now, girls are supposed to be fastidious, but I was the one who suffered most from this. Nora, my sister, just sucked up to the old woman for the penny she got every Friday out of the old-age pension,

Now, he is describing his sister *Nora*: *sucked up* means she is very close to her grandmother because she get one penny from her.

a thing I could not do.

This means he is different from his sister.

I was too honest, that was my trouble;

He is honest and *Nora* is not.

and when I was playing with Bill Connell, the sergeant major's son, and saw my grandmother steering up the path with the jug of porter sticking out from beneath her shawl, I was mortified. I made excuses not to let him come into the house, because I could never be sure what she would be up to when we went in.

He moves on talking about his friend *Bill Connell*. This means he does not like *Bill* to see his grandmother. The following paragraph talks about *Jackie's* parents. Notice that the grandmother also causes troubles between the father and the mother.

When Mother was at work and my grandmother made the dinner I wouldn't touch it. Nora once tried to make me, but I hid under the table from her and took the bread-knife with me for protection.

Nora tried to force him to eat from his grandmother's food.

Nora let on to be very indignant (she wasn't, of course, but she knew *Mother* saw through her, so she sided with *Gran*) and came after me. I lashed out at her with the bread-knife, and after that she left me alone.

Notice how he is honest. *Gran* means grandmother.

I stayed there till Mother came in from work and made my dinner, but when Father came in later, Nora said in a shocked voice: "Oh, Dadda, do you know what Jackie did at dinnertime?" Then, of course, it all came out; Father gave me a flaking; Mother interfered, and for days after that he didn't speak to me and Mother barely spoke to Nora.

Nora is not just annoying *Jackie*, but she is also gossiping. His mother sided with him against his grandmother this time.

And all because of that old woman ! God knows, I was heart-scalded.

heart-scalded means he was so angry.

Then, to crown my misfortunes, I had to make my first confession and communion. It was an old woman called Ryan who prepared us for these.

Now, he introduces his teacher *Mrs. Ryan*. To make your first confession as a child, you need to go through a training, *Mrs. Ryan* is going to teach him this.

She was about the one age with Gran; she was well-to-do, lived in a big house on Montenotte, wore a black cloak and bonnet,

She is an old lady like his grandmother. She is rich.

and came every day to school at three o'clock when we should have been going home, and talked to us of hell. She may have mentioned the other place as well, but that could only have been by accident, for hell had the first place in her heart.

The other place is paradise. He gives us examples in the next paragraph.

She lit a candle, took out a new half-crown, and offered it to the first boy who would hold one finger, only one finger! - in the flame for five minutes by the school clock.

She is teaching them by punishment and fear.

Being always very ambitious I was tempted to volunteer, but I thought it might look greedy. Then she asked were we afraid of holding one finger-only one finger! - in a little candle flame for five minutes and not afraid of burning all over in roasting hot furnaces for all eternity. "All eternity! Just think of that! A whole lifetime goes by and it's nothing, not even a drop in the ocean of your sufferings." The woman was really interested about hell, but my attention was all fixed on the half-crown. At the end of the lesson she put it back in her purse. It was a great disappointment; a religious woman like that, you wouldn't think she'd bother about a thing like a half-crown.

She is not wrong in this, but it is wrong to tell the children that.

Another day she said she knew a priest who woke one night to find a fellow he didn't recognize leaning over the end of his bed. The priest was a bit frightened, naturally enough but he asked the fellow what he wanted, and the fellow said in a deep, husky voice that he wanted to go to confession. The priest said it was an awkward time and wouldn't it do in the morning, but the fellow said that last time he went to confession, there was one sin he kept back, being ashamed to mention it, and now it was always on his mind. Then the priest knew it was a bad case, because the fellow was after making a bad confession and committing a mortal sin. He got up to dress, and just then the cock crew in the yard outside, and lo and behold! - when the priest looked round there was no sign of the fellow, only a smell of burning timber, and when the priest looked at his bed didn't he see the print of two hands burned in it? That was because the fellow had made a bad confession. This story made a shocking impression on me.

Now, he is giving us another example which we call a story within a story or what we call a plot within a plot. This means that the short story itself has two plots; main and secondary, but they are interconnected because the same theme connects both. The story is told by *Mrs. Ryan*; it is about a priest (not the character priest in our story) who received a stranger guy at home after 12 o'clock at midnight. Why? Because the guy made a bad confession which means he lied, so he could not sleep and came to the priest again. He told the priest that he wants to go to confession, and the priest of course asked him if he can wait till morning. As they were talking, the stranger was burned; so *Mrs. Ryan* is telling the children that he made a bad confession and lied, and the punishment was that he was burned.

Then, the third example is when *Jackie* talks about *Mrs. Ryan* telling other children to examine their consciences. All these words are meaningful to adults, but not children.

But the worst of all was when she showed us how to examine our conscience. Did we take the name of the Lord, our God, in vain? Did we honor our father and our mother? (I asked her did this include grandmothers and she said it did.) Did we love our neighbours as ourselves? Did we covet our neighbor's goods? (I thought of the way I felt about the penny that Nora got every Friday.) I decided that, between one thing and another, I must have broken the whole ten commandments, all on account of that old woman, and so far as I could see, so long as she remained in the house, I had no hope of ever doing anything else.

He thought that he is the bad sinner.

I was scared to death of confession.

He speaks on behalf of all children. Religion -from *Mrs. Ryan* point of view- causes fear, but later, when we see the priest, we see that religion causes joy and happiness. We will finish the whole story next time.

That is all for today
See you next week

