



**NATIOANL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**COURSE CODE: ENG 111**

**COURSE TITLE: AN INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE  
AND LITERARY CRITICISM**

**COURSE  
GUIDE****ENG 111  
AN INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE AND LITERARY  
CRITICISM**

**Course Team**      Professor    Olaofe    Isaac    Ade    (Course  
Developer/Writer) - ABU  
Oyeniyi Okunoye (Course Writer) - OAU  
Onyeka Iwuchukwu (Course Coordinator) - NOUN

**NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

National Open University of Nigeria  
Headquarters  
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way  
Victoria Island, Lagos

Abuja Office  
5 Dar es Salaam Street  
Off Aminu Kano Crescent  
Wuse II, Abuja

e-mail: [centralinfo@nou.edu.ng](mailto:centralinfo@nou.edu.ng)

URL: [www.nou.edu.ng](http://www.nou.edu.ng)

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *ENG 111: Introduction to Literature and Literary Criticism*. This three-credit unit course is available for students in the second semester of the first year BA English Language. The course serves as a foundation in the study of literary criticism. It exposes you to forms critical theories and concept in literary criticism. You will also read some literary texts which are used to illustrate the above. The materials have been developed with the Nigerian context in view. This course guide provides information on the organisation and requirements of the course.

## COURSE AIMS

The aims are to help you understand the concept of literature and literary criticism. These broad aims will be achieved by:

- i. introducing you to the study of literature and literary criticism
- ii. familiarising you with the unique characteristics of literature and literary criticism
- iii. acquainting you with the unique procedure that will enable you read, appreciates and analyse literary texts
- iv. preparing you for further studies in literature and literary criticism.

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

There are 18 units in the course and each unit has its objectives. You should read the objectives of each unit and bear them in mind as you go through the unit.

On your successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- a. define literature and literary criticism
- b. discuss the concepts and principles that you need for the study and enjoyment of literary works
- c. explain the different genres of literature
- d. recognise the techniques needed in literary criticism
- e. analyse literary texts
- f. enjoy and appreciate any literary work.

## WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

To complete this course, you are required to study the units, the recommended novels, plays, poems and other related materials. You will be required to undertake some exercises for which you need a pen, a notebook, and other materials that will be listed in this guide. At the end of each unit, you will be required to submit written assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of the course, you will write a final examination.

## COURSE MATERIALS

The major materials you will need for the course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

## STUDY UNITS

The breakdown of the 18 study units are as follows:

### Module 1 Concepts and Definition

- Unit 1 Introducing Literature: Definitions and Forms
- Unit 2 Introducing Literature: Its Characteristics I
- Unit 3 Introducing Literature: Its Characteristics II

### Module 2 Convention and Techniques

- Unit 1 Introducing Prose Works: Characteristics and Techniques
- Unit 2 Introducing Prose Works: Prose Fiction
- Unit 3 Introducing Prose Works: Non-Fiction

### Module 3 Introducing Prose

- Unit 1 The Nature of Drama
- Unit 2 Dramatic Elements and Device
- Unit 3 Tragedy
- Unit 4 Comedy and Tragicomedy

**Module 4 Introducing Poetry**

- Unit 1 Introduction to Poetry: Origin, Form and Structure
- Unit 2 Language of Poetry
- Unit 3 Introduction to Literary Appreciation of Poetry
- Unit 4 Introduction to African and Non-African Poetry
- Unit 5 Appreciating a Poem

**Module 5 Textual Analysis**

- Unit 1 Textual Analysis of Prose Fiction: *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- Unit 2 Texture Analysis of Drama: Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*
- Unit 3 Textual Analysis of Poetic Works: English Poems

**TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES**

Every unit contains a list of references and further readings. Try to get as many as possible of those textbooks and materials listed. The textbooks and materials are meant to deepen your knowledge of the course.

**ASSIGNMENT FILE**

An assessment file and a marking scheme will be made available to you. In the assessment file, you will find details of the works you must submit to your tutor marking. There are two aspects of the assessment of this course; the tutor-marked assignment and the written examination. The marks you obtain in these two areas will make up your final marks. The assignment must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadline stated in the presentation schedule and the assignment file.

**TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS (TMAs)**

You will have to submit a specified number of the (TMAs). Every unit in this course has a tutor marked assignment. You are required to attempt all questions, and you will be assessed on all of them but the best four performances from the (TMAs) will be used for your 30% grading. When you have completed an assignment, send it together with a tutor-marked assignment form, to your tutor. Make sure each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline for submissions. If for any reason, you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor for a possible extension. Extension will not be granted after the due date unless under exceptional circumstances.

## FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination will be a test of two hours and you will be examined in all areas of course. Find time to read the units all over before your examination. The final examination will constitute 70% of your final grade and you will be required to answer three questions.

## PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

The dates for the submission of all assignments will be communicated to you. You will also be told the date of completing the study units and dates for examinations.

## COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The following table lays out how the actual course mark allocation is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1-4 (the best four of all the assignments submitted)	Four assignments, marked out of 10% totaling 30%.
Final examination	70% of overall course score
Total	100% of course score

## COURSE OVERVIEW

Unit	Title of work	Weeks Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
	Course Guide		
<b>Module 1 Nature of Drama: Concept and Definitions</b>			
1	Introducing Literature: Definitions and Forms	Week 1	Assignment 1
2	Introducing Literature: Its Characteristics I	Week 2	Assignment 2
3	Introducing Literature: Its Characteristics II	Week 3	Assignment 3
<b>Module 2 Convention and Techniques</b>			
1	Introducing Prose Works: Characteristics and Techniques	Week 4	Assignment 1
2	Introducing Prose Works: Prose Fiction	Week 5	Assignment 2
3	Introducing Prose Works: Non-Fiction	Week 6	Assignment 3



<b>Module 3 Introducing Drama</b>			
1	The Nature of Drama	Week 7	Assignment 2
2	Dramatic Elements and Device	Week 8	Assignment 3
3	Tragedy	Week 9	
4	Comedy and Tragicomedy	Week 10	Assignment 1
<b>Module 4 Introducing Poetry</b>			
1	Introduction to Poetry: Origin, Form and Structure	Week 11	Assignment 1
2	Language of Poetry	Week 12	Assignment 2
3	Introduction to Literary Appreciation of Poetry	Week 13	Assignment 3
4	Introduction to African and Non-African Poetry	Week 14	Assignment 4
5	Appreciating a Poem	Week 15	Assignment 5
<b>Module 5 Textual Analysis</b>			
1	Textual Analysis of Prose Fiction: <i>The River Between</i> by Ngugi wa Thiong'o	Week 16	Assignment 1
2	Texture Analysis of Drama: Niyi Osundare's <i>The State Visit</i>	Week 17	Assignment 2
3	Textual Analysis of Poetic Works: English	Week 18	Assignment 3

## HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

You will be required to study the units on your own. However, you may arrange to meet with your tutor for tutorials on an optional basis at a Study Centre. Also, you can organise interactive sessions with your course mates.

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning, you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tells you when to read, and which are your text materials or set books. You are provided exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly

improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from the reading section. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into any difficulty, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this course guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment.
2. Organise a study schedule. Design a 'Course Overview' to guide you through the course. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Important information, e.g. details of your tutorials, and the date of the first day of the semester is available from the Study Centre. You need to gather all the information into one place, such as your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates and schedule of work for each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please, let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to unit 1, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. You will need your set books and the unit you are studying at any point in time.
6. Work through the unit. As you work through the unit, you will know what sources to consult for further information.
7. Keep in touch with your Study Centre. Up-to-date information on the course will be continuously available there.
8. Well, before the relevant due date (about 4 weeks before due dates), keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.
9. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor.
10. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
11. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay

particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also the written comments on the ordinary assignments.

12. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the Course Guide).

## **FACILITATORS/TUTORS AND TUTORIALS**

Information relating to the tutorials will be provided at the appropriate time. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and any other difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must take your tutor marked assignments to the Study Centre well before the due date (at least two work days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor if you need help. Contact your tutor if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or assigned readings
- you have difficulty with the exercises
- you have a question or assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

## **SUMMARY**

The course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study, the course teaches you the concept literature, elements, the basic techniques of literary criticism and how these techniques are applied in textual analysis.

We wish you success in the course and hope that you will find it interesting and useful.





**MAIN  
COURSE**

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## **MODULE 1 NATURE OF DRAMA: CONCEPT AND DEFINITIONS**

Unit 1	Introducing Literature: Definitions and Forms
Unit 2	Introducing Literature: Its Characteristics I
Unit 3	Introducing Literature: Its Characteristics II

### **UNIT 1 INTRODUCING LITERATURE: DEFINITIONS AND FORMS**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
	3.1 Definition Forms of Literature
	3.2 Forms of Literature
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In this course you will be introduced to the world of literature. As a student of English, you must have studied literature, especially in English at a lower level than the present one. That means to some of you, what you are going to learn in the early part of this course may not be entirely new. There is therefore a need to bring your previous knowledge to bear on the new knowledge that you acquire in the course.

In this unit, you will learn about the definitions of literature and different literary forms. Literature is a study that concerns a whole range of human life and activities. Thus, literature concerns you and me.

#### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define literature
- evaluate the different definitions of literature
- discuss the different forms of literature.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Definitions

It should be made clear from the onset that there is no real consensus or one all embracing definition of the term literature. You should also know that some of the definitions of literature given by scholars are largely according to their wealth of life experience within their locations. Before we move further, let us consider literature both on its broad and narrow planes. Gyasi (1973) defines it in its broad sense as "anything that is written", while Rees (1973) sees it in the narrow sense of "writing which expresses and communicates thought, feelings and attitudes towards life".

The broad definition of literature appears to be vague and amorphous in that it includes works that are not literature per se, like works in fields of Education, Biology, History and a host of others, because they are written. However, they cannot qualify as real literature. The narrow definition delineates literature from its general purview to what can be called literature as a subject of study.

For you to really know what literature is, some more definitions will be given to you. This will be followed by the evaluation of each of the definitions to see which one can be said or taken to be most appropriate in discussing literature.

Moody (1987) writes that literature springs from our inborn love of telling a story, of arranging words in pleasing patterns, of expressing in words some special aspects of our human experience.

Boulton (1980) defines literature from a functional perspective as the imaginative work that gives us R's: recreation, recognition, revelation and redemption.

Rees (1973), after describing what he regarded as literature, summed up that literature is a permanent expression in words of some thoughts or feelings in ideas about life and the world.

All the above definitions describe literature from different perspectives. Still, there are certain things that are common to them. They all recognise the fact that:

- i. literature is imaginative
- ii. literature expresses thoughts and feelings
- iii. literature deals with life experiences

- iv. literature uses words in a powerful, effective and yet captivating manner
- vi. literature promotes recreation and revelation of hidden facts.

Literature is thus summed up as permanent expressions in words (written or spoken), specially arranged in pleasing accepted patterns or forms. Literature expresses thoughts, feelings, ideas or other special aspects of human experiences.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

List the characteristics that distinguish literature from other things written in the fields of Education, Law, Biology or Economics. Why is literature an important subject?

### **3.2 Forms of Literature**

Forms are taken to mean the mode in which literature is expressed. Usually, it is in either the spoken or written form. The spoken form predated the written one. The spoken form is common to many in the Third World or developing countries of Africa that are not literate. This is the form of literature that is called “orature”. It is orally rendered and transmitted from generation to generation. Examples are the oral literature from your locality.

The written form of literature is that which has been reduced to writing. It is common among literate cultures. It is no wonder therefore that when the British colonialists came to Africa, they did not recognise our literature, which was mostly in the oral form.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What are the steps you must take to study literature?

Remember, the reason for this self-assessment exercise is not to test you but to encourage you to discover facts for yourself. This is one of the best ways to learn.

### **Steps in studying literature**

What are the steps in studying literature?

Before this unit is rounded off, it is necessary to look at language issues in defining literature. Language is an important tool in literature. It is in literature that words are used in a special sense for the writer to bring out intentions. That is, words are manipulated in literature to suite the



writer's intention. Let us consider the following piece of literary illustration:

Those who have nothing but guns for the hungry and think of  
nothing but death and dying Let them spend our earth's  
fortune harvesting blood from the fields of war the last  
banquet shall be their children's blood.

In the above poem, the poet uses ordinary words in a special sense. Look at the phrase "harvesting blood".

Grains are normally what is harvested (or do you think blood is harvested?). However, in the poem, the poet uses 'harvest' to convey his intentions.

It is the special use of language in this manner that distinguishes literature as a subject of study, distinct from other subjects in the curriculum.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Read the poem beginning with "Those who have nothing but guns for the hungry ...." again. Bring out four other words that are used in a special sense. Give the everyday use of the words and the way they are used in a special sense in the poem.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The attempt in this first unit is to introduce you to the world of literature. It is also to start to kindle your interest in reading and studying the work of art. There is no better way words are used in a special and yet powerful manner than in literature. Anyone who neglects literature neglects the greatest part of life. Literature will invigorate the life in you.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit you have learnt:

- what literature is
- how to evaluate different definitions of literature
- how to study literature, and
- the major forms or parts of literature.

This unit is intended to be purely introductory. It prepares you for the serious literary analyses that will be done in subsequent units.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

"Literature can be interesting, innovating and dynamic". Discuss this statement in the light of your knowledge of literature and literary activities. Cite specific literary works and quotations from these works to support your answer.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Ahmed, M. M. & Odiwo, K. (1999). *Understanding Literature and Criticism*. Zaria: Al Azeem Supreme Printers.

Gyasi, I. K. (1988). *Ordinary Level English Literature*. Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Co.

Moody, H. (1972). *The Study of Literature*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Rees, R. J. (1973). *English Literature: An Introduction for Foreign Readers*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd.

## **UNIT 2     INTRODUCING LITERATURE: ITS CHARACTERISTICS I**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Types of Literature
  - 3.2 Poetry
  - 3.3 Prose Works
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Having defined literature and its forms in unit 1, in this unit and the next, we shall discuss the types and characteristics of literature. You are expected to follow the discussion closely and do all the activities you are asked to do.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the types of literature
- state the characteristics of poetry
- state the characteristics of prose.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Types of Literature**

Before we go into this unit, do you still remember what you learnt in the first unit? Without opening to unit 1, can you define literature from your own perspective? From your previous knowledge, what do you understand by the term "types of literature"? Attempt this to answer these questions before you read this section further.

By types of literature we mean genres of literature. Majority, there are three broad types of literature; these are drama, poetry and prose. Under drama we have: dance drama, radio and television drama, mime, pantomime, heroic and morality plays. Principally however, they all come under: tragedy, comedy, tragic-comedy and melodrama. Each of

these will be discussed in detail and later on in the course. For now, we should note that drama is primarily written to be performed or acted on stage. Therefore, the playwright usually writes his plays character by character, scene by scene and act by act to forestall any confusion and to ensure correctness during performance.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What do you understand by the terms playwright, scene, character and act as used above? What also is meant by the quality of immediacy and vitality?

### **3.2 Poetry**

Poetry is another genre or type of literature. It is written in verse, that is, it is usually in lines known as verse. The use of verse is hence different from the biblical sense of chapter and verse. It simply refers to poems written in rhythmic patterns and lines. Consider the following poem:

#### **WE HAVE COME HOME**

We have come home  
From the bloodless wars  
with sunken hearts -  
Our boots full of pride  
From the true massacre of the soul  
When we have asked  
"What does it cost?  
To be loved and left alone"

The illustrative poem above depicts versification. It was not written in prose or continuous *form*, but line by line. This is one of the reasons it is a poem and not a play (drama) or prose (novel).

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What is the poem "We Have Come Home" about? What are the words that bring out the meaning of the poem?

Thus poems are written in specialised language. The words are not usually used in the ordinary sense of a word. They have surface and deeper meaning. For example:

sunken hearts (shows lack of joy)  
bloodless wars (conflicts that are not bloody)

boots (not used in the same sense of boots but means our hearts or that we walk with pride).

### 3.3 Prose Works

The next genre or type of literature we shall consider is prose. This is a term you should be familiar with. What do you understand by it? Give your answer before reading this unit any further.

Prose refers to the literary or written form of the language of ordinary speech. We often talk about a book written in prose style or continuous form. The novel falls under prose. It is the latest arrival of the literary genres, in fact, novel means new.

How many novels have you read? Mention 10 of them and name their authors. The prose could be fiction or non-fiction. Fictions are imagined or invented stories. Thus, the events presented did not occur in real life, although they may be real to life, because, all literary work should depict life of various types. They include fables common in African literature and the modern George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, where the characters, mainly animals are made to talk, act and behave like human beings. Others are allegory which are similar to fables, but whose characters represent ideas, such as love, hope, meekness and the like, as is seen in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Also included in the class of prose are parables, romance and short stories.

Non-fiction prose is more or less true-to-life stories. They include biography, autobiography, travels and adventures and the essay. All these types will be dealt with more fully in other modules.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

From the little you have learnt about prose, what do you think are its characteristics?

Do not read the next section until you have completed this exercise.

Let us consider the characteristics of a prose together now that you have completed the exercise.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Attempt to write a story of one paragraph, putting in play all the characteristics of a prose work presented above.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit has been able to expose you to the three types of literature. You have also seen that literature is a work of art that is not restricted to only one form, but that there are different types depending on the writer's devices, theme and kinds of writing. Whether drama, prose or poetic literary work, creativity is a common trend in literature.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have learnt that the different types of literature are drama, poetry and prose. You have also learnt the basic characteristics of each of the genres of literature. Subsequent units will attempt to analyse If samples of literary texts to bring out all these characteristics.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Think of a novel you have ever read. Use the characteristics of a prose work discussed in this unit to analyse the novel. Bring out the characteristics as vividly as possible. Give specific examples and quotations from the novel as illustrations.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

Nkosi, L. (1981). *Tasks and Masks*. Harrow: Longman Group Ltd.

Rees, R. J. (1973). *English Literature: An Introduction for Foreign Readers*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd.

## **UNIT 3     INTRODUCING LITERATURE: ITS CHARACTERISTICS II**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Characteristics of Drama
  - 3.2 Characteristics of Poetry
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last unit, you have been introduced to the various types of literature. Do you still remember the genres? How many are they? It would be good if you could name them without referring to last unit. We looked at the characteristics or features of prose. In this unit, we shall look at the characteristics of drama and poetry. The attempt in this unit is to prepare you for more intensive study of drama and poetry works in the subsequent units. As you study the unit, have a notebook with you, some writing materials, and some poetic and dramatic texts.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the characteristics of drama
- state and explain the characteristics of poetry.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Characteristics of Drama**

We will consider some of the features or characteristics of drama here. Each type of drama has its peculiar characteristics, but we shall consider those that are common to them all.

#### **Playwright**

Do you know who a playwright is? This is the author or writer of a drama text or play. For example Ola Rotimi is the playwright of the play *The Gods are Not to Blame*, Wole Soyinka is the playwright of *The Lion*

and the Jewel and William Shakespeare is the playwright of *The Twelfth Night*".

### Characters

These are the persons, animals, other creatures or things that the playwright has created to act out the play or drama. There are usually two types of characters: the flat and round.

- a. **Flat characters** are static characters that do not change from the beginning to the end of the play.
- b. **Round characters** in contrast to the flat characters, are dynamic and they grow and develop with the play. Everything about them is revealed in the play. They are usually the main characters of the play.

### Protagonists

These are the leading characters in a play. They are the most important. The entire action of the play centers on them. They are the heroes or heroines of the play. If the play has a happy ending, the protagonists are comic characters. If the play has a sad ending, the protagonists are tragic characters.

### Antagonists

These are the characters whose main aim is to contend with the protagonists. They work against the interest of the protagonists. In most cases, they lead to the downfall of the protagonists, if the play is tragic or to the happy ending if the play is comical.

### Conflict

This is another characteristic of the drama. It is usually a struggle for supremacy between the protagonists and antagonists of the play. The conflict is usually resolved. This is called **conflict resolution or denouement**.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Take a drama text and bring out the following:

- i. Flat character
- ii. Round character
- iii. Protagonist
- iv. Antagonist



v. The playwright.

Of course, it is possible for you to view a drama text from another angle. This is the angle of the characteristic features of the drama text itself. Some of the features you should be familiar with are: **plot, scenes, acts, prologue, epilogue, interlude, flashback, dramatis personae, cast, suspense, climax and soliloquy.** I think you will be happy if each of these terms is defined for you. Indeed, you will need to know their definitions to be able to appreciate drama texts that will be analysed in the course of this study.

A scene is the performable, parts into which a drama piece is divided. Scenes are under an act and they represent a complete episode or event to be dramatised. Most of the Shakespearean plays are presented in scenes. Indeed, a scene is a sequence of continuous action in a play. A play is made up of acts, and acts are made up of scenes.

A plot is the central plan or an outline of events in a play. The plot usually runs from the beginning of the play to the end.

A prologue suggests an introductory scene to the play or an address or speech made before the commencement of a dramatic performance. Many of the Shakespearean plays start with prologues. So also do Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.

An epilogue is the direct opposite of a prologue. A short scene is tagged to a play at the end, like an appendage or final address or a final speech at the close of dramatic performance. An example is found in many of the Shakespearean plays and Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Use your dictionary to find the meaning of the following dramatic terms: interlude, flashback, cast, dramatic personae, suspense, climax and soliloquy.

### 3.2 Characteristics of Poetry

You will recall that in unit one, poetry was delineated as one of the genre of literature. You will also remember that poetry, (that is, poems), is written in verse form. In this section we shall look at some of the characteristics of poetry.

## Poetic Reality

This is one feature of poetry which expresses the vital truth of human reality and feeling. It is derived from the reality of inner experience and not the form of reality of everyday experience.

## Language

Another important feature of poetry is the dexterous or sophisticated way in which the poet manipulates the ordinary language. This is why special consideration is given to the connotative and denotative meanings of all words used in poems. The language of poetry is beyond the scope of this unit. This is because it is wide and elaborate to discuss. There is often an elaborate use of images, symbols (words representing concrete objects) and a re-structured sentence pattern. Let's illustrate all these in an extract of a poem titled "Night Rain".

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read the extract of the poem titled "Night Rain" and bring out the following poetic characteristics:

- a) vital truth of human experience
- b) feelings or sensations
- c) connotative meaning
- d) denotative meaning
- e) images
- f) symbols.

Do not turn to the discussion that follows until you have completed the exercise.

Once the exercises are completed, turn to the discussion.

The extract of the poem: "Night Rain"

What time of the night it is i do not know  
Except like some fish doped out of the deep  
I have bobbed up belly wise from the stream of sleep  
and no cocks crow It is drumming hard here and I  
suppose everywhere Droning with insistent ardour  
upon our roof-thatch and shed.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

You will agree with me that literature is an interesting subject. With a creative use of language, dramatic texts are produced for the audience to watch, and for the readers to enjoy. Poetic works stand unique amongst, all works of art. They represent a sophisticated and intricate use of language. The only way to enjoy literature is to read extensively.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed to the characteristic features of dramatic texts and poetic works. The unit prepares you for a detailed study of drama and poetic works in the subsequent modules and units.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Compare and contrast the characteristic features of drama and poetic works, bringing out quotations from texts, areas of similarities and differences.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Umukoro, M. *et al.* (1997). *Exam Focus: Literature in English*. Ibadan: University Press Plc.

Rees, R. J. (1973). *English Literature: An Introduction for Foreign Readers*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd.

## **MODULE 2      INTRODUCING PROSE WORKS**

Unit 1	Introducing Prose Works: Characteristics and Techniques
Unit 2	Introducing Prose Works: Prose Fiction
Unit 3	Introducing Prose Works: Non-Fiction

### **UNIT 1      INTRODUCING PROSE WORKS: CHARACTERISTICS AND TECHNIQUES**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Characteristics of Prose Work
3.2	Narrative Techniques
3.3	Coherence and Unity in Prose Works
3.4	Variety of Rhetorical Forms
3.5	Different Levels of Language Use
3.6	Authorial Interpretation and Comment
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### **1.0      INTRODUCTION**

This module introduces you to an important part of literature which is the prose works. In this unit you will learn about prose works, their characteristics and techniques. This is to prepare you for the next unit (unit 2) which looks at a sub-division of prose work referred to as prose-fiction. Unit 3 of this module will look at another sub-division of prose works called non-fiction. As you study this unit, you are expected to have at least three novels beside you, preferably African novels. I wish you success as you go through this unit.

#### **2.0      OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- enumerate the characteristics of prose works
- explain narrative techniques and apply them to specific prose works
- identify different kinds of rhetorical forms of prose writing
- analyse the language of prose works

- list the need for authorial interpretation and comment in prose works.

Let's start the proper study by looking at the characteristics of prose works.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Characteristics of Prose Work**

Before a thorough knowledge of techniques used in prose can be grasped, you need to acquaint yourself with the characteristics of prose works. These will be discussed with you in this section.

1. The prose work is the use of language in an imaginative way. Prose is a work of the writer's imagination. It recounts the 'writer's life experience in an imaginative manner. When prose recounts only the artist's actual life experiences, it becomes, autobiographical, when it presents historical facts in an imaginative, but not necessarily an accurate manner, it becomes historical literature. When it is restricted to the record of the life of another person by the writer, it is biographical. If the characters in the story go from one adventure to another, it is picturesque or episodic.
2. Prose work is dramatic. The writer creates a real or imaginary world, and presents actions and reactions to this world in form of dialogues, conversations, symbols (concrete objects used to represent serious ideas), images (a series of concrete objects represent ideas, one following the other in the story), and vivid descriptions.
3. Prose works are centered on narration. By this we mean recounting events as they occur in spatial or chronological order. In doing this, the writer packs the narration full of sensation, emotion, conflicting situations, sources of happiness, sadness and different responses to life situations.
4. Prose works combine description, argumentation, exposition, compare and contrast, cause and effect, classification and other rhetorical forms to make the storyline vivid and the message to come out as clearly as possible.
5. Prose works are largely to render a message or messages. While, we cannot rule out art for art sake, that is, writing to display sophisticated work of art, most prose works are presented to pass

to the readers important messages regarding life in general, political, socio-economic life of a community, people or a nation, historical consequences of the action of some people on other groups, and so on.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Have you read any or all of these prose works? Classify them according to the five characteristics given in this unit.

Peter Abraham's	<i>Tell Freedom</i>
Ngugi wa Thiong'o's	<i>The River Between</i>
Olusegun Obasanjo's	<i>Nzeogu</i>
Amos Tutuola's	<i>Palm-Wine Drinkard</i>
Isidore Okpewho's	<i>The Last Duty</i>
Chinua Achebe's	<i>Things Fall Apart</i>

### **3.2 Narrative Techniques**

The emergence of the writing tradition led to the changes in the nature or form of prose narratives (from oral to written). The techniques of story telling changed from oral to the adoption of new traditions that suited the new tradition. Scholars have worked on the new techniques adopted in written novels and they have been able to come up with the following narrative techniques.

Rees (1973) for example identified techniques which include plain narrative, letter, conversation, interior monologue or stream of consciousness.

What Rees (1973) sees as plain narrative, is broken into two different categories by other authors. These categories are:

- (i) First person narration, and
- (ii) Omniscient narration.

#### **First Person Narration**

This is the nearest to the oral narration of a folktale. It gives the impression of authenticity, because the narrator, who is usually an eye witness, gives first-hand information. The eye witness may be the observer and not the protagonist. This gives room for the observer to pass judgment on the actions in the novel, including that of the protagonist. This would not have been possible if the protagonist is also the narrator.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Who is a first person narrator?

Let's now go to the second aspect of plain narrative technique.

### **Omniscient Narration**

The writer, who adopts this technique, frees narration from the limitation of time and space. The narrator may or may not be a commentator. Apart from telling the story, the narrator stops over at various points to pass moral comments or to try to guide the reader in his interpretation of the episode. At other times, the narrator of the story tells the story without stopping to moralise or make comments. In this way the story is presented as it is. Readers are left to make their own deductions, to read between the lines or to take hints from characters. The narrator not only describes the outward behaviour and actions of his characters, but also their thoughts and feelings.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Who is an omniscient narrator and what are his narrative skills?

The next narrative technique that you will be exposed to is the use of a series of letters. The disadvantage of this kind of presentation is that the writer may find it difficult to write in a number of different styles. An example is Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*.

### **Conversational Technique**

This is the next narrative technique. Many novelists adopt this technique, although there has not been any novel that consists of nothing but conversation. Still, a great deal of writers uses conversational techniques in their novel. The novelist needs to have a good ear to catch and imitate the speech habits and voices of people in conversation.

The last narrative technique that will be discussed in this section is the interior monologue or stream of consciousness type of narration. This technique is based on the assumption that some of the most important activities of the human mind take place below the level of consciousness. They feel that the traditional method of telling a story in chronological order, and showing human characters as though they were reasoning, conscious beings and no more, give a picture of life that is incomplete and superficial. Thus, the novelist may invite the readers to enter the mind of his characters, and share their streams of

consciousness and feel the 'incessant shower of innumerable atoms', almost indeed to become the characters.

### **3.3 Coherence and Unity in Prose Works**

Another way a prose work can be looked at is from the way coherence and unity is achieved. The technique of a good prose writer includes the ability to organise the prose work in a clear-cut fashion that has a beginning, middle, a climax and an end. Of course flashback is possible, in which the end comes to the beginning, before the proper beginning of the prose work. Prose work is to be written in such a way that it gives coherence, continuity and wholeness.

### **3.4 Variety of Rhetorical Forms**

Prose works should contain a variety of rhetorical forms such as dialogues, conversations, monologues, explanation or exposition, argumentation, cause and effect, and so on. The ability to use the different rhetorical forms that suit the particular event, character or situation and setting is a mark of great craftsmanship of the writer. A combination of rhetorical forms knits the prose together and brings the message out vividly.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Take any of the novels at your disposal and write an example of dialogues, conversation and exposition used in the novel.

### **3.5 Different Levels of Language Use**

Prose work blends a variety of language forms: standard English, Pidgin English, non-standard English, colloquial, and slang expressions. The use of these varieties of English depends on the characters, the level of education of such characters, and the nature of the interaction going on.

#### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Go through the novel at your disposal, and give two varieties of English used in the novel. Copy a sample of each variety of English into the space below.

With varieties of language use, Achebe is able to bring the real Igbo life and community into his novel.



### 3.6 Authorial Interpretation and Comment

In the midst of different characters playing out different roles in a novel or prose work, the author reserves the right to interrupt narrations, conversations, dialogues and presentations, being done in the novel to address the reader directly. If you go through any prose work or if you have been reading them, you will find a lot of examples of this.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

List the reasons authors interrupt narration to give comments or explanations in the space provided below.

Take note. All the techniques discussed in this unit are not peculiar to certain authors. They are techniques that are common to all authors. Most writers often use a mixture of these techniques in writing. Their choice of any of the techniques is controlled by suitability to the aspect of the novel, relevance to the purpose of the novel and meeting the demand and the intention of the author at a given time or stage of the novel.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has been able to introduce you to a very important aspect of prose works, and this is the technique of writing prose works. The unit can serve two major purposes:

- i. It can stimulate you to be a writer.
- ii. It can also assist you in analysing different types of prose works.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt the following:

- characteristics of prose works
- narrative techniques
- coherence and unity in prose works
- variety of rhetorical forms in prose works
- different levels of language use as could be found in prose works; and
- authorial interruption and comment as a technique in prose works.

The unit is expected to assist you in reading prose writings more effectively. It is also aimed at preparing you for analysis of prose works that will be done later in this course.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

"The techniques of prose works are diverse, interwoven and highly systematic". Do you agree with this statement? Support your answer with illustrations, quotations and specific examples from at least two prose works.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Ahmed, M. M. & Odiwo, K. (1999). *Understanding Literature and Criticism*. Zaria: Al Azeem Supreme Printers.

Achebe, C. (1960). *No Longer At Ease*. London, Ibadan and Nairobi: Heinemann.

Cook, D. (1977). *African Literature: A Critical View*. London: Longman.

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## UNIT 2 INTRODUCING PROSE WORKS: PROSE FICTION

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Prose Fiction and Falsehood
  - 3.2 Types of Prose Fiction
    - 3.2.1 Fable
    - 3.2.2 Allegory
    - 3.2.3 Romance
    - 3.2.4 The Novel
    - 3.2.5 The Novelette
    - 3.2.6 The Short Story
  - 3.3 Procedures for Analysing Prose Fiction
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you are going to learn the types of prose fiction. This study will make you to learn more about prose fiction. As we have said earlier, fiction may be used in two ways. In a broad sense, it refers to any story which has been invented. There are different invented stories, and they go under the names of fables, allegory, parable, romance, myth, folktale, short story and the novel. Any of these stories may be presented as a play or in the form of a prose or verse narrative. What this means is that the distinctions among prose, poetry and drama are not as clear-cut as we may think. They are all interwoven. Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, for example, presents the story of *Macbeth's* rise and fall. In Jane Austen's *Emma*, the story is in form of a prose narrative. Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale" also tells a story, but in verse form. So when we refer to poetic forms in novels or plays in this course, do not be surprised.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the different kinds of fiction
- analyse each prose fiction type
- outline the characteristics of each prose fiction.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Prose Fiction and Falsehood

When the term prose fiction is used, it does not imply falsehood or lying. That is, you should not think the novelist is a liar. The foundation of work of art in the real sense is on facts or truth about life. This is however painted using the writer's imaginative and word power.

Have you ever read Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*? It is the true story of a Scottish seaman, Alexander Selkirk that is coloured by the author's power of imagination and vivid use of words and expressions. The facts are not presented in the way a historian will *present* it. This is because in literature, the author has certain liberty in creating his own world by using words, or let's say language, the way the writer likes and feels the intention can be vividly presented. It is this additional liberty that makes a writer never a liar, since all the works of art are creations of the writer's imagination.

Prose fiction is usually based on hidden facts. The only difference is that such facts are not presented in the way a historian will do. The creative writer is not bound to give facts accurately in terms of the time, period place and order of events. Do not attempt to verify the facts of a literary writer or accuse him of not presenting the facts as they occur in history

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Have you ever read Chinua Achebe's novels? *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* or *No Longer At Ease*? Decide the differences between Chinua Achebe and a historian writing about the history of the Igbo people. List the differences in the space provided below.

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## 3.2 Types of Prose Fiction

In this section, the types of prose fiction that will be considered are: fable, allegory, romance, the novel, the novelette and the short story.

### 3.2.1 Fable

This is usually a very brief story. Its concern is to explain a problem in very simple terms, or to point out a moral truth in an inoffensive manner. This is why it usually carries a deeper meaning, through a surface story. More often than not, the characters are mostly animals who act as surrogate human beings. This does not however totally exclude human characters in some cases. Examples abound in African literature, for instance, Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Others are Aesop's *Fables* and Orwell's *Animal Farm*. The *Animal Farm* which satirises the defunct Russian revolution is however longer than a normal fable.

### 3.2.2 Allegory

This is also a short story like a fable. The only difference is that its characters represent ideas such as Hope, Endurance, Love, Jealousy, and the like. There are very many of these in Nigerian literature. An example is Amos Tutuola's *A Forest of Thousand Demons*. An example of a famous allegory written by Bunyan is *Pilgrims Progress*.

### 3.2.3 Romance

Romance, as a type of prose fiction, is a fantastic story whose story incidence and sometimes the characters are detached from real life primarily written to delight shock or chill the blood of the reader. Example is Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*.

### 3.2.4 The Novel

Generally, the novel is a long, fictitious prose narrative whose imaginary characters and events are presented in a realistic, true-to-life manner. You should note that there is no hard and fast rule on the length of the novel. This is why novels are not uniform in their length. Have you considered the length of African novels and English novels? You will observe that African novels are much shorter than the English novels.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Take any of Chinua Achebe's novels and compare its length with any Charles Dickens novels. Are they of the same length?

Some have adduced that English novels are usually long because of the people's reading culture.

The novel could also be a biography or autobiography, if it is an account of somebody's life, when written by another person or by the person himself respectively. *My Command* by Olusegun Obasanjo and *Zambia Shall be Free* are examples of autobiographical literature.

### 3.2.5 The Novelette

It is like a novel. The major difference is that the novelette is short and thus, it can be called a "short novel". It is sometimes said to be a "long short story".

### 3.2.6 The Short Story

Like the novelette, the short story is another miniature novel. The short story may be independent or annexed to a novel. Charles Dickens' *The Pick Wick Papers* is an example of a famous short story.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

State in the space provided below, the steps you would follow in analysing prose fiction. Cross-check your answers with the *ones* presented in the next section of this unit.

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## 3.3 Procedures for Analysing Prose Fiction

Have you finished the exercise? Were you able to present reasonable steps to follow in analysing a novel or any prose fiction? Cross-check your responses with the ones presented below. To analyse a prose fiction:

- a) Read the text very carefully and be sure you understand the story. Re-read the story if understanding is not achieved.
- b) Identify the common trends of the events in a logical order as they occur in the story, i.e. the storyline.

- c) Use the storyline to determine the theme or themes of the prose fiction.
- d) Relate all other issues, facts, events and activities in the story to the major theme.
- e) Formulate impressions about the characters (minor and major characters), through what they say themselves, what they do, and what other people say about them. 'Relate the characters to the theme of the novel'.
- f) Draw conclusions, inferences and implications regarding life, experiences, conflicting issues and the world at large through all the presentations in prose fiction.
- g) Relate the use of words, expressions and the language of prose fiction to the themes, characterisation and the storyline. Identify the powerful and effective use of language to bring out the author's intentions.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Our effort in this unit is to closely introduce various aspects of prose fiction. Prose fiction is a work of art, a by-product of imagination, a source of pleasure and the most vivid way to depict life and the world in its reality.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, you have been exposed to:

- the distinction between prose fiction and falsehood
- types of prose fiction: allegory, fables, the novel, the novelette the short story, etc. and
- the ways prose fiction can be analysed.

We hope that at the end of the study of this unit, you understand prose fiction better and you will be ready to read as many of such works as you can lay your hands on. The unit is preparing you for a more rigorous analysis of prose works in the subsequent units. Indeed, this unit lays a solid foundation for the study of prose fiction in the future.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Compare and contrast the African and English novelists. What are their preoccupations, areas of divergence and areas of convergence?
2. What is historical and non historical about them? Cite specific examples and give illustrations.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Ahmed, M. M. & Odiwo, K. (1999). *Understanding Literature: and Criticism*. Zaria: Al Azeem Supreme Printers.

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## **UNIT 3 INTRODUCING PROSE WORKS: NON-FICTION**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Use of the Term Prose
  - 3.2 Kinds of Non-Fiction Prose
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In a previous unit (unit 1) of this module, you learnt about the term prose. Can you still remember the meaning of prose? Try to write its meaning on a piece of paper without checking the relevant unit. The term prose refers to the literary or written form of literature that is continuous. It is a mode of telling a story through narration. Writings or compositions in prose, are known as prose writings or works in prose. We warned, however, in unit 2, that not all prose works are fictitious. Not all of them tell stories. In this unit, we shall consider non-fiction prose.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the term prose works
- identify the types of non-fiction prose
- use the term non-fiction prose in relation to different real life situations.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Use of the Term Prose**

If we take the meaning of prose as the literary or writing form of the language of ordinary speech, then you will agree with me that the works of prose are too numerous to be mentioned.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Using the definition of prose works given above, write the prose works that you know in the space provided below:

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Were you able to list many? Cross-check your list with the one given here. They include: history, religion, law, philosophy, biography, autobiography, medicine, the novel, short story, magazine articles, essays, criticism, travels, etc. These works are conventionally classified into factual writing and fictional writing, or simply, fiction and non-fiction. The distinction between fiction and non-fiction has been discussed in an earlier unit (unit 1 of module 2). Can you still remember these? The present unit deals with non-fiction prose.

**3.2 Kinds of Non-Fiction Prose**

Like prose works in general, non-fiction prose covers a considerably wide range of subjects. It is not possible to give coverage to all of them and one unit. Moreover, only certain types may be selected as a set of texts for literature examination papers. The kinds of non-fiction prose that are relevant to literature field are the ones that stimulate and satisfy the readers' imagination or creative mind.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Assess the following prose works in terms of whether they stimulate and satisfy the readers' imagination and creative mind. Tick the boxes marked yes or no against each prose work. Yes for those that satisfy and stimulate the readers' imagination and creative mind; no for those that do not.

	Yes	No
Physics textbook		
Biology textbook		
Bibliography		
Autobiography		
The essay		
Travel books		

Adventure books		
Criticism		
Technical reports		
Biography		

See whether your rating agrees with mine in the discussion below.

Using the definition of non-fiction prose works given above, we can easily see that physics textbooks, biology textbooks, and bibliography texts cannot stimulate the kinds of literary creativity and imagination needed. Technical reports are also not supposed to stimulate the kind of creative and imaginative thought that we would expect of a work of literature. The texts are technical or scientific. They deal with technical and scientific issues. They may be partly descriptive by giving us insight into how things look and how they work. They may also be partly expository in nature, by telling us more about the topic. The most obvious feature of these types of passages is the pronounced technical and scientific terms, which are often explained for the benefit of the layman. Topics dealing with astronomy, space travel, architecture, computer, oil exportation, political and socio-economic development, do not belong to the kind of creative and imaginative work that we envisage here.

Others that qualify as works of art include: autobiography, the essay, travel, criticism and biography. Some of these will be discussed in this unit as examples of non-fiction prose works.

Let's discuss them one by one.

#### a) **Biography**

The biography is an account of the life of a person written by another person. An example is *Nzeogu* written by Olusegun Obasanjo and *My Unfortunate Brothers and Sisters: An Authorised and Biography of Stephen Ibn Akga* written by Gideon Tseja. A person's biography may be written while he is still alive, or after his death. The biographer presents the facts of the person's life as he uncovers them through research, interviews and visits. But it is possible for the biographer to insert his own imaginative thought, stories and appreciative comments, to bring out the life of that person. Thus, unlike a scientific or technical text, a biography may consist of imagery, figures of speech, narration, description, argumentation and exposition.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Which of the following is possible in a biographical work: Tick Yes/No.

- i. the biographer following the person he is writing about
- ii. the biographer becoming violent against the person he is writing about
- iii. the biographer to become sycophantic, praising the person he is writing about
- iv. the biographer to pack the biography full of nothing but lies.

Have you completed the exercise? If you have done so, cross-check your responses with the ones below.

Indeed, the most difficult part of writing a biography is to be neutral and objective. There is the tendency for the biographer to be a sycophant, praise singer or an utter brute that condemns the person whose biography he is writing about completely. A biography loses its credibility if it is packed full of lies. Although the writer has the liberty to invent stories, they should not be all lies.

**b. Autobiography**

The difference between a biography and an autobiography is that the autobiography is an account of the person's life written by him personally. Modern biographies and autobiographies show the tendency of adopting forms used in writing a novel. The straightforward narrative is largely broken by presentations of dialogue, conversations, flashbacks suspense, descriptions of a particular issue, exposition, varieties of English, etc.

**c. The Essay**

It is not easy to write about the essay as a form. It differs from period to period. From the 16th century down to the present, essays have been undergoing tremendous changes. The essayists are also quite different in form, style and subject matter. The same essayist may write different essays, different not only in subject matter, but also in style. The characteristics of an essay are:

- i) fairly short composition prose
- ii) focus on a topical issue; It is an expression of thoughts on a single subject
- iii) uncommonly, some are a little lengthy
- iv) not a narrative and quite different from a schoolboy composition;
- v) written by renowned literary artists

- vi) not limited to a few subjects, diverse in topics; and use different rhetoric forms: narration, description, exposition
- vii) essays are written primarily to inform, reform, instruct or merely to entertain
- viii) essays create pleasant surprises, can be frank, intimate and usually reveal the personality of the essayists.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

List the different essays you have ever come across in your life in the space below.

<b>RENOWNED ESSAYISTS</b>	
Alexander Pope:	An Essay on Criticism An Essay on Man
W.E. Williams:	A Book of English Essays
D. H. Lawrence:	Essays
Others are Essays written by Jeremy Taylor, E.V. Lucas, Joseph Addison Aldous Huxley and G.K. Chesterton.	

#### a. Travel and Adventure

Books on travel and adventure are straightforward narration combined with descriptions, expository surveys, etc. Emphasis is not only on the facts presented, but on the manner of presentation. They are full of brave deeds, descriptions of people of great explorations and real or imagined scenes of various kinds.

#### b. Criticism

Criticism is very similar to essays in form and substance. While essays can be on many diverse topics, criticism is somewhat limited to passing valued judgments on works of literature: drama, prose, fiction, non-fiction, and other works of art, such as music, art, film, etc. Critical evaluation, strict assessment, and critical analysis of issues are all the intense pre-occupation of criticisms.

Of most importance to you is literary criticism, whereby literary texts are assessed along the lines of theme, stylistic preoccupations, plot, language and characterisation.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has merely briefly presented a seemingly wide field that is beyond the scope of this study. Non-fiction prose works are as diverse in types as they are in quality. Only a few of them could be discussed in this unit.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you learnt:

- the use of the term prose
- different types of non-fiction prose:
  - biography
  - autobiography
  - essays
  - travel and adventure
  - criticism.

The attempt is to expose you to these forms of writing and to stimulate you to read them.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

“Non-fiction prose is fiction prose in disguise”. Do you agree? Support your answer with illustrations, examples and quotes from Non-fiction prose texts.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Gyasi, 1. K. (1988). *Ordinary Level English Literature*. Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Co.

Tseja, G. (2001). *My Unfortunate Brothers and Sisters: The Authorised Biography of Steven Ibn Akiga*. Zaria: Tamaza Publishing Co.

Rees, R. J. (1973). *English Literature: An Introduction for Foreign Readers*. Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Education Ltd.

## MODULE 3      INTRODUCING DRAMA

Unit 1	The Nature of Drama
Unit 2	Dramatic Elements and Device
Unit 3	Introducing Drama: Tragedy
Unit 4	Introducing Drama: Comedy and Tragicomedy

### UNIT 1      THE NATURE OF DRAMA

#### CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	What is Drama?
3.2	Origin of Drama
3.3	The Nature of Drama
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### 1.0      INTRODUCTION

We have examined various aspects of poetry. In this unit, our focus would be on drama, another form of literature. Drama is apparently different from poetry and prose narrative because it can both be read as text and watched on stage. While drama shares certain qualities and elements with the other forms of literature, it also has some unique features.

#### 2.0      OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- recognise the peculiarity of drama as a form of literature
- identify the basic principles and elements of drama.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 What is Drama?

You may wonder why we are raising this question. If you are asked this same question, you will definitely have an answer. One can guess that your answer will reflect your understanding of drama based on your exposure to it. Let us assume that each one of us will give different definitions based on a peculiar understanding of the subject. A better approach may be to examine the various ways drama has been defined, so we can note the qualities of drama that are highlighted.

In the everyday use of the word drama, the element of conflict is often given prominence. This particularly emerges from the way it is seen in the mass media. The dramatic is any situation which creates a sense of the unexpected or the abnormal. At other times, the dramatic is limited to that which involves action in the sense of demonstration. For instance, a teacher may be said to be dramatic if he injects life into his teaching by acting out situations and experiences that he is describing.

For our purpose, a broader and more universal understanding of the dramatic is needed. For a start, you should recognise the fact that drama involves some components which no informed examination can overlook. These components are ACTION, DIALOGUE and CONFLICT. Drama brings all these together to make a meaningful whole. We shall take a closer look at these aspects of drama in a moment. However, we must immediately admit that the ultimate experience of drama is the presentation on stage before an audience. This implies that it has a message to communicate and has some relevance to human experience. This is probably why the concept of MIMESIS or imitation is often emphasised in relation to drama. To say that drama is MIMETIC implies that it is imitative of reality. The mimetic impulse of drama is one feature that makes it appeal to people. In other words, it is the quality that makes it relevant. Let us for a moment consider the components of drama that we earlier identified.

#### **Action**

This is what keeps the plot of a play moving. The play emerges from the enactment of actions before an audience. Acting generally generates other actions. Conflict evolves in the process until there is a climax under which the plot is finally terminated through the resolution or denouncement.



## **Character**

Drama is impossible without people. People who are allotted roles in a play are called characters. Character is an important component of drama as is DIALOGUE.

The verbal exchanges among characters in a play help to realise the intention of a playwright. Just as a novelist narrates his story, the playwright depends on the interaction of characters to expand his ideas. Characters are made to speak in such a way that the situations desired by the writer will be created. Even though the writer often supplies relevant background information, the characters always play out the writer's intentions in their action and verbal exchanges - with the exception of MIME that does not use dialogue, most forms of drama depend largely on dialogue. At times, some characters also embark on an extensive revelation of their minds to the audience; such bursts are called soliloquies. It is normal that characters be assigned the language that is appropriate to their social status in the drama.

## **Conflict**

Conflict is another aspect of drama you will need to recognise. It naturally grows out of interaction of the characters. It is a product of the contending forces in a drama. The conflicting actions and tendencies manifest when the play reaches the climax. The conflict is eventually resolved at the end and is known as DENOUEMENT.

### **3.2 Origins of Drama**

It may interest you to know that there have been debates as to the origins of drama. You should not be surprised at this. It is customary for scholars to advance arguments and counter-arguments on matters of interest. Scholarly debates are meant to help us to properly understand issues by scrutinising them and subjecting them to critical assessment. There are mainly three positions or theories that have been proposed to explain the origin of drama. Let us quickly add that there may not be only one explanation of drama in different parts of the world.

#### **Ritual Origin Theory**

The theory that insists on the ritual origin of drama is about the most influential. It suggests that the roots of drama may be traced to ritual observances. This ritual would normally involve a ceremony in which the priest played an important role at a designated location. The priest would also wear a special dress especially meant for the occasion. The role, dress and utterances of the priest will have parallels in the theatre.

The case of the Dionysian ritual in ancient Greece has often been cited as a case point. This explains why the roots of Greek drama are generally traced to the ritual observances in the temple of Dionysus.

### **The Mimetic Impulse Theory**

One other attempt at explaining the origin of drama suggests that we cannot divorce drama from the tendency to imitate actions and experiences, as a way of seeking to understand them better.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. What is drama?
- ii. Identify four components of drama.
- iii. Identify and discuss two theories that explain the origin of drama.

### **3.3 The Nature of Drama**

You need to note that drama mirrors society. It has also developed and absorbed the major conditions of various dramatists over the ages. The unique identity of drama is that, like other forms of literature, it can be read and it can also be experienced on stage. But there are certain aspects of drama that mark it as different from the prose narrative which is realised through narration: drama only unfolds through dialogue. While the novel is also divided into chapters and a poem is written mostly in stanzas, drama is divided into Acts and Scenes. Interesting dramatic practice allows the dramatist a lot of latitude. There is no rule specifying how long a play can be. William Shakespeare made the five-act structure the standard for his plays. Many playwrights have since adopted other standards.

While dialogue is central to the advancement of action in acts and scenes, **STAGE DIRECTORS** help give shape to actions on stage and they represent the playwright's intervention. A few plays make use of the **NARRATOR** whose duty is to give some insight into actions to be anticipated.

In addition to the fact that a drama text can be read by an individual in the privacy of his residence, the **AUDIENCE** in the theatre can give immediate reaction to a play which is being presented on stage.

It is also possible to have a sense of **PLOT** in a play. Without a clear understanding of the storyline, it is impossible to properly appreciate a play.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

How are the following related to drama?

- i. acts and scenes
- ii. stage directors
- iii. climax.

It is always necessary for you to try to identify the central character in a play that is called the protagonist

In many cases, the actions in the play will revolve round the protagonist. All other characters in the play must also be seen and assessed to determine the role they are assigned. Most of the time, the language a character is allotted will reveal a lot about his social position, level of education, and so on.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

The world of drama is an exciting world, one in which there is entertainment and the portrayal of a variety of character traits. Drama also engages many issues bordering on our religious, social, political and economic experiences. These are issues you may need to draw more attention to while assessing a play. In a sense, the experience of drama makes it much more related to society. The immediate experience of drama in the theatre itself is a pointer to this.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has drawn attention to the uniqueness of drama. Our emphasis has been that drama is both oral literature and a performance. This unit must have laid the foundation for further explorations in drama in the subsequent units.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write short notes on any four of the following in relation to drama:

1. dialogue
2. acts and scenes
3. character
4. mime
5. action
6. stages direction
7. stage directors.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dasylva, A.O. (1997). *Dramatic Literature: A Critical Source Book*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman Education and Communication Services.

Eghagha, H. (2001). "Introduction to Drama". In: *The English Compendium*. Leke Fakoya & Steve Ogunpitan (Eds). Lagos: Department of English, Lagos State University.

## **UNIT 2     DRAMATIC ELEMENTS AND DEVICES**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Elements of Drama
  - 3.2 Dramatic Techniques
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous unit, we introduced dramatic literature by drawing attention to the basic aspect of drama which would help us define drama and its nature. You need to know that drama also has certain elements and techniques that you should be familiar with.

When you are familiar with these, it would not be difficult for you to appreciate a play. The advantage that the discussion of these elements will give you at this point is that it will be very easy for you to follow our discussion of the plays that have been placed on the reading list for this course, when each of them is being studied.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the concepts and principles necessary for the reading and enjoyment of a play
- recognise the main element of technique employed in drama.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Elements of Drama**

Dramatic literature, you will soon discover, is very rich. Your enjoyment of it will be determined by your ability to recognise some of its components. In this section of the unit, we shall endeavour to take a look at some of them. If a few of the concepts examined in the previous chapter are discussed once again, it is because they are so important that we must keep on referring to them.

**Plot**

The plot refers to the story that a play tells. Normally, the events are arranged sequentially. This does not happen all the time. Some of the plays distort the sequence of events. What you do is to reconstruct the play. The fact that the plot of a play is not sequential or chronological does not necessarily suggest that you will have any difficulty understanding it.

**Setting**

Setting generally refers to the location of a literary work. The setting is a reference to the placement of a work in both time and place. The locale or environment in which a play is set will determine a lot about it. The setting is often related to the focus or concern of the play.

**Theme**

Each play makes a statement about the social world. This may emerge from an exploration of the entire play. The theme is the central message of a play. It is however possible to have sub-themes along with major dramatists who seek to make statements that have universal validity in their works. Generally, plays that treat common human problems make statements that have timeless relevance and consequently have more appeal as they speak to people of all ages and at all places.

**Characterisation**

In the last unit you learnt that a play cannot be successful without people. This is not all that you need to know. Characters do not just occur in a play. Playwrights take care to create the right kind of characters to serve their purpose.

In the first place a playwright creates characters in line with his purpose; most of the time the characters are types. Typical characters are meant to represent certain categories of people in society. A character may represent people or members of the ruling elite, and another may represent the poor and the oppressed that are often at the mercy of the rich and powerful.

Dramatists always try to delineate characters, that is, establish the individual identities of characters, through the particular traits that the characters depict. In most cases, language is used. For instance, you must have observed that many of the uneducated characters that feature in plays on the television are often made to speak Pidgin English, while their bosses speak Standard English. Language thus becomes a yardstick

for character delineation in this case. In addition to this, the characters will be made to wear dresses that will reflect their social status on stage.

In almost every play, there are characters that act prominent roles. These are called major characters. The others are called minor characters. The most prominent characters in a play is called the protagonist. It is possible to further describe characters in a play by finding out whether they are flat. Flat characters are those that embody certain qualities. They are not capable of growing (i.e. changing). They simply personify some values e.g. faithfulness, goodness etc. The individual identities of these characters are not established. They are found in didactic plays, a good example of which is *Everyman*. Round characters, on the other hand, are those that have individual identities.

They can change in the course of a play. From all that we have said about characterisation, it should be easy for you to guess what characterisation is all about. It means the pattern adapted in the creation of characters in a work. This includes roles and tendencies assigned to particular characters.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Comment briefly on the following elements of drama:

- i. Theme
- ii. Plot
- iii. Setting
- iv. Characterisation.

### **Exposition, Complication, Climax, Denouement or Resolution and Conclusion**

These four elements are related to the plot of a play. Exposition refers to the phase of the plot in which the characters are just being introduced. It is at this stage that a lot is revealed to us about the characters before they are seen in action. The exposition may give us some insight into the past of the characters if this is important for us to understand them.

The complication emerges when in the course of the play there is an obstacle on the way of the protagonist. The climax marks the height of the conflict in the play. At this point the stage is set for the major act that will lead to the resolution of the major problem in the play.

What follows the climax is the denouement which in French means the "untying of a knot". It is also known as resolution or conclusion.

### **3.2 Dramatic Techniques**

This may be a convenient point to draw attention to some techniques that are commonly used in dramatic works. You will discover these techniques in the texts you are to study in this course.

#### **Suspense**

Suspense is a technique by which the playwright keeps the reader/audience in anxious expectation of what will happen next. It is a good way of sustaining their interest in the play. It is a common strategy in drama.

#### **Comic Relief**

This is a moment of light or seemingly unserious action which is marked by laughter after some serious or tragic action. As the name suggests, it is intended to create some atmosphere of relief in a play. The comic relief is often provided by clowns (characters that are meant to entertain others) in the plays of Shakespeare. They crack jokes or do some other funny things that will make the audience laugh and thereby get rid of the tension that might have been created earlier by a serious action or experience.

#### **Flashback**

The flashback technique enables the playwright to bring an experience in the past to the present to illuminate a problem or our understanding of a matter.

#### **Foreshadowing**

This is a technique which enables a playwright to an experience in the future. It creates anxiety and anticipation of the experience.

#### **Dramatic Irony**

This occurs when an event or situation is seen in a particular way by a character in a play whereas the audience and some other characters have a proper outlook on it. It creates anxiety when it intensifies a tragic experience.



### **Deus Ex Machina**

This is a technique through which a supernatural force is brought in to facilitate some action or experience. This technique originally involved bringing a god to the stage to solve a problem.

### **Alienation Effect**

This is a technique popularised by the German playwrights and theatre directors to inject some detachment into the way actors and the audience relate with their plays. This will prevent much emotional involvement and it may involve interaction between the actors and the audience.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

How do flashback and comic relief operate in a play?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit has drawn your attention to elements of drama and some dramatic techniques. You need to note that these principles are better understood in relation to particular plays. Each dramatic work often brings some ingenuity to the use of each of the elements and techniques.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

Most of the concepts explored in this unit are important as they help us define the variety of situations you can encounter in dramatic literature. It is necessary for you to realise that it is not in every play that all these elements will occur. We shall be taking a look at the various forms of drama. This will enable us to further discover some ideas and concepts that are associated with each of these forms.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Write short notes on any four of the following, using adequate illustration from plays you have read:

1. Characterisation
2. Plot
3. Denouement
4. Comic relief
5. Dramatic irony

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Dasylva, A. O. (1997). *Dramatic Literature: A Critical Source Book*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman Educational and Communication Services.

Kennedy, X. J. (1983). *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

## **UNIT 3 INTRODUCING DRAMA: TRAGEDY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Origin of Tragedy
  - 3.2 Classical Tragedy: The Aristotelian Tradition
  - 3.3 Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition of Tragedy
  - 3.4 Modern Tragedy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In introducing drama, we cannot overlook its various forms. Our exploration must however be broad enough to accommodate the developments over the ages that have transformed dramatic forms. Whatever we now say about each form must help us in appreciating the texts that we plan to engage. Each time we talk about tragedy, for example, we have to find out what constituted tragedy in the Greek tradition and ask if this outlook on tragedy has not been challenged over the years.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- recognise the uniqueness of tragedy as form of drama
- appraise the transformation of the concept of drama from the Classical period to the modern
- identify texts that illustrate each of the traditions of tragedy in drama.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 The Origin of Tragedy**

Scholars seem to have agreed that the roots of tragedy must be traced to the Greece of the fifth century BC. Aristotle's theory of tragedy was formulated in the fourth century BC. Many people believed that Aristotle simply prescribed rules with which tragedy should be judged. On the contrary, his outlook seems to have been shaped by his

familiarity with classical tragedies that had been performed. His theory may then be seen as an attempt to describe what he had carefully observed. Even though tragedy, as a dramatic form, is generally believed to have originated from Greece, it has evolved over the ages, incorporating changes and modifications of principle and practice in modern times.

### **3.2 Classical Tragedy: The Aristotelian Tradition**

Aristotle's *Poetics* remains a good guide to the Greek tradition of tragedy which is commonly referred to as classical drama. As earlier stated, his ideas must have been shaped by his exposure to tragedies that were staged in his own days. It is however apparent that his outlook on tragedy was largely shaped by Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which also serves as his favourite example. Aristotle defined tragedy as:

A representation of an action that is worth serious attention, complete in itself, and some amplified; in a language enriched by a variety of artistic devices appropriate to the several parts of the play; presented in the form of action, not narration; by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation of emotion? (cited in English: 473).

It is necessary to analyse the elements of Aristotelian theory of tragedy as noted as in the quotation, for a proper understanding. They help us to understand the classical principles of tragedy.

#### **(a) The Tragedy Hero or Tragic Hero**

The hero in classical tragedy was expected to be a man of noble birth. The nobility of the character is essential to make his fall tragic. This simply implies that the fall of an ordinary man was not considered remarkable enough to provoke dramatic interest. This explains why tragic heroes in most of these plays are either kings or other highly placed persons.

#### **(b) Elevated Language**

The language of tragedy, in the classical tradition, was also expected to be elevated. The ideal language for this form of drama was therefore seen as verse. It is reasonable to conclude that only elevated language would be suitable for the class of people that were the object of tragedy. Language was certainly seen as a reflection of the status of character and the seriousness of the subject of tragic plays.

### (c) **The Three Unities**

Time, place, action: The Aristotelian principles also recognised the need to ensure that the action of the play is shaped by what have come to be known as the three unities. One of the principles is that the action of the play should not extend beyond a day. The unity of place has to do with the concentration of the action to a locale. The unity of action implies that only one action should be seen on the stage at any time. In addition, there should be only one plot. This equally extends to the purity of genre, implying that there should not be any digression. The plot must be so tight that it will not make any room for a comic relief.

### (d) **Hubris - The Hero's Tragedy Flaw or Tragic Flaw**

One other feature of classical tragedy, as clarified by Aristotle, has to do with the weakness of the tragic hero. The tragic hero was expected to have a weakness in his character which will make his fall possible.

### (e) **Catharsis - Purgation of Emotion**

The last element of classical tragedy has nothing to do with the play or the hero. It is directly related to the effect of the fall on the audience. The fall of the tragic hero is expected to elicit the purgation of emotion (what Aristotle called catharsis) due to the relief that the hero will cause.

## 3.3 **Shakespeare and the Classical Tradition of Tragedy**

You may have heard about the great English writer called William Shakespeare. He lived between 1564 and 1616 and is rightly considered a great playwright of all time. He wrote many plays, many of which are described as tragedies. Shakespeare's work is best seen as building on the existing tradition - the classical tradition of tragedy - in the sense that, like other Elizabethan playwrights, he recognised the Greek tradition as one on which to draw, while at the same time injecting his own original ideas. Such originality accounts for the production of his plays. His main tragedies include *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*.

Even though Shakespeare was a dramatist and not a theorist like Aristotle, we should be interested in his contribution to the making of tragedy as a dramatic form. In this case too, it is proper to assess his work in relation to the standard set by the classical tradition of tragedy to see the extent to which he upheld the tradition and the remarkable departures in his work. We may just consider Shakespeare's work against each of the principles defined by Aristotle. What you will

discover is that many of the principles are upheld and only a few are disregarded.

A major feature of classical tragedy which also operates in Shakespeare's plays has to do with the social status of the tragic hero. The hero must be highly placed. This is sustained in Shakespeare's tragedies. His tragic heroes are kings, princes or war generals. Each of them is at least presented as a distinguished member of the society. Othello who is the hero of a play of the same title is a respected general. There are also kings like Hamlet and Lear, while Macbeth is a nobleman.

The element of hubris itself is evidenced in Shakespearian tragedies. For instance, we are made to see Othello as jealous and almost gullible. These facilitate his errors and eventual fall. The tragic hero in Shakespeare is generally not faultless. Most of the time, his own weakness is largely responsible for his fall.

The language of Shakespearian tragedies is additionally elevated. This is apparent in the use that he makes of verse. In fact the speeches of the tragic heroes are generally embellished and - this has been a factor that endears his work to so many readers. The observation of the prescriptions with regard to the status of the tragic heroes and the adoption of a befitting language for them in Shakespeare, coupled with the operation of the element of tragic flaw in them, should give you the impression that some other elements of classical tragedy will naturally become applicable with their fall - the elements of reversal of fortune, of anagnorisis that the tragic figure experiences, and catharsis that the audience also partakes of, as the emotions of fear and pity are elicited by the tragic end of the characters.

But you should not be hasty to conclude that Shakespeare upholds all the principles outlined in the Aristotelian Tradition. He discountenances the idea of the unities of place, action and time beyond the day his tragedies end in them. This factor shows that Shakespeare only complied with the Greek Tradition to the extent that it was relevant to his own intention; after all, traditions are made by man.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

To what extent does Shakespeare's work draw on classical tragedy?

### 3.4 Modern Tragedy

You may have noticed that the Aristotelian principles of tragedy have been very influential. The fact that it is possible to assess the work of Shakespeare using the principles is a clear testimony of this. While it is true that Shakespeare tries to depart from the tradition, he at least upholds some of its principles.

We may, in fact, say that the classical tradition of tragedy has been the main standard from which all other traditions define their principles. Apart from the Greek tradition of tragedy which Aristotle tried to characterise, you should note that there is also a modern tradition of tragedy.

Modern tragedy makes a clear departure from the classical convention. This development is associated with the work of dramatists like Henrik Ibsen and Arthur Miller. At the heart of the concern of modern tragedy is the desire to assert that not only the highly placed or the noble are fit as subject of tragedy. In other words, the ordinary man is equally fit as a subject of a tragedy. Aristotle had thought that only people of high birth could be tragic heroes.

A play like *Death of a Salesman* by the American playwright is a good example of a modern tragedy. The tragic hero in the play is Willy Loman who is by no means a man of high birth. What is suggested in the play, as in all other plays operating within this tradition, is that anyone can be a tragic hero. In addition, all other requirements prescribed by Aristotle with regard to the form, duration, language and character of tragic hero are discountenanced.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have taken a look at tragedy which is generally taken as an important form of drama. The fact that the concept of tragedy itself has evolved over the ages is evidence that tragedy is responding to changes within the human societies.

Drama responds to the changes in society and culture. We may, for instance, illustrate this with the difference between Sophocles' *Oedipus* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Ola Rotimi's play is an adaptation of Sophocles' play and it is situated within the Yoruba culture environment. What we have in it is an attempt to present the substance of Sophocles' work in a manner in which it would be meaningful within a different cultural environment. The product of this effort emerges as a departure from the original work in many respects.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

Greece has had a lot of influence on the development of drama in Europe, America and Africa. A very good example is the evolution of tragedy as a dramatic form. We cannot deny the fact that all that we have is a situation in which a conscious effort is only being made to depart from the classical tradition.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Examine the evolution of tragedy as a dramatic form from the classical to the modern period.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Etherton, M. (1982). *The Development of African Drama*. London: Hutchinson University Library for Africa.

Miller, A. (1983). "Tragedy and the Common Man." *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. X. J. Kennedy (Ed.). Boston: Little Brown and Company.



## **UNIT 4 INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA: COMEDY AND TRAGICOMEDY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Nature of Comedy
  - 3.2 Origin of Comedy
  - 3.3 Form of Comedy
  - 3.4 Tragicomedy
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

You should naturally feel that if tragedy is a form of drama that draws attention to serious issues and most of the time ends on a note that elicits pity and fear in the audience, there should be another form of drama that makes a different impact. If you have felt like that, you are right. In fact, some people have a way of stating the essence of tragedy. They consider it as a play that ends on a sad note. That is true in a sense. On the other hand, they consider comedy as a play that ends on a happy note. These sound simplistic, but they are true. We shall be studying comedy in this unit but we shall not stop there. We would also consider a form of drama which seems to blend the tragic with the comic. This is called Tragicomedy.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the characteristic features of the comedy
- differentiate between comedy and tragedy
- recognise the peculiarity of tragicomedy
- mention examples of comedies and tragicomedies.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 The Nature of Comedy

Comedy comes from the Greek word *Komos* which means "a revel" and its origin is traced to activities surrounding ritual performances in honour of the Greek god of fertility and wine called Dionysus. Comedy is a form of drama often considered as the exact opposite of tragedy. It is remarkable that the popular emblem of drama, a pair of masks, appears to confirm this relationship between comedy and tragedy. While the sorrowful one is representing tragedy, the one smiling designates comedy.

Apparently, comedy is generally characterised by an element of the comic. But while a whole play may be described as comic, an aspect of a play may just constitute the comic element. This means that you may find the comic element in a play, even when it is not a comedy.

Another principle which is used in judging whether a play is a comedy or not is whether it ends on a happy note. A tragedy is often seen as ending on a sad note, often with the death of the hero. A third principle that we may apply to identify a comedy also emphasises its differences from the tragedy. It suggests that a tragedy appeals to our emotion while a comedy appeals to our reason. In other words, comedy makes us think due to the issues it raises.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Identify three features of comedy.

#### 3.2 Origin of Comedy

Comedy, just like Tragedy, is believed to have originated in Greece. Aristotle saw it as inferior and thus detracts from the importance of its subject. Aristophanes (448-385 BC) is believed to have contributed a lot to the making of the form. He made comedy a medium for the correction of social ills. Interestingly, the leaders of Athens were not spared. If satire was the main concern of Aristophanes' comedy, Menander, was identified with a different tradition of comedy, one that focused primarily on love. There have also been significant contributions to the development of comedy in various places, including Italy, France and England. Moliere promoted a tradition of comedy in France in the seventeenth century. Shakespeare has also written a number of comedies which, expectedly, have defined an identity for his comedy.

Shakespeare's comedies draw extensively on various sources and are often set in outlandish places. Most of his comedies are concerned with love; music is employed to enliven the unique world that they represent. One of the best known of his comedies is *The Merchant of Venice*.

### 3.3 Forms of Comedy

Comedy is broadly divided into two forms: high comedy and low Comedy. High comedy is that type of comedy that elicits a form of laughter that is thoughtful. It is friendly while trying to correct man. Examples of high comedy are comedy of festivities, comedy of manners and situational comedy.

Low comedy, on the other hand, is unsparing in ridiculing man. This is also reflected in the form of laughter it provokes. Examples of low comedy are Comedy of Marionette, slapstick comedy and farce.

### 3.4 Tragicomedy

We have examined two main forms of drama - tragedy and comedy. You will be right if you wonder whether there is a form that stands in between the two. The form in this case blends the attributes of tragedy and comedy. The form is called Tragicomedy. It elicits both tragic and comic feelings. A tragicomedy normally has two plots that must eventually merge.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Differentiate between high comedy and low comedy.

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

It should not be surprising that comedy and tragedy have always been associated. They have a common root in ancient Greece. You must keep this fact in mind as it enables you explain the tendency to always try to explain one by differentiating it from the other. But the discussion on comedy should even appeal more to the average African because most of the plays written by African playwrights tend to be satirical. Satire, incidentally, is a sub-genre of comedy. The list of such African plays is long. It will include Wole Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Beautification of an Area Boy*.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

The evolution of dramatic forms as traced in this course, you will observe, has not drawn attention to the African contribution. This is not a way of denying the existence of drama in Africa. The fact is that a dramatic performance in Africa takes forms other than those that the Western idea of drama accommodates. In a sense, we admit that there is more to drama than what ancient Greece, Elizabethan England or the Romans have offered us. This fact will be clarified much later in the courses that explore African drama and oral literary traditions.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write short notes on the following:

- 1) High comedy
- 2) Shakespearean comedy
- 3) Tragicomedy
- 4) Low comedy.

## 7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING

Azeez, T. (2001). "Drama: An Introduction". In: *The English Compendium*. Leke Fakoya & Stephen Ogunpitan (Eds). Lagos: Department of English, Lagos State University.

## **MODULE 4      INTRODUCING POETRY**

Unit 1	Introduction to Poetry: Origin, Form and Structure
Unit 2	Language of Poetry
Unit 3	Introduction to Literary Appreciation of Poetry
Unit 4	Introduction to African and Non-African Poetry
Unit 5	Introduction to Unseen Literature
Unit 6	Appreciating a Poem

### **UNIT 1      INTRODUCTION TO POETRY: ORIGIN, FORM AND STRUCTURE**

#### **CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Poetry and its Origin
3.2	Form and Structure of Poetry
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

#### **1.0      INTRODUCTION**

We have said bye for now to prose and dramatic works. Let's go to another important aspect of literature, and this is poetry. This unit establishes the origin of poetic works. It presents the forms and structures of literature as vividly as possible. As you go through the unit, you should have at least one collection of poems with you to refer to. Read some of these poems before studying the unit. Confirm some of the aspects taught in this unit with how the poems in the collection are presented.

Do you fear poems? You should not. By the end of this unit, you will see that poems are your friends. They are not enemies.

#### **2.0      OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- state the origin of poetry
- list the different kinds and forms of poetry
- analyse some of the poetic forms and devices in actual poetic works.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Poetry and its Origin

Before you can fully understand the forms and structure of poetry, you have to familiarise yourself with poetry as an art and its origins.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Have you read any poem? I guess you have read some throughout life. What do you think poetry is? Why is poetry a work of art?

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Through imagination, what are the things that the poet can do? List at least ten such things in the space below:

Cross-check your answers with the ones provided below:

Indeed, poems are written about some experiences which have caught the poet's interest and stirred up his feelings. These feelings are put into words as clearly as he can. In this way, he makes it possible for people to share in his experience.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Can you think of the origin of poetry? Put some of your thoughts here.

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Maybe your thoughts are somehow similar to mine.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

You can be a poet. Do you believe this? Demonstrate the poetic zeal in you by attempting to write a poem on SORROW in the space provided below.

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Compare your poem with one I composed on sorrow in the box.

**SORROW**

It comes unexpected to you  
 It breaks the heart, renders souls  
 Tears to pieces with tears  
 Break into chasm of uncertainty  
 It pains, breaks and grips  
 Sorrow, the name we call despair  
 Sorrow, I say you are not for me.

Are you a poet? If you have composed a poem on Sorrow, like me, then you are a poet. Why then do we fear poetry as a subject? All poems are written by people like you and me. If they can write poems so beautifully, I can do so as well.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

From what we have said so far, what do you think the form and structure of poems are? Put your answer in the space below.

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Study the next section of this unit after you have completed the last four exercises.

**3.1 Form and Structure of Poetry**

**a. Line Arrangement and Capital Letters**

One feature that marks poetry out is the arrangement in lines and in a regular manner. Another one is the beginning of each line with a capital letter. These features are forms and structure peculiar to poetry. Let's consider an example from Clark's Abiku:

Coming and going these several seasons,  
 Do stay out on the baobab tree,  
 Follow where you please your kindred spirits,  
 If indoors is not good enough for you

Did you take note of the line arrangements and capital letters? These are seen in words like Coming, Do, Follow and If, which would not be capitalised normally.

### b. Stanza

The stanza is a group of lines in a repeated pattern, forming part of a poem. A stanza may consist of two, three, four or sometimes more than twelve lines.

It will interest you to know that special names have been given to some of these stanzas. These are set out in the table below:

**Table 1: Stanza Names**

Number of Lines	Special Name
Two	Distich or couplet
Three	Tercet
Three lines that rhyme	Triplet
Four	Quatrain
Five	Quintain
Six	Sestet
Seven	Rhyme Royal
Eight	Ottava Rima

There are, however, no special names for stanzas of nine lines and above. You should know that there are poems with irregular stanzas. These are poems without uniform stanzas. Some stanzas may be of four or five lines, while others may be ten or more.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Take a copy of *West African Verse or Selection of African Poetry*, and look for poems that could be classified as:

- i. Quatrain
- ii. Ottava Rima
- iii. Tercet
- iv. Sestet

Did you find any? The poems you choose may not be the same as mine.

### c. Metre

As this is an introductory course, we may not be able to delve into the study of the metre. You will need some linguistic and stylistic



knowledge before you can have a full grasp of metre. For now, you should know that metre refers to the pattern of accented (or stressed) and unaccented (unstressed) syllables in a line.

A syllable, from your study of phonetics and phonology, is that minimum utterance that can be produced with one breath or pulse. Accent is defined as that aspect of a person's pronunciation which excludes, on the one hand, everything he has in common with all other speakers of the language, and on the other hand, everything that comes under the two other classes of indices.

But in poetry, accent means metrical accent, that is, the stress placed on certain syllables in a line of poetry. You should therefore expect to find a number of accented and unaccented syllables arranged in a certain order. This order or pattern is what is called metre.

There are different types of metre in literature. For you to know the types of metre used, you must also know the number of feet in the line, and the arrangement of the accented and unaccented syllables. A foot is a group of syllables forming a metrical unit of between two or three syllables. Examples of feet common in English poetry are Iambus, Trochee, Anapaest and the Actyl.

Metres range between one and eight. The type of metre, the number of feet in each, and the number of syllables in each foot is given in table 2 below:

**Table 2: Type of Metre by Feet and Syllables**

<b>Metre</b>	<b>Number of Feet</b>	<b>Number of Syllables</b>
Monometer	One	Two
Dimetre	Two	Four
Trimetre	Three	Six
Tetrametre	Four	Eight
Pentametre	Five	Ten
Hexametre	Six	Twelve
Heptametre	Seven	Fourteen
Octometre	Eight	Sixteen

When you advance in your study of literature, you will learn about scansion. This is the method of dividing a line into feet, saying what kind of feet and how many there are.

**d. Rhythm**

Another structure common to poetry is rhythm. This is the regular occurrence of accented (stressed) and unaccented (unstressed) syllables in poetry. It is the alternation of stressed and unstressed pattern of words in poetry work. A poet may make a conscious effort to regulate the rhythm by means of metre which you have just learnt in this unit. Rhythmic patterns are another way that a poet produces musical effects. Rhythm is part of many of the things around us: the throbbing of a car engine, rhythm of a drum, of music and rhythmic movements. Poetry is not an exception.

**e. Rhyme**

The form and structure of poetry also feature rhyme, which is the repetition of the same sound. You will do well to remember the popular elementary rhyme.

Twinkle, twinkle little star, a.  
 How I wonder what you are, a  
 Up above the world so high, b  
 Like a diamond in the sky b

'star' and 'are' go together or rhyme; while 'high' and 'sky' also go together, or rhyme.

The pattern or sequence in which the rhymes occur or are arranged is called rhyme scheme. This is the essence of using the letters a and b to group similar sounds together. In the example given above, it is a a b b. It is possible to have a b a b, a b c b, a b b a or even more complicated rhyming patterns in poems.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

i. Break this poem into its rhythmic patterns using the symbols “/” for accented or stressed and /v/ for the unaccented or unstressed.

- a. I woke with a start in the
- b. Middle of the night
- c. Any many was the feather bed.

ii. Break the poem below into its rhyming pattern:

I wonder lonely as a cloud  
 That floats high o'er vales and hills  
 When all at once I saw a crowd  
 A host of golden daffodils

Beside the lake, beneath the trees  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze

Let's do the exercise together

As we said in the unit, rhythm is the alteration of stressed and unstressed pattern in poetic lines. If this definition is applied to the poem, we get the following rhythmic pattern:

v / v v / v  
I woke with a start in the  
/ v v /  
Middle of the night  
v / / v / v /  
And many was the feather bed

Remember, each strong stress is referred to as a beat. Rhythmic beat can be regular, irregular or regular in some lines and irregular in other lines within the same poem.

In the second part of the exercise, you were required to analyse the rhyming scheme or pattern of the poem. This pattern is possible.

I wonder lonely as a cloud	a
That floats high O' er vales and hills	b
When all at once I saw a crowd	a
A host of golden daffodils	b
Beside the lake, beneath the trees	c
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze	c

The rhyming pattern can be said to be ab ab cc. Rhyming in poetry is the echoing back and forth of similar sounds which add to our enjoyment of the poem. The poet uses rhymes to produce musical effects by repeating the same sounds. Thus we often say rhymes add to the musical quality of the poem: It is not just for decorating the poem. Please note! Not all poems rhyme. Many of the Shakespearean works and Milton's *Paradise Lost* do not rhyme. Again, rhymes are not necessarily at the end of poetic lines. They can be at the middle. When rhymes occur at the middle, they are referred to as internal rhymes e.g. Blake's *To the Evening Star*. We can also have what we call Para-rhyme (or half rhyme) when words are partially and not completely rhyming: the consonants may have similar, sounds, but not the vowels. E.g. Escaped/scrouped and groaned are examples of the para-rhyming pattern. Ezra Pound's poems exhibit a lot of para-rhymes.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit is the beginning of the study of poetry: its origin, forms and structure. From what has been presented so far, you will agree with me that poetry is a systematic work of art. Poems have definite patterns and structure. Poems originate from songs, dance and drum beats. They are thus, lyrical or musical. Poetry is not a subject that we should fear. Poems are written by human beings like you and me. We can also be poets.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt:

- What poetry is;
- Origin of poetry; and
- Form and structure of poems which include: line arrangements, stanza, metre, rhythm and rhymes.

This unit is a preparatory one for poetic analyses that will be done later on in this course. It is also supposed to stimulate you to love poetry and to be a poet yourself.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

"Poetry is a work of art that brings aesthetics, romance, language and systematic presentation of verse forms into reality". Discuss with reference to collection of poems and other concrete illustrations.

#### 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Boulton, M. (1953). *The Anatomy of Poetry*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

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## UNIT 2 LANGUAGE OF POETRY

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Imagery
  - 3.2 Symbolism
  - 3.3 Alliteration
  - 3.4 Onomatopoeia
  - 3.5 Assonance
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit the forms and structure of poetry are extended to include elements of language as it affects poetry. Thus, poetic devices such as imagery, symbolism, alliteration, onomatopoeia and assonance are discussed in the unit. Samples of poems are given for you to analyse in order to be able to appreciate the way poetic language forms or poetic devices are used to bring out the beauty, lyrical quality and effectiveness of poetry. At the end of this unit, our goal is to make you love poetry and analyse poetic works with confidence and accuracy. The poems you need in this unit are produced for you. Read them carefully before attempting to undertake the practice exercises.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify images in poetic works
- bring out symbols in selected poetic works
- recognise and analyse different forms of alliteration
- identify and analyse the different forms of onomatopoeia
- identify as well as analyse assonance in poetic works.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Imagery

This unit is a continuation of the last unit. But rather than calling this unit Origin and Forms of Poetry, we have decided to call it Language of Poetry or Poetic devices.

The first poetic device discussed here is imagery. Images are concrete objects; pictures of real things. By the use of imagery, the poet makes what is not familiar to us familiar. The poet is interested in using images because he wishes to share with us his experiences, thoughts, feelings and ideas. Images are used to avoid lengthy descriptions and to use language most economically without wasting words. Images are like flowers that decorate a beautifully painted poetic message.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read the poem below and identify the images used. Show how these images are created.

Cross-check your answers with the ones in the discussion below.

#### **Nightfall in Soweto**

Nightfall comes like  
A dreaded disease  
Seeping through the pores  
Of a healthy body  
And ravaging beyond repair

A murderer's hand  
Lurking in the shadows;  
Clasping the dagger,  
Strikes down the helpless victim

I am the victim  
I am slaughtered  
Every night in the streets  
I am cornered by the fear  
Gnawing at me  
In my helplessness I languish.

Man has ceased to be man  
Man has become beast  
Man has become prey

I am the prey  
 I am the quarry to be run down  
 By the marauding beast  
 Let loose by cruel nightfall  
 From its cage of death

Where is my refuge?  
 Where am I safe?  
 Not in my matchbox house  
 Where I barricade myself against nightfall.

I tremble at his crunching footsteps,  
 I quake at his deafening knock on the door.  
 "Open up" he barks like a rabid dog  
 thirsty for my blood.  
 Nightfall! Nightfall!  
 You are my mortal enemy.  
 But why were you created?  
 Why can't it be daytime?  
 Daytime forever more?

Oswald M. Mtshali; South Africa

If you have read and studied the poem *Nightfall* in Soweto very well, you will have come across the following images:

**Verse 1**                      Night  
 disease  
 pores  
 healthy body

In that verse SIMILE whereby something is compared with another thing using words like as...as and is used to liken nightfall to a dreaded disease:

Nightfall comes like  
 A dreaded disease

The words pores and healthy body are images used directly to illustrate the destructive nature of Nightfall

**Verse 2:**      Murder's hand  
 The shadows  
 dagger  
 helpless victim

The above are all images of destruction in the poem. These images are stated directly in the poem.

**Verse 3:** streets

Timid heart

Verse 4 is metaphoric. By metaphor mean I images created by comparing two things together without using words such as like or as...as. The following metaphors are seen in verse 4.

Man has become beast

Man has become prey

I am the prey

I am the quarry

Man is likened to beast, prey and quarry. Other images in verse 4 stated directly are: marauding beast, cage of death. By the use of metaphors, poems are compacted and economically presented without much waste of words.

**Versed 5:** the image presented here is that of matchbox house. This is also somehow metaphoric because the house is compared with a matchbox to highlight its smallness.

**Verse 6:** gives us images of crunching footsteps – again this is a metaphor. Footstep described as crunching. In that verse also, the barking of the night marauders (thieves, armed robbers) is compared to rabid dog, thus suggesting another example of a simile.

"Open up" he barks like a rabid dog thirsty for my blood.

Verse 7 which is the last verse of *Nightfall in Soweto* is metaphorically likened to *Mortal enemy*.

What are we saying in all these analyses?

Imagery is an important element in poetry. Images are presented in the form of similes and metaphors. Of course, images may be presented in poems not compared with other images. A series of images in poems give vividness, effectiveness and the beauty that a great poetic work of art provides.

### 3.1 Symbolism

This is a poetic art of representing persons, objectives or ideas with another. More often than not, concrete objects symbolise. Symbolism is another way of creating imagery through comparison. The objects used



throughout the poem, when gathered together call to mind the particular idea no matter where they may come from.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

List the different kinds of symbols that may be evoked by a poet.

Cross-check your answers with the ones discussed in the section below.

Symbolism in poetry is an indirect expression which has a deeper meaning not immediately apparent until you have brought together the various images used by the poet. The coming together of all the images gives an overall impression of the symbol being used by the poet.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Read the poem below and provide the images painted by the poet.

#### **Letter to Martha**

In prison  
 The clouds assume importance  
 And the birds  
 With a small space of the sky

Cut off by walls  
 Of bleak hostility  
 And pressed upon by hostile authority  
 The mind turns upwards  
 When it can

There is no hope  
 Of seeing the stars  
 The arcs and fluorescent  
 Have blotted them out  
 The complex aeronautics of birds  
 And their exuberant acrobatics  
 Become matters of intrigued speculation  
 And wonderment  
 Clichés about freedom of birds  
 And their absolute freedom from care  
 Become meaningful  
 And the graceful unimpeding of the clouds

A kind of music, poetry, dance  
 Sends delicate rhythms tremoring through the flesh

And fantasies course easily through the mind

Where are they going  
Where will they dissolve  
Will they be seen by those at home  
And whom will they delight?

*/-/ Dennis Brutus*

Have you completed the exercise? Let's discuss some of the symbols evoked by the poet.

because we know this poet is longing for freedom, similar to the freedom that the birds and the clouds enjoy.

Notice in the example above, we arrive at the symbolism through a series of images that the poet has painted, which do not change but consistently point to one thing: lack of freedom. Thus one can say, that when metaphors or images occur many times in a poem and have the same meaning, they become a symbol.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Why is symbolism important in poetry?

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Cross-check your answers with those provided in the box below.

#### **IMPORTANCE OF SYMBOLISM IN POETRY**

Symbolism in poetry:

- i. enhances the meaning by associating the idea with objects and persons
- ii. reinforces the meaning brought out by the reoccurrence of metaphors or images many times
- iii. conveys deeper meaning through important objects

### 3.2 Alliteration

Alliteration is another poetic device used in poetry. It is the use of a series of words with the same initial letter. It is a patterned repetition of identical consonantal sounds at the beginning of words. Let's give some examples:

Peter Piper picked a piece of pickled pepper

Six words in this line start with "p".

Let's take another example from Alexander Pope:  
 The book full blockheaded  
 Ignorantly read  
 With loads of learned lumbar in his head.

Can you analyse the alliteration in this poem?

"b" is repeated in the first line and "l" is repeated in the second one.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Why do poets use alliteration in their poems?

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Check your answer in the box below:

#### IMPORTANCE OF ALLITERATION

Alliteration is used for:

- i. Musical quality
- ii. Adding beauty to the poem
- iii. Conveying strong emotions
- iv. Making the poem interesting, peculiar, harmonious and enjoyable

### 3.3 Onomatopoeia

This refers to words whose sounds resemble the noise or sound they make. Words like murmur, whiz, buzz and bang are onomatopoeic.

When used in a poem, it adds beauty, colour and musical quality to the poem.

### 3.4 Assonance

This is another way the poet gains sound effect in his poem. The difference between assonance and alliteration is that in assonance, unlike alliteration, the repetition of sounds involves vowels and not consonants. The other difference is the lack of rigidity in the rule regarding the position in which the identical vowel sounds should occur in words. Study the following words;

Twinkle/milky  
bought/down  
rays/flames  
hold/road

What do you notice in all these words. There is a repetition of vowel sounds, mostly at the middle of the words. These are partial internal rhyming schemes.

- gain musical quality
- for poetic sound effect
- make poems interesting
- gain harmony in poems

### 4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has brought together so many of the poetic devices, that are used in different poems. The effort in the unit is to assist you in analysing poems by making you gain familiarity with the poetic devices. We can conclude from all our discussions that poetry is patterned, musical and effective when words are used in a specific manner.

### 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt:

- images, metaphors and similes
- symbolism
- alliteration
- onomatopoeia
- assonance

This unit prepares you for poetic analysis and appreciation. It also provides you with devices you can use if you want to write your own poem. I think you can now appreciate poetry as a great work of art after this unit. This is our goal and expectation.

## **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Read and analyse the poem titled *Ode to a Graecian Urn* by John Keats.

## **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 3 INTRODUCTION TO LITERARY APPRECIATION OF POETRY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Type of Poetry
  - 3.2 Literary Appreciation of Different Types of Poems
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit takes you into a critical look at appreciation, types of poetry, and the relationship between the two. The goal of the unit is to familiarise you with different types of poetic works, and how these poetic works can be critically analysed and literarily appreciated. The first section of this unit gives you a brief rundown of some poetic types that are recognised in poetry. Of course, it is not possible for us to introduce you to all the types of poetry within the context of one unit. What we have presented here is purely introductory in nature. As you study literature further in life, more types of poems will be exposed to you. Again, it is not possible to analyse all the poetic types. The few that are analysed here are meant to stimulate your interest in analysing more poems on your own.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- enumerate the forms and characteristics of a narrative poem
- enumerate and analyse a lyrical poem
- undertake literary appreciation of some selected poems.

Let's go into the study proper by looking at types of poetry.

### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Types of Poetry

##### 1. Narrative Poetry

As the name implies, a narrative poem tells a story. The story may be serious and seriously told, as in Chaucer's *The Knights Tale*. The story could also be bawdy or sensuous as in Chaucer's *The Miller's Tale*. The story could be one long, unbroken, continuous verse, or could be divided into stanzas and verses.

Having understood what narrative poetry is, we shall now consider two types, viz. epic and ballad.

##### a. Epic

It is a long, great narrative poem, which tells about the doings of one or more characters from history or legend. It could be the adventures and famous exploits of a hero. The following are characteristics of an epic poem:

- i. **Descriptiveness:** Because the epic is long, the poet has plenty of opportunity for vivid description. For example, Milton in *Paradise Lost* took time to describe the shield and spear of Satan in great detail.
- ii. **Choric nature:** This refers to the fact that epic poetry is more or less an expression of public opinion. That is, the thought and feelings of some large group or community. For example, Milton in *Paradise Lost* is, in many respects, a spokesman for the English and European Protestantism of his time.
- iii. **High seriousness:** The subject matter of the Epic is always serious and seriously told. The epic poets are usually over ambitious. They aim at setting an unbreakable standard in their works. Their poems are therefore carefully and greatly planned. In it, the hero faces severe odds and difficulties. He, however, overcomes all his obstacles and records a huge success after a hard struggle.

##### b. Ballad

A ballad is a short narrative folk song or a dance story. It could be regarded as a lyrical poem since it is normally meant for singing. Some of them may have choruses. The two major subject matters usually

treated in a ballad are war and love on the one hand, and supernatural happenings on the other. It uses simple, uncomplicated language to present its story through narration, dialogue and description. Its evolution is from oratory.

It is the earliest form of poetry, and has been transmitted by oral tradition through many generations.

Another feature of a ballad is that it is often written in the form of a quatrain or four line stanza. Its rhyme scheme is either abab or aabb.

Most folk ballads deal with a single episode of a highly dramatic and usually tragic nature. Since many of them are choruses, repetitions to keep time going serve as a mark of rhythm. There are some ballads that are not traditional and have not come down by word of mouth. These are called literary ballads to distinguish them from other kinds. *Ancient Mariner* is a popular literary ballad.

## 2. Lyrical Poetry

Another type of poem is the lyric. This is usually a short poem that can be sung or that is musical. Ordinarily, lyric means song: the sort of song: which was sung in ancient Greece to the music of the lyre, and which in the modern world, is sung to the music of the guitar. However, nowadays, the lyrical poem needs not be sung to the accompaniment of the lyre or the guitar. They merely record emotions, personal meditations and deal with non-narrative subjects.

The subject matter and the form of lyrics are extremely varied. Love, patriotism, beauty and brave deeds are some of the subject matter of lyrics.

The poet's thoughts and feelings on some issues or subjects are expressed often in a sharp, moving and vivid manner, to achieve the musical effect. They are built up in a harmonious pattern by the use of rhymes, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, repetition and personification.

Let us illustrate all the different types of poetry discussed so far with specific examples.

We begin with Wordsworth's *Rainbow*.

### **Rainbow**

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky;



So was it when my life began;  
 So it is now I am a man;  
 So be it when I grow old,  
 Or let me die!  
 The child is the father of the man;  
 And I could wish my days to be  
 Bound each to each by natural piety.  
*William Wordsworth*

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Critically analyse the poem titled *Rainbow*, bringing out the poetic devices used by the poet to make the message vivid and effective. Crosscheck your answer with the ones presented in the section on Literary Appreciation of Different Types of Poems. Use the space provided below:

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### 3.2 Literary Appreciation of Different Types of Poems

It is not possible to analyse samples of all types of poems discussed in this unit. We shall, however, try to attempt literary appreciation of some of them. For literary criticism or appreciation of poetic works, you should follow the outline presented below:

- i. **The Subject matter of the poem:** (or theme of the poem) - Why is the poem written? What message is the poem trying to pass to the readers? What is the poem addressing?
- ii. **The background setting of the poem:** What is the setting of the poem? What type of life is the poem trying to portray? On which background is the poem based?
- iii. **The form or structure of the poem:** What verse form? What type of lines? Any rhyming or rhythmic pattern? What kind of stanzas? etc.

- iv. **The Language and style:** What are the interesting language or stylistic features such as the use of symbolism, compare, contrast, repetition, parallelism (parallel structures), metaphor, similes, appropriateness of diction (or tone mood of the poet as exhibited in the poem), alliteration, personification (making inanimate objects behave like or possess the characteristics of the animate), onomatopoeia, and so on?

Going by the outline of things to look for in a poem given above, let's try a critical and literary appreciation of the poem titled *Rainbow*.

- a) **Theme:** the permanence of a rainbow with all its beautiful attributes. The poem is written to appreciate the wonders of a rainbow.
- b) **Background/Setting:** The setting is in a natural area where the poet can take a glimpse at the sky uninterrupted. It is a reminiscence of the way the rainbow was when the poet was young and even when he was old. The poem is trying to portray the life of a man who is in love with natural things like the rainbow.
- c) **Form and Structure:** The poem is a nine-line lyrical poem, short, vivid, well compacted and meaning-effective. There are some rhyming patterns: abode abbd sort of pattern. The rhythmic pattern of lines 1 -2 can be illustrated thus:

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky:

- d) **Language and style**
- i. The poet maintains a definitive style: uses words and expressions that make the rainbow in the sky so beautiful, important, admirable and stable. These words include: my heart leaps up, so it was, so it is, so be it.
- ii. The images are sharp: rainbow, Sky, man, natural piety, etc
- iii. Symbolism: the rainbow is made to symbolise a thing of permanence and a thing of beauty which makes the heart leap for joy.
- iv. Assonance: “hearts” / “leap”, “when” / “began”, “I am” / “Man”, “grow” / “old”, “let” / “die” “father” / “man”

v. Alliteration: "am" / "man"

vi. Repetition: so it was  
so is it  
so be it

this is also an example of parallel construction

Let's take another example. We shall do a literary appreciation of a narrative poem titled *Stanley Meets Mutesa*.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Read the poem titled *Stanley Meets Mutesa* below and do a detailed literary appreciation of the poem. Use your notebook.

#### *Stanley Meets Mutesa*

Such a time of it they had;  
The heat of the day  
The heat of the night  
And the mosquitoes that followed.  
Such was the time and  
They bound for a kingdom.  
The thin weary line of carriers  
With tattered dirty rags to cover their backs;  
The battered bulky chests  
That kept on falling off their shaven heads.  
Their tempers high and hot,  
The fierce sun scorching  
With it rose their spirits  
With its fall their hopes  
As each day sweated their body dry and  
Flies clung in clumps to their sweat-scented backs  
Such was the march  
And the hot season just breaking.

Each day a weary pony dropped  
Left for the vultures on the plains;  
Each afternoon a human skeleton collapsed;  
Left for the Masai on the plains.  
But the march trudged on  
Its khaki leader in front  
He the spirit that inspired  
He the light of hope.

Then came the afternoon of a hungry march

A hot and hungry march it was;  
The Nile and the Nyanza  
Lay like two twins  
Azure across the green countryside  
The march leapt on chaunting  
Like young gazelles to a water-hole.  
Hearts beat faster  
Loads felt lighter  
As cool water lapt their soft, sore feet.  
No more the dread of hungry hyenas  
But only tales of valour when  
At Mutesa's court fires are lit.  
No more burning heat of the day  
But song, laughter and dance.  
The village looks on behind banana groves,  
Children peer behind reed fences;  
Such was the welcome  
No singing women to chant a welcome  
Or drums to greet the white ambassador;  
Only a few silent nods from aged faces  
And one rumbling drum rolls  
To summon Mutesa's court to parley  
For the country was not sure  
The gate of reeds is flung open  
There is silence  
But only a moment's silence  
The tall black king steps forward,  
He towers over the thin beard of the white man  
Then grabbing his lean white hand  
Manages to whisper  
"Mtu Mweupe Karibu"  
White man you are welcome.

The gate of polished reed closes behind them  
And the west is let in.

Have you completed the literary appreciation of the poem? If you have, you can crosscheck your answers with the ones presented in this section. Now that you have completed the above exercise, let's attempt a literary appreciation of the poem together.

**a) Subject Matter/Theme**

The poem is a narrative which recalls the visit of a nineteenth century explorer, Henry Stanley, to Buganda (present day Uganda), and the

meeting with the powerful King Mutesa. The satire or sarcasm symbolises the arrival of colonial power into the land.

**b) Background and Setting**

The poem has a colonial background, set in East Africa and symbolising Henry Stanley's exploration. The rivers mentioned in the poem suggest exploratory venture

**c) Language and Style**

**d) Use of Symbolism:** Stanley is the white ambassador; Mutesa represents the black race. The meeting symbolises the African subscribing to the Western

**e) Contrast**

White versus black, heat of the day contrasted with the chill of the night, the tall king contrasted with the frail, smallish, lean white man, etc.

**e) Use of Repetition**

Such a time of it they had/  
Such was the time

The battered  
The fierce sun } the repetition in sentence pattern  
He the spirit that inspired  
He the light of hope } To stress the white men view of coming  
to Africa

No more the dread of hungry hyenas

No more burning heat of the day } To illustrate the primitive and harsh  
African life

**f) Parallelism**

(in construction and idea presentation)  
Each day a weary pony dropped  
Each afternoon a human skeleton collapsed

**g) Metaphor**

The white man likened to khaki leader  
The Nile and the Nyanza likened to two twins

**h) Simile**

The march leapt on chanting

Like young gazelles to a water-hole

**i) Appropriate Diction**

The use of words to depict the life of the traveler: weary line of carriers, tattered dirty rags, battered bulky chests, such was the march, the march trudged on, etc. diction to show the beauty of the land.

**j) Alliteration**

"battered"/ "bulky", "clung"/ "clumps", "sweat- scented", "two"/ "twins" etc.

**k) Personification**

Nile and Nyanza presented as twins.

**l) Onomatopoeia**

"rumbling" echoes the sound of drum.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What is your overall impression after reading the poem *Stanley Meets Mutesa*? Write your impression in the space provided below:

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Crosscheck your/answer with the ones presented in the poem below.

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

This unit has been able to introduce you to literary appreciation of types of poetry. The unit has also given you an outline of how you can do a critical appreciation of a poetic work. The language, style, meaning and effectiveness are ingredients which are often looked for in literary appreciation.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

The unit has presented to you:

- type of poetry: narrative subdivided into epic and ballads; and lyrical poetry
- literary appreciation of different types of poems, especially the lyrical and narrative poems.

You should now be able to do detailed appreciation of any poem that may be given to you. If you cannot, you are advised to go through this unit again. Indeed, literary appreciation is an important component of literature that you must be familiar with.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Take any two poems of at least four stanzas each and undertake literary appreciation of them using the criteria for literary appreciation suggested in this unit. All points must be adequately discussed and substantiated with evidence from poems.

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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## **UNIT 4 INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN AND NON-AFRICAN POETRY**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Characteristics of African Poetry
  - 3.2 Characteristics of Non-African Poetry
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit attempts a broad-based area, which cannot be contained in the context of a lesson. This is the African and non-African poetry. Since this course is introductory in outlook, the unit will merely expose you to general points in relation to African and non-African poetry. Future literature courses will dwell more on each poetic division. This unit enables you to recognise what African and non-African poetry are, their characteristics and general stylistic features. Literary appreciation of samples of these poetic types will also be done. As you study the unit, make sure you have a collection of African poems and other collections of English and American poetic works with you.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define African and non-African poetry
- state the characteristic features of African poetry
- analyse samples of African and non-African poetic works.

Are you ready to study the unit? Let's kick off the study with African poetry: its characteristics.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Characteristics of African Poetry**

The term African is reserved for poetry by Africans. These are poems by African poets, mostly written on African themes and based on an African background. The distinction between African and non-African



poetry should be regarded as largely for convenience. There are African poetic works that have elements of non-African themes and some non - African poets that concentrate on African issues. There are, however, some characteristic features that can make certain poetic works basically African.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Try to list in the space below, some possible feature of African poetry. Cross-check your answer with the ones provided in the discussions that follow this exercise.

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If you have completed the exercise, you should compare your answer with the ones given below:

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Read the poem titled Night rain reproduced below, and bring out some of the poetic devices that make the poem truly African in style. Use the space below.

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**Night Rain**

What time of the night it is  
I do not know  
Except like some fish  
Doped out of the deep  
I have bobbed up belly wise  
From the stream of sleep  
And no cocks crow  
It is drumming hard here  
And I suppose everywhere  
Droning with insistent ardour upon  
Our roof-thatch and shed  
And thro' sheaves slit open  
I cannot quite make out overhead  
Great water drops are dribbling falling like orange or mango  
Fruits showered forth in the wind  
Or perhaps I shall say so  
Much like beads I could in prayer tell  
Them on string as they break  
In wooden bowls and earthenware  
Mother is busy now deploying  
I know her practised step as  
She moves her bins, bags and vats  
Out of the run of water  
Of the floor. Do not tremble then  
But turn brothers, turn upon your side  
Of the loosening mats  
To where others lie  
We have drunk tonight of a spell  
Deeper than the owl's or bat's  
That wet of wings may not fly  
Bedraggled upon the iroko, they stand  
Emptied of hearts, and  
Therefore will not stir, on, not  
They must scurry in to hide  
So we'll roll to the beat  
Of drumming all over the land  
And under its ample soothing hand  
Joined to that of the sea  
We will settle to sleep of the innocent and free.

### 3.1 Characteristics of Non-African Poetry

Non- African poetry is such a wide classification of poetry that it cannot be curtailed within the context of a single unit. It means that literature is not written by an African and possible, without an African setting. It means therefore that poetic works by French, English, American, Russian, Finish, Arabian, etc. poets will fall into this category. If we narrow the scope to English and American poets, we may start to do the topic. But even in this narrowed down classification, only very few characteristic features can be brought out.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Can you think of some of the characteristics of English and African poetry? Put them in the space below.

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Do not read the next section of this unit until when this exercise is completed

1. The English and American poetry have been in existence a long time before the African written poetry. As from the Middle Ages to the present age, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, John Keats, Shirley and many others have been writing poems.
2. The English and American poetic works are of various types.

Poets are classified in various terms:

- The romantic poets: Wordsworth, John Keats, Coleridge, etc.
  - Narrative poets: Chaucer, Milton, etc.
  - Lyric poets: Wordsworth, John Keats, W. Yeats, etc.
3. The background and setting of their poems are usually English or American setting. Shirley, for example, in the poem titled *The Glories of our Blood and State* refers to images like swords, fresh laurels, garlands, victor-victim, blossom etc. to give the poem the English taste. Also in the poem *Mending Wall*, by Robert Frost, images such as boulders, yelping dogs, pineapple orchard, apple trees, and spring give the poem the American setting.

4. The language, stylistic devices, poetic structures are English and American in outlook.

Now that you have completed the exercise, compare the characteristics you identified with the ones below.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What makes the poem *The Glories of Our Blood and State* in English style and poetic devices? List some of these in the space provided below.

#### **The Glories of our Blood and State**

The glories of our blood and state  
 Are shadows, not substantial things  
 There is no armour against fate  
 Death lays his icy hands on kings  
 Sceptre and crown  
 Must tumble down  
 And must in dust be equal made  
 With the poor and crooked scythe and spade

Some men with sword may reap the field  
 And plant fresh laurels where they skill  
 But their strong nerves at last must yield  
 They tame but one another still  
 Earl or fate  
 They stoop to fate

And must give their murmuring breath  
 When they, pale captives creep to death

The garlands wither on your brow  
 Then boast on more your might deeds  
 Upon deaths purple alter now  
 See where victor-victim bleeds

Your heads must come  
 To the cold tomb  
 Only the actions of the just  
 Smell sweet and blossom in the dust.

**James Shirley**

Cross-check your points with the ones given below:

Scepter and crown  
 Must tumble down  
 And must in dust be equal made  
 With the poor and crooked scythe and spade

Thus, although we can say that Shirley is stylistically English, thematically, he is universal.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What makes the poem *Mending Wall* American in style and devices? What makes the poem not American but universal. Use the space provided for your answer.

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Cross-check your answer with the ones presented below:

**Mending Wall**

Something there is, that doesn't love a wall  
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it  
 And makes gaps the upper boulders in the sun  
 The work of hunters is another thing  
 I have come after them and made repair  
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone  
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding  
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean  
 No one has seen them made or heard them there  
 I let my neighbour know beyond the hill  
 And no a day we meet to walk the line  
 And set the wall between us once again  
 We keep the wall between us as we go  
 To each the boulders that have fallen to each  
 And some are loaves and some are so nearly balls  
 We have to use a spell to make  
 'Stay where you are until our backs are balance

We wear our fingers rough with handling them  
 Oh just another kind of outdoor game  
 One on a side. It comes to little more  
 There where it is we do not need a wall  
 He is all pine and I am apple orchard  
 And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him  
 He only says 'Good fences make good neighbours  
 Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder  
 If I could put a notion in his head  
 'Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't  
 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows  
 Before I built a wall I'd asked to know  
 Whether I was walling in or walling out  
 And to whom I was like to give offence  
 But it's not elves exactly, I'd rather  
 He said it for himself. I see him there  
 Bring a stone grasped firmly by the top  
 In each hand, like an old stone savage armed  
 He moves in darkness, as it seems to me  
 Not of woods only and the shade of trees  
 He will not go behind his father's saying  
 And he likes having thought of it so well  
 He says again, Good fences make good neighbours.

*Robert Frost; USA*

*Mending Wall* is written by an American poet, Robert Frost. It has the following feature that make the poem American in outlook:

1. Setting and background: The poem has its setting in place where there is snow - "frozen-ground-swell", a typical urban centre which may be American: scenes of gates, fences and other forms of artificial barriers. Such a set up can be found everywhere in the world, but is more common in Europe and America, than Africa. It is also a predominant feature less common in rural areas.
2. The language flows like an American language, e.g. something there is, that doesn't love a wall, That sends the frozen-ground swell under it,

The multiple modifications such as:

"frozen- ground-swell" "spring mending-time"

"too-little more"

"another kind of outdoor game"

the excessive use of contractions:

"doesn't", "isn't it", "I d", "couldn't", "I d rather"

and the use of expressions such as:  
 "yelping dogs"  
 "handling them"  
 "wailing out"  
 "out of hiding"  
 "its not elves exactly"

Suggest some sort of Americanism that is perceptible in the poem.

Although traces of American English are observable in the poem, the theme, as in the case of Shirley's *The Glories of our Blood and State*, is universal. A theme which suggests a need to remove the various forms of human and artificial barriers that prevent good neighbourliness and effective communication, that is not only American but also universal.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

Although in this unit we have tried to make distinction between African and non-African poetry, we have been able to show that such a distinction is artificial. At the surface of it all, there may be some traces of language and poetic devices that make a poem African and another English or American. In most cases, the themes of poems are universal. The poetic devices used are also largely universal.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit, the attempt has been made to expose you to the characteristics of African and non-African poetic works. More specifically, you have learnt about:

- the characteristics of African poetry; and
- the characteristics of English and American poetry.

The unit is expected to equip you with the holistic concept of what poetry is and the different kinds of poetry that you will come in contact with in life.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Compare and contrast the English American and African poetry. Give specific examples from at least five poems from each category.

#### **7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING**

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## **UNIT 5 INTRODUCTION TO UNSEEN LITERATURE**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 The Characteristics of Unseen Literature
  - 3.2 Procedures for Tackling the Unseen Literature
  - 3.3 Literature Appreciation of Sample Unseen Prose
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This unit starts a new aspect of literature. This is the unseen literature. The unit is rooted in the premise that literature, whether seen or unseen, is meant to be appreciated and enjoyed. The unit treats the characteristics of the unseen literature, procedures for tackling the literary analysis of the unseen. The unit ends with a sample literary appreciation of an unseen prose work to illustrate the way the unseen can be tackled. It is expected that you will use the suggestions in the unit to analyse any unseen literature that you may come in contact with. I wish you success as you go through the unit.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define the unseen literature
- enumerate the characteristics of unseen literature
- outline the procedures to follow in tackling any unseen literary passage
- apply the procedures for tackling the unseen to analysing a sampled unseen prose passage.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Characteristics of the Unseen Literature**

Literary appreciation suggests one's ability to respond promptly to any literary work bringing out its beauty, effectiveness, message and the devices used for unfolding all these literary qualities. Literary

appreciation can be divided into two parts: literary appreciation of work of art seen or previously written, read and studied as well as the literary work of art not seen or previously studied.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What are the characteristic features of unseen literature? Put your answers in the space below:

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Cross -check your answers with the ones presented in this section. Unseen literature is characterised by:

- i. not ever seen or read before literary appreciation is demanded of you
- ii. the fact that the author may not be known of previously read or studied
- iii. the fact that the passage may be prose fiction, prose-non fiction, poetry or drama; and
- iv. the fact that if not peculiar to any other work of art seen in term of basic devices used by the literary artist and the way the message and its effectiveness is brought out.

What are we trying to say in this section? Even if we have not seen a prose work or poem before, if we know the methods used in writing the poem or the prose work, to understand literary appreciation of such a work of art will not be difficult. Let's put this in another way. If you have not seen a poem before but can identify and discuss the basic devices used to bring out the beauty and meaning of the poem in an effective manner, bulk of your task in tackling the unseen poetry is solved.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What are the skills that you must possess if you want to tackle the unseen literature? List them in the space provided below:

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**Skills Needed to Tackle the Unseens**

In order to respond spontaneously to unseen literature you must:

- i) possess the usual reading skills: be able to read the prose or the poetic works properly and accurately.
- ii) possess comprehension skills: understand the surface and the deeper meaning of what is presented in the literature.
- iii) possess the ability to identify the literary devices or techniques used in the literary work: such devices are imaginary, figure of speech, symbols, narrative style, character presentation, variety of language structure, etc.
- iv) possess the skill of identifying the theme of the literary work, subject matter, setting/background, plot, language and overall effect or impact the literary work has on you or the readers.

**3.2 Procedures for Tackling the Unseen Literature**

Nobody can give you all the rules you need to tackle unseen literature. What will be given to you here as procedures are the ones that we have tried and found to have worked for us. There is every assurance that they will also work for you.

1. Read the passage or the poem carefully paying attention to every word, expressions and illustration in the passage or poem. That is, you must read the unseen with absolute concentration and dedication.
2. Form notes on the parts of the unseen that will enable you to answer any literary questions that are genuine for you to tackle. Do not waste time on note making and not have time actual tackling of the prose passage or poem.
3. Ensure that you have obtained a surface and deeper-meaning of what the poem or passage is all about before you start to analyse the unseen.
4. Determine the type of unseen passage or poem you are given. The passage may be narrative, descriptive, argumentative, expository, technical or scientific or it may be any of the following:
  - i) An ode: a poem that is written in celebration of some special events or things.
  - ii) A lyric: a poem expressing intense emotions and sensations; it is musical and works like a song.

- iii) A ballad: a simple poem that is in form of song that tells an old story.
- iv) An elegy: a poem of sorrow usually song for the dead.
- v) A sonnet: a poem usually in fourteen lines, written in a regular rhyming and rhythmic pattern.
- vi) A blank verse: a poem without a regular rhyme scheme.
- vii) A pastoral poem: a poem that deals with the ideal life of a shepherd.
- viii) A satirical poem: a poem that ridicules or laughs at a particular thing, society, institution, or human behaviour with the hope of calling attention to the ridiculous behaviour possibly for a change.
- ix) A traditional poem: a poem which belongs to oral tradition but that is now written for one generation to be able to hand it over to another generation.

If it is a drama, it may be comedy, tragedy, or tragic-comedy.

5. Analyse the language used in the unseen prose, poem or drama. In analysing the language, you should consider the following:

- a) The diction: choice of most appropriate word and expressions that match the ideas being conveyed and that give the desired effectiveness.
- b) Figure of speech: a figurative use of words as distinct from its usual, surface, literal or ordinary meaning; figure of speech involves the use of metaphors and similes.
- c) Proverbial language and idioms: short saying containing explanations, advice, warning, lesson, etc. are referred to as proverbs, while idioms are peculiar use of language to convey meaning that are deep and not literal or ordinary.

Other language issues that could be brought out in the unseen are: imagery, symbolism, structural patterns, (e.g. rhymes, rhythms, paragraphs structure, etc.), tone assonance, alliteration, metaphor, repetition, hyperbole, personification, etc.

- d) Determine the way the characters are presented. Decide whether they are presented as:
  - i) Flat characters, that is, static characters who do not change from the beginning to the end.

- ii) Round characters - who are dynamic, grow and develop to optimal level in the course of the drama. All about a round character is known in the work.
- iii) Foils are characters that are used to prevent the major character from achieving his or her ultimate goal or success.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

What are the literary based questions that you can ask if you are to undertake a literary appreciation of an unseen work of art?

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Cross-check your questions with the ones presented in the box below:

**When you are in contact with an unseen work of art, ask the following questions:**

- i) What kind of prose, poetry or drama is it?
- ii) Who is addressing who in the unseen?
- iii) What are the obvious characteristics of the unseen?
- iv) What is the use to which the characteristic is put?
- v) How effective are the characteristics of the unseen?
- vi) Did the unseen appeal to emotions, our senses of taste, smell, touch, hearing, sight, etc?
- vii) Does the unseen appeal to you personally?
- viii) What is the subject matter, theme of the unseen? Any message? Is the message localised or universal? How effective is the writer in dealing with the subject matter?
- ix) What deeper meaning can be read into the unseen? Is there any understanding philosophical meaning or message that is implied or hinted at?
- x) What about the language of the unseen? How effective are the poetic devices?
- xi) What is your overall impression about the unseen?

**3.3 Literary Appreciation of Sample Unseen Prose**

It is not possible to analyse many unseen prose and exercise in this unit. We will not even touch unseen drama. The sample presented to you in

this unit is just to give you a feel of what to do when in contact with the unseen.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Critically undertake literary appreciation of the unseen prose presented below

But do you think there's something wrong in fighting and killing unless you are doing so for a great cause like US.

What great cause is ours?

'Why freedom and the return of our lost heritage'

May be there is something in that. But for me, freedom is meaningless unless it can bring back a brother I lost. Because it can't do that, the only thing left to me is to fight to kill and rejoice at any who falls under my sword. But enough, Chief Jacobin must die.

Compare your literary appreciation with the one presented in this section.

The appreciation of the unseen prose is based on the passage which can be titled, "Fighting with a Cause". The analysis is broken down into the following sub-headings:

- i. **Subject matter:** It is a dialogue between two freedom fighters that are probably in the bush fighting. The first fighter sees the freedom as the main reason for fighting while the second fighter sees fighting as a means of revenging the death of his brother. The message is why war at all? Why can't we be friends?
- ii. **Theme:** The arts of war and the conflicting reasons why people destroy one another.
- iii. **Kind of Prose Passage:** Prose in form of dialogue.
- iv. **Addresser–Addressee:** The first fighter is addressing the second on the cause of fighting which the first speaker sees as freedom and the return of other heritage. The second speaker has a different reason for fighting to avenge the Death of his brother.
- v. **Characterisation:** The character design used in the passage is a simple one. The characters are symbolic the first speaker

symbolises that of a freedom fighter, the second is an avenger. They are both ruthless, the first ready to fight for a noble cause, while the second is for his own selfish reason.

- vi. **The appeal in the unseen:** The passage appeals to our emotion: fighting and killing, no matter the cause.
- vii. **The language:** Appropriate use of dialogue, simple English, informal style and use of repetition and rhetorical questions.

"There's something wrong in fighting" there is something in that. Emphasis is laid on fighting. With a good control of language the writer is able to bring the two opposing views for fighting. The presentation is vivid, captivating and precise.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

Literary appreciation is an important component of this course. It is the primary goal of studying literature. This unit has been able to expose you to the demands of literary appreciation. With the suggestions offered in the unit, you should be able to tackle any unseen literature in an effective way. You should also be able to appreciate any literary work of art better.

#### 5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt the following in this unit:

- what is referred to as unseen literature
- characteristics of unseen literature; and
- how to undertake a literary appreciation of a sample unseen prose.

More specifically, you have learnt that unseen literature has not been read or studied before. Its characteristics are that the topic, author of the unseen may not be known, the passage may be prose, poetry or drama and that they use literary devices normally used in already seen literature. You should see this unit as a preparation for more intensive literary appreciation of unseen works in the next literature course.

#### 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Read the poem below and attempt a detailed literary appreciation of the poem.

You lime of the forest, honey among the rocks  
Lemon of the clister, grape of the savannah

A hip to be enclosed by one hand  
A thing round like piston  
Your back, a manuscript to read hymens from  
Your eyes, trigger-happy shoot heroes  
Your gown, cob-web tender  
Your skirt like soothing balm  
Soap? oh no, you wash in Arabian Scent  
Your calf painted in silver lines  
I dare not touch you!  
Hardly dare to look back.  
You mistress of my body  
More precious to me than my hand or my foot  
Like the fruit of the valley, the water of paradise  
Flower of the right: wrought by divine craftsmen  
With muscular thigh she stepped on my heart  
Her eternal heel trod me down  
But have no compassion with me  
Her breast resembles the finest gold  
When she opens her heart  
And Jerusalem herself, scared city  
Shouts "Holy! Holy!"

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Boulton, M. (1953). *The Anatomy of Poetry*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Egudu, R.N. (1979). *The Study of Poetry*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd.
- Umukoro, M.A. *et al.* (1987). *Exam Focus: Literature in English*. Ibadan: University Press Ltd.



## **UNIT 6 APPRECIATING A POEM**

### **CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
  - 3.1 Reading the Poem for Subject Matter
  - 3.2 Discovering the Theme
  - 3.3 Commenting on the Form of a Poem
  - 3.4 A Sample Appreciation
  - 3.5 Question and Answers
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In the last two units we have examined the elements of poetry. The units are meant to acquaint you with what we often consider in the appreciation of poetry. The point has to be made, however, that the appreciation of literature or what we call literary criticism, is a skill you develop with practice. Familiarity with the elements of poetry that we have considered is always necessary. But having these concepts is just to prepare you for the appreciation of poetry itself. We intend to put the principles into practice in this unit by demonstrating the procedure for the practical appreciation of poetry.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

At the end of this unit, you should be able:

- to identify the procedure for the appreciation of poetry
- recognise the elements that are relevant to the appreciation of a poem
- apply the procedure outlined in the sample appreciation in the criticism of a poem.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 Reading the Poem for Subject Matter**

The appreciation of poetry may be more demanding than the appreciation of drama or prose narrative just because poetry tends to be more imaginative, suggestive and often difficult. What this implies is

that, it is easier to misinterpret a poem. The right approach to the reading of poetry, therefore, is to be more patient and more discerning. The first step in the reading of a poem is to discover its subject matter. This is generally easier to discover than the theme(s).

A careful reading of a poem may give an idea of what the poem is about in a general sense, depending on how difficult the poem is. But it is not proper to depend on just one reading of the poem. There is always a temptation to feel that one has gained enough insight into the poem to be able to read it. While some poems can be understood the first time you read them, others need to be read over and over again. The risk one stands if one depends on just a reading of a poem to form one opinion about it is that of misreading poems that are deceptively simple. The fact that a poem does not use difficult words may not suggest that it is simple. It may just be a convenient way for the poet to hide its meaning. In fact, we often make a distinction between the denotative and connotative meanings in poetry. The denotative meaning of a poem will reflect the meaning of a poem that emerges you from the dictionary meaning of the words in it; while the connotative meaning comes from what the entire poem suggests. This may not be just apparent and demands some careful exploration.

Repeated readings of a poem will always help you to guard against hasty and often wrong judgment about what a poem is about. A second reading should lead you to a better understanding of the poem. You will normally feel more confident to answer questions on the poem after the second reading. You may, however, need to read it again to confirm that your understanding of a poem is correct. Repeated readings may still be necessary to answer specific questions.

In sum, what you do when you are answering questions on what a poem is all about, is to see if you can paraphrase the poem as a whole. This normally helps you to answer questions that have to do with what the poem is about, that is, its subject matter. A summary may not be exactly the same as the paraphrase since it may not be as detailed as a paraphrase. Hence a summary may be too short to make any meaning.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Why should you not depend on only one reading of a poem? What is the difference between the denotative and connotative meanings of a poem?

### **3.2 Discovering the Theme**

We have already observed that it is easier to discover the subject matter of a poem than its theme. This should just tell you that, there is a

difference between the two. You must however note that once you have been able to discover the subject matter, you are not far from discovering the theme.

Theme is the central argument or idea in a poem. It may not be explicitly stated and may even not be present in some poems. Some poems simply state their themes in the first line. In some others, it emerges as a repeated statement which sums up the note of the poem.

We must also note that it is easier to discover the themes of some poems than those of others. What is always needed is to ensure that you properly read a poem before attempting to comment on its central argument. Do not forget that it is possible to have more than a theme in a poem. While there is a main theme, you can also have sub-themes.

### 3.3 Commenting on the Form of a Poem

You will recall that we have in the last two units drawn attention to the fact that a poem is made up of basically two components: **content and form**. While content embraces subject matter and theme, form is concerned with everything that has to do with method, style or technique. These include poetic form, verification, diction, symbolism, imagery, allusion, tone, mood, rhyme scheme, etc.

It is good that you are already familiar with these elements of technique, but you must realise that not all of them will occur in one single poem. This then suggests that you should be sensitive enough to discover the elements of technique that feature in a poem. In most cases, however, diction and tone tend to be important in reading almost every poem.

All that we have said boils down to the fact that you do not have to fix your mind as to what you are going to say about a poem until you have read it. You cannot talk about allusion, for instance, while discussing a poem if it does not occur there. At the same time, it is necessary to say that your ability to comment on a poem will reflect a lot about your exposure and critical judgement. This explains why some people are quick to draw attention to certain elements in a poem.

### 3.4 A Sample Appreciation

Let us now apply the procedure that we have developed to the reading of the following poem.

- a) Read this poem carefully and answer the questions that follow.

**The Pulley**

When God at first made man,  
 Having a glass of blessings standing by,  
 Let us (said he) pour on him all we can,  
 Let the world's riches, which despaired lie,

5. Contract into a span  
 So strength first made a way  
 Then beauties flow'd, then wisdom, honour, pleasure.  
 When almost all was out, God made a stay,  
 Perceiving that alone of all his treasure,  
 10. Rest in the bottom lay  
 For if I should (said he)  
 Bestow this Jewell also on my creature,  
 He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
 And rest in nature, not the God of Nature.  
 15. So both should have be  
 Yet let him keep the rest,  
 But keep them with ripping restlessness  
 May tesse him to my breast.

**3.5 Questions**

- a) Comment on the subject matter of the poem.  
 b) What would you consider the main argument of this poem?  
 c) What do you find remarkable about the structure, diction and tone of the poem?  
 d) How appropriate is the image of the pulley to the concern of the poem?  
 e) Comment on the use of pun in the poem.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Read the following poem and answer the questions that follow it.

**I Want to Go to Keta**

I want to go to Keta  
 before it's washed away  
 Before the palm-trees wither  
 And drawn outside the bay.

I want to go to Keta  
 Where boys drum all the day  
 And the girls dance *agbadza*  
 To keep the tears away.

I want to go to Keta  
 While yet they live who care  
 to point out like a star  
 that frothing spot out there

Where they would sit with *dada*  
 Those days the sea was land  
 I want to go to Keta  
 While yet there's place to stand.

I want to go to Keta  
 before the tenderness  
 of grief so keen and bitter  
 chills to cold callousness

and the vagueness of laughter  
 drowns the shared joy of pain.  
 I want to go to Keta -  
 It might not long remain.

### **Kobena Eyi Acquah**

1. Comment on the central argument of the poem.
2. How does the use of repetition contribute to the success of the poem?
3. Does the tone of the poem have any relationship with its thematic interest?

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The practical appreciation of poetry that you are being introduced to, can be very exciting. You only need to develop your critical ability by interacting with many poems. Do not forget that each time you are asked to comment on a poem that you have never seen or read, the questions you will be asked will normally be based on what is said in the poem. You are not expected to bring in any information that is not contained in the poem into your reading of the poem.

## **5.0 SUMMARY**

What this unit and the two earlier ones are intended to achieve is to introduce you to the practical criticism of poetry. It is not possible to teach you everything that you need to know about the appreciation of poetry in one single course.

As you keep on reading and writing about literature, you will acquire both the skill and the language needed for the study of poetry.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Read the following poem and answer the questions that follow it.

### For Ken

Compressed giant  
This loss, proportioned  
More than the cause  
Is larger than you  
In size.

It is equally only  
By the daily departures  
In turns and scores  
Of the finished and fed-up  
And the eternal tears drilled  
On the sorrow-laden land.

The injury is written  
Deep in my soul  
Learning a manuscript  
To remain and remind  
Me of the deeds  
Left undone

1. Comment on the subject matter of the poem.
2. How do the subject matter of the poem and tone reveal the form of the poem.
3. Which word in stanza tells you about the poet's vocation? Comment on it effectively and the insight it gives into the poet's - diction.
4. Why does the poet particularly miss Ken?

## 7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING

Brookes, C. W & Warren, R.P. (1938). *Understanding Poetry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

## MODULE 5      TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

- Unit 1      Textual Analysis of Prose Fiction: *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- Unit 2      Texture Analysis of Drama: Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*
- Unit 3      Textual Analysis of Poetic Works: English Poems

### UNIT 1      TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF PROSE FICTION: THE RIVER BETWEEN BY NGUGI WA THIONG'O

#### CONTENTS

- 1.0      Introduction
- 2.0      Objectives
- 3.0      Main Content
  - 3.1      The Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o
  - 3.2      Ngugi's *The River Between* as a Representative of the East African Novels
    - 3.2.1      Theme of *The River Between*
    - 3.2.2      Conflicts in *The River Between*
    - 3.2.3      Characterisation in *The River Between*
- 4.0      Conclusion
- 5.0      Summary
- 6.0      Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0      References/Further Reading

#### 1.0      INTRODUCTION

This unit is the last in the African literature series that will be discussed in the prose fiction section of this course. The aim here is to introduce you to East African novels, having studied the Nigerian and West African examples. At the end of this unit, you should appreciate the East African novels better. You should also get used to the reading of the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o. The novel, *The River Between* is used as a representative of the East African novels. You should possess a copy and read it before studying this unit. The exercises are only possible if you have read the text.

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- list the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- identify why *The River Between* can be representative of the East African literary effort
- discuss the major themes of *The River Between*
- discussion conflicts in *The River Between*
- draw a character sketch of the main characters in the novel.

## 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

### 3.1 The Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o

No reading of African literature is complete without an effort to study the work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o of East Africa. He arrived at his creative work through his obsession with writing about violence, and criticism of Christians and religious leaders. Also influencing his works was the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. Turmoil and uncertainty brought about by the violence, detention and oppression witnessed in his formative years, are depicted in the second part of his novel, *Weep Not Child*. Despite the crisis in his family and society, Ngugi went to Makerere University in 1959, and had an active and productive college year. Most of his novels were either drafted or compiled during his student days at Makerere.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

In the space below, list all the novels of Ngugi wa Thiong'o that you are familiar with.

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However if you are not familiar with any of them, the studying of this section of the unit will familiarise you with some of them. *The Black Messiah*, which won the East African Literature Bureau Prize, was written in 1965. *The Black Hermit*, a play, was written in 1962. Added to such early efforts is *The River Between* (written in 1965).



After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in Makerere in 1964, Ngugi worked briefly as the editor of *Zuka*. *Weep Not Child*, which won the literature prize from the Dakar Festival of Negro Arts in 1965, was published in 1964. His experience of social and economic relations in Britain, more than in Kenya, actually settle Ngugi's socialist conviction: the need for redistribution of land in the interest of the deprived peasantry, and the need to remove the interclass hostility in the capitalist system. All these views are expressed, although not in a forceful and convincing manner, in his novels, especially in *Weep Not Child*, *The River Between*, and *A Grain of Wheat*.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

From the views expressed about Ngugi, what do you think are Ngugi's opinions and preoccupations? Use the space below to list these opinions and preoccupations of Ngugi in his writings.

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Cross-check your answers with the ones given below. Ngugi's preoccupations and opinion are:

*Grain of Wheat* (1967), marks new phase in Ngugi's career. The novel reflects a change in his literary career, and bears the stamp of socialist influence. Also with some socialist tendencies are found in his novel *Petals of Blood* (1977). The two novels show that Ngugi has become more involved in the social conditions of his people. Also, the dropping of James from his name is a public rejection of Western culture, and its Christian affinities. It is regarded by some critics as a steady progress towards a close identification of Ngugi to his cultural roots.

His collection of short stories, *Secret Lives*, was published in 1975. This is followed by a play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976). *Petals of Blood* was published in 1977, and was regarded as the bombshell against capitalists.

### 3.2 Ngugi's *The River Between* as a Representative of the East African Novels

You will agree with me that you need more than one unit to be able to discuss the East African novels satisfactorily. This luxury is not available in this course. Since the course is an introductory one, only one novel will be used to illustrate the novels of East Africa. This novel is *The River Between* by the founding father of East African novels, Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

#### SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

What attributes of *The River Between* do you think makes the novel a good representation of East African novels? State some of these attributes in the space provided below.

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#### 3.2.1 Theme of *The River Between*

1. *The River Between* is a novel of many conflicts between children and parents (e.g. Joshua the local church priest, and the daughter Mutuoni), between religious and political factions (e.g. the Christian religion and the African traditional system of government), conflicts between friends and lovers, as well as deeper and harrowing conflicts within many individuals, like Kameno and Makuyu.
2. *The River Between* is a novel that wants to preach the ideal, utopianism of universal peace and unity. This is represented by River Honia: Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It joined them; men, cattle, wild beasts and the trees, were all united by this life stream (page 1).

This is the dream of New Jerusalem, a new earth that Ngugi envisaged but which does not materialise at the end of the novel. Although the conflicts are predominant, Ngugi managed them with such artistry, that they do not explode into violence prematurely or unnecessarily.

3. The novel depicts an equal amount of disillusionment and despair. What emerges at the end of the novel is really not a vision of strife or violence, but a dream seen by Waiyaku and Chege from the mountain top of Kerinyaga.

Kameno and Makuyu were no longer antagonistic. They had emerged into one area of beautiful land, which is what, perhaps, they were meant to be. Makuyu, Kameno and the other ridges lay in peace and there was no sign of life as one stood on the hill of God (page 16).

This is the ideal from the hill of God, but in the real world which Ngugi's art describes, people live with numerous problems and questions needing answers. Such questions include: who owns the land of Kenya, and how shall it be restored to the rightful owners? The novel is unable to answer the numerous questions, and at the same time, unable to bring the desired unity and peace. Thus, as far as this ideal is concerned, the novel ends with disillusionment and despair.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Briefly outline the conflicts in *The River Between* and the significance of the conflicts. Use the space below:

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#### **3.2.2 Conflicts in *The River Between***

1. It is possible to see the novel as a novel of conflicts. The conflicts exist and persist within the society (Makuyu and Kameno) because of land disputes. Who owns the land? How is the land to be restored to the rightful owner? Who is going to be the Messiah to restore the land, to the rightful owner? Who is going to be the Messiah to restore the land, etc. Conflicts persist because each character in the novel is making honest efforts to proffer solutions to conflicts, thus entering into yet more insoluble problems. The conflicts are intensified because the character is going his/her own way, with his ideas just as Makuyu and Kameno, the missionaries and their Kenyan adversaries are all going their separate ways. The conflicts between Makuyu and Kameno are leadership tussles; leadership has been left to Makuyu. Not all the people believed this should be so (page 1).

2. Another level of conflict in the novel is between the western culture and the culture of the people. These conflicts are strengthened by the non-conformists, like Joshua and Waiyaki. People like Joshua try to reject the culture of the people of Gikuyu and trying to impose Western culture and religion as the solution to the societal ills. Chege blames the Christians for misleading the people of the ridges and creating various problems in the society. Uppermost on Chege's list is the rejection of female circumcision. Joshua regards any association with the non-Christians as going back to Egypt.

Circumcision as the central rite in Gikuyu was of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows and goats for such a girl? Certainly it would never be his son. Waiyaki would never betray the tribe (pages 37 & 38).

To Chege, Muthoni's death "was a warning to all", to stick to the way of the ridges, to the ancient wisdom of the land, to its ritual and song" (page 54).

And according to Joshua who owes allegiance to the western way of life and Christianity, Gikuyu's god is the prince of darkness. He grows day by day in wrath and in vehement condemnation of the behaviour of non-Christians (page 31). Forgiveness which is the core of Christian conduct and belief, does not make Joshua forgive anyone, even his daughter, for going to the ways of the non-Christian circumcision, which, to him, is the ultimate unforgivable sin. Joshua's prayer when circumcision preparations are to commence is:

O God, look at their preparations. O God, why don't you descend on this wicked generation and finish their evil ways. Circumcision is coming. Fight by me O God.

He felt like going out with a stick, punishing the people, and forcing them on their knees. Was this not what was done to those children of Israel who turned away from God, who would not hearken to his voice.

Bring down fire and thunder  
Bring down the flood (page 32).

Then Muthoni, his daughter, disappears, and his other daughter Nyambura leaks the news that the disappearance is for circumcision, in fury he held the news-bearer, turning her into a culprit.

There is no help for it. She looked at the door, ready to run out as she gathered her courage to say one ominous word:

'circumcision'

'what'

'To be circumcised'

Before she could run out, Joshua was on her. He glared at her, shaking her all the time. He was almost mad, and small foams of saliva could be seen at the sides of the mouth (page 35).

Joshua sees Muthoni's going to the non-Christians to be circumcised, and refusal to come back when she was asked to do so as going "back to Egypt".

All right, let her go back to Egypt

Yes, let her go back

He Joshua would travel, on, on, on, to New Jerusalem (p.36)

3. Indeed, *The River Between* is a conflict within the individual, such as:
  - i. Waiyaki, on how to bring peace, unity between the ridges and the two religions, as well as the love affair. The conflicts destroy him because he is unable to learn all the wisdom of the white men, but not his vices. He at the end cannot be true to the modern and ancient rites.
  - ii. Joshua, about how to contend with the humiliation received from Muthoni who joined the non-Christian to be circumcised and Nyambura who ran away.
  - iii. Chege, who wanted the African way of life, and challenged Westernisation, but contradicted himself by sending his son, Waiyaki, to the very missionary centre which setting up he had opposed (page 38).

Arise. Heed the prophesy. Go to the mission place learning all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your people and the ancient rites (page 20).

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Judging from all that has been discussed regarding the preoccupations of *The River Between*, what you can say about Ngugi's mode of characterisation. Use the space provided below.

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Cross-check your answer with the ones in the next section.

### 3.2.3 Characterisation in the *River Between*

The following are the general things that could be said about the mode of characterisation in *The River Between*.

- 1. The characters are a bunch of contradiction:** Chege's contradiction in condemning Westernisation and taking his child to the missionary centre; Waiyaki, loving the Western ways and still keeping to the African ways of life; Joshua accepting the Christian faith, but still afraid of the revenge from the hills, the anger of his friends; Joshua's converts still going back into drinking, dancing the tribal ritual dance and circumcision (page 30).
- 2. The characters are all beset with one critical problem or the other:** Joshua, the family problems of Muthoni and Nyambura; Chege of Waiyaki, balancing the western tradition with the traditional ways of life; Muthoni, absconding from Christianity, only to face death in 'Egypt', that she goes to; Waiyaki, the problem of being able to bring the contradictions of religion, cultures (Western and traditional), as well as the warring factions together, etc.
- 3. Some of the characters play ironical roles:** for example, Muthoni goes to the traditional, and is destroyed by the traditional rites; Chege condemns the Western ways of life, but takes his son to the missionary centre; Joshua fanatically sticks to Christianity but disgraced by his daughters, and his non-Christian-like behaviours of anger, fury, non-forgiving spirit, etc.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION

This little that has been exposed to you about *The River Between*, will have kindled your interest in reading the book. It should also stimulate your interest in reading other novels by Ngugi. No doubt, this unit has given you some insight into East African literature. I think you have also learnt to appreciate Ngugi's *The River Between* as a work of art.

## 5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt:

- about the work of Ngugi
- the choice of *The River Between* as a representation of the East African novels
- the themes of *The River Between*
- the conflicts in *The River Between*, and
- the mode of characterisation in *The River Between*.

All the efforts in this unit are to make you appreciate the East African work of art better. It is also to stimulate you to read many of the literary works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o.

## 6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Give an appropriate stylistic assessment of Ngugi's *The River Between*. Would you say that Ngugi is an infallible artist?

## 7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Ngugi, W. (1968). *The River Between*. London: Heinemann.

Nwankwo, C. (1992). *The Works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o*. Ikeja, Nigeria: Longman.

## UNIT 2 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF DRAMA: NIYI OSUNDARE'S THE STATE VISIT

### CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Much of modern writing in Africa is based on the African experience. This is what you will soon discover as you interact more closely with contemporary African literature. The African historical experience has provided the raw material for the literary exploration of many writers. Beginning with the destructive impact of the colonial struggle for independence, to the disappointing performance of the African leaders after independence, the African problem has provided the subject matter for the average writer. This is the more so because Africans generally feel that whatever they write should have some influence on or relevance to their immediate environment. This explains why there is a tendency for the leaders to critically assess the political leaders and expose their faults and excesses. This interest of African writers has often, brought them into conflict with the political leaders who could either be civilians or soldiers.

Writers that are committed to social criticism feel it is a form of service to the society. For them, it is a way of acting as the voice of the masses and the many people who are unjustly oppressed by the erring political clan. This is the sense in which you should try to read the play that we are studying in this unit, Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*.

### 2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- analyse Osundare's *The State Visit* as a political satire
- relate the technique the play adopts with its interests.



### 3.0 MAIN CONTENT

#### 3.1 Niyi Osundare: A Biographical Sketch

Niyi Osundare is a leading African writer who has been given a lot of recognition internationally. Born in Ikere Ekiti in Ekiti State, Nigeria in 1937, he was educated at the universities of Ibadan, Leeds and York, in Toronto, Canada. He is best known as a poet. Osundare has published more than ten collections of poems and four plays. He was a professor of English at the University of Ibadan and has been a dominant figure in contemporary Anglophone African writing. His work is profoundly concerned with the plight of the common people, the exercise of visionless African leaders and the urgency of resisting them. His poems and plays express the same interests. Satire is his favourite mode for exploring the relationship between rulers and the ruled in African. He also draws freely on the artistic traditions of his immediate cultural group, the Yoruba, in his work.

#### 3.2 *The State Visit a Synopsis*

All the events in the play surround preparations for a state visit. The play opens with the Narrator embarking on an extensive discussion of the rot and madness men that characterise the government machinery in Yakeland. The meeting of the state cabinet they begin with the head of state or Head, presiding. The subject of the discussion is the impending visit of the head of Wilama, to a neighbouring country and the preparation to accord him a befitting reception.

The cabinet meeting itself exposes the head and his ministers as unserious minds, for all that they talk about is how to divert public funds to provide essential services to the state visit. Meanwhile, the land is experiencing drought, decline in national earnings and the discontent of the populace. It is decided that the six hundred million naira for the maize project be diverted to planning the state visit against the counsel of the finance minister, the only voice of reason in the cabinet.

We later encounter the beggars in front of a supermarket, Sule, Etim, Obi and Abeke. They all recount their tales of woe, all pointing to the fact that they are victim of the insensitivity of the society to the plight of the common people. Order is later given that they are cleaned from the streets in preparation for the visit.

When the cabinet meeting resumes, the uncooperative finance minister has been replaced. Reports are also taken as to the preparation for the visit. The cabinet is assured of the co-operation of the 'Daily Gist' that

has been paid to ensure good media coverage and the opposition of the 'Telling Tempo'.

A few people appear before the council. First is the service Professor who is gladly serving as the speech writer of the Head of State. Then come the Medal Smith, who is mandated to decorate the ceremonial coat of the Head. After him comes the Paint who turns out to be confrontational, insisting on not working for or collaborating with a tyrannical government. He affirms his allegiance to truth he is ordered to be taken out.

Colonel, who is in charge of traffic, is the next to appear. He justifies their preference for instant punishment for lawless motorists and other road users as opposed to the alternative of trying them according to the law.

The next act presents a rally of workers and students where they narrate their woes and affirm their opposition to the senseless arrangement for the state visit of the Head of Wilama. As usual their gathering is declared unlawful and dispersed by the police.

The narrator then appears again to thank the audience and to draw their attention to the issues that are raised in the play. He concludes that the drama of opposition to the bad government of the land has just started. The play ends on this note.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Attempt a summary of the plot of *The State Visit*.

### **3.3 Thematic Issues in *The State Visit***

*The State Visit* is a satirical work which critically exposes the inadequacies of African military dictators. Even though it is set in Yankeland which is also referred to as "the land of two rivers" a veiled reference to Nigeria, issues that the play engages are generally applicable to many African states. The issues that are raised in the play are therefore best understood in this sense. The major thematic concerns of the play are as follow:

#### **Visionless Leadership**

*The State Visit* exposes the lack of vision of the leadership of a situation in which the state cabinet is busy deliberating on how to ensure that a visiting president is well received when their land is experiencing a drought indicates that they lack direction. The Head of state himself has no plan for his people. Government of the inept leaders is an opportunity

to loot the treasury, violate the rights of the people and encourage sycophancy and vanity. The fact that the leadership of Yanke land would not mind diverting money meant to ensure food security in Yankeland to plan a reception for a visiting president confirms their folly and insensitivity to the plight of their people.

### **Corruption, Greed and Inefficiency**

Not only are the leaders of Yankeland shown as visionless, their incompetence, corruption and greed contribute to their failure. The impression that we are given in the play is that the Head who has been in power for thirty years, knows nothing about the demands of leadership and feels he can empty the treasury and pay journalists and others who will sing praise. This is the reason that the first minister of finance is sacked.

### **Suppression of Opposition and Dissent**

There is also the related theme of intolerance of opposition in the play. You will recall that only those that support the government of Yankeland are tolerated. All summon the courage to voice their opposition are victimised as they are those who seen as a threat to the security of the state. Ironically the security of Yankeland in this sense simply means the security of the leadership. Painter, for instance, is hated for daring to express his opposition to the Head of state and his administration. The rally organised by the students and workers is also dispersed by the agents who simply see the suppression of dissent against the government as their - only duty. They kill arrest and intimidate the helpless masses.

### **The Necessity of Resistance**

There is one other theme in this play which you should not overlook. It concerns the necessity of resisting the visionless, intolerant and corrupt leadership of African states. This is a theme that runs through the entire play. In fact the play reads as an urgent call to action. From the insight that the Narrator gives into the situation in Yankeland, through the principled stance of the fist finance minister and the courage of the painter to the utterance and solidarity of Worker, Old man, Student and the beggars who confront the junta and its agents, the play promotes purposeful solidarity and resistance to oppression.

### 3.4 Dramatic Technique and Devices

#### Satirical Essence

*The State Visit* is essentially a satire. You will observe from the beginning of the play that its intention is not hidden. It sets out to expose the excesses and faults of modern African leaders. There is a sense in which the narrator speaks for the playwright. His comments influence the judgement of the reader who is already given the impression that all that the play does is dramatise the madness that he has already been told about. The play is a biting satire which is unsparing in the manner that it condemns contemporary African leaders. It elicits laughter while also provoking serious thought about the issues that are raised.

#### Plot

The play has a linear plot. All the events in the play surround the preparation to receive the Head of Wilama. The focus of the play shifts from the cabinet meeting to the beggars and moves back to another cabinet meeting. From this point, the focus is now on the demonstration organised by students and workers. *All the scenes are about the impending state visit.* It is the subject of discussion among the beggars and the reason for the demonstration. The events are likely to have lasted a few days, even though the time span is not suggested.

#### Narrator

The Narrator, as we have already observed, plays an important role in the play. He draws attention to the essence of the play. He suggests that the play is intended to confirm the entire things he has said about the state of Yanke. At the end of the play again he comes to comment on the play, drawing attention to the demonstration. He suggests that the land will witness a change because of the resolve of the people. He is very optimistic about the change that he anticipates.

#### Humour

Humour is vehicle for satire in the play. This emerges in particular at the Cabinet meetings, where the issues that are to be satirised, are apparent utterances of the Head, of the Minister of External Affairs, and the Minister of Agriculture. The humour at times becomes so intense that it almost degenerates into the type we associate with low comedy.

## Characterisation

The characters in the play represent different strata in the society. They may be broadly categorised into two - the powerful and the oppressed. The difference is apparent in the social status of the people. But there are also members of the oppressed group that serve as agents of the IS ruling elite. Policemen fall into this category. The Head of State and his cabinet constitutes the powerful in society.

## Songs

The songs in this play help to reinforce its message. The songs are meant to sensitise the common people and mobilise them for powerful action. Some of the songs are also meant to achieve the satirised purpose. It should also be noted that some of the songs are written in Yoruba. The demonstrators use songs that explain their defiance and resolve to fight the oppressive regime.

## Language

The playwright employs simple but effective language. He uses a lot of Yoruba proverbs and expressions, most of which are translated. Sentences are punctuated with Yoruba expression. The narrator uses Yoruba interjections, songs and greetings. The second time he appears, he greets the audience:

"E kuu joko oo" (p.64) and includes on the note: "Eku Ie o" (p.64). These greetings are, incidentally, not easy to translate into English.

## Contrast

Contrast is a favourite strategy Osundare uses. He, for instance, establishes the different conditions of the rulers and the ruled in Yanke, by shifting the scene of the play from the Cabinet meeting, to the community of beggars. While the ministers are deliberating on how to waste the resources of the nation, the beggars are lamenting their condition and thinking of how to survive. The creation of the characters that are hypocritical and service (like Professor) and those that are principled like Painter and the sacked minister of finance are intended to establish the fact that the society is not completely hopeless.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Discuss the thematic interests of Niyi Osundare in *The State Visit*.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The writing of this play was inspired by Nigeria's exposure to military dictatorship. This probably explains why there is reference to certain events drawn from the Nigerian experience. But to properly appreciate the plays, you should recognise a problem that most African countries share: The leadership problem which is always at its worst under the military dictators. Ironically the sincere people are those that suffer under bad leaders.

#### **5.0 SUMMARY**

A play like *The State Visit* is not just to entertain. It is to enlighten and sensitise. This makes it a good example of a committed work, that is, a work that promotes a cause.

#### **6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Osundare's *The State Visit* is a striking critique of the African condition." Discuss this critical observation with close reference to the text.

#### **7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING**

Osundare, N. (2002). *The State Visit*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.

## **UNIT 3    TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF POETIC WORKS: ENGLISH POEMS**

### **CONTENTS**

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  - 3.4 Thematic Concerns of the Poem
  - 3.5 Technique
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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- 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

We have, in the last two units, examined two African poems. What seems to be common to the poems is a concern for shared experiences. In the next two units we shall be studying poems drawn from the English tradition. You must have been noting in the previous units the variety that characterises poetic expression in terms of length, technique and the subjects of poetic exploration.

### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

In this unit we shall analyse an English poem. At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- discuss the thematic interest of the poem
- identify and relate the devices employed in the poem to its success or failure
- recognise the sonnet as a poetic type.

### **3.0 MAIN CONTENT**

#### **3.1 John Milton's Sonnet XVII**

The following poem, Sonnet XVII, by John Milton, is to be studied in this unit. Read it carefully:

**Sonnet XVII**

When I consider how my light is spent,  
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
 And that one talent which is death to hide  
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my maker, and present  
 My true account, lest he returning, chide  
 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?  
 I fondly ask; but Patience, to prevent

The murmur, son replies: 'God doth not need  
 Either man's work or his own gifts; who best  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state

Is kingly – thousands at his bidding speed  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest:  
 They also serve who only stand and wait'

1652? 1673

- John Milton

**3.2 Background to the Poem**

John Milton lived between 1608 and 1674. He remains one of the most outstanding and committed poets in the English poetic tradition. He was inclined towards religious poetry. His Christian outlook is given expression in much of his work. He is best known for *Paradise Lost* which he dictated while he was going blind. The poem was completed in 1665. His total blindness is dated between 1651 and 1652.

Incidentally you need to draw on this insight into Milton's blindness in order to understand the poem. In plain terms, the poem is about his blindness. It explores his blindness in the light of the Christian idea of stewardship in which man is seen as accountable to God. This comes out clearly in a parable told by Jesus during His earthly ministry about the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 25:14-30. The parable talks about a lord who gave his servants various amounts of money. The wise ones invested what they were given while the foolish one simply buried his. Their master was pleased with those that profited from using their talents and blamed the one that foolishly buried his. As far as Milton was concerned, his blindness would make him bury his talent. His worry was whether God would blame him for not utilising his talent which he saw as the ability to write poems. In a sense, the poem is a product of Milton's anxiety.



Apart from the fact that the poem draws on Milton's personal experience, it is also a sonnet. That means it is a fourteen-line poem. The sonnet originated from Italy and was originally concerned with the subject of love. A sonnet is traditionally divided into two main parts: the first eight lines (called the octet) and the last six (the sextet). It is normal for the development of the idea in a poem to be based on this division. For instance, the octet can raise a problem which the sextet will resolve. Milton put the sonnet to a special use.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. In what sense is the parable of the Kingdom of Heaven told by Jesus related to Milton's concern in this poem?
- ii. What two factors about the poem and the poet serve as background information for our understanding of this poem?

### **3.3 A Summary of the Poem**

You must have observed from the background information provided to appreciate this poem that deliberate effort has been made to tell you of what inspired John Milton to write this poem. Now read the poem again and try to answer the following question:

The poem, you will observe, starts with the poet-persona complaining. He was aware of the fact that he had some talent or gift from God which - like the servants in the parable told by Jesus – he had to put to good use and also profit with. At the same time he was conscious of his blindness. He felt that he was already going blind before half his days ("my light" line 1) was already gone. The loss of sight made him to idea of consider the world as dark. At the same time he would not want to bury his God-given ability to write poems, knowing the penalty that might come from doing otherwise ("which is death to hide:" line 3). His dilemma comes from the fact that while he would want to serve God, he was naturally handicapped. But he would not know what would be his fate due to this. As far as he was concerned, it was not unwillingness on his part that would make him not put his talent to use.

While the octet states the argument of the poet, the answer to his question comes in the sextet in which Patience, apparently a personification of the virtue, replies the agitated poet. He is told that God is not made richer by man's works or the gift He gives men and that there are different ways to serve God. Some may have to patiently endure their agony. God is already in matchless glory and has countless angels at His service. Many other people would have to just express their commitment and service by merely waiting on Him if they have no ability to run errands. In short, there are various ways of serving God.

What you will observe in this poem is that it is more of an externalisation of the thought of the poet. In other words, the poet seems to be thinking aloud in the poem. The first octet poses a question to which the sextet provides an answer.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

In what way does the poem relate the idea of the talent to his personal experience?

### **3.4 Thematic Concerns of the Poem**

The poem is primarily concerned with exploring man's responsibility and accountability to God. The persona is burdened due to the awareness that he must put his God-given ability to use. But he sees his blindness as a barrier to realising his desire of being a poet. The question this raises has to do with whether what God expects from people is based on their ability. In his own case it would not be possible to render the kind of service he would have loved to God due to his disability; he would like to be assured that his failure to execute his desire would not be taken as a form of irresponsibility.

There is also the related theme of God's just treatment which emerges in the last six lines of the poem that is the sextet. The anxiety of the poet only gives way when he is told by Patience that God would not expect people to give what they do not have the ability to give to Him in the form of service. This presents God as just and considerate in His expectation. This would bring a lot of relief to Milton who already asked whether God would expect the blind to do as much as their counterparts with the benefit of sight.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

- i. Make a distinction between the octet and the sextet.
- ii. Identify the two thematic interests of John Milton's "Sonnet XVII".

### **3.5 Technique**

Milton's "Sonnet XVII" succeeds largely because the poet has adopted appropriate devices. The most important of them are as follows:

#### **(a) Biblical Allusion**

The allusion to the parable of the Kingdom of Heaven told by Jesus in Matthew 25:14-30 is so central to the success of this poem that attention

has to be drawn to it. The allusion is important in the sense that it provides a basis for the persona to compare his state with that of the unfaithful servants that buried their talents. The ideas that are explored in the poem are also rooted in this biblical allusion. This suggests that it is impossible to properly appreciate the poem without a reference to the parable that inspired it. There is also an allusion to Matthew 11:29-30 where there is an encouragement to followers of Jesus to patiently bear their yoke.

**(b) Structure**

You must have also observed that the poem is divided into two parts which coincide with the conventional division of a sonnet to the first eight lines (the octet) to explore the problem bothering the persona while the last six (the sextet) answer his question and thereby render his anxiety unnecessary. This structure is logical as questions normally come before answers. This makes the poem complete in the sense that it is self-contained.

**(c) Diction**

The fact that the inspiration for the writing of this poem is I, derived from the Bible is also reflected in the poet's choice of words. Much of the poem is built around the idea of the "talent" (line 3) which originally meant a weight of gold. In the context of this poem it means an ability or a potential. There is also a reference to "yoke" in line 11. This is derived from the admonition of Jesus in Matthew 11:29-30 in which reference is made to the cost of following Jesus. These words are consistent with the concern of the poem and are also appropriately used in such a way that their suggestions are not hidden.

**(d) Pun**

You need to also note that the poet does not just carefully select words. He also plays on them. There are two of such that you need to pay attention to. The first is "dark" which occurs in line 2. It at once suggests that everything turned dark for Milton after his blindness and that the world is full of evil and ungodliness. The latter suggestion is essentially a Christian idea. The second word on which the poet plays is "light" (lines 1, 7). Light here also suggests Milton's lost sight and, by extension, his life. His societal relevance was, no doubt, reduced after the loss of his sight. This probably accounts for his lament as to the danger his condition would pose to his self-fulfillment.

**(e) Poetic Mode**

The poem is presented as a dramatic monologue. This enables the persona to directly express his experience. The fact that the persona relates his experience in this manner makes it more believable..

**4.0 CONCLUSION**

John Milton's "Sonnet XVII" is an interesting exploration of the poet's personal experience. It demonstrates the viability of personal experience as raw material for poetic expression. The use to which the poet puts a religious conviction provides a basis for exploring his own aspiration in the light of the outlook on human aspiration that his religious persuasion dictates. The poet in a way reveals that religion and reason can be reconciled.

**5.0 SUMMARY**

In this unit we have been able to study a poem which, in addition to being autobiographical, is also an example of the sonnet. It is also remarkable that the poem departs from the convention of exploring subjects of love in sonnets to treating a subject within the sphere of religion. This in a way demonstrates the capacity of poetic forms to lend themselves to uses other than those which convention assigns them when the need arises.

**6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Examine the harmony between theme and technique in John Milton's Sonnet XVII.

**7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING**

Hollander, J. & Frank, K. (1973). *The Literature of Renaissance England*. New York: Oxford University Press.