

*A Textbook on*  
**COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH II**  
**(Literature)**

**Edited by**  
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## FOREWORD

I feel exceptionally honoured to write the foreword to this enlightening and communicative textbook, *Introduction to Communication in English II* (GST102). This is the first time we are producing any book for General Studies and we have been able to put together different books for each General Studies course, of which this is one.

This book serves the same informatory impetus of its initial sequel, GST 101(Communication of English1). Howbeit, the expression of its nuances extends beyond the functionality of language as it also captures the need to comprehend the intricacies of expressions for social interactions. Therefore, the basis of this course GST 102 (Communication in English 11), is to enable students and readers alike to appreciate human interpersonal relationships and be able to interpret its dynamics, aided with the knowledge that literature offers.

Literature has often been defined by scholars as a mirror of life, picturing life as a reproducible content is one of the valuable diagnostic techniques that literature empowers with. Man learns better through inference. The ability to infer critical lessons from similar situations of life into one's reality makes life less difficult to navigate. To master this skill, students are exposed to the informational instructions in this study to prepare them for life beyond the circumference of the university environment. Recognising the indispensability of this study, The General Study Unit of Chrisland University, Ajebo Road, Abeokuta Ogun State, saw it as an opportunity to give our students a holistic approach to the study of *Communication in English*.

The chapters in this introductory book are written in simple clear terms to enable students to assimilate easily the elements and concepts of literature needed for the mastery of communication. In all, there are five chapters which encapsulate the diverse aspects of literature- genres of literature; literary devices and techniques; literary appreciation; background on oral literature, forms and characters; and creative writing.

Equipped with the right diagnostic tools made available by seasoned academicians in their fields, it is our expectation that students who actively pay attention to lectures delivered in the course, aided with the guiding principles in this material will find it easier to chart their paths in life. I therefore strongly recommend the book for use by students and literary enthusiasts who aspire to exhibit plausible interpretational skills.

Thank you.

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION TO THE GENRES OF LITERATURE**

*Gabriel Okonkwo*

The phrase, “genres of literature,” means “branches of literature” or “classes of literature”. The term, “genre,” means “branch” or “class” in this context. Over the centuries, there have been several classes into which the components of literature were grouped. However, with the writings of some literary scholars, like Aristotle, especially in his *Poetics*, the three larger classes – prose, poetry, and drama – began to emerge. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham (2012) define genres as:

A term, French in origin, that denotes types or classes or classes of literature. The genres into which literary works have been grouped at different times are very numerous, and the criteria on which the classifications have been based are highly variable. Since the writings of Plato and Aristotle, however, there has been an enduring division of the overall literary domain into three large classes, in accordance with who speaks in the work: *lyric* (uttered throughout in the first person), *epic or narrative* (in which the narrator speaks in the first person, then lets the characters speak for themselves); *drama* (in which the characters do all the talking). (148)

According to M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, the three “enduring divisions” of literature are lyric (poetry), epic or narrative (prose), and drama. Literature is like a big tree that has three main branches, namely: drama, poetry and prose. Each of these three main branches further has sub-branches or sub-genres that work holistically for the realisation of the main goals of the tree called literature. The main goals of literature in whatever form or manifestation are didacticism and entertainment. To say literature is didactic through the instrumentality of any of its genres is to claim that literature teaches moral and instructs the reader, viewer, or listener – reader when literature manifests in the written form; viewer when it manifests in the pictorial or virtual forms, and listener when it manifests in the auditory form. To claim it entertains is to say it excites or amuses the reader, viewer, or listener. Essentially, these three branches of literature – prose, poetry, and drama – are the vital tools literature uses for expression and to interface with the audience. The genres of literature can manifest in two main

forms – oral and written. Before the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg around 1440, the genres of literature were mainly in the oral form in most cultures of the world especially Africa. In today's 21st century world, these genres of literature manifest mostly in the written form and New Media forms – the auditory and the virtual.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

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

1. explain the genres of literature, and
2. note the characteristics of each genre of literature.

### **PROSE**

Prose as a word is amorphous or ambiguous. By being ambiguous, it means that prose is subject to more than one interpretation. Prose can be a language that is devoid of the characteristics of poetry like symbolism, imagery, versification, and stanza. Hence, our everyday simple and common use of language can be termed prose. Prose can also technically refer to prose fiction. Prose as prose fiction is an imaginary or invented story or narrative written in paragraphs and chapters. Interestingly, the language of prose or prose fiction is also the language of our everyday use of language.

### **Forms of Prose**

**There are two major forms of prose, namely:**

1. Fiction
2. Non-fiction

Some other scholars will talk about faction (a mixture of facts and fiction).

1. **Fiction:** Many students erroneously think that fiction means that which is false. The term fiction is not equal to falsehood. Fiction is simply a representation of the real – a mirroring of the real. Fiction is an imagined or invented story or narrative that represents the things or events that happen in real life. As a story, fiction is often expressed in flash fiction, short story, novellas/novelette, and novels. We even have some epic poems whose language is very close to the language of prose. Hence, to differentiate between prose in narrative or dramatic forms; we use prose fiction. Examples of fiction are:

*Arrow of God* – Chinua Achebe

*Lord of the Flies* - William Golding

*Tenants of the House* – Wale Okediran

*Hard Times* – Charles Dickens

*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* – Thomas Hardy

### **Types of Prose Fiction**

1. Flash fiction
2. Short Story
3. Novella or Novelette
4. Novel

**Flash Fiction:** Flash Fiction is a fictional narrative that is known for its thrilling brevity. Just as the name suggests, its holistic content is unravelled very fast like a flash of light. The flash fiction is between 53 and 1000 words (Syed Hunbbel Meer: 2016). It is sometimes called short, short story, micro fiction, or postcard fiction. Meer notes that flash fiction became the more accepted term for very brief stories at the wake of the new millennium. The history of flash fiction can be traced to ancient witty narratives, such as fables and parables. The exceptionality of flash fiction can be found in its ability to suggest a main or bigger story emanating from it.

**Short Story:** Short story can be seen as a slice of life. It can be likened to the slice of bread which contains bits of all the ingredients in the other slices. It takes a single subject matter and focuses on it. Everything in the story is intertwined – the few characters, setting, mood, and plot. Historically, short story manifests in the forms of fables, fairy tales, myths, anecdotes, and folk tales. According to Meer (2016), the short story is between 3,500 and 7,500 words. Notable short stories:

*Girls at War and Other Stories:* Chinua Achebe

*The Thing around Your Neck:* Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

### **Novella or Novelette**

Novella, sometimes used interchangeably with novelette, is a condensed story with a direct plot. Novella is between the short story and the novel in terms of length and structure. Meer (2016) observes that the major difference between novella and novelette is the length. He notes that novelette is between 7500 and 17,000 words, while novella is between 17,000 and 40,000 words. Stating another difference, Meer further notes that “back in the day, the term novelette referred to a story that was romantic or sentimental in character.” Novella became popular in the early Renaissance Period. However, novella took full shape in the late and early 19th century. Because of the length advantage of the novella which is its main distinction with the novelette, it is sometimes called a long short story or a short novel. Novella seems to focus more on the development of the central character.

### **Novel**

The novel is the commonest form of prose fiction. It is quite popular because of the deliberate attention it gives to details. It usually presents the reader another world with options of all the things in the real world. In the novelistic world, there are settings, characters – common and noble – actions, conflicts, resolutions, plots, complications, and so on. The detailed plots are propelled by the actions of the characters. The word count of the novel is controversial because of the requirements of the different genres of the novel like the mystery novel, crime fiction, detective novel, allegory, espionage, fantasy, gothic novel, romance, science fiction, thriller, Roman Fleuve, propaganda novel, psychological novel and the like. Meer notes that “a novel is usually not shorter than 40,000 words”. In contemporary times, editors are likely to demand between 80,000 and 120,000 words for a novel.

### **Non-fiction**

As the name suggests, a work is said to be non-fictional when it presents or explores real life or non-fictional experiences. A writing which is said to be non-fictional would normally explore the experiences, especially, of an important personality. It is also important to note for the sake scholarship that it is almost impossible to have an “event-full” writing that is totally devoid of fictionalisation. The fitfulness and imperfection of the human memory makes fictionalisation inevitable. Nevertheless, there are two main forms of non-fictional writings that are to a very large extent non-fictional – they are biography and autobiography. A biography is the true-life



story of an important person written by another person, while an autobiography is the true-life story of a person written by the person himself or herself. These stories put so much emphasis on the private life of the persons involved.

**Examples of biography:**

*Alexander Hamilton*: Ron Chernow

*Steve Jobs*: Walter Isaacson

*Into the Wild*: Jon Krakauer

**Examples of autobiography:**

*I am Malala*: Malala Yousafzai

*Long Walk to Freedom*: Nelson Mandela

*Born a Crime*: Trevor Noah

*My Odyssey*: Nnamdi Azikiwe

**Literary Autobiography**

*Ake*: Wole Soyinka

*The African Child*: Camara Laye

*Moll Flanders*: Daniel Defoe

**POETRY**

Poetry, just as literature, is very difficult to define as there is no generally accepted definition. Be that as it may, there are certain features constituting poetry which must resonate in every poetry definition. For instance, poetry is about:

1. Strong feelings
2. Imagery
3. Symbolism
4. Aesthetics
5. Entertainment

6. Didacticism
7. Allusions
8. Rhythm/cadence
9. Poetic licence
10. Free verse or blank verse

Over the years, many poets and scholars have tried to define poetry. Find some of the definitions of poetry as compiled by F.B.O Akporobaro (2015) below:

1. Poetry is the imaginative expression of strong feeling, usually rhythmical, the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity. **William Wordsworth (1770-1850)**
2. Poetry is a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and beauty. **Matthew Arnold (1882-1888)**
3. Absolute poetry is the concrete and artistic expression of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language. **Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909)**
4. The rhythmic inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision. **Dylan Thomas (1814-1953)**
5. Presentment, in musical form, to the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions. **John Ruskin (1819-1900)**
6. Forms of writing in verse rhymed or unrhymed, characterised by a sustained and notable use of figurative and sensuous language used to convey imaginative experience. **F. B. O. Akporobaro (2015: 20)**

From the definitions above, it is obvious that poetry relates to the characteristics earlier stated. We can, therefore, say that poetry is the creative exploration of a subject matter with condensed and symbolic words evincing strong emotions or feelings. In poetry, the poet sets out to talk about a subject matter. The poet then begins to talk or write about the subject artistically with symbolic words and phrases which capture his or her emotions.

#### **The Goals of Poetry for the Poet:**

1. Expression of personal opinions
2. Expression of strong emotions
3. Educating the audience

4. Personal delight

### **The Goals of Poetry for the Audience**

1. Didacticism (learn moral lessons)
2. Entertainment
3. Reassurance
4. Ideology
5. Creativity

### **Classification of Poetry**

The motivation and the idea behind a poem determine its classification. For instance, a poem that tells a story is likely to be a narrative poem. According to Johnson O. Nchikogwa (2008), poems can be classified into narrative, descriptive, lyrical, dramatic, philosophical, and light verse poems.

### **Narrative Poems**

A narrative poem tells a story about an event or incident. The events often narrated in narrative poems could be of adventures of romance, heroic actions, supernatural engagements, or tragedy. In terms of form and language, they could be simple or complex. Some examples of narrative poems are epics, romance, and ballad.

### **Epic**

An epic is a narrative poem that is long in length. Deploying elevated language as style, it recounts the heroic deeds of heroes – gods, warriors, important persons – which could be real or mythical. The adventures of a hero form the basis for the focus of an epic. This hero is often derived from the folkloric tales and legends of a nation.

### **Examples of Epics are:**

*Illiad and Odyssey*: Homer

*Aeneid*: Virgil

*Paradise Lost*: John Milton

*Divine Comedy*: Dante

*Sundjata*: Anonymous

*Bayajidda*: Anonymous

### **Romance**

This is a narrative poem with attitudes of chivalry by knights and heroes. The knights and heroes usually find themselves in improbable adventures and quests. The style of a romance is usually lower than that of the epic. The actions are also not as noble as those of the epic. It is equally shorter than the epic.

### **Examples of Romance:**

*Faerie Queen*: Edmund Spenser

*The Eve of St. Agnes*: John Keats

*Pride and Prejudice*: Jane Austen

### **Ballad**

The traditional English ballad is a narrative poem of quatrains constituting stanzas. Ballads trace their origin to the folkloric songs of rustic societies. Because of their cultural imperative, most ballads tend to be owned collectively in the communities where they are sung. Hence, they have anonymous authors. They tell stories of great and heroic deeds of legends and people of valour who form the founding basis of the community where such ballads are popular. A ballad can be seen as a short epic. It is like a slice of an epic.

### **Examples:**

*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: Samuel Coleridge

*La Belle Dame sans merci (The Beautiful Lady without Pity)*: John Keats

*Lyrical Ballads*: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth

*As You Came from the Holy Land*: Sir Walter Raleigh

### **Types of Ballad**

1. **Folk Ballad**: The folk ballad is also known as traditional or popular ballad. The folk ballad is the core ballad that is communally owned. It moves from one generation to another by

means of oral transmission. It lacks authorship as it is usually the property of the whole community. The folk ballad can further be classified into religious, supernatural, tragic, love, legendary, historical, and comical ballads.

2. **Written Ballad:** A written ballad is the direct opposite of the folk ballad. It is usually composed by renowned and knowledgeable poets who imitate the structure and ideation of the folk ballad. Most written ballads by great poets fall in this category.

### **Descriptive Poems**

Descriptive poems are a set of poems that use descriptive words to create mental pictures of their subject matters. An amalgam of these mental pictures is called imagery. The mental pictures created from the descriptive poem appeal to our senses of hearing, smell, taste, and sight. Sense impression is the key term in defining descriptive poems.

### **Types of Descriptive Poems**

Johnson O. Nchikogwa (2008) identifies the following descriptive poems:

1. **Pastorals:** A poem that idealises the life of the shepherd in a village setting. Examples:

*The Passionate Shepherd to His Love:* Christopher Marlowe

*Adonais:* P.B. Shelly

*The Shepherd Calendar:* Edmund Spenser

2. **Idyll:** An idyll is a short, pictorial poem on pastoral subjects and rural simplicity.

Examples

*L'Allegro:* **John Milton**

*Idylls for the King:* Lord Tennyson

*Hermann and Dorothea:* Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

3. **Eclogue:** An eclogue is a short, dramatic poem that is set in a rural environment but talks about city life and social issues. Examples:

*Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn:* **Andrew Marvell**

*Ibadan:* **J. P. Clark**

4. **Topographical or Loco-descriptive Poetry:** A poem whose main subject matters are hills, landscapes, rivers, caves and the ilk. It describes or often praises a landscape or place.  
Example:

**Ibadan:** J. P. Clark

Charles Hoyle's "Three Days at Killarney"

5. **Lyrics:** A lyric is a short poem that explores the emotions of the poet. The lyric was originally accompanied with the lyre. Forms of lyrics: psalms, hymns, sonnets, elegies, and odes.

**Sonnets:** a sonnet is a poem of 14 lines. There are two main types: Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, and English, Shakespearean or Elizabethan sonnet.

### Structure

**Italian Sonnet:** ABBAABBA, CDECDE = Octave + Sestet

*On His Blindness:* John Milton

**Shakespearean Sonnet:** ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG = 4 quatrains + 1 couplet.

*Sonnet CXVT:* William Shakespeare

**Ode:** An ode is a lyrical poem of address. It can address someone or something. Odes are also poems of reflection or mediation. They are written when one is meditating on the deep mysteries of life. Examples:

*Ode to the Nightingale:* John Keats

*Ode on a Grecian Urn:* John Keats

*Ode to the West Wind:* Percy Bysshe Shelley

**Elegy:** An elegy is a poem of grief and lamentation. It has a serious tone that expresses the pain of the loss of someone or something precious. Examples:

*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard:* Thomas Gray

*In Memoriam*: Lord Tennyson

**Hymn**: A hymn is a lyrical poem that expresses religious sentiments and devotion often in praise of God. It is intended to be sung by the choir during Mass or similar worship. Examples:

*Amazing Grace*: **John Newton**

*Bringing in the Sheaves*: **Knowles Shaw**

**Psalm**: A lyrical poem in praise of God. The notable psalms are found in the Bible. Example:

Psalm 23: *The Lord is my shepherd*

**Dramatic Poems**: A dramatic poem is a poem that has some elements of drama. Most dramatic poems make use of dramatic monologue – a poem with an imagined speaker addressing a silent listener, not usually the reader. Examples:

*Telephone Conversation*: **Wole Soyinka**

*Ulysses*: **Lord Tennyson**

*The Love Song of J*: **T. S. Eliot**

*My Last Duchess*: **Robert Browning**

**Philosophical Poems**: A philosophical poem is a poem that focuses on reflection – examining and interrogating existential phenomena, things that are often beyond the explanation and understanding of the human mind. Philosophical poems are also called metaphysical poems. Metaphysical poets make so much use of conceit or metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor that often compares two opposing realities. Examples of philosophical poems:

*Death Be Not Proud*: **John Donne**

*The Flea*: **John Donne**

**Light Verses**: Light verses are short and simple lyrical poems whose main intention is to enthruse humour. Behind the humour in a light verse is satire. Examples of light verses are limerick and nursery rhyme. A limerick is a poem of five lines written in anapaestic metre with the rhyming scheme AABBA. Examples:

There was a young fellow named Hall  
Who fell in the spring in the fall.  
'Twould have been a sad thing  
Had he died in the spring,  
But he didn't – he died in the fall. **Anonymous**

**Nursery Rhymes:** Nursery rhymes are light-hearted poems that are meant to make children happy. They are usually sung. Examples:

Baa baa black sheep  
Have you any wool?  
Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full!  
One for the master, one for the dame,  
And one for the little boy who lives down the lane. **Rudyard Kipling**

## **DRAMA**

Drama is a script written in dialogues to be acted on a stage. The script is often about the experiences of human beings and the realities in nature. The exploration of these experiences can be done seriously or hilariously. The main techniques of drama are dialogues, gestures, costumes, scenery, soliloquy, improvisation, aside, cliffhanger, pathos, plot twist, ticking clock scenario and so on. These techniques help to bring about the performative essence of drama.

**Origin of Drama:** Many scholars agree that drama is traceable to the early religious rituals, festivals and ceremonies of ancient civilisations. While the West will trace the origin of drama to the worship of Greco-Roman gods like Dionysius, Apollo, Aphrodite and the like, in African literature, drama is traceable to the early religious rituals and festivals in honour of African gods and goddesses like Osun, Sango, Amadioha, and the like.

**A play** is a dramatic script written to be acted on stage. It is divided into acts and scenes.



## **Types of Drama**

**1. Comedy:** This is a type of drama that represents life and human beings hilariously or seriously but often with a happy ending. Examples:

*As you Like It:* William Shakespeare

*A Midsummer Night's Dream:* William Shakespeare

**2. Tragedy:** This is serious drama with chains of calamitous events ending ultimately in catastrophe. The unhappy ending in a tragedy often elicits empathy and distress from the audience. Examples

*Macbeth:* William Shakespeare

*Oedipus Rex:* Sophocles

*Hamlet:* William Shakespeare

**3. Melodrama:** This is a sensational and sentimental drama with a plot designed to appeal to the emotions of the audience rather than reason. In melodrama, music and dialogue play key roles.

**4. Farce:** Farce drama elicits laughter from the audience because of the ridiculous and implausible events it represents.

**5. Opera:** An opera is a musical drama whose dialogue is mainly sung and not spoken.

**6. Mime:** This is a play without dialogue using facial expressions and gestures for dramatic effects.

**7. Mock Drama:** This is a play that ridicules the theatre conventions of its time.

**8. Miracle play:** This is a medieval religious play that is based on the life of Christian saints or the miracles they performed.

**9. Mystery:** This is a medieval religious play that is based on the life of Jesus Christ.

**10. Morality Play:** This is a medieval play that uses allegory to address moral issues. In the play, abstract entities like vices and virtues are personified.

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## CHAPTER 2

### LITERARY DEVICES AND TECHNIQUES

*Gabriel Okonkwo*

#### **Introduction**

Literary devices or techniques are tools used by writers to impress connotative meanings in the mind of the reader. Literary devices represent significant meanings that are not on the surface. They give aesthetic and utility value to creative writings and expressions. They allow the reader the opportunity of reflecting on the significance of the literary device(s) used in a creative work. They enable a rich literary experience for the reader. Literary devices or techniques are called figures of speech.

#### **Objectives**

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

1. explain the concept of literary devices and techniques,
2. define, with examples, the major literary devices and techniques.

#### **Some Literary Devices and their Corresponding Examples**

**Allegory:** As a literary device, allegory suggests its political, moral, spiritual, anthropological, or social meanings through the use of animate or inanimate symbols. Allegory is actually a Greek word meaning, “implication”. It is found mostly in fables, parables, and apologue. In other forms of art, allegory can be pictorial. Textual examples:

*Animal Farm:* George Orwell

*The Pilgrim’s Progress:* John Bunyan

**Metaphor:** Metaphor is an indirect comparison of two dissimilar nouns (persons, things, places, animals etc.). Examples are:

1. Ade is a goat.

(The comparison is indirect because it relates to stubbornness which is a feature both Ade and the goat share. Ade, who is a human being, cannot be an animal as is suggested by the copula verb, “is”. What is compared is the indirect feature called “stubbornness”.)

2. The lion is the king of animals.

(Again, what is compared here is the charisma of the lion which is a feature it shares with a human king. A king is expected to be charismatic.)

**Simile:** This is a comparison of two dissimilar nouns with “like”, “as if” or “as...as”. Examples:

1. Peter is as fat as his father.
2. Chike looks like the smallest among his classmates.

**Imagery:** Imagery refers to either the mental pictures one gets from some key words in a creative work or the entire literary constituents that make up a poem. An image which is a mental picture in a poem can appeal to the five senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing, and touch. Examples:

1. The weeds spread like Covid-19 on the farm.
2. Tolu’s voice honked like a horn.

**Personification:** This is giving human attributes to non-human objects. Examples:

The car is crying.

The bell called the priest.

**Pathetic Fallacy:** This is giving human attributes and qualities to elements of nature. Examples:

The sun is crying.

The moon smiled at me.

Death has called Mr. Peter.

The wind is dancing.

**Antonomasia:** This is using a popular epithet or moniker to substitute the proper name of a person, animal, place, or thing. Examples:

**Wise man** for the Biblical Solomon

**White House** for the US government

**Papilo** for Mr. Kanu Nwankwo

**Hyperbole:** This is the exaggeration and overstatement of things and situations mainly for emphasis or comical effect. Examples:

All Nigerians were at the national stadium to cheer on the Super Eagles.

Ada is the most intelligent girl in the world.

**Juxtaposition:** This is a kind of inversion in which two things or ideas with contrasting features are placed side by side so as to amplify their differences. Examples:

Good and evil...

Virtue and vice...

Ask not for food, food is not necessary.

**Allusion:** This is an indirect reference to a noun – a person, an event, a place, or a thing – especially as the noun appears in another text. There is always a shared knowledge between the one making the allusion and the one reading or beholding the allusion. Examples:

Daniel was a great man.

We saw a Good Samaritan.

We will not allow another Hitler in this organisation.

**Onomatopoeia:** It refers to a word that sounds like the thing it describes. Examples:

Boom = bomb (impact sound)

Honk = horn (machine sound)

Mew = cat (animal sound)

**Euphemism:** This is literary device that makes something serious appear mild. Examples:

He kicked the bucket. (He died.)

Ade has gone to be with the Lord. (Ade died.)

**Irony:** This is a statement whose opposite is intended. You are ironical when you say something but have an opposite meaning in mind. Examples:

A short man enters a class and the teacher announces, “Behold the tallest man in Nigeria.” (A short man)

### **Types of Irony**

1. **Verbal Irony:** It occurs when the literal meaning of what someone says is different from - and often opposite to - what he/she means. Example:

When there is a hurricane raging outside and someone remarks “What lovely weather we are having.”

“Ade is a good man,” said Paul. (Meaning: Ade is a bad man.)

2. **Dramatic Irony:** This is situation in a play when the audience know something about the fate of the protagonist which is oblivious to him or her. Example: In Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, the audience already know that Oedipus is the killer of his father, Laius, but he is initially ignorant of that detail.

3. **Situational Irony:** When the outcome of a situation is contrary to or different from what is expected. Examples: A police station being robbed. A soccer player kicking the ball into his own goal while trying to block a shot.

**Metonymy:** In this literary device, two things are closely related, and one is used in place of the other. Example:

The British Crown is coming tomorrow. (Crown: Queen of England)

The Khakis are ruling. (Khaki: Soldiers)

**Synecdoche:** This is when a part is used to represent a whole or a whole is used to represent a part. Examples:

All hands must be on deck. (Concerted effort enabled by everyone.)

Two good heads are better than one. (Two intelligent people)

You have good wheels in this house. (Wheels: vehicles or cars)

**Zeugma or Syllepsis:** This is a situation where a word, usually an adjective or a verb, applies to more than one noun, but its contextual sense is only appropriate to one of the nouns. Examples:

He saw the ruler and the ruler in the palace. (Ruler: **A school material** and **a leader**... the contextual sense is **the leader** because of the word “**palace**”.)

The beautiful girl and boy will go with us. (Beautiful: for the girl not boy)

**Chiasmus or Antimetabole:** This is a kind of inversion of the association between the elements of a sentence or phrase. Here, a phrase is repeated in a reversed order. Examples:

1. Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

(John F. Kennedy)

2. Pray not for yourself, pray for others.

**Antithesis:** Here, two opposing and contrasting phrases are put side by side. Examples:

United we stand, divided we fall.

To err is human, to forgive is divine.

**Paradox:** This is a statement that appears contradictory on the surface. However, a deeper examination will reveal the truth in it. Examples:

The boy is the father of the man.

Water, water, everywhere but there is none to drink. (‘The Ancient Mariner’ in Samuel Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*)

**Oxymoron:** This is when two contradictory words are placed side by side. Examples:

Bitter sweet experience...

That was a holy lie...

What a good devil...

**Pun:** This is a play on words. In pun, homophonic or polysemic words are used cloudily to achieve an aesthetic effect. Examples:

When it was time for Mass, the priest **told** the altar boys, and the altar boys **tolled** the bell.

In the bank, I will do some transaction and relaxation.

**Apostrophe:** This is an address to an absentee listener. The absentee listener is usually a personified object. Examples:

Oh, WAEC!

Why did you fail me again!

**Alliteration:** This is the repetition of initial consonant sound usually in a line of poetry. Examples:

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper.

Father Francis fried five fish.

**Anaphora:** This is the repetition of words or phrases at the beginning of parallel sentences. Its main function is emphasis. Examples:

God is great.

God is merciful.

God is gracious.

God is faithful. (“God” is emphasised)

**Understatement:** In understatement, a speaker does not give the full meaning of what he desires to say. He makes something serious appear less serious. Example:

It is just a minor injury.

It is just a negligible challenge.

**Litotes or Meiosis:** This is a form of understatement in which a strong sentiment is expressed with the negatives, “no or not”. Examples:

I am a citizen of no mean country. (My country is good.)

That girl is not bad. (The girl is good.)

**Assonance:** This is the repetition of medial vowels in words in a line of poetry. Example:

I love the son of the sun.

We caught the lord of the cord.



**Transferred Epithets:** Here, an adjective (qualifier) which is usually appropriate in describing certain kinds of nouns is transferred to another noun which is not so appropriate for it.

Examples:

Angry night...

A careless book...

A beautiful boy...

We passed through seven **hungry forests**.

I saw a **bloody moon** yesterday.

**Epigram:** This is a brief witty and pointed saying. Examples:

What an elder sits down to see on the Iroko, a child will stand and not see it.

You hit below the belt.

**Circumlocution:** This is the act of expressing an idea in a tedious manner. Example:

He spoke words of divine salvation. (He preached.)

**Climax:** This is the arrangement of words, phrases, or actions in an ascending order. Example:

He came, he saw, he conquered.

**Anticlimax** or Bathos: This is the arrangement of words, phrases, or actions in a descending order. Example:

He moved from a king to a prince, a knight, and a commoner.

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## CHAPTER 3 LITERARY APPRECIATION

*Oyeronke Oyeleye*

### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces students to appreciation of literary works, that is, poetry, prose, and drama. Literary appreciation refers to the understanding of a work of literature and being able to recognise and evaluate (judge) the various aspects of its form and content according to generally agreed principles and criteria in literature. In other words, in literary appreciation, the reader interprets and evaluates a literary work to determine the artistic merits or demerits of such a work. The need for knowledge about literary appreciation is not limited to students of English Literature or those in the Arts and Humanities; it is imperative for every university student, who intends to use English as the language of communication, to master the art of literary appreciation irrespective of his or her field of study.

### **Objectives**

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- i. define literature and explain its importance for every student.
- ii. identify the elements of prose and explain the various forms of prose.
- iii. identify and explain the forms and elements of drama.
- iv. identify and explain the major features of poetry and associated literary devices such as simile, metaphor, personification, synecdoche, metonymy, alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, antithesis, oxymoron, euphemism, hyperbole, innuendo, litotes, and climax.

### **Definition and Importance of Literature**

#### **What is Literature?**

According to the *Advanced Dictionary*, the word “Literate” means the ability to read and write. This means that writing is evidence of literacy. Literature can therefore be defined as anything written about a subject. However, not everything that is committed to writing can be referred to as a piece of literary work. This is why books on Engineering, Agriculture, Physics, and Biology may never be regarded as literature. ‘Literary’ refers to written works with artistic value or creative worth, such as poetry, prose fiction, and drama. Unlike the writer in scientific

writing whose focus is on precision in the presentation of facts, the creative writer or literary artist does not usually present his work in a direct, straightforward manner. His words do not have one meaning and are not subject to one interpretation. For instance, while the writer of basic literature about the computer sets out to trace the origin, make-up, use, advantages, disadvantages, problems, and prospects of the computer, what a literary artist does is deliberately adding ornaments to his writing. To achieve this, the writer of a literary work uses special devices in language such as proverbs, transliterations, figurative expressions, ambiguity, parallelism, and the like. Literature, therefore, is concerned mainly with life. It is the communication of ideas and feelings. It is not concerned with the documentary report as we have in journalism, but the creative man is with the consciousness of the people he is writing for, their past predicaments, their immediate problems, hopes, and aspirations. He takes into cognisance the people's present conditions and circumstances, their life patterns, and ideological orientation. Literature is the art of being creative. It connotes the ability to produce literary works like poems, plays, and prose narratives.

### **Importance of Literature**

The importance of literature is manifold. Some of them are provided below:

- i.** Literature entertains: Ogunsiji (2003) asserts that the form of entertainment offered by literature affords the mind the opportunity of overcoming psychological tensions and conflicts. To achieve this, the writer draws from important events in real life and arranges them in such a way that they have a beginning, middle and an end.
- ii.** Literature educates its readers: To develop the linguistic competence of the reader, literature arouses in him the zeal to read more. It helps the reader to develop fluency and the ability to comprehend what is read. Literature also helps to sharpen the reader's intellect and broaden his educational outlook. It enhances the reader's appreciation of words and draws him closer to the writer's style of writing.
- iii.** The study of literature involves making character judgments and analysing situations; it helps one to think critically and write analytically. Reading literary works can develop critical, empathy, cultural awareness, and communication skills. It fosters creativity and enables skills acquisition and development.

- iv. The cultural importance of literature is immense; it helps to preserve, enliven and enrich people's culture. Literature deepens one's understanding of other people. It gives one an opportunity to see things through other people's eyes. Because events captured in literature are realistic, and the lessons learnt from their study are wise commentaries on human nature. Reading about history, anthropology, or religious studies provides a method of learning about cultures and beliefs other than our own.
- v. Literature enhances good moral conduct: The way morality is taught in literature is usually different when compared to religious preaching. In literature, morality is presented in a more subtle and creative form.
- vi. Good reading of literature inspires to greater ideals like patriotism, sacrifice, and commitment.

### **1. Poetry**

Poetry is one of the genres of literature. The word 'poetry' is derived from the Greek word *Poesis*, which means 'making' or 'creating'. It is an art form with elevated language in verses, expressing deep feelings or noble thoughts in a rhythmic manner with the aim of communicating an experience. Poetry expresses ideas, ideologies and experience of its creator. These ideas, thoughts and experiences cannot be stated simply, but rather they are presented in embodiment and force in dialogues, actions, situations, and words. The thought is expressed in concrete images in a style charged with feelings. The poet succeeds in transforming his feelings and ideas to the level of metaphor or concrete particulars.

The student of poetry needs to understand its significance as a work of art which contributes to the store of human knowledge and experiences. Even though the symbolic and imagistic characteristic nature of poetry sometimes constitutes the fear and confusion of its learners. Poetry has always been seen as a literary phenomenon that constantly reflects an unknown and unseen world. The reason being its involvement in emotions, passions, imagination and sentiment; learners of poetry have always decried its remoteness from the concretely perceivable world. Explaining an unseeing poem involves going through the poem to locate any word or terms not familiar; looking up the meaning of the word from the content of the poem, since some words are culture-bound; reading the poem for a general impression; giving a reasonable close consideration of each declarative statement; considering the terms which provide ground for imagination; making the most consistent interpretation; having a recourse to

external authority; viewing the poem against assumptions, and determining the faithfulness of the poem.

### **Features of Poetry**

One of the major problems confronting the appreciation of poetry is the issue of imagery and symbolism. The adornment or clothing of a poem with symbols and images makes the understanding of any poem a tedious business. Therefore, any imagistic and symbolic rendering of a poem puts the learner off balance. But an understanding of the functions of these symbols and images in any poetic work will help the learner realize that poetry has no meaning without the inter-play of symbols and images. The symbols and images with other essential critical elements which foster the appreciation of poetry and differentiates it from other literary genres (prose and drama) are hereby explained:

- i.** Imagery
- ii.** Rhythm
- iii.** Sound
- iv.** Diction

### **Imagery**

Imagery in poetry is a picture evoked by language, something particular, concrete, objective and capable of easy visualisation. It may be the pictorial description of an object, a landscape, an animal, a person or divine, an action or an event. It is the use of figurative language to represent objects, actions and ideas in such a way that it appeals to the reader's physical senses. Imagery is used by poets to arouse specific emotions in the reader and create beauty, which is an important quality of poetry. Imagery is associated with mental pictures, and it employs the aid of the following specific literary devices to appeal to the reader's sense organs. If an image is a picture with meanings, implications, a symbol could literarily mean a picture of anything, be it animate or inanimate. However, this picture does not mean what it literarily represents, instead it could mean or represent something else (Section 3.2 contains a discussion of some other literary devices):

**Figures of Speech:** this is the use of words to convey more than they ordinarily mean in order to give an effective expression to the idea.

### **i. Simile**

This is a figure of speech in which comparison is made between two unlike things with the use of ‘like’ or ‘as’ for example:

- i. The boy was as fast as a cheetah on the field today.
- ii. As quick as light.
- iii. Mr Sam is as blind as a bat without his glasses.
- iv. Tola and Tolu fight like cats and dogs all the time.

Example i compares the speed of the boy during a race to that of a cheetah, the fastest animal. Mr Sam’s blindness in example iii is likened to a bat; this is lack of sight or visual acuity.

### **ii. Metaphor**

Unlike the simile, a metaphor’s comparison is implied. It is a figure of speech that is used to make a comparison between two things that are not alike but have something in common. For example:

- i. The boy was a cheetah in the race today.
- ii. Her smile is a shining light that brightens my day.
- iii. Taiwo and Taiye are cat and rat.

Example i compares the speed of the boy in a race to the speed of a Cheetah. Example iii is a description of two twin brothers, Taiwo and Taiye, who are always in disagreement; that is, just as cats and rats never agree, they can never agree nor be together.

### **iii. Personification**

This figure of speech enables the reader to endow human attributes to inanimate objects and non-human beings. In other words, human attributes, such as walking, talking, eating, sleeping, etc., are transferred to non-humans. For instance,

Then I hear a wailing piano

Solo speaking of complex ways

In tear-furrowed concerto

Of faraway lands...

**Gabriel Okara, 'Piano and Drums'**

“until the day breathes...”

**Songs of Solomon 4:6**

“In those days when civilisation kicked us in the face”

**David Diop,**

## **Rhythm**

As an element of poetry, rhythm is considered the most important of a poet's technical resources because it has to do with the flow of words or thoughts, which helps to convey mood and meaning in poetry. Rhythm can be compared with a beat or pulse, and as a beat or pulse, it implies the presence of movement in which there is a recurrence of identical points. Rhythm follows a patterned arrangement of sounds, which is either stressed or unstressed, to follow the equivalent intervals between specific sounds in poetry (music).

## **Sound**

This is one of the features that give satisfaction in a poem. Sound in poetry is identical to melody in music, and this melody can be well appreciated if the poem is read aloud. However, this does not mean that one still cannot enjoy the melodious feel of the poem if read silently. Sound in poetry is used to convey meaning, emotion and pleasure, and it employs the help of literary devices, such as onomatopoeia, assonance, alliteration, consonance, repetition, and refrains, as expatiated below.

### **i. Alliteration**

This is a literary device in which two or more words in a row have the same first consonant sound. An important point to note is that alliteration does not depend on letters but on sounds.

Examples:                      From forth the fatal loins of these two foes.

Peter piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.  
*“The Vultures”*

## ii. Onomatopoeia

The literary artist uses this poetic device to create words by imitating or mimicking the sound of the thing it describes. For example, the words we use to describe the noises that animals make are all onomatopoeic, such as dog’s “bark”, and cat’s “meow”.

Example:

Three fields to cross till a farm appears

A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch

And blue spurt of a lighted match

**Robert Browning**

*“Meeting at night”*

## Diction

This is how words are used in oral or written discourse. It has to do with the peculiar choice of words used by the poet to convey his/her message to his/her audience. To write well, the poet must use correct and accurate vocabulary to convey meanings so that his/her work will not be verbose or ambiguous. Sometimes the choice of words of the poet can make his/her work plain, homely, exotic, cryptic, contemporary, and the like; therefore, it is left to the reader to decipher or analyse the dominant pattern of the diction employed by a poet in his work.

## More Literary Devices

Literary devices are narrative techniques that writers use to produce special effects in their writing, particularly to provoke a particular response from the reader. There is a large volume of them, but only a few of the basic ones are mentioned here.



### **i. Paradox**

It is a form of speech which seems contradictory at first, but on closer examination, it contains a lot of truth. As a literary device often used in poetry, the truth contained in paradoxical expressions is often realised against a religious or philosophical background. Examples:

- You can't save money by spending it.

- "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others", **George Orwell**, *Animal Farm*

### **ii. Hyperbole**

This is the deliberate use of exaggeration or overstatement by the poet that must not be taken literally, with the aim of heightening the effect of his/her work on the reader.

Examples:

An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze

Two hundred to adore each breast

**Andrew Marvel**, "*To his coy mistress*"

I'll love you, dear, I'll love you till China and Africa meet

And the river jumps over the mountain

And the salmon sing in the street

**W.H. Auden**, "*As I walked out one evening*"

### **iii. Metonymy**

It involves the use of an object or idea to stand for or signify some other thing with which it is closely associated, but not an integral part. In other words, the idea or object is not called by its original name but by the name of something intimately close to or associated with it.

Examples:

- i. The pen is mightier than the sword. In this case the pen might stand for a writer, while the sword might stand for a soldier.
- ii. Jide goes after any skirt in school. The skirt in this sentence stands for females.

#### **iv. Synecdoche**

This is similar to metonymy because both work on the basis of association. Synecdoche is however different in that a part of an object, person, or place, for example, is made to stand for the whole. For instance, if your parents buy you a car and you say that you just got a new set of wheels, you are using synecdoche- you are using “wheels”, which are parts of a car, to refer to the whole car. Another example is:

“All hands on deck” In this case, the hand, which is a part of the body, is used to represent the whole ship crew.

#### **v. Apostrophe**

This is when the persona (poetic voice) directly addresses an animate object or idea as one would address a living person. The apostrophe is sometimes represented by the exclamation, “oh”. Examples are:

Oh, Christmas tree, oh, Christmas tree, how lovely are your branches.

Oh! How the mighty has fallen.

O holy virgin! Clad in purest white.

#### **vi. Oxymoron**

This literary device combines two opposite words together in a sentence. The sentence is self-contradictory in nature to reveal a paradox.

Examples:

Why is my world upside down?

The edifice in your office is beautiful nonsense.

#### **vii. Irony**

Irony is the use of words in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning.

### **viii. Litotes**

This device consists of an understatement that uses a negation to express a positive. It is a form of verbal irony.

Examples:

“Not too bad a singer” (A good singer)

It was not unlike expected. (It was just as expected)

### **ix. Pun**

This is a play on words. It is the humorous use of a word to suggest its different meanings or uses. It adds profound meaning to a text and shapes the way the text is interpreted.

Example:

“Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana”.

## **Other Features of Poetry**

Aside paying attention to the poetic or literary devices employed in a poem, another essential means of appreciating a poem is to pay attention to the theme, subject matter, mood, tone and style/technique. These features are discussed below.

### **i. Theme**

Theme is the main message in a poem. The concept of theme connotes the significance of events rather than the events themselves. The idea might be war, love, death, unhappiness, and the like. In identifying the theme of a poem, one must pay close attention to the intention of the poet, which may be vaguely spelt out or directly used. One fundamental point to take note of is that the theme of a poem is informed by the poet’s social, philosophical, religious, moral, and political background. Therefore, to find meaning in a poem, one must put oneself in the poet’s universe and efface part of oneself (Dasylva and Jegede, 2005).

## **ii. Subject Matter**

This is the content summary of a poem that gives a clue to the central idea. In other words, subject matter makes the theme conclusive. In inferring a subject matter, the topic stages of the poem must be recognised.

## **iii. Mood**

This is also known as atmosphere. It is a literary device that invokes certain feelings and emotions in the readers through the poet's use of words and description. Mood is developed in a poem through various means like setting, theme, tone and diction.

## **iv. Tone**

This is the poet's attitude towards the poem persona, reader, and subject matter as interpreted by the reader. Elements, such as diction, imagery, and figurative language, can be used by the poet to create tone in a work of poetry. Also, there may be more than one tone that a poet takes towards his/her work at the same time. For instance, the tone of a poem can be humorous and dark at the same time.

## **v. Style/Technique**

This is the method which a poet uses to convey meaning, tone, and emotion in his/her poem. The poet might decide to convey his/her meaning through one of the various forms of poetry like sonnet, lyric, ode, etc. or through musical devices like rhythm, rhyme, etc.

## **2. Prose Fiction**

Prose fiction is like a written-down story as opposed to a poem. It is called fiction because the stories describe imaginary people and events. Non-Fiction prose on the other hand is generally a work that has literary qualities, but lays claim to being factual. Non-fiction prose is usually truthful accounts of real men. Under the non-fiction category, there are the diary, autobiography and biography (Oriola and Olaoye, 2008).

Prose fiction has certain characteristic elements and may be written in different forms.

## **Elements of Prose Fiction**

There are five basic aspects of prose fiction to watch out for in literary appreciation. These are plot, point of view, characterisation, theme, and setting.

### **Plot**

Plot refers to the series of events that form the story in a literary text. Structurally, these events or occurrences are logically and sequentially arranged. The arrangement may be spatial (from one place to another) or chronological (from cause to effect or from effect to cause). It is important to note that descriptions and analyses of happenings are not part of the plot. The elements of plot structure to watch out for are exposition, complication, crisis, climax, and resolution.

- i. Exposition:** This is the introductory part of the sequence of events. It describes the background of the story and reveals basic information about the characters and the setting of the story.
- ii. Complication:** In this part of the plot structure, an event or character that causes difficulty is introduced into the story.
- iii. Crisis:** This is the critical moment in the story, the point when the conflicting forces meet, and the difficult situation becomes most intense.
- iv. Climax:** It is the outcome of the crisis. The climax is the turning-point when a major positive or negative change happens in the life of the main characters in the story.
- v. Resolution:** This is also referred to as denouement. It is the final part of the story, the conclusion of all the actions when there are no more questions to be answered and no more surprises to expect.

### **Point of View**

Point of view refers to the narrator or character's perspective about the events and situations in the story. Different points of view may be expressed in the same story, such as the following:

- i. First-person point of view:** In this case, the story is narrated by one of the characters in the story who can reveal only what he or she sees or hears directly from other characters. Also, the first-person narrator can share only his/her personal opinions and emotions, not those of other characters in the story.
- ii. Omniscient point of view:** Here, the narrator has an unlimited knowledge of the events. He/she can reveal the thoughts in the mind of each of the characters.

## **Characters**

The people portrayed in the story are referred to as characters. Again, different types of characters may exist in a story.

- i. Round or dynamic characters: These appear in realistic stories and have good and bad qualities which change or grow as the story progresses.
- ii. Flat or static characters: These kinds of characters often have only one or two outstanding traits. Flat characters do not change in the story.

## **Theme**

The theme of a story is the central message or dominant idea. It should be noted that the theme of a literary work is not the same as the topic or subject. A theme makes a statement or expresses an opinion about the subject or topic of the story. There may be more than one theme in a story, and these may be categorised as major and minor (or sub-) themes.

## **Setting**

The physical environment in which the action takes place is called the setting. It also includes the era or period in time and the place in which the events of the story occur.

## **Forms of Prose Fiction**

In this module, three major forms of prose fiction will be discussed, namely, the short story, novella, and novel.

### **Short Story**

Short story is shorter than the novel in volume (size). The name is derived from the length of the story. The consensus is that a reader should be able to start and complete the reading of a short story within one or two hours without missing any part of the story. The plot of short story is not complicated as that of the novel; it is concise and has no room for subplots (Afolayan & Owoeye, 2004). Just like the novel, it has a theme, plot, point of view, setting and characters; however, the characters are few and not fully developed like in the novel. An example of a short story is Achebe's "The Madman".

## **Novella/Novelette**

This is a form of prose fiction that is normally longer than a short story but shorter than a novel. As a rule of thumb, the novella is more than 20,000 but fewer than 50,000 words in length. Structurally, the novella has fewer subplots and conflicts than a full-length novel. It concerns itself with the emotional and personal development of the characters rather than dealing with society at large. George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* are examples of novella/novelette.

## **Novel**

The novel is a narrative work of prose with an extended scope, length and plot. Due to its length, it has the ability to accommodate a greater number of characters, and a complication of plots (NOUN, 2006). Thematically, the novel is based on human experiences and how these experiences affect the society at large. The novel is often said to have emerged with the appearance of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1722).

## **Types of Novel**

There are numerous kinds of novel, but just a few of them are discussed here.

- i. Bildungsroman:** This type of novel deals with the psychological development and moral education of the main character from the formative years; for example, Seffi Atta's, *Everything Good will Come*.
- ii. Satirical novel:** Satirical novel aims to improve humanity by criticising its follies. This type of novel exposes and criticises the ills and foolishness of an individual or a society by using irony, humour, and exaggeration. An example is Mark Twain's, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
- iii. Historical novel:** This type of novel depends heavily on historical events, dates and time to develop its plot and setting, although its characters are often fictional. It is set against a background of real conflicts and issues. For example, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*; Ayi Kwei Armah's, *Two Thousand Seasons*.
- iv. Psychological novel:** It explains the motivation of the actions of the characters in a novel. This type of novel focuses on the internal life of the character, whether mental, emotional, and the

like, to explore the various levels of mental activity. An example is Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*.

- v. **Sociological novel:** A novel of this type focuses on social problems, such as gender issues, racism, prejudice, etc, affecting the character or society. For instance, Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*.

### 3. Drama

Drama is a work of art which describes human life and activities through the presentation of actions by means of dialogues between groups of characters. It is a story devised to be presented by actors on a stage before an audience. The word drama originated from the Greek word, *dran*, which means to do or to act. It encompasses all written plays irrespective of form or genre. The story told by drama through actions and dialogues is conventionally divided into acts and scenes, unlike prose, which is divided into chapters. The actions of the characters developed in drama are usually exaggerated or made larger than life. The person who writes plays for the stage is known as a playwright, while an actor or actress impersonates characters developed by a playwright on the stage before an audience.

#### Elements of Drama

Aspects of the novel such as the plot, setting, characters and characterisation, subject matter, theme, and language are equally obtainable in drama but with slight differences as discussed below.

##### i. Plot Structure

The structural divisions of the action are more obvious in drama than in the novel, and they are divided into Acts and subdivided into Scenes. As an essential part of a good plot, the events must be linked in a chain-like form, usually tagged "unity of plot", while irrelevances are excluded. The plot structure of the play conventionally begins with an exposition, followed by rising action, climax, anagnorisis (popular in plots for tragic plays), falling action, resolution, and denouement.

**Exposition:** This is the beginning of the play. It serves the audience with some background information and sets the scene for subsequent events. At this level, characters are identified and



introduced. The prologue is connected with the exposition which also forms the background to the whole story.

**Rising Action:** This is also known as Complication; it projects the problems or conflicts in the story. As the situation begins to change, tension sets in, and a problem builds up from the original situation in the story.

**Climax:** The highest point of all the forces constituting the conflict in a play is called the climax.

**Anagnorisis:** It is a moment of realisation in the plot. At this point, the tragic hero recognises the reality about himself and realises his responsibility for his actions. For example, in *Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles, Oedipus the protagonist realises his responsibility for his actions – his sins of incest and patricide. Though committed unconsciously, the reality of the situation is cruelly and sharply revealed to him.

**Falling action:** It is also known as reversal of fortune.

**Resolution:** This refers to the level at which the protagonist makes certain decisions that are capable of determining the outcome of the crisis.

**Denouement:** this refers to the end of a play in which everything is explained or settled. It is the result of the conflicting occurrences in the play.

## **ii. Setting**

The setting of a play involves the location of the actions of the play. It includes the time and place in which the action of the play occurs. Some scholars also use the term to designate the situation or context of a play, as exemplified by such terms as historical setting, cultural setting, and social setting or background of the play. To determine the setting, it is necessary to first ascertain where and when the play occurs, and then turn attention to where the stage action begins.

## **iii. Characterisation**

This is also known as character development. Actions in a play can be given their form, meaning, and interpretation only through characters. Characters in a play are created for action. Therefore, the playwright must present his characters simply and directly.

### **Types of characters:**

**A. Flat Characters** are those with manifest and unique characteristics that are not likely to change in circumstances; they are highly predictable. They are also referred to as 'stock' or 'type' characters. They are identified with certain traits or qualities. They are stereotyped characters. For example:

The handsome brave hero; the beautiful spy; the stubborn child; the incorruptible lecturer.

**B. Round characters:** they are those characters with dynamic interest and behaviour and are subject to changes under new situations. Their actions are influenced by circumstances. They are adaptable to changing situations; they are very unpredictable. A round character is multidimensional with different interests and tastes. This character-type summarises the life of an average human being.

### **iv. Subject Matter**

This simply means the central message of the play; that is, what the play is talking about. The subject matter can be used to illustrate the theme.

### **v. Theme**

This is the subject, concern, and preoccupation of a play. The concept of theme connotes the significance of events rather than the events themselves. This refers to the lesson learned from a work of art. In the play, *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles, the audience learns that an uncontrolled temper can destroy its victim.

### **vi. Dialogue**

It is similar to point of view or narrative technique in prose. Dialogue is the conversation that occurs between or among characters in a play. It can serve as a clue to character development in that the attitude and idiosyncrasies of a character are assessed by what he says of himself and what others say about him.

### **Forms of Drama**

The form of a drama is the way that the story is told, the way the characters play their parts, and the way the themes are explored. There are five major forms of drama by convention, namely: tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, melo-drama, and farce.

## **Tragedy**

Tragedy is a play with a serious purpose in which the main character experiences a fatal ending. It contains one central character, but it uses other characters to develop its theme, and it ends sorrowfully. The protagonist of a classical tragic play, according to Aristotle, must be a character of a noble background as it was believed that only such people could take part in serious matters, which make their fall from grace to grass a pitiable one. Aristotle further qualifies tragedy as a play that must bring about the emotions of pity and fear in the audience; the audience should pity the tragic hero and fear for themselves as human beings. The tragic character is a person who suffers psychological conflict within himself and takes a resolution that determines the outcome of the event. Examples of tragic characters are Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles; Odewale in *The gods are not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, and Macbeth in *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare.

It is good to note that not all tragic heroes are developed from noble births. Playwrights and critics after Aristotle have improved on the character development of a tragic hero. He can be an ordinary citizen but must possess traits that place him head and shoulders above other characters in the text. Othello, the Moor of Venice, in Shakespeare's *Othello*, excelled by sheer merit of the excellent qualities he displayed.

## **Comedy**

Unlike a tragedy, a comedy is a play with a happy beginning and a happy ending. The characters are involved in a state of confusion as events unfold, but the situation returns to normalcy, and the play ends happily. Types of comedy include comedy of errors, comedy of manners, romantic comedy, and satiric comedy. The major characteristics of comedy are:

- i.** A happy ending with less serious but complex intrigues.
- ii.** Ordinary characters with no extraordinary problems.
- iii.** Enrichment with spectacles.
- iv.** Misrepresentations, disguise in terms of physical appearance, names, sex, etc, which generate mistaken identity and humour. Examples are: *She Stoops to Conquer* by Oliver Goldsmith; *ur Husband has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi.

## **Tragicomedy**

Tragicomedy is a mixture of tragedy which goes from good fortune to bad, and comedy which reverses the order from bad fortune to good. It is a kind of play that combines serious and comic incidents, and mixes styles, subject matter, and language. Guarini (1601) in his book, *Compendium of Tragi-comic Poetry*, quoted by Ogunjimi (2003), asserts that “Tragi-comedy... takes from tragedy its great persons, but not its great actions, its movement of the feeling but not its disturbances of them, its pleasure but not its sadness, its danger but not its death; from comedy, it takes laughter that is not excessive, modest amusement, feigned difficulty and happy reversal”.

From the above definition, tragicomedy in essence is made up of characters of high and low degrees. Its actions are of serious magnitude, sometimes threatening a tragic disaster to the protagonist but ending happily. Comic and crude situations, including surprises, coincidences, and exaggerations, are parts of tragicomedy.

## **Melodrama**

Melodrama derives its name from the Greek word *Melos*, meaning music. It is a combination of two words, representing music and drama. It is a form of dramatic composition that employs a multiplicity of styles, tragedy, comedy, pantomime, and spectacle to appeal to a popular audience. Melodrama is usually concerned with situation and plot, and employs the use of stock characters:

- i. A heroine who is threatened by a villain.
- ii. A hero who rescues the heroine and defeats the villain.

The viewpoint of melodrama is moral and humanitarian, while the tendency is principally sentimental and high-spirited. It is a play that is full of exciting events and in which the characters and emotions seem too exaggerated to be real. They are portrayed as either good or bad and pursue their interests in a series of actions devoid of thought, recognition, or psychological complexity. The protagonists are flat characters, and the plot revolves around malevolent intrigue and violence.

## **Farce**

the word farce is derived from the Latin word, *farsus*, meaning to stuff. The term Farsus from the church liturgy where it came from means expansion and addition. In comic drama, farce implies adding extemporaneous materials, especially jokes and clowning, in a play. Farce was developed by adding spontaneous actions and jokes not originally in the play script. Farce is a comedy of the situation. It is the lowest form of comedy because it relies heavily on the situation and visual humour, and features mainly uncomplicated characters, and it is generally used for light entertainment. The characters in farce are of two types:

- i. The typical manipulators who manipulate the action of the play.
- ii. The ridiculous buffoon, created mainly as targets for farcical laughter.

The main purpose of farcical dramatists is to produce laughter; though the play may have a resolution, it contains no element of thought in the Aristotelian sense. It may also criticise the mores of society, the criticism is not aimed at correction but entertainment.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have explained what literature is and highlighted why the basic knowledge of literary appreciation of poetry, prose and drama is important for every student, irrespective of his or her field of study. The defining features, basic characteristics, types, literary devices, and elements of each of the three genres of fiction poetry, prose, and drama, have also been discussed, supported with ample illustrations taken from a rich variety of texts to help the reader.

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**CHAPTER 4**  
**BACKGROUND ON ORAL LITERATURE: DEFINITIONS, FORMS AND**  
**CHARACTERISTICS**

*Kehinde Oyetimi*

**Introduction**

Humanity embodies the art of storytelling, finding joy and fulfilment through song, dance, and spiritual reverence. Narrative, dance, music, drumming, and poetry recitals form the very essence of man's existence. Today's written language merely reflects the evolution from humanity's earliest mode of self-expression and creativity: oral forms. Both oral and written literatures embody the innate human drive for artistic ingenuity. The aesthetic and artistic essence of oral literature thrives in its performance context. Oral literary works are artistic expressions in action, aiming to evoke and sustain emotional engagement and audience interest. The oral artist's mastery of language is the conduit through which they captivate and stir their audience. Man's expressive endeavours through tales, folklore, music, and proverbial wisdom, akin to contemporary films, novels, and dramas, serve as mediums for his social, moral, and spiritual discourse.

**Objectives**

After reading through this chapter, students should be able to:

- i. establish the relationship between oral literature and folklore,
- ii. locate the different sources, nature and functions of Oral Literature; and
- iii. engage and analyse selected oral literary forms with emphasis on salient themes and motifs peculiar to such forms.

**Folklore and Oral Literature: Definitions and Delineations**

Folklore encompasses the collective repository of communal beliefs, customs, narratives, melodies, and rituals transmitted orally within a society. It embodies the shared knowledge, traditions and cultural legacy of a specific community. In its scope, folklore includes myths, legends, fairy tales, proverbs, folk music, artistic expressions, rites, and festivities passed down through generations. The term 'folk' denotes a community or populace, while 'lore' denotes the

localised traditions and distinctive practices unique to a particular group. Richard Dorson (1976) defines folklore as the study of art embedded in everyday life. Echoing Dorson's perspective, William Bascom (1992) suggests that folklore entails the artistic communication within small social units, where certain themes and genres of oral literature evolve and adapt over time.

Prominent scholars, both international and local, who have significantly contributed to the exploration of various forms of oral literature include the Grimm Brothers, Ruth Finnegan, Richard Dorson, Wande Abimbola, Oyin Ogunba, J.P. Clark, Adeboye Babalola, Isidore Okpewho, Ademola Dasylva, G.O. Amali, Olutoyin Jegede, F.B.O. Akporobaro, and Olatunde Olatunji. The Grimm Brothers, Jacob Ludvig Carl (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Carl (1786-1859), trained as philologists, curated an extensive collection of folktales and legends, famously known as Grimm Fairy Tales. Their profound collections, coupled with the charm and literary merits therein, have played a pivotal role in guiding scholars and enthusiasts of diverse backgrounds toward the earnest gathering and examination of their respective folkloric traditions. Ruth Finnegan's seminal work, *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), stands as the most comprehensive exploration of various traditional African literary forms. With a focus on practical insights rather than theoretical frameworks, the book delves into the stylistic attributes, social significance, diversity, and functions of African oral expressions.

Richard Dorson's scholarship significantly influenced American academics, encouraging them to broaden their scope beyond their native folklore to include traditions from diverse regions like Africa. Adeboye Babalola extensively researched and published on Yoruba oral literature, notably contributing *The Form and Content of Yoruba Ijala*, a seminal work in the field. Isidore Okpewho specialised in the epic genre within African literature. Wande Abimbola's notable contribution lies in his study and collection of Ifa Divination verses, exemplified in his work *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa* Oyin Ogunba, recognised as the first drama Professor, conducted significant research on the Agemo festival of the Ijebu people in Southwestern Nigeria. Ademola Dasylva's work focuses on the taxonomy of oral traditions. Olatunde Olatunji's research centres on the features of Yoruba poetry. Olutoyin Jegede examined court poetry as a distinctive genre within oral literature. F.B.O. Akporobaro extensively researched African folktales, contributing to the understanding of oral traditions on the continent.



However, it is essential to underscore that oral literature constitutes a facet of folklore. Functioning within the realm of folklore, oral literature or oral tradition encompasses the cultural tradition of transmitting creatively crafted stories, myths, legends, poems, songs, and other literary forms verbally rather than through written texts. This practice has long been a pivotal aspect of human culture, serving as a primary method for transmitting knowledge, wisdom, and cultural heritage across generations. Scholars, such as Simon Bronner (2017), Thomas Green (2019), Fred Akporobaro (2012), Sue-Ann Harding and Ovidi Carbonell-Cortés (2020), Ademola Dasylva (2021), and Olutoyin Jegede (2023) have highlighted the enduring significance of oral literature evident in folk narratives, songs, and various oral literary expressions within contemporary literature. For example, Jegede (2023) contends that oral literature comprises imaginative oral expressions transmitted across generations. She asserts that oral literature exists in various forms worldwide wherever human societies thrive. Akporobaro (2012), in his examination of oral literature, presents multiple descriptions of this genre. Central to these definitions, Akporobaro emphasises the verbal nature, creative importance, communal ownership, longstanding tradition of composition, and both entertaining and educational aspects of oral literature. He posits that oral literature, or folk literature encompasses the imaginative verbal creations, narratives, folk beliefs, and songs of pre-literate societies, which have evolved and been transmitted orally from one generation to the next. These imaginative compositions are distinguished by their expressive beauty and local concepts, developed over time by a community and passed down orally from one generation to another.

### **Characteristics of Oral Literature**

Various factors shape the identity of oral literary forms, representing the creative framework within which these forms emerge. The characteristics of the medium through which the oral artist works impose limitations, which are evident in the styles and forms they choose for their artistic expression.

The artist utilising spoken language engages in a parallel creative endeavour to the contemporary writer who crafts with the written word. Whether immersed in storytelling through folklore or legend, conjuring imagery in poetry recitation, or weaving rhythm and melody in lyrical expression, the oral artist and the modern writer alike harness creativity and manipulate language. This creative process encompasses various dimensions, including

imaginative expression of experience, communication of ideas with human significance, and skilful utilisation of language resources to achieve aesthetic impact. The overarching characteristics of oral literature encompass the following.

### **Oral Literature as Performance**

At its core, oral literature is inherently performative. It exists as a living expression, brought to life through speech acts enhanced by gestures, social norms, and the specific context of its performance. Essentially, the substance and attributes of oral literary forms come alive in the act of performance.

### **Improvisation/Creativity**

A key feature of oral literature, distinct from its written counterpart, is the ongoing element of improvisation. The oral storyteller, poet, and performer do not rigidly adhere to pre-existing forms; instead, they express their creative ingenuity during each performance. They introduce fresh words, imagery, motifs, and even references to contemporary issues and figures, reflecting the ever-evolving realities of daily life. Skilfully blending delivery techniques with spontaneous improvisations enhances the artistic impact of the recitation and the artist's prowess.

### **The Audience's Central Role**

A fundamental aspect of oral literature lies in its connection to the audience. Frequently, the audience actively participates in the realisation and reinterpretation of oral pieces. This involvement stems from the artist's receptivity to the audience's reactions, expectations, and cultural backgrounds. Depending on the genre or the narrator's disposition, the audience's responses and beliefs are interwoven into the narrative, poem, or performance. Furthermore, oral literature, as a form of live creation, inherently requires an audience. Unlike a writer, the oral artist cannot evade face-to-face interaction with their audience.

### **The Significance of the Performer's Personality**

Another crucial aspect of orature is the persona of the storyteller. The performer not only re-imagines but also mediates between the established core forms and their live rendition, influenced by factors such as personal experiences, religious beliefs, worldview, narrative flair,

verbal prowess, and the strength of memory and voice. While serving as a re-interpreter, the performer is never neutral; they infuse the received forms with their family, clan, or group's subjective reality and values.

### **The Importance of the Text**

The term "text" refers to the material available to the performer, which may include songs, folktales, proverbs, or other oral literary forms. This text must align with the occasion and cater for the audience's age group. Finnegan (1976) describes how performers employ characterisation, mimicry, exaggeration, and other techniques to vividly present the action, captivating and amusing the audience. Jegede (2023) distinguishes between received and created texts: received texts encompass the shared stock images, characters, and content of oral materials within a community, while created texts are those imaginatively (re)constructed by the performer.

### **The Art of Drumming**

Drumming plays a crucial role in the transmission of oral African literature. In African societies, drumming is utilised to convey messages. For instance, the talking drum, prominent among the Yoruba people and other ethnic groups in Africa, is adept at conveying decipherable information, surpassing mere speculation. Despite advancements in science and technology enabling the recording and preservation of words and actions through cinematography, thereby ensuring the continuity of oral performances in oral literature, the authenticity and organic essence inherent in the art of talking drums remain irreplaceable and aesthetically gratifying. As exemplified by the Ayan family of drummers among the Yoruba people in Nigeria, West Africa, drummers and drums hold significant importance in oral literature.

### **The Role of Memory**

Oral narrative performance, whether through recitation or storytelling, represents a dialectical-creative interaction between the performer and the audience. While the performer engages the audience with suspense, drama, and surprise, the audience's emotional presence also fuels the performer. The performer draws upon mental structures, symbols, allusions, historical figures, places, and deities as narrative tools to stimulate, surprise, and enrich the audience's imagination.

## **Sources and Functions of Oral Literature**

Jegade (2023) identifies three sources of oral literature: verbal, partly verbal and non-verbal sources. Verbal sources encompass expressive modes of communication, requiring creative interpretation. Oral literature manifests within folk speech, comprising various forms such as riddles, rhymes, narratives, proverbs, songs, and more. Partly verbal sources combine words with actions, including customs, festivals, games, dances, popular beliefs, and superstitions. Non-verbal sources, devoid of language, are products of imagination, such as arts, crafts, and gestures.

Much more than these, oral literature serves as the treasury of essential knowledge, philosophy, and wisdom within non-literate societies. Through narratives, poetry, songs, dances, myths, fables, and religious texts, it offers a depiction of life's meaning within a specific societal context, addressing existential challenges unique to that time and place. It encapsulates traditional knowledge, beliefs, and societal values concerning the environment and the society itself.

Arising from a universal aesthetic impulse, oral literature provides narratives that explore life's nature and human responses to challenges. It guides moral conduct and elucidates humanity's relationship with the divine, preserving societal knowledge for future generations. It also records the society's history and collective experiences, presenting belief systems that offer insight into life's complexities and providing guidance on human behaviour and moral living. However, with the advent of literacy, the essence of this literature and its artistic essence face rapid erosion.

Moreover, oral literature serves as a vessel for artistic expression within society, resonating with beauty across cultural boundaries. It responds to humanity's innate quest for balance, harmony, and understanding in a world fraught with pain, suffering, and evil. It explains the origins of human suffering, justifies them, and suggests pathways towards reconciliation and healing. Additionally, oral literature accomplishes the need for religious beliefs and spiritual fulfilment, delving into a universal realm populated by spiritual entities through stories, songs, myths, legends, prayers, and ritual texts. It narrates the exploits of deities, elucidates the origins of the world and human existence, and illuminates the complexities of human frailty.

Furthermore, oral literature serves as a medium for communicating ideas, emotions, beliefs, and appreciation for life. It interprets and elaborates on society's perception of reality and the perils of the world, celebrating human endeavours and achievements in the face of adversity. Through the texts of societal rituals and ceremonies, it portrays critical ecological elements vital to society's sustenance and sanctifies their significance.

Lastly, oral literature provides entertainment and fosters solidarity among individuals who share similar experiences. In summary, oral literature encompasses diverse genres of linguistic expression and serves multifaceted functions within society.

### **Genres of Oral Literature**

Similar to the written literary tradition, the diverse arrays of oral literary creations can be categorised into three fundamental genres: prose, poetry, and drama. These forms represent the rich literary traditions and accomplishments of indigenous African societies, reflecting traditional creative imagination, beliefs, and perceptions of social reality. They serve as mediums for constructing and deconstructing the sociocultural landscape, offering verbal and auditory expressions of humanity's innate creative impulse and sensibility.

### **Poetry**

Poetry in traditional oral societies embodies the rhythmic and expressive use of language, serving as a stylised form of art. Here, poetry encompasses various verse forms designed to evoke emotions, convey ideas, and capture the essence of a culture's beliefs, values, and lived experiences. Frequently performed, poetry as a verbal art derives its essence from communal traditions and cultural contexts, enriching its significance and relevance. It is important to note that within pre-literate societies, poetry serves as a medium for storytelling, preserving cultural heritage, and expressing artistic sentiments across indigenous communities. As a genre of oral literature, the various forms of poetry include praise poetry, heroic poetry (epic, court poetry), funerary poetry, occupational poetry, proverbs, satirical songs, lullaby, riddles, and religious poetry (divination, chants and incantatory poetry).

#### **i. Heroic poetry**

In Africa, heroic poetry stands out as a remarkable expression of oral literature, spotlighting the courageous feats and virtues of revered figures within indigenous communities. It intricately

narrates the daring acts, adventures, and triumphs of legendary individuals such as warriors, chiefs, and historical leaders. Themes of bravery, honour, loyalty, and resilience permeate this genre, depicting these figures as paragons of virtue who embody the ideals and values cherished by their society. Beyond mere entertainment, heroic poetry serves as a vital tool for safeguarding cultural heritage, imparting moral lessons, and fostering a collective sense of identity and pride within the community. Heroic poetry includes epic poems and court poetry. Examples of heroic poetry in Africa encompass diverse forms such as epics, and praise songs dedicated to celebrated individuals and their remarkable exploits.

In Mali, the Sundiata epic chronicles the remarkable life and accomplishments of Sundiata Keita, the visionary founder of the Mali Empire. This epic saga celebrates his transformative journey from exile to becoming a revered warrior and ruler, highlighting his wisdom, strength, and leadership prowess as he overcomes adversity to fulfil his destiny.

Similarly, the praise songs of Shaka among the Zulu people honour the legendary status of Shaka Zulu, a revered leader in Zulu history. Known as Izibongo, these songs extol Shaka's military brilliance, leadership acumen, and significant contributions to the expansion of the Zulu Kingdom, cementing his legacy as a heroic figure in Zulu culture.

Among the Yoruba community, the Ijala chants, performed by traditional hunters, serve as a poignant form of heroic poetry. These chants, accompanied by rhythmic drumming and dance, commemorate the valorous deeds and victories of individual warriors, while also celebrating the collective bravery of the community in times of conflict. Serving as both entertainment and a repository of oral history, the Ijala chants reinforce cultural values, inspire future generations, and preserve the rich heritage of the Yoruba people.

On the other hand, court poetry in Africa denotes a distinctive genre of verse that thrives in the esteemed environs of royal courts across diverse African kingdoms and societies. Crafted and recited by adept poets and musicians, often under the patronage of rulers or nobility, it fulfils various roles within these societies. These include lauding royalty, providing entertainment and cultural expression, serving as a vehicle for educating and advising rulers, and imparting moral lessons, ethical values, and practical insights that influence the conduct and decisions of both rulers and courtiers.

## **ii. Praise Poetry**

Praise poetry refers to a unique verbal expression dedicated to celebrating individuals, communities, or notable events. It is characterised by eloquent verses that extol the virtues, achievements, and esteemed qualities of its subjects. Praise poetry serves as a powerful tool for affirming social bonds, reinforcing communal identity, and honouring significant figures within African societies. This sub-genre of oral poetry is deeply rooted in oral traditions and is often performed in public gatherings, ceremonies, or rituals. Praise singers or griots are skilled at improvising verses on the spot or reciting memorised compositions tailored to the occasion and the individual being honoured.

A very important example of praise poetry among the Yoruba people is Oriki. Oriki, originating from the Yoruba culture of Nigeria and other Yoruba-speaking regions in West Africa, is a traditional form of praise poetry or panegyric. It comprises poetic verses or chants dedicated to celebrating the qualities, accomplishments, and ancestry of individuals, families, communities, and even deities. The Yoruba people have been notable for possessing oriki even for non-humans (Olatunde, 2005). In his examination of oriki among the Yoruba people, Babalola (1996) asserts that such praise poetry has both physical and supersensible relevance. He argues that it is traditionally believed that the correct performance of oriki in honour of a progenitor gladdens the progenitor in the world of the spirits and induces him to shower blessings on his offspring on earth. Suffice it to say that despite the vagaries of modernity, the performance and utilisation of oriki have not shirked the subgenre's relevance.

## **iii. Occupational poetry**

Occupational poetry finds its definition within the specific contexts of various professions or trades in different indigenous communities in Africa. It encompasses poetic expressions or chants crafted and recited within these occupational spheres. These poetic forms fulfil diverse functions, ranging from imparting specialised knowledge to fostering camaraderie among workers, and even documenting the triumphs and tribulations experienced by individuals in their respective occupations. Rooted in oral tradition and performance, occupational poetry is passed down orally through generations within occupational groups. These poems honour the skills, expertise, and contributions of workers across a spectrum of fields, including farming, fishing, blacksmithing, and weaving. Through the use of poetic language and imagery,

occupational poetry highlights the dignity and significance of different occupations within the social fabric of African societies.

#### **iv. Proverbs**

Proverbs are concise and widely known expressions characterised by vivid imagery, conveying a general truth or superstition. Kwame Appiah (1992) contends that proverbs, succinct and often metaphorical statements, serve as more than mere moral and philosophical expressions within African societies. They act as significant tools for shaping identity, communication, and ethical reasoning. Covering a wide array of themes like ethics, morality, leadership, and human nature, proverbs are integral to everyday communication, storytelling, and teaching in indigenous societies. Acting as both mnemonic devices and guiding principles for behaviour and decision-making, they utilise vivid imagery, symbolism, and rhetorical devices to effectively convey messages. Reflecting the diverse cultures and languages of Africa, proverbs offer profound insights into shared experiences and collective wisdom. They also reflect societal dynamics, such as power, social hierarchies, and gender roles, playing roles in public discourse, negotiations, and conflict resolution.

#### **v. Religious Poetry**

Religious poetry encompasses highly imaginative expressions that encapsulate the spiritual beliefs, rituals, and practices found within diverse African and other indigenous, indigenous religious traditions. These poems often serve as channels for expressing devotion, reverence, and awe towards deities, ancestors, and spiritual entities. Finnegan (1970) and Okpewho (1992) highlight the oral nature of religious poetry in Africa, emphasising its transmission through oral tradition and performance rather than written texts. This oral transmission allows religious poetry to adapt and evolve over time, reflecting the dynamic nature of African cultures and spiritual beliefs. Religious poetry may address a wide array of themes, including creation myths, divine attributes, ethical teachings, and concepts related to the afterlife.

Deeply intertwined with oral tradition, religious poetry is passed down through generations within religious communities. It holds a central role in religious ceremonies, rites of passage, and communal gatherings, serving to inspire faith, foster spiritual connection, and reinforce religious doctrines. Through the use of metaphor, symbolism, and rhythmic language, religious poetry in African oral literature evokes a sense of the divine and provides insights into the



spiritual worldview of African cultures. It is often referred to as incantatory and divinatory poetry. For instance, Ifa, a sacred text capturing the religious dimensions of the Yoruba people, consists of incantatory and oracular poetry.

#### **vi. Funerary Poetry**

Funerary poetry locates its voice during solemn occasions such as funeral ceremonies, graveside rituals, or memorial services. These poignant verses serve as a heartfelt tribute to the departed, narrating their life accomplishments, virtues, and contributions, while also invoking shared memories and expressing the profound sorrow felt by the community. Essentially, funerary poetry is crafted with the specific purpose of honouring and commemorating the deceased. It holds a vital role within African funeral customs and practices, offering a channel for collective grief expression, a platform for celebrating the life of the departed, and a source of solace for the grieving. Moreover, funerary poetry often mirrors cultural beliefs surrounding death, the afterlife, and the enduring presence of the ancestors.

Jegede (2023) discerns nuances among the subcategories of funerary poetry: dirge, elegy, and lament. While each shares common themes, their performance contexts vary. A dirge is traditionally chanted near the deceased's body or the place of preparation for burial, while an elegy is recited in remembrance of the departed after their interment. A lament, on the other hand, delves into the personal grief and experiences of the mourner, offering a profound expression of mourning and loss.

#### **vii. Satirical Songs**

In traditional African societies, satirical songs serve as potent tools for social commentary, assessment, and entertainment. Karin Barber (2007) emphasises their significance, noting how they are intricately woven into the fabric of social critique and commentary. With their witty lyrics, playful melodies, and often humorous tone, satirical songs adeptly tackle sensitive or contentious issues in a light-hearted manner. Typically performed during communal gatherings, these songs take aim at individuals, societal norms, political figures, or cultural practices, employing irony, exaggeration, and innuendo to convey their message.

Beyond mere entertainment, satirical songs also function as a means of cultural resistance. They provide marginalised or oppressed groups with a platform to voice grievances and express

dissent in a creative and subversive fashion. Through humour and satire, these songs effectively critique power structures and offer alternative perspectives within African societies. Such depictions of satire have also found resonance in modern literary works, showcasing its enduring relevance and impact.

### **viii. Lullaby**

Lullabies in oral tradition are gentle melodies sung to infants and young children to help them drift into sleep. Passed down through generations within families and communities, these tender songs hold a cherished place in cultural heritage. With their soothing rhythms and comforting lyrics, lullabies create a tranquil environment, nurturing the bond between caregiver and child. According to Jane Beck (1985), a folklorist and researcher, lullabies play a vital role in preserving unique folk traditions, embodying the universal experience of caregiving and the profound love shared between caregivers and children. They serve as a testament to the richness of oral heritage, offering solace and cultural depth to communities worldwide.

### **Prose Narratives**

Another very important genre of indigenous oral literary expression is prose narrative. It must however be emphasised that many oral literary expressions are crafted in prose, distinct from traditional poetry. This distinction does not negate the presence of stylistic elements typically associated with poetry. Essentially, these narratives, anecdotes, or expressions maintain a prose structure, with artists refraining from incorporating formal poetic features like meter, rhyme, and vivid imagery.

Therefore, prose narratives in oral literature comprise diverse storytelling forms communicated verbally rather than through written texts. These narratives encompass myths, legends, folktales, anecdotes, and personal stories. Unlike structured written prose, oral narratives often feature fluidity and improvisation, adapting to the context of each retelling and the audience's involvement. In Africa, oral prose narratives exhibit a dynamic quality, with storytellers frequently improvising and tailoring the tales to fit the situation and audience. These narratives play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage, shaping collective identities, and nurturing connections between generations within African communities.

**i) Folktale**

A folktale is a fictional narrative rooted in the collective imagination of an indigenous community, passed down through generations to express societal values and cultural identity. It is a prevalent form of oral literature in many African societies, characterised by its dynamic nature and audience interaction. Linda Dégh (2001) underscores the performative dimension of folktales, highlighting their evolution through oral tradition and communal engagement. Though folktale narratives may contain elements of belief, they are generally understood as fictional rather than factual accounts.

Nonetheless, folktales serve important moral and aesthetic functions, shaping human understanding through storytelling, character development, and themes of justice. Structurally, folktales often follow a predictable pattern, including a dramatic opening, narration, musical interludes, and a concluding resolution. They are crafted with imaginative literary devices, making them artistically rich expressions of cultural heritage.

Daniel Kunene embarked on a thorough exploration of African oral traditions, with a particular emphasis on folktales, in his meticulously researched work titled *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho* (1991). Within this endeavour, he discerned various folk narratives based on their core themes, repetitive motifs, and prevalent narrative structures, especially within the context of Southern Africa. Also, Jegede (2023) categorises folktale types into several thematic groups. According to her classification, these include rescue tales, trickster-tales, why-tales, and dilemma-tales. In rescue tales, the narrative revolves around a scenario where an animal or character encounters trouble and is subsequently rescued by other animals or humans. Trickster tales, on the other hand, depict conflicts between unequal-sized animals, with the smaller and weaker character cleverly outsmarting the larger and stronger opponent. Why-tales seek to explain the origins or reasons behind certain natural phenomena or societal customs. Finally, dilemma tales present situations where the protagonist is faced with a challenging decision between two equally significant options.

**ii) Myth**

Myth serves as a narrative tool within cultures, typically passed down anonymously and orally, to reinforce social norms or offer explanations for natural and human phenomena, often in

imaginative or supernatural terms. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in his work, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986), characterises myths as repositories of collective memory, preserving historical accounts and cultural heritage. Akporobaro (2012:188) further categorises myths into various types: founding myths elucidate origins; creation myths explain the universe's nature, and hero myths glorify exceptional individuals. Additionally, myths cover themes such as fertility, birth, divinities, death, burial, and reincarnation. Myths therefore are prose narratives which explain the corpus of the belief systems and philosophies of any indigenous society.

### iii) **Legend**

Legends in traditional African oral traditions are captivating narrative tales passed down orally through generations within a community. Legends could be about humans or non-humans. These tales often revolve around historical or quasi-historical figures, mythical creatures, or remarkable events. Combining elements of truth with imaginative storytelling, legends become integral to a community's cultural identity. They may elucidate the origins of customs, landmarks, or traditions, while also serving to convey moral lessons or uphold cultural values. What sets this narrative apart is the ability to captivate listeners and adapt over time as are retold in various contexts. Whether recounting heroic deeds or fatal encounters, legends can be living or dead individuals.

### **Dramatic Forms**

Traditional performances often exhibit a vibrant and visually striking demeanour. Whether during festivals, ritual celebrations, or children's games, oral dramatic forms are infused with colour and entertainment. These enactments serve as vivid expressions of history, beliefs, and social experiences, incorporating elements of literary creativity and dramaturgy. Religious rituals, traditional festivals, and indigenous children's games feature a rich array of dramatic elements, including songs, dialogues, dances, impersonations, masks, costumes, acrobatics, and body paintings.

A primary function of festival drama in the African context is to reinforce the continuity of life, prosperity, security, fertility, and protection from malevolent forces. These ritual festivals provide a platform for music, dance, drumming, worship, and literary creativity. Through these

dramatic forms sourced from rituals and festivals, African communities promote moral education, aesthetic appreciation, and artistic development. They also nurture religious awareness, cultural sensitivity, and faith in social institutions.

## **Conclusion**

In indigenous societies devoid of written records, storytelling, myths, songs, and performances served as vital means of documenting significant events, ensuring their enduring presence in the collective memory. Myths, legends, epics, songs, and praise poems were crafted to preserve historical consciousness, narrating tales of origins, heroic deeds, and notable events. Despite the prevalence of writing in modern times, oral literature retains its distinctiveness, richness, and potency in both expression and cultural preservation. Even in contemporary literary landscapes shaped by technological advancements, folklore and oral traditions continue to serve as wellsprings of creative inspiration.

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## CHAPTER 5

### CREATIVE WRITING: FROM INSPIRATION TO PERSPIRATION

*Stephen Kekeghe*

#### **Introduction**

Creative writing is a form of specialised writing that involves the imaginative and artistic deployment of the resources of language to convey human experiences in educative and entertaining ways. It is simply seen as an imaginative writing that characterises literature in a particular dimension such as writing poetry, prose and drama. At the generic level, every written material is regarded as literature. Thus, we have religious literature, medical literature, chemical literature, geographical literature, historical literature, legal literature etc. However, at the particular dimension, literature refers to an artistic, fictional form of writing that is meant to inform, educate and entertain the reader. The practice of creative writing falls into the domain of literature in the particular perspective. For any writing to be stimulating, as we also have in journalistic reportage, it requires a touch of creativity. This implies that apart from the conventional practice of literary expression in the form of poetry, prose and drama, creativity is required in other related fields like journalism, auto/biographies, memoirs and historical narratives, to captivate the attention of the reader.

Over the years, creative writing has attained a significant place in the curricula of different universities in the world as a specialised sub-field of study, especially in America. British and African universities have also continued to adopt creative writing as a course domiciled in the Department of English. Scholars have continued to argue that since the technical and creative use of language constitutes the thrust of creative writing, it should occupy a significant place in the syllabi of universities. Tanure Ojaide (2005) notes that the enlisting of creative writing in the university system is pioneered by American universities. He observes that the delayed inclusion of creative writing in the curricula of African universities is because “African educational systems are generally modelled on European systems because of the colonial legacy” (1). Thus, the influence of the European colonial system on African universities caused a delay in the formal teaching of creative writing in African universities. Ojaide further

declares: “Africans who studied creative writing in the United States and returned to the Continent must have influenced its inclusion in the university curriculum” (1).

Creative writing is now taught as a course in Departments of English across universities in different African countries. Those who influenced the inclusion of creative writing in African universities are aware of the technicalities involved in writing works that are both pleasurable and informative. As special form of writing, creative writing requires formal language training for intended writers. Besides the social experiences that powers writers’ inspiration and imaginative consciousness, there is the significant place of craftsmanship which constitutes the main thrust of any creative endeavour. A good creative writer must endeavour to learn language skills, rules of grammar, concord, tenses and punctuation marks which come to bear in creative expression. That is, in addition to the special training on the use of images, metaphors, figurative devices and narrative strategies, a writer who wishes to write creatively in any of the genre is expected to assume the status of an apprentice learning the art of creativity. On this note, Tanure Ojaide asserts:

Writing needs practice to have an increasing facility with words, creative ideas and techniques. Consistent practice leads to perfection in whatever we do...Practice gradually leads to maturity and self-confidence. The artist needs training to develop to fully realise his or her full potentials (3)

Ojaide’s assertion above is apt. As a distinguished poet, scholar and university teacher, Tanure Ojaide has a robust knowledge on the significance of teaching creative writing in the University system. With a higher degree in creative writing in an American university and an author of over twenty collections of poems, novels and short stories, Tanure Ojaide’s perspective is a professional offering to intended creative writers.

### **Constituents of Creative Writing**

Creative writing is a serious exercise that comprises different features and components. For any artistic or creative writing task is realised, there are varying mechanisms that are put together. A finished poem, novel, short story or play involves different features that constitute its making. Some of these constituents or components of creative writing are: experience, inspiration, imagination, expression and perspiration. Effort is further made here to discuss issue of these



constituents of creative writing. This can be represented in this form: EXPERIENCE + INSPIRATION+ IMAGINATION + EXPRESSION + PERSPIRATION

## **Experience**

Experience is integral to creative writing. Literary works reflect and refract the prevailing experiences in the society. Every writer is a product of a society, from which he or she recreates the human condition. The writer draws inspiration from the myriads of social experiences and convey them through an aesthetic language and techniques of expression. The five sense organs are utilised by the creative writer in recreating human experiences. These are sense of touch, hearing, sight, taste and smell. By implication, a creative writer can draw imaginative story from what he sees, hears, touches, tastes, feels and smells. These experiences will enable the writer to create a vivid realistic picture of human society. This is why Ian Watt; author of *The Rise of the Novel* (1957) refers to the novel as “a replica of societal phenomenon.” Watt’s definition attests to the connection between social experiences and literary imagination. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which marked the beginning of the English novel, Tobias Smollett, a Scottish novelist and surgeon, defines the novel as “a large, diffused picture comprehending the characters of life” (Piper, 1963: 45-56). The sociological relevance of the novel is its ability to imaginatively capture human experiences with a sense of verisimilitude.

Experiences are raw materials for creative writers. The writers do not merely present factual experiences, they imagine situations that resemble life, to make statement on the human condition. In *The Progress of Romance* (1785), Clara Reeve declares that literature or the novel is “a picture of real life and manners and of the time in which it was written.” Every literary work is a product of experience. Writers like Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, George Eliot wrote novels that convey burdens of experiences engendered by the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dickens’ *Hard Times*, for instance, satirically represents the negative experiences of the industrial revolution in England. Though an imaginative narrative, Dickens draws his experiences from the society at that time. That is how experiences give rise to creative writing. The creative writer invents stories from the society based on his/her experiences. This is what Clara Reeve portrays in the definition above. This implies that social experiences create themes for the creative writers. Without public or private events happening

around the writer, he/she will have nothing to imagine and create. In other words, inspiration and imagination are anchored to experience, which gives birth to expression.

African literature continues to explore the different sociopolitical and cultural experiences since the era of British colonialism to the present. African writers reflect the prevailing experiences in the African continent, with the motivation for sociopolitical and economic improvement. So, social experiences power creative consciousness and writing in Africa. On this note, Chinua Achebe (1968) declares: “It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant—like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.” Achebe’s assertion points to the fact that the creative writer in Africa is conscious of and committed to the prevailing experiences in the African continent. This is suggestive of the fact that the value of a literary product is its representation of common human sensibilities and experiences. This is why Bamidele (2003) affirms that “art is meaningless without any validity to the moral or social” (26).

Different Nigerian literary texts give testimonies to the Nigerian experience—from colonial to independence. Novels like Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Ferdinand Oyono’s *Old Man and the Medal*, Camara Laaye’s *Radiance of the King* explore the manifestations of British colonialism in Africa. The instability and cultural conflict engendered by the colonial experiences in different African communities are depicted in these novels. This implies that it is the specific social experiences power the imaginative consciousness of writers. The cultural conflict depicted in Wole Soyinka’s play, *Death and the King’s Horseman* is informed by his experience of a particular traditional ritual practice of the Yoruba people. Soyinka’s exposure to the colonial experience and such indigenous religious practice of the Yoruba people enabled him to imaginatively capture experiences of cultural conflict, using the medium of drama.

Contemporary Nigerian poets, playwrights and novelists have captured the devastating experience of kidnapping and terrorism in their creative works. In the poetry of J.P. Clark, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Remi Raji and numerous poets of the new generation, there is commitment to reflect the sociopolitical and economic realities in Nigeria. There are also poems that depict private individual experiences. Soji Cole’s *Embers*, Stephen Kekeghe’s *Broken Edges* and Peter Omoko’s *Kidnapped* are good examples of how social experiences give birth to

creative writing. While Cole's *Embers* reflects the agonising atmosphere created by Boko Haram terrorism in the Northeast, Kekeghe's *Broken Edges* explores the devastating effects of herdsmen terrorism and Omoko's *Kidnapped* satirises the establishment of kidnapping as a repulsive career in Nigeria. Experiences of health and biomedical practices are also portrayed by the Nigerian writers. In Bayo Adebowale's novel, *Out of His Mind*, he narrates mental health conditions that are caused by economic decline and domestic stress. Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale's play, *The President's Physician*, raises questions that border on medical ethics and physician-patient relationship. Like Adebowale's novel, Omobowale's play is informed by his exposure to the therapeutic relationship in different health institutions in Nigeria and abroad. All these literary texts underscore the place of experience in creative consciousness.

### **Inspiration**

Inspiration is the mental stimulation that powers creative writing. It is the strong, overpowering feeling to write. Inspiration is simply referred to the muse (the greed god of inspiration). Creative writers are inspired to write. Inspiration is anchored to experiences. That is, if writers are inspired to create, they are driven by the burdens of experiences that they have had. Once one is inspired, he or she must not allow the feeling to slide away. At that moment, writers are expected to make some notes on the subject matter which they will develop later. Without sociological and psychological experiences, writers will have nothing to inspire them. Every literary text is a product of inspiration, which is driven by an experience or burdens of experience.

### **Imagination**

Imagination is a very significant constituent in creative writing. Every writer forms a mental picture of different situations before writing about them in the form of poetry, prose or drama. Imagination is the process of forming a mental picture of a situation that is not a practical experience. In creative writing, imagination is the ability of the mind to be creative and inventive. A good imagination leads to the creation of a realistic (not factual) work of art. Once a writer is inspired to write, he or she will form an imaginary picture of certain experiences and write about them. This is to say that experience and inspiration power imagination, which further leads to expression. Before a writer imagines situations, he/she would have first been inspired to write about certain experiences.

## **Expression**

In creative writing, expression is the act of writing products of imagination. The stories, poems or dialogues that are created are based on events or episodes in the mind of the creative writer. The first uninterrupted stage of writing is very important. Here, the creative writer responds to the inspiration by imagining situations and inventing story, events, images, dialogues and characters. In the process of expression, the writer ensures that he or she does not defy objective reality. The creative writer creates an imaginary world. The universe of the art is the universe of the artist, which is invented from his/her imagination of the universal world. In other words, the creative writer draws inspiration from the universe created by God, to create an imaginary world (the world of the artist). So, every literary work is a universe of its own.

## **Perspiration**

Literally, the word ‘perspiration’ is the process of sweating. In creative writing, perspiration is a rigorous process that requires the creative writer to aesthetically and logically improve a literary product. In Ben Johnson’s “Ode to Shakespeare,” he declares that the creative writer, “Who casts to write a living line, must sweat” (line 59). Simply put, in creative writing, perspiration is the stage of crafting, where the creative writer is required to tax his or her mind (and perspire). Here, the creative writer modifies what has been expressed, by strengthening its literariness. Any literary work requires the blend of content and form. While the content is the message of the text, the form is concerned with the aesthetic features and artistic language utilised to convey the message. In creative writing, the writer deploys language not only to inform and educate, but to excite and entertain the reader. For a literary language to attain this creative status, the creative writer is expected to be intentional about re-crafting what has been written. According to R. N. Egudu (1979), literature “is the art of saying or expressing something by suggestion or indirection” (2). This implies that in creative writing, the writer is required to express a message beautifully through techniques and images. In other words, “when we look at a passage from the perspective of literature, we are mainly concerned with the method of expression, which...is often characterised by suggestion or indirection, and imagination or invention” (Egudu, 1979: 3). Therefore, the business of creative writing does not end in expression. The creative writer needs to go beyond that by modifying the language texture, both to adhere to grammatical rules and to have aesthetic appeals.

## **The Place of Language Learning in Creative Writing**

Creative writing is a serious formal exercise that requires a good grasp of language and its technical rules. A good creative writer must have read intensely and should have a broad knowledge of *concordances* (agreements between subjects and verbs in sentences with the rules of exceptions), *tenses* (forms of verbs that express time) and *punctuation marks* (technical, grammatical marks that are used to indicate how a written text should be read). To be a good creative writer, one must have an excellent grasp of the grammar of a language and vocabulary development. This can only be achieved if one is a voracious reader. The implication is that every good writer is first, a great reader.

## **Practical Creative Writing: Elements and Features of Literary Forms**

Creative writing is simply literary writing. Primarily, the task of creative writing is domiciled within the domains of the three genres of literature and their sub-forms. These include poetry, prose and drama. Despite the overall idea of aestheticism that constitutes the centre-stage of creative writing, the various forms of literature possess specific distinguishing features and elements. Egudu (1979) clarifies the distinguishing features of these literary forms:

The essence of literature, therefore, is the fact that it is a method or art with certain identifiable features. This method or art has a number of facets of which three are major: the novel, drama and poetry. Each of these shares in the essence of literature as a method and has those traits which characterize literature. But each has its own central peculiar method of suggestion and invention: for instance, the novel suggests mainly by an invented story or series of stories; drama by an invented action or series of actions; and poetry by invented 'pictures' or images (3).

The excerpt above shows the uniqueness of the different genres of literature. There are, however, general features that cut across all the literary forms: their literariness. In other words, apart from the features and elements that are specifically used to characterise the different literary forms, there are specific characteristics and elements that are put into consideration while engaging in the creative task of writing the individual forms. Effort is made to further discuss these specific unique features in the various literary forms.

## **Writing Poetry**

Poetry is referred to as the oldest genre of literature, that has the structure of music. Poetry is said to have originated from music. The oldest form of poetry like the ballad, is a song that is accompanied with dance. In *The Study of Poetry* (1979), Egudu discusses the relationship between poetry and music: “poetry or music was originally meant to be sung or read aloud [...] This tradition of song has been faithfully associated with poetry” despite the print form that it has taken over the years through invention of the printing press (53). Thus, in the writing of poetry, emotions of the poet are rhythmically captured. This is why William Wordsworth defines poetry as a spontaneous outpouring of emotions that are recollected in moments of tranquility. In poetry, there is a transference of deep feelings and thoughts from the poet to the reader or audience.

Due to the brevity of form and economic use of language, poetry requires a great artistry. This is why Samuel Taylor Coleridge defines poetry as “best words in their best order.” The implication is that a poet selects the best of words (images and sounds) and arranges them to obey structural rules and create rhythmic effect. The common distinguishing features of poetry are *stanzas* and *verses*. In poetry, *stanza* refers to a group of words that form a metrical unit in a poem while *verse* is used to describe the rhythmic lines of a poem. The following poem is used here to illustrate the relationship between *stanza* and *verse* as distinguishing features of poetry:

We are in the hollow belly  
of the murky sky, floating  
on wings of the wind  
bearing anguish on our shoulders

A cemetery of dumb ghosts  
and callous caretakers  
shrouded by darkness  
punctuated by the owl’s songs...

(‘Hovering Horror’ in Stephen Kekeghe’s *Rumbling Sky*, 12).

The excerpt above is made up of two stanzas of a poem. Each of the stanzas consists of four lines (verse). The metrical arrangement of the lines shows the connection between poetry and music. Apart from *stanza* and *verse* as distinguishing features of poetry, the brevity of form and economic use of language is another feature of poetry. This is evident in the extract above.

In the writing of a poem, three major elements are commonly utilised. These are: *imagery*, *rhythm* and *sounds*. Imagery is the collection of mental pictures (images) in poetry. Images are created in poetry through the use of figures of speech and sensory appeal. That is, for a poet to create a good poem, he/she has to deploy figurative devices like simile, metaphor, personification, Euphemism, irony, synecdoche, oxymoron, paradox, hyperbole, apostrophe etc. to create mental pictures (images). Mental pictures are created in the mind's eyes through the art of indirection or suggestion of meaning. Through such images the reader can see beyond the environment of the text. Images in poetry can be illustrated with J. P. Clark's poem, "Ibadan" thus:

Ibadan  
running splash of rust  
and gold-flung and scattered  
among seven hills like broken  
china in the sun.

In the poem above, poetic image like 'running splash' depicts the picture of a stream that floats and splashes. The reader may have that picture in the mind. What follow are images like 'rust', 'gold', 'broken china'. All these works create pictures in the mind of the reader. The use of simile in the poem expresses a sense of strangeness in the comparison, and this helps to form pictures in the mind of the reader. Apart from the use of figures of speech to create images, poets also use sensory appeals, which means appeal to the sense organs— sense of touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. Where there are no specific figures of speech in a poem, a vivid depiction of an episode can appeal to the senses.

Other elements of poetry are rhythm and sounds. Rhythm is the flow, movement, alternation or variation in poetic lines. Like sounds, rhythm is a common feature of music that is found in poetry. Every poem is conditioned into a special rhythmic pattern. To achieve a special rhythmic effect, poets deploy sounds. Some of the common devices of sounds that are found in poetry are: alliteration, assonance, consonance, refrain, repetition, rhyme etc. These sound devices add sing-song quality to a poem.

### **Writing Drama**

Drama is a genre of literature that is based on imitation of actions. All human activities have dramatic elements in them. This is because human beings engage in regular *dialogues* and

*action*, which are common features of drama. Other elements of drama are setting, story, plot, characterisation, spectacles, dramatic devices and diction. It is through characterization, dialogues and actions that the message of a play is conveyed. The common features of drama are illustrated in the excerpt below:

*Light beams on a young man, EJAITA, chained to a domestic madhouse. He broadcasts his thoughts loudly to the audience.*

EJAITA: They think I am mad, these mad plunderers and the plundered! Two sets of people in two different worlds, united in absurdity. Look at their mocking eyes and little minds. All these lunatics who cannot possess their thoughts really think Ejaita, the grandson of Ogba, is mad and wrecked. (*Laughs.*) Those low-heads put these rusty chains on my legs. Beasts! (*He struggles to remove the chains, becomes visibly violent; he tries to stand but crashes.*) See what they are doing to the treasures of a community. Chains! They continue to chain the assets and fortunes. Yes, they have chained sanity. (*He turns to the audience.*) You see, those empty heads are free, hovering but grappling for life and meaning. A thoroughly sick community regards the fertile minds as insane and wrecked. How can I be a lunatic? Look at me! Look at my eyes, do I look like a plunderer? (*Children dance into the stage, singing and throwing objects at EJAITA.*)

CHILDREN: The madman is dirty. He is dirty  
The madman eats filthy food He eats filthy food

The madman runs naked

He runs naked

The madman is wicked

He is wicked (*The children get close to the madhouse, singing, laughing and throwing stones at EJAITA. As if amused by their performances, EJAITA laughs hysterically and suddenly breaks into a dance. The children, now obviously consumed by the performance, begin to sing more deafeningly. EJAITA stops abruptly and addresses them.*)

EJAITA: Children, you all and your hungry parents are made insane by lunatic plunderers. It is the insane that is sane. It is the sane that is insane ...

CHILDREN: (*Resume their singing.*)

The madman is dirty He is dirty

The madman eats filthy food He eats filthy food

The madman runs naked He runs naked

The madman is wicked He is wicked.

EJAITA: Poor children! Look at their wilting innocent faces. They don't know the configuration of an ailing community. They know nothing about the lunatic plunderer! Do they speak of dirt and death, and of filth and faith? Children of a blistering world, go to your mad parents. Go and feel the strains of repressions that sit on their skin. In this world of broken buds and charred remains, to be sane is to be ragingly insane.

11

Children (*Become more acrobatic.*): Madness is bad



It is bad  
Madness is a diseaseIt is a disease  
Mad people are wretchedThey are wretched  
Mad people are dirtyThey are dirty...

EJAITA: (*Laughs.*) Poor children of hollow hope, groping in the fog! You speak of my lunacy, but you do not speak of the lunacy of your parents and the one they bequeathed on you. Your distressed parents did not tell you about the lunaticplunderers. They did not tell you of the righteous rage of the redemptive lunatic. Do you know of the beauty and ugliness of lunacy? Do you knowof the lunacy that sets the homestead ablaze andthe lunacy that extinguishes the fire? Do you knowof the lunacy that takes all and the lunacy that gives all? Poor children of gloom and bile! (*The children raise the song again; this time, in a broken, low tone. EJAITA dances as they fade into the distance. He stops dancing, faces the audience and speaks.*)

(Stephen Kekeghe's *Broken Edges*, p.10-12)

As shown above, drama is based on dialogues and actions. Through the dialogues and actions of the characters, a story is conveyed to the reader. That is what makes drama a reflection of human activities and actions. So, a playwright is expected to bring to bear the social reality in drama by creating characters that manifest sociological and psychological reality.

### **Writing Prose**

Prose is a genre of poetry that utilizes the resources of narration (telling). The commonest forms of prose fiction are: novel, novella, novelette and short story. There is a sense of narratology in prose writing. The major distinguishing feature of prose are: *narratology, realism, atmosphere* and *tone*. In all the elements of prose fiction like setting, plot, story, characterization, theme and subject matter, realism manifests through them. By implication, the setting of a novel has to be a realistic human habitation. The story should have a sense of verisimilitude (it should resemble a social experience). The characters are to manifest convincing physical and psychological human traits. Dialogue is a common feature of drama that is reflected in prose fiction.

## Conclusion

The formal teaching of creative writing in the school or university systems is meant to enhance professionalism. As discussed, and illustrated above, creative writing is a serious, formalized skill that requires consistent training and practice. Apart from the constituents, features and elements that characterize the different literary forms, language learning and development occupy a significant place in the art of creative writing. The creative writer who wishes to write in English language must first, learn rules of concords, tenses and punctuation marks. This is because, in the business of creative writing, these grammatical and technical rules are indispensable. Also, creative writing is not a mere expression of ideas. It requires a creative expression of ideas, to have both informative and entertaining effect on the reader. The various constituents of creative writing like experiences, inspiration, imagination and perspiration are applicable to all the genres of literature: poetry, prose and drama.

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