

MODULE 1 FICTION

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UNIT 1 PRELIMINARY ISSUES IN FICTION WRITING**CONTENTS**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Creative writing is a many-sided venture. There can be many approaches to it. Indeed, one could assume that there is really no distinction between a good novel, and a good play and a good poem; that they are all ‘phases’ of one phenomenon – products of the imagination. But in fact, all writing is *CRAFT*. From such “crafting”, yes, a learner or reader could extract ‘knowledge’ of various kinds, from either *one* greater and famous *writer*, or from various works of *many* great and famous *writers*. Because it is “craft”, writing is a “task”, a practical task. But because the ‘practice’ of ‘describing’ an object, ‘narrating’, ‘telling’, about that one object, *is* different from “dialoguing” with that object when it is a person, a character in action on a stage, which character has a specific “voice”, a particular feature, creative writing needs to be “artificially” separated into fiction (novel), drama (playwriting) and poetry (poetic composing-like music).

Creative writing involves you as a writer writing always. It is a practical task. A laboratory for practising the art of using language in a creative way. It also involves you reading the work of great writers and emulating their styles. There is no creative writing without creative reading.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- appreciate the many-sided splendour of creative writing;
- appreciate the need for revising and correcting the first inspired onrush of words and ideas when you start writing;
- discuss the joy and exhilaration, or the challenges that you faced initially;
- determine from the beginning what kind of “knowledge” or information you consciously want your reader to imbibe from your work; and
- determine the content of your work (novel, play or poem) before hand because it is not accidental.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 How to ‘Open’ Novel-Writing

As is being emphasized all writing is purposeful. Think now of the word, “Creative”. To “Create” means to bring about by **imaginative skill something purposefully new**. Because the process affects the producer, the product, and the consumer (here, the reader) of the product, “creative” now becomes an all-affective thing which envelopes all three “stakeholders”. This is why a work of art interests the artist, appeals to the art appreciator, and remains a memorable thing with an autonomous life of its own.

3.2 Purpose and Method

Purpose and Method must then merge and drive each other along, much as the *fuel* in the tank of a car must be in an internally burning engine to ‘exhaust’ itself as it pulls/propels the engine along. How does a writer “pull the reader” into his story in the first place, from the *first* sentence in the *first* paragraph on the *first* page of the book? A reader must be “hooked”, like a fish attracted to a bait is. The fish is given an attractive reason to want to feed. That is why he sees the bait, goes for it, and gets “hooked”. Remember your fish need not “die”, but can be coaxed there from into an experiment, living or dying later? “Narrative Hook” as Rita Clay Estrada and Rita Gallagher call it, must make your reader **CURIIOUS**, **INQUISITIVE**, and give him a **REASON** for staying on to read your novel. Method and Purpose also underline a writer’s technique.

Consider the following three or four “Openers”/Methods and see the Intent/Purpose of the author(s).

“*Metal on concrete jars my drinking lobes*”
 [Soyinka’s Sago in opening the novel, *The Interpreters*]
 “*Akwaasa!: [The lorry blew through the breeze]*”
 [V.C.Ike in opening the novel, *Toads for Supper*].

“*Once upon a time a young man was savouring the pleasures of a new car*”.
 [Nkem Nwankwo in opening the novel, *My Mercedes Is Bigger Than Yours*]

“*Even before my death I have become a ghost...*”
 [Ayi Kwei Armah in opening the novel, *Why Are We so Blest?*]

Some American Romance novel openers include:
 “*She stood alone and lonely under the dim street lamp*”.

and “*I’m sorry, but my ad stated female, not male, to share my house*”, Joan Evans said, ignoring her instant attraction to the handsome man at the door.”

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Pick any *three* of these six examples of openers as intimation of *method* and *purpose*, and write down five ways in which they are good “baits” to draw a reader into the story and keep him there.

3.3 Shaping

Also, in the preliminary stage of beginning a novel, the ‘shape’ of the story is intimated. At the beginning the story rolls loosely around a number of subjects and persons. It may be around a family history, or a political event, or a police clash with a community, or a student who’s gone missing from school or village. You don’t know whether to write down a “facts or anecdotes” collection. Shape comes into your mind as you *THINK* and as you think, do not trust your mind to retain all of it; get a notebook, or some sheets of paper, plain sheets or ruled faint with margin; remember writing is hard work, and it needs tools to shape it, even as we use our hoes to shape mounds in the farm; or matchets to cut and clear the bush for farming; our spades to make the straight or curving ridges, etc. An unshaped written novel is an uncleared bush, full of brambles and undergrowths and wet, rotten leaves-strewn ground. “Writing is refined thinking”, says Stephen King (2000:131), like a well-shaped form is great harvest.

You shape your mind for creative writing by writing what you know through your heart of imagination. You can write about anything you can imagine.

3.4 Tools in Hand - Your Mind, Pen, Notebook, and Machines

Natalie Goldberg [*Writing Down The Bones* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986.5-7)] says that since writing is an attempt to “penetrate life”, student learner-writers must begin at the beginning – that is, with their *mind*. I agree. The beginner’s mind embarks on a journey, a task. To shape the journey (see 3.3 above), to expedite the task, let’s lend you Robert Olmstead’s analogy: writing, he asserts, is like driving at night. You only have your headlights, but manage to get where you’re going. As writers, we have our shaped novel, play, poem, short story, essay, memoir destination in mind. There are “small concerns” – tools we need. Goldberg lists these tools of concern: the pen you write with. What kind is it? – ballpoints, pencils, felt tips... are slow. Use a fast writing pen so your thoughts are caught up with your hand. Pen must “feel the connection and texture” with paper. You also need a notebook which is to you what “a hammer and nails are to a carpenter”) – preferably a cheap spiral note book easy to carry in a notebook size purse. The notebook may have your favourite commercial, or school, or government advert cover. Also, try out a variety of blank-lined or graphed-paged notebooks, some are hard cover, others are soft. Even when you are travelling on a bus, or in an aeroplane, and a thought you must capture turns up, use the ticket back cover. Some famous writer- doctors used their prescription pads. There was this colleague – a brother and a writer who resided in New York when we were postgraduate students-he never had a notebook. He always typed, and once on train, he had his type-writer on his laps while I played “Travel Scrabble” with someone else beside him. Well, today, there are laptops- do you have one? Late J. D. Ekwere always “wrote” by speaking into the reel-to-reel tape recorder in his office. But nowadays there are the handy Japanese – Chinese, or other Asian-made mini cassette/radio recorders, cheap and battery operated, so you could beat PHCN!

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Discuss the use of at least two “tools” in the prelim stages. How would they help you later?

4.0 CONCLUSION

People always come to the business of creative writing thinking that “technique” means the actual manner in which a writer struggles to shape his material. Here we have tried to let you see that “technique” really means not just those technical details in the actual execution, but also the manner in which you set about, right at the beginning, to acquire those *BASIC* physical necessities –

the needs of the crafts – with which the desired aim in writing will be accomplished. Thus knowledge of *what* you want to *write*; the *shape* of what you are to *write*; the manner in which, like great masters of writing, you want to hold your consumer of product, your basic tools, from pen to paper and machines – this knowledge is basic. With them you are prepared to WRITE DOWN THE BONES – a strong, meaningful creative work which has MARROW!.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Why do you agree, if you do, with this conclusion?

5.0 SUMMARY

In this first unit, we have *not* burdened you with an overload of definitions. Writing in its process and processing defines and re-defines it. We have instead led you to appreciate how to open a novel like the old masters, why you need to shape your thinking, and why you must know your basic tools.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. In what sense or senses is creative writing a ‘task’.
2. Open a story of your own in a paragraph using any method as “bait” for your reader.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Goldberg, Natalie. (1986) *Writing-Down the Bones*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Olmstead, Robert. (1997). *Elements of the Writing Craft*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Story Press Books.

UNIT 2 STORY SELECTION AND PROJECT

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- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 What is “Story”?
 - 3.2 Sources to “Select” from and Principles of Selection
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Some writers believe that a good story is the best assurance of success in the final product called the novel. And so, they emphasize the need for a well selected story. In every culture the world over people thrill over to a good story. So, in this unit we shall let you into the VALUE and PLACE of story selecting and the legal implications.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify what constitutes a story;
- discuss the varieties and variations in story perspectives list sources from which to select; and
- discuss the principles basic to selecting a story project the story as if you were a camera-eye.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is “Story”?

Ordinarily, as any good dictionary or thesaurus can tell, a story is just the account of events or incidents whose ordering may be extremely loose, tight or disorderly but in whatever form they ultimately possess elements of human sense to an extent. We see “Stories”, more or less, in this sense in the TV news, or newspaper thrillers or sensational rendering of a killing, a theft with perpetrators breaking and entering, a conversion or healing of persons on a Christian crusade ground, or even church worship occasion. In fact, our everyday life is full of “stories”.

However, when it comes to creative writing, story assumes a special *dimension*. It becomes an “imagined” or “imaginative”, “invented” – and so, called “fictional” narrative, full of contrived intrigues so plotted as to receive a variety of names such as “Anecdote” (when full of humour and amusement), or “legend” (when couched as transmitted history of a people from their previous times), or “romance” (especially as in a cowboy adventure with love incidences), or a science-fiction/thriller from an H.G. Wells or a Jules Verne, or a Girls’ or Women’ chit-chat magazine, or an H. Rider Haggard ‘mystery’ in a remote African jungle) when a man and woman, or a boy and girl *fall in love*.

Neither still, nor every kind of fictionally imagined tale with the love- element is a romance story. For instance, N.T.A’s “Super Story” is not romance; the series has one “heart-kicking dilemma, one life-threatening quandary or another, one fear-raising or emotional death or divorce or another as “elements”. So “*Super Story*” is a “soap” (opera). Other television shows such as “*Desperate House Wives*” is not romance, though the stories show the women “experiencing” “growth”, “new beginnings”, “raising children” (alone), ‘leaving their husbands’, “becoming economically independent”, or even attaining worker-status for the first time.” The story is “women’s fiction”. Once creativity comes into play, however, a story is a story when well plotted and is arrestingly gripping.

So, you need to clarify to yourself, ‘*ab initio*’, what story you are going to tell: *what* it is about; *how well ordered*; *theme*, and *basic idea*; and *premise* (the road map the story follows), (Estrada & Gallagher. 1999:1-5).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What makes a story? Why must you select?

3.2 Sources to “Select” from & Principles of Selection

If you have understood “story” as treated above, you’ll realize immediately that there are, and can be, so many stories, and varieties and variations and that as a writer you need to select carefully and meticulously. But first, where does one select from? As can be seen, and has been foreshadowed above, everyday life is a vast source to pick stories from.

In addition, you could pick and build on pre-existing folk-tales and communal stories. After all, as a writer you are also a researcher.

However, there are principles of selection involved here. In using everyday stories and communal folk stories which are in the society’s common pool of available

story stores, there are no copyright laws. The writer-researcher is free to take stories, re-shape them, modify the characterization, and give them new language.

In fact, this freedom is to select what the whole principle of adaptation is all about; it is what the imagination is to re-create (see Unit 1, 1.0).

However, where there is a previously told story, especially written up under a known individual's name and title, you must respect the copyright restrictions so as to avoid going to the "Revenue Court" for plagiarism or manuscript stealing.

Armed with unrestricted materials, the writer must now "find" his/her own "story". To find the story, you must "twist" a plot, give characters new motivations, believable behaviour, add your "invented" complications so as to give your selected story a personality, a uniqueness that will enliven the tale.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Apart from communal property folktales, and your everyday life observed sources, can you name and assess some *three* other sources for stories (Re: TV news, World disaster areas and the like).

3.3 "Outlines" of Stories

Someone has said that a writer, creative writer, is an architect, a cook, and farmer. He knows the concrete names of things around him. He must bring them specifically to life, give them their correct, living names, and put them in an order, in an outline. Through an outline he creates a list that may form chapters, or even chunks of the same story. An "outline" helps you grasp and grab your ideas, and stick to them. Jot down something like these ten "ideas". As Natalie Goldberg would:

Swimming

The stars

The most frightened you've ever been

Green places

How you learned about sex

Your first sexual experience

The closest you ever felt to God or Nature

Reading and books that have changed your life

Physical endurance

A teacher you had

(Goldberg, 1986.21)

Each is concrete, not abstract; each is real stuff. In “Outlining” you are forced to be honest, to be down to earth, not a romantic dreamer, or an escapist coward. Making an outline disciplines you; forces you to avoid procrastination. Chinua Achebe says it forces you to *do now*, not go on proposing, “*I’ll do, I’ll do*”, forever like the rat without a tail that ever hoped to grow one but never did. An outline gives you the chapters; gives you the characters; defines directions and situations, sharpens your mind to see the entrances and exits for your personages, may even push you towards seeing a resolution or conclusion, an ending to your story, especially when from a well-tuned, well-directed, soul-rending conflict, you have given your characters appropriate motivations for action within their assigned personalities.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What is an “outline”? Expand on one of the ten listed above from Goldberg.

3.4 Projecting the Story

There is a novel, *Anywhere but here*, written by Mona Simpson. The story opens in a crisis, like this: “*We fought. When my mother and I crossed State lines in the stolen car, I’d sit against the window and wouldn’t talk. I wouldn’t even look at her. The fights came when I thought she broke a promise. She said there’d be an Indian reservation. She said that we’d see buffalo in Texas. My mother said a lot of things. We were driving from Bay City, Wisconsin, to California, so I could be a child star while I was still a child.*”

“Talk to me,” my mother would say. “If you are upset, tell me”. But I wouldn’t. I knew how to make her suffer. I was mad. I was mad about a lot of things. Places she said would be there weren’t. We were running away from family. We’d left home. Then my mother would pull to the side of the road and reach over and open my door. “Get out, then”, she’d say, pushing me.”

Robert Olmstead has suggested that a lesson in “story projection” can be deduced by analysis this way:

This novel begins with a two-word sentence “*We fought*” – a subject, “we” and verb, “fought” It (the sentence) tells *what* has been happening between the narrator and her mother, from the *narrator’s point of view*. These two words give conditions. They create a complicated dynamic. Yet one that is easy to understand.

It is *not* a drama taking place before your eyes, but still a drama that *was* and *is* constant. The word, “*would*” maintains the past tense. ‘*Would*’ is the past tense of ‘*will*’ and indicates habitual action, in this case, the *relentlessness* of the fighting.

In the second sentence we find out that their car is *stolen*. But this information comes to us through an *adjective* inside a *prepositional phrase* inside a clause. That the car is stolen is made to be much less important than that they are fighting. Nevertheless, we are told the car is stolen and it isn’t mentioned again in this passage. Simply put, this information is revealed in an adjective, not in a statement of fact, as the fighting is.

Another statement of fact is “*I was mad*”. Notice how each time the narrator makes a statement of fact, she follows it with an example, reason or detail. The thinking is *personal* and *childlike*. Sometimes it doesn’t make sense. But more important, it *appears* to make sense. The narrator’s *strength* is in her thinking. This is why her mother’s behaviour in the fourth paragraph is so striking. It has consequence. Knowing the car is stolen now comes back to haunt us. The crisis is enlarged. However dangerous we thought the situation, we find we *misjudged*.

Look at all the italicised words and phrases, and you will agree the story and its opening crisis are concretely projected. The reader is on solid ground, the author-creator is on solid earth; the ‘personae’ of the story are solid reality.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Open your own imaginary story with a two-word sentence. Come up with *ten* possibilities. I suggest these three examples for you:

“We argued...”

“We ran...”

“He cried...”

4.0 CONCLUSION

If you are, or were a javelin-throwing sportsman, you would have no problem appreciating the word, “projection” “throwing-forth and far away”. The action will be full of energy, excitement, and breath-taking. This Unit tells you just the place of “projection, “audible-visible” energy of a story that starts its narrative journey.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Write in three more sentences following my own sentences, to expand your *understanding* of the importance of “story projection”. Or is a story better “handled” than “projected”?

5.0 SUMMARY

In this second Unit you have been given the concrete grounds for knowing what a “story” should be. You were shown how even the smallest word/phrase could energize a tale. The place of “outlines”; and how to select from sources without breaking intellectual property laws are some of the aspects inn this unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What is “copyright”?
2. Discuss any difficulties or problems you had in self-Assessment Exercise 4
3. Give three reasons why thinking of “outlines” for your story is equivalent to evolving suitable topics for sections of your imaginative work.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Goldberg, Natalie. (1986). *Writing-Down the Bones*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Olmstead, Robert. (1997). *Elements of the Writing Craft*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Story Press Books.

UNIT 3 SETTING: SITUATION AND ENVIRONMENT

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 - 3.2 Setting by What You Hear: Sounds and Storms
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 - 3.4 Setting by Character: Environment and Personality
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Estrada and Gallagher insist, very correctly, that a story is not written in ‘chapters’, but rather is written in “scenes” and their “sequels”, that is in *actions organized round a situation* and the *reaction contrary to the previous*. A setting must be like a string of beads to keep a story on track. When well set out, you can see a pattern that we diagram like this; and you must be able to *describe* and *define* concretely.

SCENES = ACTION

SEQUELS = REACTION

Composed of

1. Goal (direction you are going)

2. Dilemma
(Choice must be dictated now)

3. Disaster

1. Reaction (may be opposition)

3. Decision

Indeed, for a story to begin well, the writer must think it through first. To think it through you must know exactly which direction you are going, where exactly you are at a given stage, how you are going to reach your destination.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- establish a good story in the first scene you set to hold your reader in the first few pages;

- determine what a STORY GOAL is determine what is a SCENE GOAL is;
- decide how to end each scene in a conflict or preparation for a coming conflict, big or small; and
- decide how to adjust a story so as to balance pacing, length, emotion and actions in scenes you have set.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Setting by What You See: Vision and Space

In a novel called *State of Grace*, Joy Williams writes a setting like this:

“... And the ground never dries. The yard is rich mud with no definition between it and the riverbank. Tiny fish swim in the marks our feet make. The trees are tall and always look wet as though they’d been dipped in grease. Many of them are magnolias and oaks. Pods, nuts and Spanish moss hang in wide festoons. The river is the perfect representation of a Southern river, thin and blond, swampy, sloppy and warm. It is in everyone’s geography book. I was not shocked at all when I saw it. I was not pleased, although it is quite pretty...”

This SETTING relies on *What* can be seen. Olmstead says that only a storyteller who has, and is, as a *sharps* teller like Williams has an eye for SURROUNDINGS, and a DISCERNING language for the *particular vision* can write so distinctly or clearly. The “world” this writer describes is “oozing” and “shimmering”. The movement suggests a person’s gaze crossing a landscape, moving from ground, to the tress, to the river. Each descriptive sentence is *TIGHT*. Each begins the same way: “...The yard... is..., the trees are..., the river is” with simple verbs, relating *simply* what is *seen*, *what* is seen *is*. This description *defines*. The trees are defined: *magnolias, oaks. ‘pods, ‘Nuts and Spanish moss hang in wide festoons’*. This programme developer is reminded of an almond tree in his compound at that time of the year when it sheds its dried broad leaves and they scatter far and wide in the wind beyond the foot of the tree itself into the neighbours’ compounds and onto the streets. In this kind of setting a writer shows confidence in how to perceive land and environment. In the end, what is seen is not just *physical*, but begins to embody an inner, *spiritual* dimension that gives a setting its peculiar characteristic, magic and attraction.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

If you think you have followed this part of the Unit, do two things now:

1. Choose a setting you know well, be it your yard at home, a part of Lagos lagoon near you, or the stretch of highway from Abuja International Airport into the city centre, and describe it.

2. Use a simile/metaphor to give a “push” to five descriptive phrases of your own: e.g. “The water is rotted, smelly...” With a “push”- “The water is rotted, smelly like a lifeless pond where no fish can live”.

3.2 Setting by What You Hear: Sounds and Storms

In a collection of short stories by Obi B. Egbuna titled *Emperor of the Sea* (London: Fontana Modern Novels. 1974), we read this setting.

“...Falilah suggested we went for a walk down to the creek. The moon was out... Falilah and I sat on a log of wood, all by ourselves in the silent stillness of the night... like two birds of the air... everything peace and in accord with nature... for about two hours, no word passed between us. She just sat there, in complete silence, staring at me, with a mysterious smile on her face... like a High Priestess in a trance... her eyes burning right through me... I began to feel uncomfortable ...tried to get up and tell her it was time to leave, but... it was as if an invisible force was holding me down..... Then, suddenly, Falilah said, ‘Can I trust you?’...”

And, from the book, *The Fearful Void* by Geoffrey Moorhouse, we read a setting:

“...It was a child, screaming in nightmare, which woke me. As I rose from the depths of my sleep, sluggishly, like a diver surfacing from the seabed, the corridors of the hotel echoed with those pealing, terrified cries. They poured over the balcony beyond my room and filled the courtyard beneath; they streamed out into the town which was cooling itself, ankle-deep in sand under a new moon, and they were lost, plaintively, among the low dunes scattered to the south and to the east. I reached consciousness to the dimmer sound of a father’s voice gentling the in fact terrors away, and the night became stealthy with silence again”

In each we observe dramatic settings. Obi Egbuna’s is a novel/short story; Moorhouse’s is a travel book. Each main character is involved in night, a strange, exotic setting. We enter the experience of nightmarism and *mesmerism* with the tellers. Names are concretized – “Falilah”, “I”. They do not know what lies ahead. Sound becomes silence, and silence sound. “Down to the *creek*...” “Moon was out,” “silent stillness of the night...”, “no word passed...” “...mysterious smile as a High Priestess in a trance” (Obi Egbuna’s). Then, “...cries poured... filled... was cooling... ankle-deep... scattered...” (Moorhouse’s). There is innocence in both Falilah and the child. Silence gains human attribution – the ability to move as a thief or as a High Priestess in a trance. In a gripping setting what you *hear* may be as tough as the *silence*

you don't seem to hear. That kind of paradox gives strength to the setting.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Take a setting like this: "The girl and I walked on in the silence, only hearing our breathing and the crunch of sand beneath our bare feet. Then suddenly, as if determined to jar us or separate us, an eerie wind as if driven by a thousand whistling pines crashed into us..." Continue with three other sentences.

3.3 Setting by Weather and Geology: An Environment

James Lee Burke has written, in a novel, *In The Electric Mist With The Confederate Dead*, like this:

"...The sky had gone black at sunset, and the storm had churned inland from the Gulf and drenched New Iberia and littered East Main with leaves and tree branches from the long canopy of oaks that covered the street from the old brick Post Office to the drawbridge over Bayou Teche at the edge of the town. The air was cool now, laced with light rain, heavy with the fecund smell of wet humus, night blooming jasmine, roses, and new bamboo..."

Peter K. Palangyo of Tanzania has written in the novel, *Dying in the Sun*, as follows:

"...She had weighed him down to the ground and she was running her hands over his short woolly hair, kissing his throat and chest with tears of joy, of life rediscovered, wetting his neck and chest. He surrendered himself with his arm around her repeating slowly and inaudibly, 'yes, yes, my darling'... They lay there... Darkness was slowly closing in but one could still see the narrow pathway that meandered in its carelessness toward the destination they were not too impatient to reach. Birds were still singing, especially the evening dove, and grasshoppers were moving around noisily in the dry grass. A few herd boys were crying goodnight to each other across the valleys. A cow too was mooing because of its overloaded udder or because it missed its calves.... Kachawanga was strikingly quiet ... with birds and grasshoppers singing their praise to God..."

In these extracts, weather and environment clearly give *TEXTURE* to setting, to story. *Thunderstorms, blizzards, hurricanes, extreme heat or cold, the narrowness of the pathway* of a place the author knows well, the meandering of the path, the movement and singing of grasshoppers in the dry grass, the valleys of cows and herd boys – all these *STRENGTHEN* your setting.

Men and women live in weather and coldness or heat, in darkness and twilight every day. Weather can enhance Mood. They travel together in a story. See how oblivious the lovers in Palangyo are: she “weighing him down...”, he “surrendering...”. Detail upon detail informs the reader about what lies beneath the ground, what other lives float around, “... birds singing ...grasshoppers... noisily in dry grass...” Take note of the words which *describe*. “...churned... drenched... littered... cool... laced... light... heavy... face and wet... blooming...” in Burke; and “... weighed... running... short woolly hair... wetting... repeating inaudibly...” in Palangyo.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Make a list of as many words as you can which describe or evoke weather, dry or rainy. - -
2. Where do you live in Nigeria? Follow *any* of the *two* patterns above and write about a storm, or a lovers’ meeting scene which is descriptive and evocative of place and emotion.

3.4 Setting by Character: Environment and Personality

Here is how Asare Konadu in the novel, *Ordained By Oracle*, tells us of a man who would not sleep on a bed, but rather preferred a mat on the floor because he complained that the bed was too soft.

“...This man was a farmer. He had lived through most of his life on his farm, sleeping as we are doing now (on a coarse mat on a floor). Sometimes he even slept on tree trunks when hunting. Now, he had some money and wanted to see Accra...”

“...To him it was like the Moslie man from the Republic of Mali coming to Kumasi...”

“...Yes, as the Moslie proverb goes, he who does not know Kumasi has not seen heaven. But to him the heaven was Accra. He booked into a hotel and at night when shown into his bedroom refused to sleep in the bed... He said any time he fell asleep he found himself in a deep, deep hole and he kept dropping through a bed of feathers which fluttered round him. So he rose and slept on the carpet on the floor. It was then he had a fine sleep”.

You can see here that Konadu gives this farmer an “interior” as well as an “exterior”, coloration with his taste for a particular kind of sleeping comfort, and imagination of what could befall him otherwise. Here is set, a character who loves to balance rural life-time exposure -with the “heaven” of cities, and for whom only one city, Accra, holds out that taste of heaven. By the last sentence you see this character is set as a man of realism, set habits, a ‘traditional’ man, rugged – “slept on tree trunks when hunting...”; a kind of adventurer, now that he has made some money. You can see how the contrast provided, even speculatively, about Accra and Kumasi makes places, towns, to shape an image of this farmer for the reader.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This Unit has elaborated for you what setting relies on in a good, and gripping story. You must know your imaginary places well, be they a road, a river, some bush, or forest; be they big or small, such as seeing all of a country, like Ghana from a small hotel room. Sounds and silences give texture and concreteness to setting. They create environment; food eaten, or being prepared; a marriage planned or hoped for as in Palangyo’s work, a sense of the eerie or extraordinary, even a dream as in Egbuna or Moorhouse. Setting gives flesh to both situation and environment.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this third Unit, you have been exposed to the characteristics of setting in a story. You have seen the range and variety of settings. Your “vision”, in the things you can see physically as well as the things you can imagine expands through settings; what your ears can gather, “off” and “on” stage, as it were; the kinds of weather - stormy, calm, rough and unsteady, hot or cold give your setting of a story some substance. You can now “see”, “hear”, and “create”! And these are elements of creativity you must imbibe during creative writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Invent a diagram of your own in line with suggestion in 1.0 (Introduction) to illustrate “setting as a string of beads” (You may consult your Rosary! If you have or believe in one).
2. Which writers seem to you to make “better” settings – Africans or non-Africans? What do you regard as “better” – vocabulary and diction, or descriptiveness?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Goldberg, Natalie.(1986) *Writing-Down The Bones*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Olmstead, Robert. (1997). *Elements of the Writing Craft*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Story Press Books

UNIT 4 STRUCTURE: PLOTS AND PLOTTING

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Are “Plots” Necessary?
 - 3.2 Story inside Story
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 - 3.4 Action as Determiner
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Since creative writing is a purposeful work, just as we have purpose in everyday life, the story needs to be *solid, practical and ordered*. That way writing becomes vital, clear, and good. There must be a *pathway of travel* in the story. Structuring the story is the key to *shifting into the essentials* of the human experience you wish to express. Structuring gives the writer a perspective. Structure builds together the elements of the story you want to tell. Disparate as trees, the sky, the moon, the stars may be, they are bonded in structure. Embedded in the structure are the plots and subplots. These *fertilize* the story. Structure helps generate the ideas. Structure itself is idea *in itself too*. By it you know where you are going. Your mind will be ‘leaping’, because structure is metaphor. Structure is image. Structuring helps you to slowly grapple with the positions which the pillars and pins of your human tale must take.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

As the Introduction has tried to emphasize, STRUCTURE is the basis of all design and architecture therefore.

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

- describe fully the architectonics (structural design) of putting a story together
- determine why plots are necessary;
- decide how to plot your work without making them *mechanical*;
- list the many dimensions that make up a story;
- determine the correct handling of the intricacies of story structure list many kinds of what is called “action” in the novel;

- decide how to handle action in fiction-writing; and
- decide how to use action or actions to project the fullness and significance of the story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Are ‘Plots’ Necessary?

Once you have decided on *what* you are going to write about, which normally would be *something you know*, and you are to tell it in *truth*, remembering that truth is so vital that the Lord Jesus always pointed its importance by telling his listeners, “Verily, verily... I say unto you ...”, you must settle to plot it out. You must be careful here. Life itself as we lead it is not quite a “plotted” thing. You plan a trip, yes, for instance. You plan to have a family, true. But you do not set about these mechanically. Some very serious – and successful – writers have said in interview that they do not *believe* in plotting, because they see “plotting and the spontaneity of real creation” as incompatible. They believe that “stories make themselves” and that the job of the writer is to give a story “a place to grow”, and so merely “transcribe the stories”. The real truth of course is that even if stories are “relics” one “finds” in life, as “fossils” are found by the geologist in the ground, the writer uses “tools” from a “toolbox” deliberately to shape them or present them *intact* to the world. How do you use your “tools”?

Your tools are used consciously because you have an aim and a direction in which you are moving. As in our tradition, the Elders used to admonish young girls newly married and learning to prepare pounded yam (foofoo) for their beloved husbands, “pound well, and you pound inside the mortar, but pound carelessly, and you’ll crush the bones of your thighs ...”. A writer of a story is a pounder. The “pestle” and “mortar” are tools. They must be used with care, caution and deliberateness, moving on in the direction of achieving the smoothest, most appetizingly edible pounded yam. The process is not just carried on “intuitively”. We go stage-by-stage, knowing when and how much water to add, when to turn the malleable powder in the mortar right or left, when to pick up the small knife and scrape off the bits of the foofoo from the pestle. Plotting a story is like using these necessary steps. Therefore, do not think that those who reject plotting are altogether right. Indeed, it was the case that the earlier debate we referred to (see p.... of...) on whether creative writing can or cannot be taught hinged on this argument about the necessity of plots. A famous successful writer like Stephen King, while seeming to distrust plotting, eventually spells out the inevitability of the need to plot a story when he asserts that:

.....Plot is a big tool... it's clumsy, mechanical, anti-creative.... plot is... the good writer's *last resort* the dullard's *first choice*. The story which results from it (plot) is apt to feel artificial and laboured ... lean more heavily on *intuition*... because my books tend to be based on SITUATION rather on STORY....

After this, he goes on to stress that the use of the “outline” and “notebook” – filled CHARACTER NOTES may “enslave” or “liberate” a writer's, even produce a good plotline in a story by a device called the Edgar Wallace Plot Wheel. A good plot helps to sustain the interest of the reader in a novel.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. How can the “plotting” of a story be a *check* on the absence of *control* which “intuition” alone could cause in the process?
2. Give *two* differences between “SITUATION” and “STORY”. (See further in TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT below).

3.2 Story Inside Story

When you have plotted, that is, outlined your story well, got your intuition to be controlled, and remain controllable; you may wish to tell a “story” *inside* the main story. The problem is how you move with grace and smoothness into that *second* story.

Here is how a well-known novelist/creative writing teacher once illustrated the process.

“It was with those feelings that he heard the uncle’s suddenly Solemn voice. What was this voice? This tone? What story?.”

It was in the dark afternoon on a November day of sleet, told the uncle. We waited and we waited for Louetta to get home from her trip into town. The darker it got the scarer we got”.

What does a learner writer learn from such a beginning as this? The author of the story is a man called William Goyen.

Now, see, first, how he moves both *reader* and *listener* WITHIN THE LARGER STORY. The movement is *gradual*; it is *inexorable*. It is as if things are sliding under water, falling under a spell. Robert Olmstead describes this first move as that as of the ‘solemn sound of the voice’. Then the question, “What voice”?.

Then a reference to TONE, then “What story?”, and before any answer is forthcoming, the story commences. Yet we are not sure until we too are already under its spell and read the words, “TOLD THE UNCLE...”. The story, second story, has thus already ‘Begun’! The storyteller inside your story will sound different from the narrator, will be *unique* within the larger story.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Write down five phrases that describe a voice. For example, “His voice (sounded like) metal on stone”.

3.3 Handling Conflicts

You need to know what “conflict” in creative writing really means, implies. Conflict is not simply disagreement. It is not simply the tug and pull of opposites.

Take this passage from the story “Two Stories” by Bret Lott. He writes, via the narrator:

“...I used to imagine it wasn’t the flu that killed my mother, but a broken heart at the death of her beloved.

But the truth of the matter was he’d moved into a logging shack a year before he’d broke his neck, and only showed up to our house at twilight on Saturday nights to have at my mother, then to attend church the next morning, his black hair slicked back and shining with pomade”.

Here, something is happening in a mind. A soul is troubled. That is the “conflicted mind”. The writer lets you know and feel, through the narrator, the imaging of a broken heart.’ ‘the fact of flu,’ ‘the truth of abandonment,’ ‘the reality of a broken neck’ – all in four lines! The conflict occurs in a contentious mind, a mind that has to face up to the differences between imagination and truth. The author also reveals and explores the way the imagination can still operate in the face of what it knows to be a fact.

Let us take another example in which conflict is in the minds of the characters. Here is a passage from the story, “Living through the winter” by Mary Bush. It’s a telephone talk.

*“...He was ready to hang up when she answered
‘Hello?’ She said*

*He couldn’t move. The voice went through him like
ice. He could feel it even after she stopped speaking.*

‘Hello’: She said again.

He heard noise in the background, the TV going, and a

*man saying,
‘who is it?’ over the sound of the TV.*

‘Who is this? She said

He hung up the phone gently.

He sat there for a long time, dazed, not feeling a thing...”

See the conflict: someone, a man, a young boy, whoever intends to talk, to converse with some other person – a girl, a woman. He is intimidated, somehow. The scene is full of sound. Conflicting sounds – the ‘voice’ at other end of the phone which goes *through him like ice*, TV set is going in the *background*, like a voice through ice. Then there is a man’s voice, booming, perhaps, with ‘who is it?’ and the girl or woman on this side repeating, ‘Who is this?’ You can see the conflicts and the thwarting of the caller’s intentions – ‘dazed’, ‘not feeling a thing – the conflicts lead to a defeat, according to writer Bush.

Conflicts can be created, especially in war situations, boxing arena settings, football pitches, or even in a classroom. They must indicate a direction to solving their tangling or to reveal a commitment or disengagement, a lack of interest, timidity or stubbornness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Make two (2) lists for phrases, like (see the one from Lot’s story) “I used to imagine ...” and a second list for phrases like “He was ready to...” (from the Bush story). Do five phrases for each:

e.g “I used to imagine (think) that girls are shy, but to tell you the truth...” (5 times)

e.g “He was ready to give up the effort, but just then his big brother showed...” (3times)

3.4 Action as Determiner

A master of the art of how novels are structured, Dwight V. Swain has been quoted as asserting as follows: “*That a story tells how a character overcomes obstacles on the way to an important goal*” (Estrada & Gallagher. 1999:47). The actions of characters, especially when in conflict or in expressing opposing views, make a story. Estrada and Gallagher affirm that a so-called story about “happy people, in a happy house, in a happy town, in a happy country, in a happy world” is NOT A STORY. There must be obstacles to action, or action producing challenge to what someone would want to solve but then cannot do. Characters are determined by actions. That is life. In a well-written novel (romance novel, for instance), Estrada and Gallagher insist that “love, that most basic emotion that is part of every person on this planet hurt, anger, despair and betrayed must mingle with hope, doubt, anticipation, desire, fear, disloyalty, wishes and faith” (1999:48). Action in all these is determiner of conflict. Take this passage that Robert Olmstead uses to show how action to interior’ determines characters, from the story, “Shed of Grace” by Melissa Pritchard.

“...I will not defend myself. I was experiencing..... revenge towards my sister. But I intended this familiarity to stop; I fully intended to control its limits.

Later, when he drove onto the dirt road which led to the graveyard, saying that he had left something, I knew that my revenge had conjoined with his and that we would very soon prove uncontrolled, weakly submissive to our instincts.

He parked behind the white shed, leaving the door of the truck yawning open...”

See how the *mutual* ambitions of the Narrator (Sister) and the Husband (of the first woman) to betray her become one. See the ‘action in the character’s interior – what Gabriel Okara calls the inside, in the second paragraph. The action takes place as ‘thought’ – so it is not told, it is not narrated – but the use of the first person narration style carries it. The first person narrator is in alliance with the reader, thus drawing him to immediately share *potential* action as *completed* action.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

1. List phrases that show a character expressing interior action. For example, “I was experiencing ...”; “I know at once that ...”; “I had planned...”

2. In the first two lines of the passage, the narrator-character explains her. Create a small movement where one of your characters does the same thing. For example, "...I was enjoying what was happening on a Lagos beach at Xmas..." You may further refer to the opening scene of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

3.5 Description inside Structure

In 3.4 we tried to show how action can drag the reader into the heart of a story when well told. We indicated that sometimes not all action is *narrated*, as Pritchard demonstrates.

Now we do not mean that *describing* a scene or describing narratively is not necessary. After all, a story must be *told*. We now want to refer here to the importance of description inside the story structure - remember we are still elaborating on the phenomenon of PLOT.

Stephen King asserts (2000:173) that description is what makes the reader a *SENSORY PARTICIPANT* in the story (emphasis mine). Good description is a *skill* one must learn. You learn it by reading a lot, and writing a lot. How much must one write? Just write. Don't be like the young female lecturer who started writing a novel, describing characters and situations six times, and then discarded all, because she said each attempt made her "sound like Achebe". But she wanted to be *different!* How? Is Chimamanda not like an Achebe in *Purple Hibiscus*?

In description, you first *VISUALIZE* what your reader is to experience; then you *TRANSLATE* that vision into words inside your story. Description must be neither *thin*, nor too *thick*.

Let us examine Elechi Amadi's *The Slave*, chapter 10:

"...Olumati felt vaguely happy and wondered why. Then he remembered he was due to occupy his new house in a few days' time. The walls were now dry and smoothly scrubbed. So were the floor and sleeping mounds. What remained was the charcoal-and-chalk decoration on the front wall. It was not really necessary, but Aleru was insisting. His house, she said, should look right, whether he was worried or not..."

...As usual, Aleru called in Adiba to help. Adiba was known to be good at putting on wall decorations. Some said she took after her brother in matters of skill. Like flood waters which always collected in the same places after rain, skill tended to reside in

certain families...” (*The Slave*. 1978.83).

Here, description consists in a few well chosen details – Olumati’s new house, ... walls now dry, smoothly scrubbed,...” remaining the “charcoal-and-chalk decoration on front wall...”. The skills of the Adiba family are like “flood waters... collecting in same places after rain...”

Description here too is straight. Not too thin. Not too thick. It is also a set scene with wonderful use of adjectives as modifiers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has given you all the possible main guidelines to place of plot and description or narration inside a story. The main content is that a plot is as necessary to a story as arms and legs are to a total body. Conflict, Action and Description are those limbs.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this fourth unit of module 1, we have dealt with structure in totality. The human anatomy, for instance, without flesh, is a gathering of bones without beauty, dry and frighteningly white. When bones of an anatomy are covered with full flesh, there is beauty of form. Structure is the beauty of a story.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by the “architectonics” of story-telling?
2. Give a brief description of the lounge of a modern fast food joint in a Nigerian city of your choice as *prelude* to a story on a festive occasion.
3. Name ten novels you’ve read and find descriptions in them memorable.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Goldberg, Natalie.(1986) *Writing-Down The Bones*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Olmstead, Robert. (1997). *Elements Of The Writing Craft*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Story Press Books.

UNIT 5 SOUND – THE RHYTHM OF PROSE AND DIALOGUE FLOW

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Syntax & Rhetoric – Is it Important?
 - 3.2 Language of the Word, or the Word of the Language?
 - 3.3 Dialogue
 - 3.4 Rhythm and Voice
 - 3.5 “Poetic” and “Prosaic” Language
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The English language is not the African’s native tongue/language. Both as speaker and as writer of it therefore, the African must know the rules of correct usage of the language, though he may be doing his thinking in his indigenous idioms or thought – patterns. The creative writer who is African, therefore, needs a particularly careful approach to the use of English if he is to be a successful writer. He must be master of GRAMMAR. There is ‘grammar’ in ‘conversational’ language, there is ‘grammar’ in reading, and there is ‘grammar’ in writing. For us in Nigeria, in particular, one must notice there is a difference, somewhat, between *American* and *British* grammar, just as in oral speech, there are differences. The creative writer should stick with the *British* for British grammar, says Stephen King, is more “sturdy” than the American. Whether Americanizing, or Anglicising, any way, you need to know that *Bad grammar produces bad sentences*. A good novel is always written in good sentences.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- determine the importance of exhibiting a good knowledge of syntax in your writing;
- distinguish between complete and ‘incomplete’ sentences;

- make language sound ‘pliable’;
- create good dialogue; and
- distinguish between ‘prosaic’ and ‘poetic’ language in the novel.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Syntax & Rhetoric – Is It Important?

Natalie Goldberg does three things to illustrate the centrality of good syntax for the writer who has a good ear for language, who knows all the parts of speech of English, who can distinguish between ‘nouns’ and ‘verbs’ and ‘articles’ and ‘conjunctions’. To the writer, the good writer, words in English are not simply wooden blocks to be moved around at random. As the mind is always trying to construct a meaning, so the words must be arranged to make sense (see unit 7). To adapt the first example of the three which Natalie Goldberg uses, let us write, like this:

1. *“...I can’t write because I’m a bucket of water and my mouth goes dry and there’s nothing to say and I’d rather drink water from a cup...”*

Now, if every word was equal to the other, and there was no *ordering* of words, and your mind cannot construct anything, you’ll have to repeat the words, something like this

2. *“Write I’m an mouth rather water say drink and nothing dry I an write say and my goes drink cup I’m an write I nothing say goes can’t because nothing cup I’d dry to and say water rather my bucket nothing there’s say.”*

Or, she suggests, now put in some full stops, a question mark or two, an exclamation mark, colons, or semi-colons. Do that anyhow, without thought. Don’t try to make sense. Have fun.

3. *“... Write I’m an mouth rather water. Say drink and nothing dry! I am write rather say and; my goes drink cup because an there’s. I’d to dry goes write can’t. Cup my bucket nothing. Rather to my water...”*

Here, you see clearly that the English language, British or American (and therefore, any other brand – Nigerian – others African, Australian or Canadian) needs to be *locked* into a sentence – syntax of this formula: S – V – (O) that is Subject – Verb – Object (direct or indirect). So, sentences come out as, “I see the bird” – or “Okon killed the goat”, where a “subject” acts on an object, where “I” or “Okon” is the centre of the universe. The way we think, in sentences, is the way we see. Philosophically, for the writer, there is a two-way traffic. “I see the bird” – but the “bird ‘sees’ me” too “Okon *killed* the goat, - but the goat has an effect on him too.

This philosophy, opened up, is the spread of perception, along the slide of language, for writer and reader! Natalie Goldberg rightly insists that “the more you are aware of the syntax you move, see, and write in, the better CONTROL you have and the more you can step out of it when you need to... breaking open syntax, you often get closer to the truth of what you need to say” (Goldberg:63). Nouns and verbs remain the “two indispensable parts of writing”; They make subject and predicate, beginning with a capital letter, and ending with a full-stop, they combine to make a COMPLETE THOUGHT which starts in the writer’s head and then “leaps to the reader’s”.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Name *all* the parts of speech in English that you know.
2. How important to good grammar is syntax?

3.2 Language of the Word, or the Word of the Language?

As we have seen from the section on the place and significance of syntax – that is that *ordered arrangement* of words in a sentence to create sense, feeling, and total meaning – words are the key to basic thinking for the creative writer. There’s the “tale” told about James Joyce, the famous Anglo-Irish novelist who authored *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake*, monuments of word-craft in 20thc novel-writing. Joyce had spent a whole day in his study, supposedly writing chapter of the novel, *Ulysses*. Later in the day, his friend and biographer, Stuart Gilbert, came to see him. Joyce, the story goes, looked all *wan* and exhausted from his exertions. Gilbert asked how many chapters Joyce had written that day. The reply was short, shocking but insightful and significant – “*one word*”, Joyce is said to have replied, “One word, all day?” Gilbert couldn’t believe it. “*One word*”, Joyce repeated, and fell silent.

The “language” which a “word” speaks, then, in any good writing, tells tales and is far-reaching. Because the writer must have the ear, the mind (intellect) and the skill, to *select* and select the most *fitting*, fitting to character, situation, plot and overall meaning!

For instance, Stephen King illustrates, emphasizing the need for brevity in style, and accuracy in choice of words, that there are *two* types of *verbs*: ACTIVE and PASSIVE, where the first *does* something, while with the second is *being done* to the *subject* of the sentence. “*YOU SHOULD AVOID THE PASSIVE TENSES*”, because everything about its use is *passive*, unresponsive, weak, circuitous, tortuous and cold, like lawyers; *Torts* language!! King says, and one must agree. Write:

1. “Freddy and Myra carried the body out of the kitchen...”

Not “The body was carried from the kitchen by Freddy and Myra...”

2. “The meetings is at seven...”.

Not “The meeting will be held at seven o’clock...”

3. “My romance with Shayna began with our first kiss.”.

Not “My first kiss will always be recalled by me as how my romance with Shayna was begun!..”

4. “The writer threw the rope...”.

Not “The rope was thrown by the writer...”

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Make three sentences using the passive tense, and another three using the active form of the verb.
2. Give three reasons for preferring your *active* sentences.

3.3 Dialogue

We are still focusing on *sound* in the prose of the novel you are to be taught to write. Dialogue, well written, can flow, can carry humour and entertainment; can be poignant; can give insight into the colour of the soul of your characters; can not only *tell* the story, but also *move* the telling along, propel it, dig into the forward-moving action. It is important to let you know that “dialogue” is not “conversation”. Lynn Emery asserts that “...*conversations ramble on with lots of digressions. In fiction, dialogue ...serves a purpose – to increase tension, share information with the reader ... move the plot along...*” (Estrada: 85). So, there are four purposes of good dialogue:

- (i) to *reveal information about* the characters and their backgrounds, or supply back story
- (ii) to *increase tension*
- (iii) to *move the story forward*
- (iv) to *show character motivation, growth, perspective, emotion.*
(Estrada.86)

Let us use Estrada and Gallagher’s illustration to show how these four purposes can be achieved.

First, a *man* and a *woman* meet. They start to “dialogue” as follows:

“You want to marry me?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Why would you want to do that?”

“Because I’m thinking’ we get on well together.” “And that’s a basis for a lifetime of wedded bliss?”

“Yes, ma’am”

Here, there is a bit of characterization – the woman is a bit resistant. There’s a bit of plot – there is a proposed marriage. But there is no *description* of the characters or their actions.

Now, let’s see what happens when there is some narrative, some description:

Angela’s hand stilled on the tea pitcher. She stared at the man who sat on her new leather couch as if he owned it himself. As if he already belonged there.

“You want to marry me?”

“Yes, ma’am”, he said, his green eyes full of fun and mischief.

He was as handsome as always and twice as unreliable as he used to be. Some things never changed; Rand Martin was one of those things. Her hands shook as she poured tea into a glass and filled it with ice cubes. She couldn’t think of one logical reason for this madness.

With a voice as calm as she could make it under the circumstances, she asked the question that popped into her befuddled mind. “Why would you want to do that?”

“Because I’m thinking’ we get on well together”. She blinked several times, absorbing his words but not really understanding his meaning. “And that’s a basis for a lifetime of wedded bliss?”

He looked surprised at her question. “Yes ma’am.”

Here, the dialogue is unchanged. But elements of narration and description have added more to the scene – the *setting* is clear; the characters now have *names*; it is clear why the woman is *resisting*; she is *nervous* because she is *attracted* to the *handsome Rand Martin*, though he *seems unreliable*.

The four purposes must combine to flesh out all the robustness of the novel, build tension, show the characters' *characters* (inside) and advance the story by a known pace to the resolution.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Do the man and woman speak similar dialogue?
2. How does the “external” balance the “inside” of a character once dialogue opens?

3.4 Rhythm and Voice

Must a writer always write complete sentence each and every time? Stephen King gives us an appropriate answer. “If your work”, he says, “consists only of fragments and floating clauses, the Grammar Police aren’t going to come and take you away. Even William Strunk, that Musolini of rhetoric, recognized the delicious pliability of language. ‘It is an old observation’, he writes, ‘that the best writers sometimes disregard the rules of rhetoric’. Yet he goes on to add this thought, which I urge you to consider: ‘Unless he is certain of doing well, [the writer] will probably do best to follow the rules’... If you don’t have a rudimentary grasp of how the parts of speech translate into coherent sentences, how can you be certain your *are* doing well? There is a comforting *simplicity* at the heart of the *rudiments of grammar*, where there need be only *nouns*, the *words that name*, and *verbs*, the *words that act*.”

In other words the *rhythm* and *voice* of the writer’s creation are embedded in an effective use of correct language. For example, “Rocks *explode!*”; “*The Broadcaster transmits!*”; “McCrimon urges in *Writing with a Purpose*.”

3.5 “Poetic” And “Prosaic” Language

It is in the need to create, with correct, sharp sentences, and clothe up word with unusual meaning that the writer creates “poetry” and/or “prose”. Especially, if the voice on the particular subject is expressing a deeply felt, urgent message from the heart, the passion-filled heart of a speaker. The language, for instance, of most of Martin Luther King Jnr’s speeches in the pursuit of human rights and equality of status for black people in America in the 1960’s; the speeches of Winston Churchill urging Britain on to war against a tyrannical Hitler; or the speeches of Dr. Hon. Nnamdi Azikiwe baiting the colonial masters of Nigeria in the years, 1934-1964.

Even the language patterns created by today's Pentecostal pastors in their prayer and devotional daily manuals, one can see "poise" and "poetry" flowing together. This example may suffice; it is a prayer from Rev. (Dr.) Chris Kwakpovwe's *Our daily manna* Devotional booklet. Observe the *rhetorical patterns, balances of associated sounds and phrases*:

"This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it! *Today*, I *declare* and *confess*... all spiritual blessings.... I *boldly declare*... and *dwell*... I *believe and I declare* no evil, no plague ... can come near my dwelling... I believe and I declare that I shall *not die, but live*... *Today* ... the Lord is my helper... *Today* I shall not waste my destiny... *Today* I *declare* and I *declare* the Lord is my *banner*... *Today*, I hear the sound of ... rain...

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the main content, it is clear that good, clear language is at the root of good, winsome writing. One does not have to be a musician to plant music into the language of a story in a novel. Emphases on selected words, each sweetened as roasted groundnut, to modify an old Irish playwright's summary of it, will see the vision of an author gain a place on the shelf of classics.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have underscored and illustrated the major objectives of language usage when "prose" becomes "poetry" as the author opens his heart, whether it is in a persuasive public speech of a character, or it is in the impassioned prayer language of a devotee in the privacy of his church premises.

We've seen that language needs to be "pliable" – syntactically coherent and grammatically "sturdy".

We've seen how to use sentences with active verbs. So that our language 'marches' like a soldier in a parade, not lilt along like a wounded snake through dry grass.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Use a good library to search out a speech from *one* of Martin Luther King Jnr. of America, Sir Winston Churchill of Britain, and Dr. Hon. Nnamdi Azikiwe of Africa, and note five language qualities of the speeches.

2. Write a sample “speech” for a *male* or *female* character in a novel you propose to write on the consequences of exam malpractice in a tertiary institution. (See the example of Camillus Lekah’s *when the wind blows*).

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Goldberg, Natalie. (1986) *Writing-Down the Bones*. Boston & London: Shambhala Publications.

Olmstead, Robert. (1997). *Elements of the Writing Craft*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Story Press Books.

Political speeches from various sources of excellent public speakers like:

America’s Malcolm X

America’s Martin Luther King, Jnr.

Nigeria’s Hon. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, President, Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Prayer Devotionals by top class world Evangelical Preachers such as Rev. Dr. Uma Ukpai, Rev. Dr. Chris Kwakpovwe, Reinhardt Bonke and others.

Winston (Sir) Churchill, war-time leader of Great Britain.

UNIT 6 CHARACTERISATION (WITH SYMBOLS AND IMAGES)**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Building the Character
 - 3.2 Character and Life
 - 3.3 Characters as Symbols and Images
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A novel is like a rich forest upon which human beings depend for its wealth of crop trees. The crop trees are tall oaks, deciduous and evergreen Iroko; fruit – bearing mangoes; or pear trees. The edge of the forest may be lined with climbing shrubs even sweet-smelling flower shrubs. There may even be a few tall palms – oil palms, coconut palms, date palms at the edge of the forest. Characters, men, women, children; professionals, from domestic servants, vehicle drivers, artisans, to royalty and rulers, politicians, dictators, emperors, presidents and kings occupy places at the edge, in the middle or dead-centre of the book. Characters are the ‘trees’ of the novel. They have to be tall enough to be *remembered*; fat enough to *hold certain ground*; intelligent or foolish, or wicked or kind enough to move and be moved in the ‘world’ of the story being told; in the ‘universe’ of the story. Who does not recall Achebe’s *Okonkwo*? Who has forgotten Elechi Amadi’s ‘*Concubine*’ *Ifeoma*? Who does not relish Ernest Hemingway’s ‘Sailor’ and even the ‘Sea’ which though watery, lives with the old man’s medal as a *lively, concrete*, creature? Indeed, it is in *characterisation* that the writer readily becomes a creator and a style maker. Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, for example, is so gripping in attention that the reader and interpreter of the soul of the story of a collapsing civilization can no longer even remember that he was just an ‘illiterate’ high priest of a god of a tribal setting battling the ‘civilized’ giants of a cultured and colonizing religion and commerce-driven empire! When a character is *that* good, the reader *suspends* disbelief! Real ‘drama’ resides in the *character*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- create or *build* a character in fiction;
- create characters based on life experiences or and the imagination alone;
- detect the difference between *character in non-fiction* and *character in fiction* (Olmstead 14-15; Goldberg, 143);
- determine what makes a character *real* in a *real world*;
- discuss the meaning of appearance in a character;
- determine the position of both hero and heroine – in the mesh of action called conflict;
- discuss the development or growth of a character in fiction; and
- infuse proper motivation for your characters, whether they are *protagonist* or *antagonist* (adversary).

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Building the Character

Society is made up of a range of people. In some, the people are said to be in “classes” – poor and working class; rich and leisured; they live in the countryside or cities and urban conglomerates; they work in farms or in factories. In a work of fiction, the writer draws from this range of people. The characters, that is, the personages of the action in the story, like the crop trees of a rich forest, must be *built, constructed, made rich, richer*, than ordinary mundane life-living people in everyday society. Stephen King says “...the job (that is of *building* the character) boils down to *two* things; paying attention to how *real* people around you *behave* and then *telling the truth* about *what you see*. You may notice that your next-door neighbour picks his nose when he thinks no one is looking. This is a great detail, but noting it does you no good as a writer unless you’re willing to dump it into a story at some point” (King, 189).

Let us take one illustration. Aubrey Kachingwe of Malawi (born 1926) has written a novel, *No Easy Task*.

“Briefly, the novel tells the story of Jo Jozeni, son of a village pastor. Jo is offered a job on a newspaper in Kawacha, the capital of a British colony in Central Africa. Although his roots are in the country, Jo gradually takes to life in the city; and through his colleagues becomes involved in politics, though always remaining a little outside the ‘inner circles’ suddenly his attitude changes: at a political rally... it is his own gentle, retiring father who emerges as a hard, and determined political fighter. Jo is faced with a difficult choice: should he identify himself with his father? Or take the line of least resistance, marry his girl, and settle down? Or look for something else out of life?”

I have quoted the blurb on the Heinemann African Writers Series, editorially advised by Chinua Achebe, word for word. That gives you the setting. That gives you the environment. To see how Jo Jozeni's character is built up and merged into the circumstances in which he must make his choice, let us look at the *very opening* of the novel:

"I'm sorry, man. We can't take any more passengers in the bus. It's full", the conductor said. He started to close the door.

"Can't you squeeze me in, please?" I pleaded. "I have only this small suitcase. That's all".

"I can't take any more", he said firmly. "The traffic patrolmen are very strict these days. You want me to lose my job?"

He rang the bell.

"This is the last country bus for today, and I have been standing here waiting for it in this hot sun for over one hour", I said, half to myself, "surely, you can't leave me?"

I dropped my suitcase and clung to the rails of the door of the bus. The conductor pushed me off and I almost fell under the wheels as it started to move. My suitcase was run over but I was luckier.

I stood up, dusted myself, and looked at the suitcase. It had been flattened out of shape, and was gaping half open. A little dust had got inside.

It made me bitter to think that I would have to walk three miles back to the school at Makwasa, and possibly spend the night alone in an empty classroom. The place was empty now because the school was closed. I had just been there to see the principal about getting me scholarship to England, but he had promised nothing. Now I was returning to my father at Bangwe, a little mission station thirty miles farther in the interior.

I did not like to go back to that school even for a night. The principal would probably tell me to go away. Reverend John Webb and I never got on well, although he was the missionary in charge of all this area, including Bangwe where my father was the parish priest, and had thus known my parents years. Lately he had been my principal. Perhaps we knew each other too well.

Suddenly, I heard a car hoot. Shaken, I jumped off the road. The car pulled up, and the two men inside it laughed heartily.

I recognized the one driving. "I am very sorry for blocking the road, Mr. Dube", I said apologetically.

"One should expect that sort of behaviour on a country road", he said without anger. "But you are educated, Jo, and ought to know how to conduct yourself on a highway."

"I am sorry, Sir, I repeated.

"That's all right. Jo. Only don't do it again," he said. "Now, why are you here?"

"I am going to Bangwe – I was going – but the bus has left me behind," I said. "There was no room"

"I am going there; can I give you a lift?" "If you can, Sir, most grateful".

"Take your bag and come in," he said. He turned to his friend. This is Jo, the son of the Reverend Josiah Jozeni."

"And this gentleman. Jo" he said to me, "is Mr. Zake Lukani, a great friend of mine. We are both going to see the old man. Make yourself comfortable"

I shook hands with Mr. Zake Lukani as the car started to move...

Dan Dube was the first African to be a municipal councillor on the white-only Kawacha Town Council... an outstanding businessman and clever politician... tall and broad, at forty-five ... respectably handsome... I never understood how the mysterious Dan Dube and my father were such good friends... my father was over sixty, and, because of poverty and hard work, looked much older than his age... laughed seldom, and outside his clerical work... had no ambitions. Yet the two were good friends.

(Kachingwe: No Easy Task. 1966.1-3).

In this tightly-knit, economical writing, you can see how the characters of Jo Jozeni, Dan Dube, Reverend Josiah Jozeni, Mr. Lukani, and even Reverend Webb have, with deft touches, been made to *stand* as the trees in this forest of a story!

The rest of the novel develops details that tell the reader of poverty, ambitions, politics, beliefs, views and conditions that move society.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Point out how you see character build-up here.
2. What “traits”, from the bus conductor to Dan Dube’s offer of a lift to Jo, tell you that Jo will have “no easy task”?
3. Use a Dictionary to see how many meanings “trait” has.

3.2 Character and Life

The big question is, “Are the characters in fiction drawn directly from life?” If they are, why then do writers often disclaim the fact when they write, ‘... any resemblance to any living person here is purely coincidental and unintended ... characters here are all imagined ...’.

If novels are about life, if they are about society as men and women and children and families and communities, share experiences in a context, then the characters must *reflect* life. They must come out of society.

Natalie Goldberg says, if fictional characters must do this, that is *reflecting life; come out of society*, the writer must follow the old adage. “Don’t tell, but show” – that is, “don’t *tell* us *about* anger – or any of those big words like ‘honesty’, ‘truth’, ‘love’, ‘sorrow’, ‘life’, ‘justice’ – *show* the reader the *situation* “in which the character brings out the particular *feeling* or *embodied* idea. Let the character live sharp and clear and be the concrete picture you describe. For instance you can write about the nature of life from observing the birth of a child in a modern hospital: just describe *WHAT* you see: the mother’s face ... the rush of energy as the baby finally enters the world with a piercing cry, after the nurses have urged and/or bullied the woman in her several attempts at “pushing”, the husband breathing with his wife... the reader will *see* characters illustrating the nature of life.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Recall a number of “life-situations” in Nigeria, such as a traffic jam, a scuffle between two children retiring from school and struggling to pick mangoes, and do two to three sentences “showing” of the characters involved.
2. Describe *one* breath-taking incident you’ve ever experienced in no more than a paragraph.

3.3 Characters as Symbols and Images

You may wish to write an allegory, or a parable. In such seeming “fantasy” writing, your characters are “abstract” objects personified. In John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, in many Biblical “stories” which Jesus used to illustrate facts and rules of life, the characters were not always “persons” as we normally think of them. Instead you may want to focus on the things around you that make you ask whether life is worth living or not, things like crime, poverty, injustice, death; or the “things” inside each one of us, things like frustration, boredom, despair, and turn them into “living” characters. Read carefully the parable of Jesus at Mark 4:1-10, 13-20, and you will see how an abstract of “farmer” (“Sower”), “Seeds” on “path”, on “rocky places”, or “thorny ground”, and on “good soil” translate from abstractions to concrete features of life in “the word” of God among various experiences of people – with Satan, with superficial attitudes, with succumbing to deceits and temptations. In the end, “sower”, “seed” and “soil” become lively characters.

To further clarify how abstract, symbolic characters may be understood and created, let us look at a contrast: realistic characters created *in action*. Remember that all your characters are in a *setting*, have *voices*, have *beliefs and concerns in their environment*, do *develop* and *evolve*.

‘Abstract’ characters tend to be *fixed* in a situation where they exist to illustrate some idea or belief. Now, real-life characters are *real*.

Let us take an example of a character really created by “showing” her actions, in the famous American novel. *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, as Robert Olmstead illustrates it.

“...The other girl, Daisy, made an attempt to rise – she leaned slightly forward with a conscientious expression – then she laughed, an absurd, charming little laugh, and I laughed too and came forward into the room.

“I’m p-paralyzed with happiness” She laughed again, as if she said something very witty, and held my hand for a moment, looking up into my face, promising that there was no one in the world she so much wanted to see. That was a way she had. She hinted in a murmur that the surname of the balancing girl was Baker. (I’ve heard it said that Daisy’s murmur was only to make people lean toward her; an irrelevant criticism that made it no less charming.”

Here is a character, real, with a name; you come to know her from *WHAT* she is doing: - “attempts to rise, “leans”... “laughs”... “speaks”... “laughs again”...” “hold hands”...“looks”...”promises”...”hints”...”murmurs”.... Each *action* affects the story-teller because, he in turn, “...leans”, “laughs,”

“listens”, “holds” her hands. Behaviour and appearance here help to further concretize the character. It is not like that in the abstract characters of the parable or allegory.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Make a list of your own, of as many movements as you can, which you think a person could make to display ‘character’
2. One character’s series of actions observed by another *do* affect that observer. Now, take these examples:
 - a) “Ugo was crying and I started to cry too”
 - b) “Nkwekwe tossed the bone in the air and the dog leapt and grabbed it in its snout”
 - c) “Esther leaned toward me and I learned away”

Using one of these, develop a short scene between two characters.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Character and character creation are a big challenge to the writer. He has to *build* them; he has to take them from life, but not brazenly or carelessly; he has to balance various aspects and observe and use the least detail, provide them with believable motivations, or even make them abstract. Characterization produces excellent story.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Do you agree that characters are the tall trees that populate the forest that a good novel is?

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, characterization, we have set facts about character-making in fiction concretely out for you:

- Characters must be well-drawn to become memorable.
- A notable character can be made out of any kind of social type.
- Characters are built, develop, and are not still-pictures, but mobile and dynamic in their actions and words.
- Characters come from real world and life around the author, not just from imagination.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by the expression “Reader suspends disbelief when a character is good”? (See ‘introduction above)
2. Do African stories differ from American or other non-African ones? In what *concrete* ways?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 7 SENSE: TOTAL MEANING, IMPORT AND MESSAGE**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Reality and Illusion
 - 3.2 Chronology and Chronicle
 - 3.3 Endings and Import
 - 3.4 Revisions and Corrections
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the novel, as in any other branch of the creative language arts, one must agree with Stephen King that “...*the business of meaning is a very big deal. If you doubt it, think of all the times you’ve heard someone say ‘I just can’t describe it’, or ‘That isn’t what I mean’...*”

If you believe that then you know that meaning is *central*. As it is, then remember what has been said about the *word*. The word is a representation of meaning; for, even at its best, writing almost always “falls short of full meaning” (King 118). In this unit, full meaning of a creative work is the total, overall sense which it conveys at the end of it all. *Words* must be *appropriate*. The *vocabulary* must be *fitting, suitable*, not *dressed up*, nor *pretentious*, or *bombastic*. Meaning is not necessarily destroyed with “big” vocabulary however, or with “simpler” vocabulary. The word just has to be appropriate. Let us take some examples:

1. When I was a young secondary school student we used to make a joke of Psalm 23. Psalm 23 goes, in the KJV (King James Version) *Bible*, as follows:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters; He restoreth my soul. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil...”

Note the impeccable, irreplaceable “simple” words employed here. The Bible, *as had* been said often, is the classic of “simple” deep language...

We, as students, changed that simple vocabulary in order to let Psalm 23 read like this:

The *Deity* is my *pastor*, I shall not be *indigent!* He *causes* me to *repose* in *verdant lawns* He *conducts* me by the *quiescent pools...* Yeah! Though I *perambulate diametrically via glens* of *Sepulchral dormitory*, I shall not be *perturbed* by any *apparent catastrophe...*

Clearly, our schoolboy version [in which “the Lord” becomes “the Deity” and “Shepherd” becomes “pastor”, and “to lie down in green pasture” becomes “reposing in verdant lawns...” and “walking through the valley of the shadow of death” becomes “perambulating dametrically via glens of sepulchral dormitory”] [as in italics above] is insubrious, even ludicrous. Stephen King has a joke from George Carlin which spells out the inappropriateness of such: says Carlin, “...in some company it’s perfectly all right to *prick your finger*, but very bad form to *finger your prick* (King:118). Sense depends, to a large extent, on the word.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- choose the right words and vocabulary that make total meaning pleasurable;
- adopt methods of re-vision and re-writing that would ensure a perfect work; and
- determine when to present a real or illusionary meanings discuss the importance of the final *message* of a novel.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Reality and Illusion

Meanings in a work of art may be calculated to create a feeling that the word, the universe is a concrete reality, or is a fantasy, an illusion. The classic example of illusion is *Alice in Wonderland* by “Lewis Carroll” (Charles) Lutwidge Dodgson). *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) and through his *Looking-Glass* (1871) says George, Sampson, “originating in stories told to little girls, have become enduring parts of English “nonsense literature” (Sampson. 604). The illusions appeal to all ages of

readers, whereas by contrast, the novels of Daniel Defoe about low class people are known in literature as “supreme *realistic* pictures of low life. (*Moll Flanders abbreviated*). The effort by a writer to create truthful reality can be found in the very character of the writer himself. For example, here is how George Sampson summarizes the life of Daniel Defoe (1659-1731).

Defoe's life and work (total meaning) defy summary. A few general considerations will help us to understand him. Like Dickens ... he was highly endowed with the “experiencing nature”. Nothing was too small to escape his notice; nothing was too large to fit into his comprehension. His curiosity was insatiable, and he knew how to turn the smallest detail to literary account. To write was as natural to him as to breathe. He made fiction seen like truth and truth seen like fiction. Neither his mind nor his character can be called lofty; yet his gifts were many and various. He was the perfect journalist. He could write on anything or nothing... (Sampson: 378)

We are urging you here, as a creative writer to be, as a creative writer whose works will make total sense, present a *message* and have *import*. You need to emulate Defoe: be able to “experience” nature; be able to observe the minutest details in life around you – e.g. the small ants carrying a dead huge grasshopper, rolling the carcass along, to their hole-home to prepare to feast during the rainy days, be insatiably curious; *breathe* writing, *eat* writing;

In the case of Defoe, realism even took a turn in the full titles of his novels. The one we call *Moll Flanders* is a novel fully, humorously, titled:

The FORTUNES and MISFORTUNES of the famous MOLL FLANDERS who was born in NEWGATE PRISON and during a life of – continu'd variety for Threescore Years... was Twelve Years a Whore, five times a wife (whereof one to her own brother) Twelve Year a Thief- Eight Years a Transported Felon in Virginia at last grew Rich, liv'd Honest and died a Penitent, written from her own Memorandums.

Defoe, even in the title of *Moll Flanders* wanted to take *Realism* to the extremity of truth in order to show how faithfully his writing reflected true life.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

1. Write out five instances where you have “experienced nature”.

2. Can you use any one of the five above to provide a *concise* title for a possible novel?
3. Name any writer you have found realistic” and any you have found illusionistic in Africa.

3.2 Chronology and Chronicle

The achievement of a good overall meaning – ‘Sense’ – in a novel can also come from the way a writer has handled and touched up what Estrada calls “Time Line” in a work that has been written over and over again. Time line or chronology helps you re-set and set the ‘vision’. The time span within which a story takes place, the manner the writer ties up all loose ends, show how well the goal of meaning overall has been attained. A story is not mere ‘chronicle’ – Rita Clay Estrada and Rita Gallagher have suggested, appropriately, that the writer may do well to follow a story “worksheet” all through the period of writing so that a total senseful story can emerge. A meaningful story is a story that has remained ‘on track’, so to speak. You may need to keep the worksheet in your computer, to fill the blanks with as much information as you need. A good worksheet will show you, they say, “how neatly your mind *connects* the dots to a better plot, *character* and, consequently, the “*book*”. Here is a modified chronology/chronicle story checklist worksheet:

NAME OF STORY	START DATE	□ □ □
PREMISE:	END DATE	

STORY GOAL:

- i. Lesson goal
- ii. Any holidays (break)

FEMALE CHARACTER NAME

- i. Any story behind it?
- ii. Physical Description:
- iii. Tags:
- iv. Her Goal:
- v. Personality Quirk
- vi. Growth Area:
- vii. Her Hobby:
- viii. Her Career:

MALE CHARACTER NAME

Any story behind it?

Physical description: Tags:

His Goal: Personality Quirk: Growth Area:

His Hobby: His Career:

1. Friend/Relative

Any story behind it?

Physical description: Tags:

Quirk/Habits: Purpose/Goal

Revelation of conflict during first meeting

Important relation of conflict during other meetings

Twist of thoughts

Dark period

Revelation of right or wrong

Who?

Why?

Adversary other than person

Overall time line

Resolution

(Estrada & Gallagher, 109-111).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. Provide a Time Line for an imaginary story titled "Uju buys her first book "or" Kola visits Coca-Cola factory".
2. Give ten reasons why a novel needs to be revised for fullest meaning to stand out.

3.3 Endings and Import

Every novel has a theme. Some writers regard them as the “most sacred of sacred cows” (King; 200). “If”, King asserts, “you write a novel, spend weeks and then months *catching* it word by word, you owe it both to the book and to yourself to *lean back*... when you have *finished* and *ask* yourself why you bothered – why you spent all that time, why it seemed *so important* ... what is it all about...”

Here, let us take you back to the forest comparison. The characters, we said, the actions, the thoughts, the conflicts are analogous to “trees” in the forest. When you finish, you have to step back, as a good portrait painter would, or as a good mathematician seeking to gain a perspective on the diagram of the theorem on the blackboard he wants to prove. You step back and look at the forest. Your novel may not have too much symbolism, or ironies, or musical flow of language – prose - , but the book *is* about *something*. What is that ‘*some – thing*’? Look at the chapters, one by one. See how the characters *are* linked (remember your worksheet in 3.2?) – how good, or bad, or ugly those personages you created are, what concerns they share – same tribes, same professions, differences in a civil war situation, such as Nigeria has had; in a post- colonial setting as much of Africa has known. How did you *envision* a final import of your message? Refer to Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, or the U.S.A based *Why Are We So Blest?* Or, look again at Yaw Boateng’s *The Return*. You will see where characters come to a dead end, where they must tell a lie to survive, even in the squalor of slums, where they love, as Seku Wattara loves the beautiful Mbinge exclusively; what the slave trade that ravaged Africa (and is still ravaging?) did. Your novel must create a “world” – violence, terrorism, human error, pride, ambitions, people who cheat, who betray others in marriage, in politics and who “serve God”, even as Rev. King, must be made to carry meaning. The children of Israel, for example, worshipped, to their peril, the Aaronic Golden Calf while Moses was away on Sinai obtaining life-giving divine laws for them. Your novel’s world may conclude that there’s only a thin line between reality and fantasy (Go back to 3.1 above). King says, “... once your basic story is on paper, you need to think about WHAT it means ...” (King 208).

3.4 Revisions and Corrections

Hints have already been given about how necessary it is to look back at what one had written. At this point we want to focus on actual revisions and corrections specific. Many drafts of a work are made as the writer tries to tune and re-tune. But basically there should be two drafts: one *original* and a *polished* version. King has asserted as follows: “...re- writing varies from writer to writer. Kurt Vonnegut, for example, re-wrote each page of his novels until he got them exactly the way he wanted them. The result was days when he might only manage a page or two of finished copy; but when the manuscript was finished, the *book* was finished...” (King. 209).

There is one inescapable truth about revising or proof-reading, or pre- viewing a work. The author will always see or hear only that which he/she originally had in mind. So, you need a second reader, a more objective, dispassionate person, someone who can detect

an error, a goof, and loudly and clearly and unflinchingly points it out but without humiliating the writer or beating him/her over the head with a club of criticism! The story is told of America's famous suspense – master. Alfred Hitchcock as follows:

“...Not long after finishing *psycho*, Hitchcock screened it for a few friends. They raved about it, declaring it to be a suspense masterpiece. Alma (Hitchcock's wife) was quiet until they'd all had their say, then she spoke very firmly: “You can't send it out like that”.

“There was thunder struck silence, except for Hitchcock himself, who only asked why not. ‘Because,’ his wife responded, ‘Janet Leigh swallows when she's supposed to be reading”.

“It was true. Hitchcock didn't argue ...”. A second reader will look at the subject – matter also. We are aiming to obtain overall solid meaning. Many times it is this reader who sort of tells the writer who has just finished a novel, ...” blow your nose, Sir” as an intimate family member would tell the Dad, as he comes out of the toilet with his flap unzipped.

There's the reader who must be a *critic*, not a friend. He is unbiased, and correct factual errors. Like when this programme developer was completing his novel, *The Court-martial*, he had to consult his friend, Major Gbulie, to have facts about *guns*, about *procedures*, and *protocols* in a case of actual court-martial (trial) *corrected*. Chinua Achebe tells of how some *critics* object to his tone of English in *Arrow of God*, and he has a sample of how he would re-write it. If he agreed to the suggestion, the novel would ‘sound’ but wouldn't be his style. So, watch the suggestions of your critics/revisers. They may not always be the answer. Some opinions, you see, do not carry weight. Just never forget that there is always an Ideal Reader who will enjoy all your writings and see the total meaning the way it is presented.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The total import, meaning or message of a novel is a complex thing. It requires many inputs to establish it – author, critical readers, correctors, and rewriters. Whether specifically true – to – life to the last detail, as those 17th and 18th c. English novelists are as culturally relevant as the Achebes and Boatengs of Africa, realism and illusion have a place in the final meaning of a prose work of art. The author *needs* possess a listening ear and a cool head. The impact of the finished work may well be the result of their combination.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Study again the life of Defoe. How does personality inform writing styles and finishes?

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have touched on the place of realistic and illusionistic approaches to subject matter. It is hoped that you will see clearly the need for wide reading in order to give widest meaning with all accessory implications to your story. You will also know that as a writer, you are both reader and author, but you need your second or third, objective or biased, reader, preferably a non-friend.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. What do you understand by “sense” and “non-sense” literature?
2. How important is a title of a work? Give full illustrative examples
3. “Time Line” and “Worksheet”: how crucial are these to the serious creative writer’s job?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Armah, Ayi Kwei: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann.
 _____ . *Why Are We So Blest?* London: Heinemann.

Boateng, Yaw M. (1977). *The Return*. London: Heinemann.

As many African and non – African novels as you can lay hands on.

MODULE 2 DRAMA

Unit 1	Preliminary Issues in Drama(tic) Composition: Devices
Unit 2	Thought/Idea
Unit 3	Plot
Unit 4	Character, Characterisation, Movement and the Stage
Unit 5	Language: Dialogue and Action
Unit 6	Spectacle
Unit 7	Music/ Dance (Sound Effects)

**UNIT 1 PRELIMINARY ISSUES IN DRAMA(TIC)
COMPOSITION DEVICES****CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Conceptualization
3.2	Germinal Idea
3.2.1	Sources of Germinal Ideas
3.3	The Process
3.4	Scenario
3.5	Tools
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the preliminary issues in playwriting for the stage, the television, the radio, and the celluloid. You are being introduced to the basic steps in playwriting mainly for the stage. I will end this introduction with Femi Osofisan's "Ten Commandments of Good Writing". He was not prescribing for writers, but just gave his opinion on issues he felt could help writers as follows:

1. Write always out of self respect.
2. Find a model among the finest minds and the best craftsman and apprentice yourself.

3. Do not ever agree to prostitute your writing or tarnish your profession by lending to vulgarity for whatever financial inducement.
4. Write always with a consciousness that art is still a powerful force in our society; therefore, someone may want to learn some wisdom from your work.
5. If what you write cannot give joy to you, it cannot give others joy.
6. Write with the knowledge that you owe an obligation to the society and those who are voiceless.
7. Make your writing a road to beauty and insight.
8. Always remember that you are a tool, the better refined you are, the better your writing.
9. Read constantly, listen more carefully, and observe more closely.
10. Love is always vital to the career of every writer. Find it.

With these at the back of your mind, you will now be taken through the first steps in play writing. Femi Osofisan incorporated these ‘commandments in his keynote address at the First International Conference of Women Writers Association (WRITA) at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of Lagos in 1998.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- conceptualize an idea;
- develop that idea into a full-length play; and
- acquaint yourselves with the basic tools you need.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Conceptualization

In the process of playwriting, first of all the playwright visualizes and conceptualizes the idea he wants to explore. After the conception of the idea, he writes it down immediately on a sketch book so that he will not forget it. It is this idea that metamorphoses into a play but not exactly as conceptualized in the imagination of the playwright. Playwriting is therefore, based on the creative imagination of the playwright. He needs mental and intellectual abilities that find expression in a fertile creative imagination for him to create effectively. He must

have a mental picture of the story he intends to write because according to Anthony Duruaku "...creativity is not possible without the imagination because the creative ability evolves from the ability to synthesize experience and rework it to accommodate present circumstance" (30). When he conceives the idea he wants to explore it. The next step is to think of how to present it as a story, in a dramatic form.

3.2 Germinal Idea

A playwright starts from a germinal idea which is the creative compulsion. This starts in his imagination. He imagines a situation or a story and proceeds to create incidents, situations, characters, and the environment where the characters will exist and interact. The probable source of the germinal idea of Wole Soyinka in *The Trials of Brother Jero* may have been religious hypocrisy. In this course material we will draw examples and illustrations where necessary, from published plays written by national and international playwrights. So get the cited plays and read them very well to enable you derive maximum benefit from this course.

3.2.1 Sources of Germinal Ideas

Germinal ideas could emanate from the following:

- a. An individual: This could be a person who the writer has seen in his imagination or interacted with in real life. This encounter can spark off an idea which could be developed into a play. In Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* may have encountered a fake Pastor before he wrote *The Trials of Brother Jero* and this encounter may have influenced his decision to explore the theme of religious hypocrisy.
- b. An environment/location: A place or an environment with peculiar things which inspire the writer to write about that place or environment. In the early days of Christianity in Igboland, most of the Pentecostal churches operated by the river side or beach. This explains why in Awka, Anambra State, they are called 'Ndu Uka Mmili' which means, 'the people of the Water Churches'. You may have observed too that the setting of Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* is the beach.
- c. An incident: A particular incident could produce an occasion for drama. For instance, a fight you witnessed could inspire you to write a play. An incident in good hands stretches into a full length play.

- d. A basic idea of life which is sometimes referred to as the conceptual thought can induce a fertile creative mind to develop it into a play. It could be a phrase or a sentence.
- e. Human relations as seen in people of different ideas and background coming together. The relations should be able to generate situations which in turn give rise to conflicts. These conflicts could be harnessed and coordinated to craft a play. Conflict is a very important element in playwriting.
- f. Information Area: An informational area which the writer has or is interested in can ignite the creative impulse of the playwright. In order to portray it very well (accurately) he goes to watch or study the situation and presents it in the dramatic form. Having decided on religious hypocrisy Soyinka may have visited such churches. When I wrote my play, *Sons for Son*, I visited such churches several times and when I wrote *Like Father Like Son*, I had to attend few court sessions at different magistrate and high courts to get a firsthand experience on the presentation of cases by the defence and prosecution counsels.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

In your own words, list and explain three possible sources of germinal ideas in play writing. Write three ideas that can be developed into a novel.

3.3 The Process

The process of organization starts after you have conceptualized your idea or situation, and visualized the type of characters that will be able to carry that story. The next step is to imagine the environment where these characters will exist. This is called setting. This setting could be a home, a school, an office or anywhere that is most suitable for you to write on. Once you have decided on the best environment, you then sketch the human relations. You should try to figure out the number of characters you need, how they will interact and how the protagonist's ideas are going to clash with those of the antagonist. After that, the next step is the preparation of the scenario.

3.4 Scenario

Scenario is the projection of a viable format for the play. Here you decide who and what will be included in the play, and at what point each character will make his appearance, then you will imagine how long each segment will last and the probable length of the entire play. Finally you propose how to link the sequences of action to form an organic

structure and a rational whole. Other issues to be considered in the scenario are:

- a. **Title:** In most cases a playwright chooses a working title which may be a tentative title. You may end the play with that tentative title or as the play progresses; you might be compelled to change the title. The title helps you to maintain the focus on your main idea. A good title gives the audience an idea of what the play is all about.
- b. **Action:** This covers the activities of the characters. You must have an imaginative picture of your characters. In addition you should have an idea of what each character would be doing at every stage of the development of the play.
- c. **Genre:** You should decide whether you intend to write a comedy, tragedy, satire or tragi-comedy. The choice of the genre will affect the action of the play. Tragedy is not supposed to have the same language with comedy. In comedy, humorous scenes will be present while language in tragic plays is usually serious.
- d. **Circumstances:** These comprise the involvement of the various characters in the play, what they do which lead to important actions contained in the play. Let us illustrate once more with Soyinka's play: what circumstance led Br. Chume to expose Br. Jero and to find out that Br. Jero is a crook. He meets Amope as she comes to ask Br. Jero to pay for the velvet cape he bought from her.
- e. **Clarity:** Remember that what we are discussing here is the plan, a kind of an outline for the play. Clarity here means that you need to state the definite idea /information you want to explore in the play. It will act as a focal point for you so that you could refer to it from time to time as you write to ensure that you explore it adequately. This will also help to avoid the bringing in introduction of many ideas in the play without relating them to the action of the play appropriately. You need to state the definite idea/information of the play clearly.
- f. **Characters:** As much as possible, give detailed descriptions of your characters, what they are and what they will do in order to sustain the action of the play, create conflict and suspense that will produce good drama.
- g. **Conflict:** State at what point of the play the conflict will emerge. Who opposes/fights who? What major principle/belief will clash with the other so as to create tension? This tension that is created through the interactions of characters and ideas is the conflict.

- h. **Story.** Give a synopsis or a brief summary of the play. You should present it in form of a general but brief narration that states what happened or what is happening in the play. This will form your plot as you write the actual play.
- i. **Motivation.** This is the individual thought of all the characters that propel them to do whatever they do in the play. Ensure that your characters' actions are properly motivated.
- j. **Dialogue.** This story in (h) is eventually presented in dialogue which is the pattern of writing and presenting a play.
- k. **Time Plan.** This is your working schedule. Do you think that you can complete the play in a month, a year or more? Once you take this decision, you will plan a breakdown of what you expect to be in each segment (call it scene, act or movement). You will then decide how long it may take for you to complete each segment, and eventually the tentative deadline for the completion of the play.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Prepare what you think would have been the scenario of Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

3.5 Tools

Apart from creative imagination, a playwright needs the following tools:

1. A good knowledge of the stage.
2. Pen and notebooks.
3. Comfortable writing table and a chair "located in a quiet environment", and reliable lighting at night (Ike 213) if you intend to write at night.
4. Money for your basic expenses like travels (where you need to carry out a research or obtain information) a typewriter. If you cannot type, you should write and send it for typing on a computer which is popular nowadays.
5. If you can afford it, obtain a desktop computer or laptop.
6. A good or standard dictionary for "accuracy in spelling and use of words"(Ike 214).
7. Any good thesaurus of English words and phrases.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Playwriting requires both talent and skill. One may have the talent but do not possess the skill. This course is expected to provide guidelines for the acquisition of the skill by aspiring playwrights. The basic steps and tools are presented above.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we examined the basic steps of playwriting from conceptualization to the scenario.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Describe the process of playwriting.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Duruaku, A.B.C. (1997). *A Handbook on Drama and Theatre*. Owerri: Colon Concepts.

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UNIT 2 **THOUGHT / IDEA**

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Theme
 - 3.2 Subject Matter
 - 3.3 The Story
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit you will learn about thought or idea in dramatic writing. You will also be in a position to distinguish between theme, subject matter and the story. At the point of conceptualization, you focus on an idea that will yield your story from which the theme and subject matter will emerge eventually.

20 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the idea or unit of thought around which a particular play revolves;
- distinguish between theme and subject matter; and
- tell your story in a dramatic form based on an idea.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Theme

Theme is the main idea that permeates the entire play. You have the major theme but you could also have other themes, hence, you could have a variety of themes in a single play. Themes could emerge from a concept, an idea, an abstract quality or an incident which the playwright uses to send his message to the audience. The theme of *The Trials of Brother Jero* for instance is religious hypocrisy or deceit. As the playwright explores the theme, he gives his perspective on the issue. The theme of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is revenge. By the end of the play as the principal actors die, it becomes clear that Shakespeare does not support revenge. Hamlet, in his bid to avenge his father's death, loses his lover, his mother, his peace of mind, his happiness and eventually dies.

The playwright could write his play on an idea based on events around him. Drama

mirrors the society and through that mirror the dramatist informs and educates while entertaining his audience. He is also referred to as the conscience of the society, so he is expected to dramatize the ills of the society or the good sides of that society in an impartial manner. Through the theme, he condemns those aspects of the society that hinder progress, while he promotes social injustice/inequality, or crime. In Nigeria for instance, many playwrights explore themes of bribery, corruption, bad leadership, insecurity, and other forms of misdemeanors that bedevil contemporary Nigeria.

Apart from contemporary issues, themes could also be drawn from myth, legend, history, or folklore. In all these, the propelling factor for the playwright is to send a message to the audience through an entertainment medium- drama. Most playwrights believe that they can make their societies better through the dramatization of the themes that promote positive values in the society with the hope that the audience will be influenced to take constructive steps for the progress of their societies. The theme is presented as an interesting story through an appropriate dramatic genre. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare explores the theme of revenge through the tragic mode while Soyinka presents the theme of religious hypocrisy through the comic mode. As the audience laughs at Brother Chume's foolery and Jero's antics, they learn to be wary of false or fake prophets. A particular theme could be dramatized by many playwrights. Each playwright explores the theme from his perspective to give it the desired originality and mark of uniqueness.

The theme of the play gives it significance because without a recognizable and definable theme, the story presented in the play will be commonplace and meaningless. So, as a playwright, you should strive to ensure that you focus clearly on your theme. This is because it is the motivating force of the story. You see that in *Hamlet* every step taken by Hamlet points towards his revenge intent. In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the old man's allegation against Brother Jero and Jero's reaction foreshadow his dubious nature that gives him away as an impostor, and a fake prophet. Also, his admiration of the young lady that goes to the beach every morning lends credence to his lustful nature. He does not allow Brother Chume to beat his wife because he does not want to lose Chume as a member of his congregation. Finally, the way he dodges Amope each time she comes to collect the money he owes her points to his dubious nature.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Think of a theme to write about. Construct TEN sentences on this theme.

Each playwright chooses a theme before choosing the style to adopt. Other aspects of the play like characters, plot, setting and language are carefully chosen in such a way that they advance the major theme of the story. A play could have more than one theme, in which case we talk about sub-themes. Usually, the major theme is obvious because the main action of the play revolves around it while the sub-theme is subsumed in the main theme but discernable.

The theme of a play could be given in one word, a sentence, a statement or a phrase. In some complex plays, it might be difficult to decipher the theme. However, as a

budding playwright, it is advisable that you choose a theme and focus on it in such a way that it will be discernable since it is the central thought, the controlling idea in the play.

A theme could be symbolic or literal. At this stage, it is easier to deal with literal themes. The audience is expected to distill the theme consciously or unconsciously as the play progresses. In some cases, the theme emerges after the reading or watching of an entire play. Although, this idea is presented in form of fiction which according to Oakley Hall is “an euphemism for lies” (23), in writing your play, you should give this fiction a semblance of truth which in the novel is referred to as verisimilitude. What we mean here is that the play should be as close as possible to reality. You can achieve this through the presentation of realistic characters who are involved in possible and plausible actions. As a playwright, you should strive to convince your audience of the authenticity of your story through **make-belief** and they will be in a good position to assimilate your story through **a willing suspension of disbelief** as if you are presenting real life situations on stage. So, you will have to select, alter, distill, distort and sometimes exaggerate facts to create this dramatic “truth”. This truth is dramatized in a process that could hold and engage the imagination of the audience. In drama therefore you strive to present an imitation of real life. The most important factor is that this real life is represented in an artistic form.

3.2 Subject Matter

The subject matter is different from the theme but some students of literature interchange them since they believe that they are the same. As a playwright you should be in a position to distinguish one from the other. The subject matter is the topic of discussion in the play. In many plays, the subject matter is extracted from the title of the play. In Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* for instance, the theme could be tradition versus modernity or to be more explicit, the triumph of African Tradition over Western Culture but the subject is the fame of Sidi (the Jewel) a young and beautiful girl and her fall through her a seduction by the Bale (the Lion) who is old enough to be her father. In many plays, the title explains the subject matter. This play presents a relationship between the Lion, Bale and the Jewel, Sidi. This alliance does not only affect her growing fame adversely but also deprives her of a marriage to a younger man, Lakunle. So in the play, the title illuminates the subject matter of the play. Also, in *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Efua Sutherland explores the theme of love but the subject matter is how Ananse marries his daughter to a chief she has never met. It means that the subject matter of any play is the subject of discussion from which the theme is extracted. Usually the theme is subsumed in the subject matter. Just as the theme is explored through other aspects of the play, the subject matter is highlighted through events, incidents and the action in the play.

Subject matter is reflected in the action which the playwright presents in the play. In most cases, the statement is about human problems from the playwright’s perspective. It is his vision of the world and in a good play; the statement is expected to have universal validity or relevance for all ages.

3.3 The Story

Every play tells an imaginary story through action. This story is the unification of the events or incidents in the play in such a way that it forms a coherent whole. The story holds the audience and raises its expectations on this or that aspect of the play as it progresses. They watch or read the play following the story with keen interest as they want to know what happens next. A good play tells an interesting story and holds the audience spellbound while an uninteresting story sends it to sleep. It is in the story that the playwright organizes his ideas in such a way that he produces something that he could hold together to achieve the desired result. In a nutshell, the story in the order or sequence of events, an outline of the incidents or events in the play, is called plot. This will be discussed in detail in Unit 3, the next unit.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What in your own understanding is the difference between theme and subject matter? Write two themes and two subject matter of your own.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that it is a unit of thought or an idea that gives rise to a play. We also explained what theme is and its importance in the play. We tried to distinguish between theme and subject matter which tends to be confusing concepts for some students.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we examined the concept of thought in playwriting. We equally discussed how this thought crystallizes into a play. In addition we examined the story which we identified as a narrative / account of incidents in the play. They are mainly imaginary tales.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

The main idea in the play is the theme. List ten ideas from which you could develop a play.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 PLOT

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 What is a Plot?
 - 3.2 The Sub Plot
 - 3.3 The Plot Structure
 - 3.4 Types of Plot
 - 3.4.1 Simple Plot
 - 3.4.2 Complex Plot
 - 3.4.3 Unified Plot
 - 3.4.4 Episodic Plot
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A playwright, as we have seen in Unit 2, tells a story. He is concerned about the story and how to make the story as interesting as possible. This story is realised in action. Action is more important in drama than the story. After he has chosen/selected an idea, the next step for him is to see how best that idea can be expanded to yield a story. His next preoccupation becomes the arrangement of this story to form a logical entity. This arrangement of the story is referred to as the plot. In this unit we will discuss the plot and different types of plot.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify what plot is;
- appreciate and undertake plot construction identify different types of plot; and
- distinguish plot from story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is a Plot?

Plot is the organization of the events of a play. In simple terms, it is the arrangement of the story in the play so that it will have a beginning, middle and an end. In the novel, the novelist presents his plot by describing the characters, their actions, and the environment where they operate, their motivations, their hopes, and aspirations, but the

playwright presents his plot mainly through dialogue in the interaction of the characters.

A good dramatic plot is expected to be an organization of series of events in the play in such a way/manner that it moves through series of conflicts, complications, and the climax to the resolution. In a play, every event is part of a carefully designed model and progression of a wholly interconnected system of events. These events are selected and arranged deliberately to fulfill an intricate set of dramatic purposes and theatrical conditions. It comprises everything which takes place in the imaginative world of the play and the playwright ensures that the “totality of the events must create a coherent imitation of the world” (Scholes and Klaus 65).

Aristotle sees plot as the most important element of drama. He refers to it as the soul of tragedy. The playwright should, therefore, pay particular attention to the construction of his plot. He should arrange it in such a way that the story will be interesting. A good plot should have a beginning, middle and an end. Once the idea is conceptualized, he draws an outline of the story using some characters. The next step is to arrange this outline in such a way that it has a beginning, middle and end.

Plot is the structure of the actions which in a particular pattern is presented in order to achieve particular emotional and artistic effects in a play. It helps to give the play its organic unity and a coherence that makes the play easy to understand. According to Aristotle, the plot is arranged in this order - exposition, point of attack, complication, crisis, climax discovery, and denouement or resolution. Discovering (anagnorisis) often tends/ commences the untangling of events in denouement or resolution.

In drama, plot is expected to produce a result or an effect on the audience so, as an aspiring playwright; you should package your play in a particular way to produce your desired impression or effect on the audience. This is why a theme like religious hypocrisy could be treated by different playwrights in different ways. In Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero*, Jero swindles people of their money with a promise of securing promotion or political positions for them. But in Onyekya Onyekuba's *Sons for My Son*, the pastor takes advantage of childless women, extorts money from them and sleeps with them. In her other play *Like Father like Son*, the pastor becomes an accomplice in a crime of fraud and exam malpractice. Each playwright presents plot from his own perspective with the aid of other stylistic devices. In some cases he proffers solution that could help to minimize or eradicate the ills of his society. The success of a play depends largely on the plot as it aids the audience's or the readers' understanding of the playwright's message.

For the playwright to achieve this, he needs to design and construct his plot in such a way that the interest of the audience is aroused continuously as the play progresses. The audience should be curious about future events in the play especially as it concerns the fate of some characters. This expectancy and curiosity of the audience about the fate of some characters or the outcome of some events is called suspense. A good playwright therefore uses suspense to sustain the interest of his audience.

Plot comprises the action that takes place on stage and the action that occurred in the past which is usually recalled through a flashback or reported speech. In *The Trials of Brother Jero* for instance, the curse placed on Brother Jero by an old man is presented in a flashback as Jero recalls it in his monologue at the opening of the play. The important element here is the arrangement of these incidents both past and present in an orderly manner. In real life incidents and events are not ordered in that form. Plot is different from scenario and story. Scenario is based mainly on the action that takes place on stage. Story is the series of incidents whose development does not necessarily depend on each other. These incidents may or may not be related or connected but in the hands of a good playwright, these seemingly unrelated incidents are coordinated and fused to form a story. It is said that every adult has at least one story in him. If you take the story of your life, for instance, you will find out that there are many incidents that are not related or connected. For instance, take a day in your life as a child: you woke up early in the morning, brushed your mouth, took your bath, ate your breakfast and went to school. At school, a teacher came to your class, met a noisy class and punished all of you. Is there a connection between what you did at home and what happened to you in school? Is the punishment a consequence of your waking up early or brushing your teeth? If you decide to write a story based on those incidents, you might decide to add that the toothpaste was an expired one so at school you started having stomach ache. Your crying and discomfort attracted the attention of others in the class and there was a commotion. At that moment, the teacher came in and without questions punished everybody and that included you.

The playwright might decide to present in a flashback how your mother bought the toothpaste without checking the expiring date or how somebody saw that it was unfit for human consumption but out of mischief allowed you to use it. The problem could not have been with the toothpaste but with the breakfast. In this case, the flashback would demonstrate how your breakfast was poisoned by a wicked stepmother.

You can see from this simple illustration that plot especially a unified one thrives on causality. In it, one incident is presented, and as a result of that incident, the next one happens and the situation must be related to each other. In a unified plot there is a beginning, middle and an end where the beginning gives rise to the middle and the conflicts initiated in the middle are resolved in the end. This resolution of the conflicts completes what was started in the beginning.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Sketch out a plot on the Ebola Virus Curse in just TEN sentences.

3.2 The Sub Plot

The subject (sub) plot is subordinated to the main plot. The main plot deals with the major events while the sub plot deals with other incidents which can be dependent on the

main plot but presented as complete and interesting stories. In most cases, the sub-plot is used to enhance the audience's understanding of the main plot or to illuminate some aspects of the action. In *Hamlet* for instance, the play-within-play (The Mousetrap) helps to illuminate the disposition of Claudius and heighten his sense of guilt. It further strengthens Hamlet's resolve to avenge his father's death as it confirms to him that his uncle is guilty of murder and of his illicit affair with Hamlet's mother.

3.3 The Plot Structure

Ideally a good a good play as stated above should have a beginning, middle and an end. According to Oscar Brockett, the beginning contains the exposition or the setting forth of information about earlier events, the identity of characters and the present situation. The point of attack which is part of the beginning is when the main story starts unfolding and a possible conflict is identified. In *The Trials of Brother Jero* the exposition in Brother Jero's monologue which gives information about himself, about Brother Chume and the curse by the old man. The curse could be seen as the point of attack as Old Man tells Jero that women are going to cause his downfall.

A series of complications constitute the middle. A complication is the introduction of a new element that changes the direction of the action and it leads to the discovery of new information. In that same play, Amope's appearance provides the complication for Brother Jero and this leads Jero to discover that she is Br. Chume's wife. Consequently, he allows Brother Chume, to beat her. This leads to a crisis which culminates in the climax when Br. Chume chases Br. Jero calling himself a fool for being so gullible that he allowed another man to dictate for him how to run his household. That discovery leads to the resolution of the play which exposes Jero as an imposter.

3.4 Types of Plot

It is not in all plays that we find what may be referred to as good plots as described above. It is therefore not surprising that we have different types of plots. Aristotle talked of purity and unification of plot. He divides plot into simple and complex plots.

3.4.1 Simple Plot

In a simple plot, the action is simple and continuous. In this type of plot the complication is not usually much and the conflict is not intense. There could be a change of fortune but usually there is no reversal of situation and no recognition. In simple plots the action runs chronologically and causally from the beginning to the end.

3.4.2 Complex Plot

In a complex plot, as the name suggests, we are presented with complex incidents and

complications. The change of fortune here is accompanied by a reversal of situation or by recognition or by both.

3.4.3 Unified Plot

In the unified plot, the incidents are presented in a logical, chronological and causal order. Here one incident leads to the other and that other one happens as a result of the previous action. The beginning, middle and end are obvious in the unified plot.

3.4.4 Episodic Plot

Here there is no causal arrangement of incidents. Obviously, the only relationship between the incidents is that a particular character is involved in all of them. In a unified plot the excision of an aspect or a part of the play affects the meaning and the organic structure of the play. There is nothing like cause and effect in an episodic plot as a part of the play could be removed and it will not affect, change or destroy the plot.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

List and explain the four types of plot as presented in this unit. Write a simple plot of your own.

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the discussion so far, you have seen the importance and centrality of plot in playwriting. An aspiring playwright should be conversant with different types of plot. This will help him in the arrangement of incidents in his play to ensure that he does not just produce an interesting story but that the story is presented in a manner that will arouse and sustain the interest of the audience.

Like I said in Unit 1, a playwright is not confined to any rule especially in contemporary times. Modern playwrights experiment with different forms and the result is that some plot less plays and illogical plots have been presented by the existentialist and absurdist playwrights. Modern and contemporary dramatists do not seem to be interested in any rule so they borrow ideas from available traditions and mix them up to expand the horizon and boundaries of their artistic expression and ideological positions.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt more on what plot is and different types of plot. This experience will be at the back of your mind as you prepare to write or as you write your play.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is a well-made plot and what is its relationship with incidents in the play.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 CHARACTER, CHARACTERIZATION, MOVEMENT AND THE STAGE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Characters
 - 3.2 Characterization
 - 3.3 Movement
 - 3.4 The Stage
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Drama comprises action and this action is presented through characters. Characters are those human beings, animals or abstract qualities. The important issue is that, they present the story that is conceptualized by the playwright.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- differentiate the characters in a play;
- distinguish between character and characterization;
- differentiate between movement and motivation; and
- discuss/design the stage geography and show how it affects you as a playwright.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Characters

Like I said in the introduction, characters could be human beings. They could be animals as we find in allegorical plays. Good examples of allegorical plays are Tess Onwueme's *The Desert Encroaches* and *Ban Empty Barn*. Characters could also be abstract qualities as we find in *Everyman*.

As you conceptualise your play, the next step is to think of the characters you could use to realize your goal. When you create your human characters, you should endow them with moral and dispositional qualities to make them real. You know that as a playwright you do not have the time and space for vivid

description of characters, events and the environment like the novelist. You should therefore give the necessary information about characters through the *dramatis personae* at the beginning of the play, stage directions, and through the dialogue. It is only through these means that you can present your comments on the character's age, his physical attributes, his mode of dressing, his temperament and other information you need.

You should be able to differentiate your characters through variation in manner of behaviour, social status, external appearance and language. In as much as they should be differentiated, they should be able to relate with one another to achieve your goal. The interpersonal relationship of characters is very important because you reveal your characters also through their words, action and what other characters say about them as W.T. Price says "characters can be brought on in no other way than by throwing people in relation" (280). You can also reveal your protagonist by pitching him against supernatural forces as Shakespeare did to King Lear or Macbeth or Sophocles did to Oedipus. This could be attributed to the fact that in the classical tragedy destiny played an important role in the fate of the characters. So the tragedy that befalls the character is not necessarily as a result of conflict between him and other characters but predetermined. Hence Romeo submits: "...He that hath the steerage of my course directs my sail" (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 1 Scene 4).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Create an imaginary character that is exceptionally UPRIGHT. Give six features of this character.

You should have a good knowledge of different types of characters (refer to the course material, *Elements of Drama*). This will enable you determine the type of characters you want to create. The hero or protagonist must be at the centre of the story. Usually, he is pitted against another important character. He changes as the play progresses. His behavioral changes are attributed to new awareness or revelation or change in the social structure in the world view of the play. The static/stock or flat character does not change in any basic way in the course of the play. Usually, he represents a group or individuals in the society. He emerges from rigid or static social and temperamental features characteristic of the profession, ethnic group, tribe or nationality he represents. It means that he must act according to the stereotyped or rigid features of the interest he represents.

3.2 Characterization

Characters live on stage as they act out the story. Characterization is the ability of portraying/creating the characters. The aspect of your conceptualization that gives birth to the characters is called characterization. In your imagination you create these characters and decide the best attribute for each of them. When you

form/conceive your idea, the next step is to develop it and then think of appropriate characters you will need to tell your /their story effectively. Your ability to create the right characters, make them appear at the right places at the right time, say the right or wrong things (depending on the effect you want to create) at the appropriate or inappropriate times and places is referred to as characterization.

The important factor in characterization is consistency and motivation. You must strive to create consistent characters. If for instance you create a servant who speaks in pidgin, he must be consistent from the beginning to the end. If suddenly he starts speaking Queens English, then he is not consistent, except if he improves himself through formal or informal education which must be highlighted in the play. This education now becomes the motivation for speaking Queen's English. Motivation in simple terms is the reason behind the action of a character. The motivation for each character's action must be obvious if not, the action will become illogical. You can present inconsistent characters and illogical actions if you are writing an absurdist play. If you are not writing an absurdist play or in the existential tradition, you are obliged to create plausible characters who indulge in plausible actions that are as close as possible to reality. You must therefore try to create credible stories for them to fit in the action appropriately.

3.3 Movement

You may wonder why movement and stage are discussed here. The reason is obvious. Drama thrives on action. Characters in the play are involved in action and the performance of the play. The action is realized through the movement of the characters on stage. As a playwright you must learn to inject action into your play to make it vibrant and interesting. The action is realized in movement on stage. If you do not have sufficient action in your play, it becomes drab and boring. You should be aware of the entrances, exits and other movements of your characters. It is not only the director that concerns himself with movement on stage. A good playwright should state the movement of the characters clearly in the stage direction. He should also decide on appropriate cue words i.e. what a character should say before or after a movement is made. For you, a budding playwright, to be able to do this effectively, you must have a good knowledge of the stage. The commonest stage is the proscenium stage. Before you write a play, in addition to the experience you may have acquired in the course and Theatre Workshop visit a theatre and get yourself acquainted with the stage geography.

3.4 The Stage

In theatre workshop, you learnt that there are different types of theatres. They include the arena, the proscenium, the open theatre, the pit theatre and many others. In this course, we will not discuss these types of theatre but we will concern ourselves with the stage. As stated earlier we will concentrate on the proscenium stage which is very close to a room though without the fourth wall. It

is through that fourth wall that the audience watches a play. Watching a play on the proscenium stage is like watching a television. So with this in mind you will create your doors and windows on the remaining three walls.

You should also have a fair knowledge of lighting to know when the light will come up, dim, or blackout. This knowledge will help you in the series of scene changes which is anticipated in drama. However if you are writing for television or for film, you will not be constrained to the particular exits. This is because the camera, light and other technological equipment are used to create the desired effects and realistic environments. Moreover, realistic settings are used in celluloid where the camera aids the provision of an unlimited time and space for the script writer. For instance, on stage you cannot bring in a car but in TV and film the special camera is used to record the dialogue of characters (actors) driving along an expressway. In radio plays you need more of sound effects. So if you are writing a play to be published, you must have a stage in mind. For literary or stage plays, the best approach is usually to produce the play before you publish it. Generally, it is believed that 'a play is not a play until it is seen live on stage'. It means that if you have the opportunity of performing your play before you publish it, you will have the advantage of adding or cutting some scenes in the play before publication.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List two ways through which you could inject action into the play you intend to write.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained that you should create your characters in such a way that they can effectively carry your story. We noted also that you should ensure that the story is credible, the characters plausible and the action possible for you to have a good play. We also said that a good playwright should have a good knowledge of the stage and method of lighting.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we examined how a playwright creates his characters. We also looked at what he should bear in mind as he creates them. These are credibility, plausibility, possibility, consistency and motivation.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is the importance of the proscenium stage for the playwright?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 5 LANGUAGE: DIALOGUE AND ACTION**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Language
 - 3.2 Types of Language
 - 3.2.1 Spoken Language
 - 3.2.2 Non-verbal Language
 - 3.3 Diction
 - 3.4 Dialogue
 - 3.5 Action
 - 3.6 Matching Language to Character
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital tool for the literary artist. In drama where the action is presented on stage, in addition to the spoken words, language includes gestures, facial expressions and other forms of action that help to convey the desired message. In the novel, the writer describes events, setting, atmosphere and character as vividly as possible. In the omniscient point of view, the writer goes further to reveal the thoughts, hopes and aspirations of characters through description. In drama, the playwright does not have the time and space for such descriptions. Everything is therefore conveyed to the audience during performance through dialogue and action. However, in written texts, other important information is given through stage direction.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- determine the importance of language in playwriting distinguish different forms of language;
- determine the functions of dialogue in a play.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Language

Language has been defined as a tool of communicating from one source to another. It has also been postulated that language is purely a linguistic behaviour that shows a social interaction that exists among people in a given speech community. The above definitions are echoed in David Crystal *Encyclopedia of Language* where language is said to be the human and non-instinctive means of communication used by individuals in a given speech community. However a contemporary definition of language postulates that it is the vocal or graphic representation of sounds in writing, used systematically and conventionally by the members of a speech community for communicating views, opinions, information, facts, and emotions and so on.

Interestingly, language is important to humans because it can either be spoken or written. This variable makes it completely different from animal form of communication “animalese”. It is important to remember that communication must not be confused with language because language is the tool for effective communication. Finally, we should note that the use of language for effective communication is context- specific. Communication is the process of exchanging information, views, opinions, and feelings as well as emotions from one source to another. Language is the medium you use in that communication.

3.2 Types of Language

Spoken Language/Verbal Non-Spoken/Nonverbal

3.2.1 Spoken Language

Spoken Language as the name implies is the realization of communication in speech. Each speech community has its own language but English language is the general mode of communication in Nigeria. A playwright chooses the language to use in writing his play. Some playwrights like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (Kenya) Peninah Muhando (Tanzania) Bode Osayin (Nigeria) Goody Onyekwonwu (Nigeria) have written plays in their native languages of Gikuyi, Swahili, Yoruba, and Igbo respectively. The problem here is that the audience is limited to only those who can read or understand the native languages. Perhaps this explains why Ngugi Wa Thiong’o translates his plays later into English Language to enable him reach a wider audience.

In Nigeria, many playwrights include their mother tongues or pidgin in their plays. In some cases, the words phrases/sentences are explained in the glossary, or alongside the vernacular or pidgin but in some other cases no explanation is given, and the audience is expected to decipher the meaning within the context it is used. You can read Ola Rotimi’s *Hopes of the Living Dead* and Tess Onwueme’s *Then She Said It* for the use of pidgin and for the inclusion of mother tongue which is common among African playwrights, especially in form of songs in the plays.

The language used by a playwright is spoken by the characters on stage. The spoken language could be in form of speech, laughter, shouting, crying and other forms of utterances made by the characters in the play. The important point here is that it is a form of sound produced through the mouth.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Write a simple paragraph of a spoken language of a character that is full of FRUSTRATION and SORROW for a proposed play.

3.2.2 Non-verbal Language

Non-verbal language comes in form of action, gestures, and facial expression. It comprises actions that send messages about a character's action or state of mind that is not expressed through vocal sounds.

3.3 Diction

Diction in playwriting refers to the choice or selection of the words you use in writing your play. From the onset, take a decision on your choice of words. Your diction could be simple and straightforward or difficult and obscure, etc. So you must, as a matter of utmost importance, write accurately. If however a particular character is to speak inaccurate English, let it be consistent. A very good example is Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Sheridan's *The Rival*. Her language is full of malapropisms and she speaks consistently in that form from the beginning of the play to the end. Malapropism is the misuse of words in an amusing way. Here the word that is used incorrectly sounds similar to the intended, word but means something quite different. You should therefore learn the basic grammatical rules especially as it concerns subject-verb agreement, tenses, punctuation, spelling, active and passive verbs, capitalization, faulty expressions and some other common errors. However, some faulty expressions result from direct or literal translation of mother tongue to English or pidgin.

Apart from accurate grammatical expression, you should learn to write beautiful language. You should therefore search continuously for the most suitable words to use. These are words that not only express your thoughts very well but are also the most appropriate words in that context. To achieve this, therefore, you need to read widely especially creative works like plays, novels and short stories. A rich vocabulary helps to "bring variety and freshness to your writing" and helps you to reduce the "excessive flogging of certain words and expressions" (Ike 19). You should also be conversant with the sentence structure in English Language. This will enable you know when to use simple sentences and when to use compound sentences. In choosing your words, it is important to bear your audience in mind. The words and expressions you will use in a play for children will not be the same with the ones you will use for a play meant for senior secondary students and undergraduates. For instance, a play for market women or people in the village may contain a lot of pidgin.

Finally, in choosing your words try to stamp a mark of originality in your work. You can learn from others but do not copy what they have written. As Chukwuemeka Ike says:

make your writing your own because your writing can only be refreshingly different from others if you view everything happening before you from your own unique experience rather than through the eyes of other people. (20)

3.4 Dialogue

Dialogue is an exchange of speech between two people. There may be many people in a particular scene but the exchange must be between two people at any given time. However, in a crowd scene, it may be between one group and another or between a group and a character. Even at that, except for choruses, only one person from the group speaks at a time.

Dialogue in drama is an integral part of the play because, through it, characters are revealed, themes are highlighted and the action is enacted. It “crystallizes relationships, conveys information, propels the plot, and precipitates revelations, crises, and climaxes” (Hall 94). Dialogue is used for exposition and characterization, so it must involve action for it not to be static. You must therefore design your dialogue in such a way that there is always a progression to a change or resolution of the action coordinated.

Your dialogue must express characters, advance the action, and record pertinent information all at once. The dialogue must be relevant and should move swiftly but at the same time you should give the impression that it is a transcription of live speech. Try to avoid obscenities or profanities; write correct/standard English and avoid the use of slang except for special effects.

A very good rule in dialogue is to limit it to one thought at a time and keep the lines short. Also, avoid words like ‘oh’, ‘uh’, because such exclamations often serve no purpose except to establish a hazy sense of authenticity or real life experience. Such words, if not handled properly could set up an irritating or monotonous rhythm to the speeches. Soliloquies are becoming old fashioned but you could create monologues in your play. The monologue like dialogue helps to reveal character and propel the plot. A good example is found in Efua Sutherland’s *Edufa* (see Seguwa’s monologue). The important factor is that you must be able to integrate it very well in the action. You can read more on dialogue in Module 1, Unit 6 of *Elements of Drama – A course material in the Department of English*.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Design a simple dialogue between a HUMBLE WIFE and OPPRESSIVE HUSBAND in just five sentences.

3.5 Action

Dialogue is realized through action. Action is the process of performing a task. It involves series of events that a character engages in, in the play. It includes what a character does or fails to do. The action must be logically presented and properly motivated except in absurdist plays. In drawing your outline of the play and the characters, you should be able to decide which action follows the other and the engagements of the characters at every stage of the development of the play. Each character is revealed through action.

Action could be physical when it involves the visible movements of the characters. It may or may not involve verbal expressions. It could be in form of movement from one place to other, or picking/dropping of objects, opening and closing doors, sitting or standing, facial movement, gestures and other such movements. You may not be able to bring all the actions on stage. The actions that you cannot present on stage are reported by appropriate characters. It is pertinent to note here that in stage plays, you should include only actions that are realizable. The ones that are not realizable should be avoided. Reported mental action is usually manifested through gesture or facial expression.

3.6 Matching Language to Character

This is a very important aspect of language in drama. You must strive towards consistency in your language. Decide at the outline stage, the language you want to use. Do you want to use language to delineate characters like causing specific characters to speak in specific ways? Do you want all of them to speak correct English irrespective of social status or educational background? Do you want any of them to speak in verse for a particular effect? Do you want to use pidgin? What is your purpose? You need to answer these and other questions to ensure consistency and for you to really match language to character.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

List five ways to ensure good dialogue in a play.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have tried to explain the role of dialogue in playwriting. We have also given you information on how to choose your words, construct your dialogue and build your action.

5.0 SUMMARY

Language is a vehicle of communication in drama. Drama is written or presented only in

dialogue when it is verbal. Action in drama can be accompanied with or without dialogue. Both dialogue and action must be properly motivated and consistent. Illogical actions, obscenities and profanities should be avoided.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain in your own words and experience what matching language to character means.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 6 SPECTACLE

CONTENTS

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Costume
 - 3.2 Make Up
 - 3.3 Scenery
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Spectacle refers to all the visual elements that contribute to the aesthetics of any dramatic production. They include the costume and make up, scene and light design and even the props. In the Aristotelian concept of drama, spectacle is mentioned as one of seven elements of drama. Do you know the other six? Refer to your course material on the Elements of Drama.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- determine what spectacle is, in a play;
- identify aspects of spectacle; and
- list its importance in dramatic performances.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Costume

In simple terms, costume is the dress which actors wear on stage. As you know, actors in a play are just pretending to be somebody else. This is called role-playing. An actor could, therefore, be a very good husband and father in one play and in another be drunkard who spends his whole fortune on women and wine, a reckless man. The same actor could in another play the role of a mad man. Apart from his utterances and action, costume helps to accentuate the personality of each actor. Once you see an actor in dirty rags, what comes to your mind is that this is a mad man. In *The Marriage of Anansewa* for instance, Ananse's way of dressing changes as soon as he becomes wealthy.

Costume is not just the dress but it includes other accessories like a hat, a walking stick, shoes, earrings, necklace, sunglasses and many others. Hand bags could also be classified as costume but in some cases as props. If for instance, a lady enters with a hand bag which matches her shoes and head gear or dress and does not drop it until her exit, it is costume because it forms part of her dressing. However, if the hand bag is placed somewhere and she goes to pick it or is given to her by another actor, it becomes a prop. Costume could be designed like the dresses worn in everyday life or it could be symbolic. The important factor is that a well designed costume should suit the character in terms of age, social status and state of mind.

The two major categories of costume are period (age) or ethnic. The period costume helps to situate the play appropriately in its historical setting. That is why we talk of classical costume, Elizabethan costume, Restoration costume, costume of the modern period of the nineteenth century and contemporary costume. If for instance you want to stage *Oedipus Rex*, you must study the Grecian mode of dressing in about the fifth century B.C. Period costume is usually influenced by fashion. So you need to know the fashion of that period.

Ethnic costume reflects the cultural background or ethnic affiliations of the characters. Ethnic costume has a relationship with the period costume. While you consider the age/period, you should also consider the socio-cultural background of the play. Like I said above, it is not the dress worn by the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. that the Americans or Africans of the fifth century wore. Since fashion is cyclical, some dresses worn in an earlier century could be fashionable in the contemporary period of the same country or another country. The ethnic costume helps the audience to tell where a particular character comes from. There is no defined style in costume but each costume is designed to fit the wearer (depending on the effect) and to reflect the period or ethnic affiliation of the wearer. In Nigeria, an actress in *Iro and Buba*, especially made from *Aso Oke* materials shows that the character represents a Yoruba woman.

The functions of the costume should be clear from the explanations above. The most important function is that it is used to distinguish (a person). Characters highlight their ages or their moods through their costumes. A person in mourning is usually dressed in black while white flowing gown with a veil depicts a bride that is about to wed or that has just wedded. Costume helps also to show a character's occupation.

You may ask what you as a playwright has to do with costume since you are not a director or a designer. As a playwright, you should contribute to the costuming of the characters in your play. You can do this through stage direction or dialogue. Below is an excerpt from a play where information on costume is given through the stage direction. The play is *Regal Dance*, by Onyeka Onyekuba. (*A procession of twelve 'Udes' file past they are dressed in expensive long white shirts and golden wrappers. Each carries a long staff which they stamp on the ground in unison as they walk majestically to the king. The king is seated on his throne and on getting close to him; they do their obeisance to him by raising their staves towards him three times. Two other bare-chested men dressed in white wrappers lead Akubuike forward to the king. He is wearing a very expensive lace material. Two younger men dressed like the other two men come up in*

their rear. One is carrying a golden staff while the other one bears a cape-like robe, made from an expensive glittering golden material...) (83-84)

You can picture this scene in your mind's eye because it is described vividly. The stage direction must not be as long as this for it to contain information concerning a particular character's dress. In Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun*, as Titubi and her group enter with placards and distribute handbills, Osofisan describes them as being (*superbly dressed, with lots of jewellery and make-up and wearing conspicuously the moremi necklace then in vogue – a little gold dagger, surrounded with golden nuggets. Leading them is Titubi, a pretty, sensual and obviously self-conscious woman*) (7).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What kind of a COSTUME do you expect to be found on the character that is playing the role of royalty in a play?

In drama, everything is condensed in dialogue but the dialogue cannot contain every bit of information especially about the characters, attire, setting, and mood. In any play, stage direction is given in italics and enclosed in brackets as you can see from the examples given above.

3.2 Make Up

Usually, costume and make up go hand in hand but for clarity we have decided to split them. Make up as the name implies is to some extent like everyday make up. It is the cosmetics worn by actors and actresses to highlight their appearances. Make up complements the costume in revealing the character which the actor plays. Make up enhances the actor's physical appearance and like costume reveals age, period, culture, mood and social status. There are two types of makeup. They are straight make up and character make up. Straight make up is like everyday make up worn especially by the women. It helps to accentuate or highlight the personal features of the actor. On the other hand, character make up is used to highlight specific features that help to transform a particular actor to suit the role he is playing. For instance, when a thirty year old lady is cast in a play to play the role of an eighty year old woman, the makeup artist will, through make up, inscribe wrinkles, grey hairs and other features on her to make her appear like an old woman.

As a playwright you should try to indicate the profession and other special features like the age of your characters. Some playwrights do this in the *dramatis personae* (cast list), in the stage direction or in the dialogue. The information is necessary to aid the director's interpretation of the script.

3.3 Scenery

As a playwright you do not have much to do with scene or lighting design. It is the duty of the designer to conceptualize or conceive the suitable dramatic environment for the

play. Scene design therefore is creating the appropriate environment for the play. Scene and lighting designs help to enhance the meaning, clarify emotions, moods and depict the environment for the dramatic action. The setting of the play comes alive through the scene and lighting design. For details on this, refer to your course material on Theatre Workshop. However, as a playwright, you should be able to indicate the setting directly or through inference. This is reflected either in the stage direction or dialogue.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

List the functions of costume in drama. State costumes for depicting mourning in a play.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Spectacle is all the visual aspects of dramatic production which help to enhance the meaning by projecting the theme/subject matter depict the background and clarify the moods as well as the emotions in the play in performance. You will understand more about this if you have watched any play on stage.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that spectacle is an element of drama which is realized mainly in performance. It consists of costume and make up, scenery and lighting design. Through them, the meaning, emotions, moods and the setting are highlighted.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What is the relationship between the playwright and spectacle?

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UNIT 7 MUSIC/DANCE (SOUND EFFECTS)

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Music and Song
 - 3.1.1 Definition of Music
 - 3.1.2 Functions of Music in Drama
 - 3.3.3 Types of Music
 - 3.2 Song
 - 3.3 Dance
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Music is part of life. Drama presents life on stage so music is part of drama. However, music is not found in all forms of drama. The inclusion of music in drama is the prerogative of the dramatist. Music contributes to the aesthetic quality of the play. If it is handled properly music helps to enhance atmosphere, mood and even helps to highlight the theme. Sometimes music is accompanied with dance.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the place of music in drama;
- differentiate between Music, song and noise;
- determine the use of dance in play writing;
- identify and efficiently use music in playwriting; and
- identify and effectively use sound effects in drama.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Music and Song

3.1.1 Definition of Music

Music is defined as “organized sound” A musical tone is said to be “a product of regular vibration, perceived when an inner part of the listener’s ear is made to vibrate in sympathy” (Sadie and Lathan14). By contrast, noise is a product of

irregular vibration. It means that banging, blowing, scraping may produce music or sound according to the object banged and the way it vibrates, depending on how it is organized or disorganized.

Music is one of the three great arts. The three major arts are literature, visual arts and music.

In every society, in every period of history, men and women have made music. They have sung it and danced to it. They have used it in solemn rituals and in light hearted entertainment. They have listened to it in fields and forests, in temples, in bars, in concert halls and opera houses. They have made it not only with their voices but by adapting natural objects and banging them, scraping them, and blowing through them. They have used it to generate collective emotions to excite, to calm, to inspire action, to draw tears. Music is a central and necessary part of human existence. People enjoy music for leisure; engage in music as a form of profession and music is used in ritual, religious, social and other ceremonial events.

Every culture has found a musical style and a means of expressing it that arises from its needs, its history, and its environment. In Black Africa for example, where there has been a crucial need for quick communication over long distances, the musical culture is more closely concerned with drums and drumming than in other cultures of the world. The 'gong-chime culture' of Indonesia, owes its existence to the fact that the region discovered its musical character during the late Bronze Age; hence their most important musical instruments are sets of gongs (Sadie and Lathan).

3.1.2 Functions of Music in Drama

Music contributes to the beauty and impact of the play on the audience in the following ways:

- a. It helps to create and intensify the atmosphere of the play. You may not have watched stage plays but let us use the home video films to illustrate. As you watch a particular movie, the music that is presented indicates whether a particular scene is a love scene, a happy/joyous occasion; a mourning or sorrowful scene or if danger is being anticipated.
- b. It initiates activity. Whenever music changes in a play by an increase or decrease in tempo, you expect a change in the action of the play. The music we are discussing here includes songs and dances.

- c. It helps to advance the theme and explicate the plot.
- d. It helps to uplift the spirit and endear expected emotions in the audience because it helps the audience to respond to the action of the play in a particular manner.
- e. It helps the audience to focus attention or concentrate on the action on stage; this helps it to understand the play better. However, if it is not handled properly, it distracts the audience.

3.1.3 Types of Music

There is much music in our lives, music surrounds us as we shop, drive, sit in parks, and in other places. We have radios in our cars, phones, portable cassette players, and many other sources of music. We listen to music because we desire and enjoy them. There are other undesired forms of music like noise in our daily environment, music that is tuned very loud as they are heard from neighbors' stereos, supermarkets, markets, and other public places.

A wide range of music, include jazz, reggae, juju, rap, pop, rock, blues and traditional drumming. We can absorb music without really paying attention to the lyrics. This is passive enjoyment. In some cases, we enjoy music leisurely while we concentrate on other things; it can be in the background, entirely unnoticed (Titon). Music expresses what words and paintings cannot. And for true understanding of music, we must pay careful attention to the beating and the lyrics as it involves the engagement of the intellect, just as painting and literature do. Music expresses some social issues concerning people in the society. And like other forms of arts, music is found in historical and social contexts.

In many regions of the world, music forms part of a festival, ritual, ceremony or other forms of activity. Studying music without considering its context can provide half the picture. The most "frequent appearance of **music** in the world is in the combination with dance" (Yudkin 13). So when you decide to infuse music in your play, think of the dance that would accompany it if it requires a dance. The music in your play must have a purpose. Do you want to present an element of culture, accentuate the setting or the mood. There are many forms of music and because, it is a fluid art, it "changes to suit the expressive and emotional desires of humankind" (Titon 25). You should therefore understand that your choice of music is able to express the emotion you want to convey in your play. The music you use in a scene that contains a marriage ceremony should definitely be different from the one you would use in a funeral service. The music in the opening

scene of your play helps to set the mood and illuminate the expected action and the disposition of the characters in that scene. The blues music at the opening scene of Tess Onwueme's *Shakara: Dance Hall Queen*, gives some information on the waywardness of Shakara who spends most of her time in night clubs.

I have tried to explain music, different types of music and how music could be used in drama. Playwrights use music to create certain effects, moods and atmosphere or even to draw attention to a particular character.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

List and explain the functions of music in a play.

3.2 Song

Song is a form of music which is produced with the mouth so it contains words. It is a piece of music that one can sing. It is through the words of the music that a musician conveys his message. A playwright also conveys part of his message through the songs. Song helps to enrich drama if it is handled properly. A playwright, through the lyrics of a song exalts or condemns specific issues or ideas raised in the play. Traditional songs in plays help to highlight the playwright's background. Femi Osofisan, for instance, uses songs extensively in his plays and they are mainly Yoruba songs. Some playwrights use vernacular to present songs in their plays but also give the English translations of the songs but others present the songs in vernacular without any translations. The contention is that the songs cannot be translated perfectly in English as it is difficult if not impossible to reflect the beauty and other nuances of the local language. In the latter case you must ensure that the songs are inserted appropriately to synchronize with the plot so that the audience will not lose the message you want to convey.

3.3 Dance

Dance is a human experience that has existed through the ages and among all peoples and races. It is an expression of an inner feeling of man through body movement. Dance is used to express the emotions of joy or sadness. Dance like music helps to accentuate the cultural background of the playwright, of the setting, of the play or a particular scene. A story is told through song and dance.

Dance occurs in reaction to music which could be in any form. The playwrights use dance to heighten the mood or the thematic preoccupation of the play. Dance in plays could be inserted in the stage direction or in the dialogue. In most plays the occurrence of dance is indicated in the stage direction but it is usually an accompaniment of music or song except for specific effects. One of such special effects is a situation where a drunkard or a mad man is one of the characters; the possibility of any of them dancing without music is high.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

In what ways can you highlight your theme through songs in the drama.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have seen that music, song, and dance in drama contribute to the overall aesthetics of the play. Wherever music is present in a play, it directs and gives shape to the action. It is not compulsory for you to include music in the play you wish to write. It depends on your theme, your perspective and the overall effect you want to achieve.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have acquired the basic knowledge of the meaning of music, song and dance and their functions in drama. You are now in a better position to apply what you have learnt when you want to write your own play. You have also learnt that it is not compulsory for you to include music and dance in your play. However if you choose to include any of them, make sure that it blends perfectly with the plot and that it helps to illuminate your theme.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain the types of music in drama, as discussed in this unit.

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MODULE 3 POETRY

Unit 1	Preliminary Issues in Poetry Writing
Unit 2	What Makes a Poem – Content and Devices
Unit 3	Creative Blocks: Emotion in Tranquility
Unit 4	Imagery and Allusion: Expanding the Scope
Unit 5	The Material of Poems: Legend and History
Unit 6	The Finished Product

UNIT 1 PRELIMINARY ISSUES IN POETRY WRITING**CONTENTS**

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Setting
3.1.1	Creating your Setting
3.2	Atmosphere/Mood/Tone
3.3	Types of Poems
3.3.1	Lyric
3.3.2	Ballad
3.3.3	Narrative Poetry
3.3.4	Epic
3.3.5	Sonnet
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you are introduced to the preliminary issues in poetry writing. We will start with the setting of the poem through the atmosphere/mood, tone and finally some types of poems.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify mood and atmosphere in a poem distinguish setting in a poem;
- determine the relationship between the setting and atmosphere; and
- list the major types of poems.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Setting

You may be surprised that we are starting this module with setting instead of the subject matter. Poetry is the most emotional of all the genres of literature. The setting is therefore important because you may have encountered a setting that left a memorable impression on you and you decide to build your poem around it. It could be a unique scenery, a busy road, a slum or a battle field. It could also be a historical period like Nigeria in the First Republic, or during the military period. Your setting could be a physical environment, or a social environment. The emotion you express in your poem must take place somewhere for it to be realistic and relevant to human experience. In fiction and drama the setting is specific because in most cases the work is set in a physical environment since human beings do not exist or operate in a vacuum. In poetry, it could be specific like the cell in Dennis Brutus's "Letters to Martha" but it could also reflect an emotional state, a spiritual plane or other unearthly experiences. In poetry according to Tanure Ojaide setting "varies in degrees from being amply presented to being minimally there. It could be narrow or broad, direct or indirect, depending upon how related and relevant the experience being expressed is with where it takes place" (40-41).

Like we said earlier, setting helps the reader to visualize the situation being described in the poem but in some cases, it is just there to provide the environment. While in the first instance, you could compare it to the scenery or decorative background in a stage play. However, setting assumes greater significance in poetry if the poem is written specifically to draw attention to the physical and social characteristics of a particular place at a given time. A good example is this excerpt from Niyi Osundare's "A Song For Ajegunle".

Through roads portholed by callous rains
 Through hovels eaves-deep in swelling pools
 Through gutters heavy with burdens
 Of cholera bowels
 Through the feverish orchestra
 Of milling mosquitoes
 I saw you sprawled out
 Like the daub of apprentice painter

Here evenings are pale smokes
 Snaking out of idle kitchens
 The toothless swagger of beer parlours
 The battering clamour of weeping wives
 The satanic rumble of supperless stomachs
 The salaaming clarion of manacled mosques

I saw you sprawled out
Like a sheath with an absent cutlass

And night, ah night, when it comes
The shadowy thunder of hurrying feet
The hooded stench of nightsoil pails
The brooding brow of startles pangs
The sweaty stupor of crowded mats
The gutsy blast of angry guns

I saw you sprawled out
Like a stream without a bed (Lines 9- 32)

3.1.1 Creating your Setting

How do you create your social or physical setting? You could create an imaginary environment or base your setting on your knowledge of an existing physical and social setting to suit your purpose. The important factor here is the intent. What do you intend to achieve? Do you want to create an imaginary world to serve as your vision of an ideal society or to warn of the dangers inherent in such an environment as we see in Wilfred Owen's "Strange Meeting" that seems to be set in a horrible situation where the enemies do not seem to be enjoying their stay there. In this poem Owen only used his imagination to create/evoke a phantasmagoric setting for these two "enemies" who, but for the lies of the politicians who cause or manage wars (as in J. P. Clark's "Casualties"), might have been friends and had a few drinks together.

If you intend to write a historical poem, you must ensure that you relate your setting to the physical and social environment prevalent at that time. In this type of poem, you must ensure that you use accurate data to create your setting. If necessary carry out a research to ensure the accuracy of your information. If you don't do this, you might paint an unreliable picture in your poem. As a budding poet, it is better for you to avoid writing historical poems. Just record your emotion the way you feel it or as the inspiration come to you.

You will do better if you create your setting from your personal recollections of events, rooms, rivers/streams, houses, landscapes, animals, birds, plants and other objects. You will write better if you write about familiar environments than writing about an entirely fictional one. As a creative writer, exposing yourself to various types of physical settings or environments will be beneficial to you. Each time you find yourself in an environment or each time you encounter a place that makes an impression on you, contemplate what possible use you could make of the setting. The poet finds beauty or ugliness in everything and expresses it in his poem. So you should start now to see settings differently and try to see their relevance to you or to the next poem you are going to write.

From now on pay particular attention to your environment taking in the details that before now you did not observe. The flowers should become more colourful, the normal sunset becomes more picturesque, the glow of worm in a dark night assumes a different dimension, the gentle breeze sends a message to you and even the snoring of your partner creates a melodious tone in your ears. Start observing the weather, the seasons, living and dying closely. In all these and more, you will find a suitable environment to set your poem. Setting can be symbolic; it could be a joyous occasion, serious and unserious events, memories, dreams and other situations and events.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Write a short song that you can integrate into a play on EXPLOITATION OF THE MASSES.

3.2 Atmosphere/Mood/Tone

According to Ogungbesan and Woolger, atmosphere refers to “the feelings suggested by the physical details in the poem”. The mood is the emotion which a poem rouses and the tone describes “the poet’s attitude (e.g. ironic, sympathetic, detached, critical, etc). The setting therefore directly or indirectly generates the atmosphere or mood that consequently sets the tone that conditions the choice of images and diction used in the poem (Ojaide 40).

The setting influences the atmosphere, mood and tone of your poem. You should therefore vary your setting to enable you elicit appropriate atmosphere, mood, tone, imagery and diction that constitute significant aspects of your poem. Mood in a poem is an overall emotional effect created in the poem. To a large extent, it reflects the degree of emotional involvement of the poet which affects the reader in almost the same way. Consequently, it draws the reader to empathize with the subject discussed in the poem. It is the impression which the reader forms of the poem as a whole.

3.3 Types of Poems

There are different types of poems. Sometimes a poet decides to write a particular type of poem but at other times, the poem is written without consideration to the type. As you read through this, it will help you to appreciate and classify poems. It will also help you to choose your style when you are writing your own poem. However, some modern poets write in styles that are difficult to classify.

3.3.1 Lyric

Lyric means in Greek a song that is sang with the accompaniment of a lyre. Lyric is the commonest form of poetry. It is usually short and musical. Lyrical poems record emotions and are not narrated. Most nursery rhymes are lyrical. It is the kind of poetry that Plato approves of. In lyric, the poet’s emotions or feelings on some issues or objects are expressed in an exciting and vivid manner to achieve the

musical effect that characterizes this type of poem. The rhythmic and harmonious pattern in lyric are achieved by the use of repetitive patterns like alliteration, assonance, rhythm and musical rhyme schemes. Lyrics convey personal experiences so are “intensively personal for they express individual’s emotions, moods and thoughts (Maxwell – Mahon 4). Originally, lyrics were sung with musical accompanied.

3.3.2 Ballad

Ballad is the oldest form of poetry. It tells a simple story but is presented in verse form. Originally, they were composed as songs with refrains for the audience to sing. In a strict sense, ballads are written in a series of four-line stanzas in which alternate end-line words rhyme. In Ballads, certain words or phrases are repeated throughout the poem. This helps to heighten the musicality of the poem. The language is usually simple, straight forward and easy to understand. Some scholars refer to ballad as folk songs that are meant to be danced to.

3.3.3 Narrative Poetry

A narrative poem tells a story presented either in verses stanzas or in a long continuous verse. Although it tells a long story, the poet is usually cautious so that it does not translate into the stringing together of connected or unconnected incidents.

A poem that is narrative invariably tells a story. A good narrative poem presents incidents or episodes that are relevant to the central idea or theme. Thus, “theme and action must form a unified structure that will not become overburdened with the addition of unnecessary incidents or that will disintegrate with the subtraction of any vital ones” (Maxwell- Mahon 47). The story told in a narrative poem could be a serious or unserious story. Ballad and epic are examples of narrative poems.

3.3.4 Epic

Epic is a long great narrative poem. It tells the story of marvelous deeds of one or more characters, mainly, from myth, legend or history. It is usually about the adventures or exploits of a hero. It thrives on vivid description of incidents, events and actions. The subject matter in epic is always rendered in a serious manner. Epics are great poems and are planned carefully by the poet to achieve the desired effect.

The hero in epic encounters severe obstacles but in the end, like in melodrama, is able to overcome all the obstacles. He emerges triumphant but after a turbulent struggle.

3.3.5 Sonnet

Sonnet is a fourteen-lined poem. Usually, it is divided into two sections of eight and six lines in which the first eight lines present a situation, while the last six express the poet’s thoughts or feelings on that situation. Sometimes, a sonnet is presented in

three sections of four- lines, in which each section presents a different form of argument that is summed up in the final couplet (two lines) in the end.

This shows that there are different types of sonnets. We stated above that a sonnet has fourteen lines but there are exceptions to this rule because there are some with more than fourteen lines. The arrangement of lines and the rhyme scheme also differ. The regular or Italian Sonnets, is the one stated above that consists of a group of eight-lines and another group of six lines. The eight line section is called the octave while the six-line section is the sestet. The octave can be sub-divided into two sections of four lines each and the sestet into two three line sections.

The English sonnet popularized by Shakespeare is divided into three four-line groups known as quatrains and a single two-liner called couplet. Usually, the couplet presents a concise conclusion or resolution of issues raised in the three quatrains.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Where do you live? Try to write five simple lines to describe your environment.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Setting is a very important element in the writing of poems. This is because it influences the atmosphere, the mood and the tone of the poem. The setting could be obvious, suggested, or symbolic. The basic forms of setting are physical and social. In some poems you find the physical setting while in some the social and in some others both. The setting creates the environment in the poem. Diction is very important because it is the tool that you need to convey your message to your readers.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt in this unit that setting is important to the poet. You should therefore identify possible settings in your environment, nature and human interactions. You can only do this with poetic eyes which enable you imagine what you could create in/with them. You have also learnt that there are different types of poems. This knowledge is expected to guide you as you decide to write your own poems.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List and explain briefly, five types of poems.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 WHAT MAKES A POEM – CONTENT AND DEVICES**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Theme
 - 3.2 Subject Matter
 - 3.3 What Makes a Poem
 - 3.3.1 Sound
 - 3.3.2 Rhythm
 - 3.3.3 Rhyme
 - 3.3.4 Diction
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In all forms of creative writing, the writer writes about a particular idea. This idea gives rise to the subject matter. The idea expressed in subject matter constitutes the message which the writer wants to send to his audience. In this unit, we will introduce you to theme and subject matter in poetry, and what actually makes a poem a unique genre of literature, i.e. the devices used by the poet to give memorable expressions to his content (subject matter and theme).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the theme in a poem;
- identify the subject matter;
- identify the uniqueness of poetic diction; and
- determine the importance of sound and rhythm in poetry.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 Theme**

In prose or drama, the theme is the underlying idea in the work. In poetry also, the theme is also the main idea which the emotion expresses. The poem offers instruction or information in a pleasant and persuasive way. You can

draw your theme from a concept, an event or a series of events, contemporary or historical, an interesting situation, setting, mood, a person, an event or a personal experience. The poet or writer does not “draw” the theme in a poem from legend, myth or folklore. The important thing is that it is that idea which permeates the entire poem and is the message which the poet wants to communicate to the audience. In most cases the theme is by the reader in one word like corruption, love, war, bad leadership, revenge, and many others. This word is what you decipher from reading the poem and not that the poet will write that s/he is treating the theme of corruption for instance. We will read the poem below and try to discover the theme.

“Let me not to the Marriage of True Minds”

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit
impediments.*

*Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove*

O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,

*That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken
Love's not time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickles compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks*

But bears it out even to the edge of doom

*If this be error, and upon me proved, I never writ, nor
no man ever loved. **William Shakespeare.***

Read this poem for at least three times. What is the underlying idea which you could call the theme? You will observe that the constancy of perfect love is stated clearly in the first quatrain. The distinct message is that a perfect love is not affected by any impediment, does not alter by any alteration or can it be removed by any remover. As you read further down, the poet states boldly that although time can affect people physically, it does not affect this perfect love. One can therefore state with confidence that the theme of the poem is love. But it will be more explicit to say that it is “perfect love”, “true love” or “permanent love”. So the message the poet is sending to his audience is that true love cannot be affected by any obstacle such as sickness, suffering, and sorrow. I decided to use

this simple and straight forward poem written by Shakespeare in the 16th century to show that a good literary work is usually relevant in all ages and nationalities. You can see also what we said in unit one about choice of words. The poet selected simple words that convey his message in a straight forward manner

3.2 Subject Matter

The subject matter in poetry is the same with the subject matter in other literary genres. It is the topic of discussion in the poem. In most cases, we deduce the subject matter from the title of the poem. It is from this topic of discussion that the theme is extracted, which means that the theme is usually subsumed in the subject matter. If we look at the poem discussed above for instance, we agree that the theme is “perfect love” what then is the subject matter? Let us look at the title again “Let Me Not to the Marriage of True Minds”. You may ask yourself what Shakespeare means by that. Then you start reading the poem and you find out that the sentence is not yet complete in the title but is completed in the second line. It then reads “let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments”. This means that any marriage between two true minds should thrive irrespective of perceived obstacle or barrier.

If you have been observant, when the bans of marriage are called in the church (especially in the Catholic Church), the catechist ends by saying “anybody who knows of any impediment to this marriage should report to the priest in charge”. The impediments, according to the canon law of the Catholic Church are thirteen (13). Shakespeare is saying that these impediments, no matter how grave they are, should not hinder the marriage of true minds. In the second and third lines he affirms this position that any love that is altered by any obstacle (alteration) is not love. From these, we can confidently say that it is only perfect or true love that can exist in such circumstance.

3.3 What Makes a Poem

Poetry is not just about language and ideas. It is an emotional exercise so it involves an experience. In this experience the poet explores a subject that crystallizes in a theme. In this experience, the poet expresses his feeling about that idea (theme) through the creative manipulation of words in a language he chooses. When this experience and expression are fused creatively he produces a very good poem. If however there is no blend of the experience and expression, the poem will not be coherent and consequently the audience/reader will not get the desired or the right message. In such situations the poet fails to communicate.

In poetry you cannot separate experience and expression. It is like a separation of content and form. If a poem is just the recording of an experience without proper attention being paid to how it is expressed, it ceases to be art but a record of ideas. On the other hand, if it is just a cluster of beautiful words that is joined together but does not express an idea, it becomes meaningless. What makes a poem therefore is what is said and how it said. The experience is what is being said while the expression is how it is said. The experience could be a real or an imagined encounter, factual or fictional, objective or subjective, but

to which the poet responds and expresses.

As a budding poet you should be aware of the fact that you should learn one thing or the other from any experience you encounter in life. You should be ready to open yourself to learn something new from every situation. You learn through all your senses as you touch, see, hear, feel and taste events, objects, things and other experiences of everyday of your lives. You record each experience in your memory because through them you could respond to fresh experiences in a new way to give them fresh realizations. Some of the common experiences in life include fear, love, and loss of dear one, hunger, poverty, sickness, victory, defeat, success and failure. Some of these experiences come in simple forms while others appear in complex forms. The experience could be serious or light.

You are not expected to respond to all the experiences you encounter in life but to only those that affect you emotionally. It must be a unique experience that you would want to share with others in a poetic form. You should be able to decide which experience is worth expressing or communicating to your audience or reader. It is worth expressing if in your perception, it is significant and towers above others. Recall the poem above and note that an experience is worth expressing if it has a universal appeal and a human dimension that can improve humanity or your society. It may or may not be a new experience and unique as the Russian poet Boris Pasternak opined; “My abiding dream was that the poem should contain something, a new thought or a new image” (quoted in Ojaide, 47). In poetry, your thoughts and feelings are inseparable. It is the same in other genres of literature but the feeling is made manifest more in poetry as the poet juggles imageries, and figures of speech to pour his “emotion in a rhythmic grace” (Eruvbetine, 3).

3.3.1 Sound

In poetry, words are very important because over and above the basic meaning, they constitute and create the real beauty of the poem. Words give impressions of the emotions of the poet and that is why specific words should be used instead of the other. For instance, a poet may decide to use the word ‘chant’ instead of ‘song’ or ‘music’. Apart from the meaning, he chooses particular words because of the sound effect he wants to achieve.

You know that words, though symbols on paper, are sounds in daily speech or spoken forms. Words, as individual sounds are selected because of the patterns which they can form to create a special meaning. Certain words in poetry are chosen to heighten the sound effects in a poem. Sound effects are achieved more through patterns of sound repetition in form of consonants or vowels. The sound patterns in figures of speech are mainly ‘alliteration’ and ‘assonance’ ‘consonance’ ‘pun’ and ‘onomatopoeia’.

Sound patterns in poetry are not often used only to create specific effects but also used to convey a special emotion. Poetry is a product of the mind or imagination; when there is a strong excitement in the mind, it is often conveyed in a rhythmic pattern and sound patterns therefore are used to create rhythm in poetry.

3.3.2 Rhythm

Rhythm is usually associated with music – song, dance, drumming and other forms. Rhythm is also associated with motion, architecture or mathematics. In all these, repetition is constant, though, with certain forms of development and variation. It appeals to the senses. Words are given prominence by the rhythm.

Poetry is musical because of the rhythmic pattern in which it is presented. Rhythm is also produced through stressed or unstressed syllables that are patterned in metre. The best way to describe metre is measure. It is the measurement of words in a poem.

Metre as stated above is the measurement of words and it is based on the stress on syllables of the words in a line. In simple terms, a syllable is that minimum utterance that can be produced with one breath or pause. In poetry accent is the stress that is placed on certain syllables in a line of poetry. A line of poetry contains a number of accented (stressed) and unaccented syllables arranged in a particular order or pattern. This order or pattern is called metre.

There are different types of metre in poetry. Each metre is categorized based on the number of feet in a line of poetry. A foot is used to describe a group of syllables that form a metrical unit between two or three syllables.

3.3.3 Rhyme

Poets produce musical effects in the poem through rhythmic patterns. Apart from the production of rhythm in poetry through alliteration and assonance, another important aspect of rhythm is rhyme.

Rhyme is the repetition of the same sound usually at the end of each line. Assonance and alliteration could be located anywhere within the line but rhyme is the repetitive pattern or sound found at the end of two or more lines.

The sequence in which the rhymes occur in a poem is called rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme is indicated by the use of alphabets at the end of the line. Some of the popular rhyme schemes are aabb, abab, abcb, abba. There are many rhyming patterns that are not indicated here. You should just learn that sound repetitions at the end of the lines are matched to form the rhyme scheme. Let us use a simple nursery rhyme to illustrate this:

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

In this short poem, ‘stars’ and ‘are’ have similar sounds while ‘high’ and ‘sky’ share the same sound. Here is another simple illustration:

Baa baa black sheep, a
 Have you any wool, b
 Yes sir yes sir, c
 Three bags full. b

Here ‘sheep’ and ‘sir’ do not have similar sounds while ‘wool’ and ‘full’ also have similar sounds. So the rhyme scheme here is abcb.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Write a short poem on any topic of your choice. Make sure the poem reflects a theme, setting and rhyming pattern.

3.3.4 Diction

Diction is simply the choice of words. It is important for you to choose the right words that will help to convey your idea appropriately. As a beginner you should use simple, ordinary and plain diction. Do not try to be deliberately poetic by engaging in extremely strange things or affectation. You should also avoid unnecessary inversions and high sounding words in your language which you may think might impress your readers. Always ask yourself if your choice of words could effectively convey your feelings or your idea.

The best way to know if you are on the right path is, according to Ojaide, to ask yourself the question, “is this the way I talk to people”. Remember that you are trying to communicate your idea to your reader or audience through your poem. You should therefore ensure that you communicate to them in a language that they will understand. It is the intensity and beauty of the language and not its obscurity or bombast that makes a good poem. As much as possible, therefore, avoid cliché, slangs, phrases and other unfamiliar or common terms. However, in line with poetic license you could make proper use of deviations in syntax, structure or form to make your poem unique.

You should acquaint yourself with different poetic forms. This will enable you decide the most appropriate form through which you may wish to convey your idea. Poetry strives on rhythm, so choose words and metres that will allow your poem to flow in a particular rhythmic pattern. Do not hesitate to delete any word that obstructs this free flow in your poem. Diction in poetry could be simple or obscure. A poem that is presented in a simple language is straight forward and very easy to understand because the words chosen by the poet are simple and very familiar words. On the other hand, obscure diction in a poem means that the words may or may not be simple words but presented in such a way that it will be difficult for you to decipher the message of the poem immediately and appreciate the poem easily. Compare the two poems below:

(A)

From the west

Clouds come hurrying
 Turning Sharply
 Here and there
 Whirling
 Tossing up things on its tail
 Like a madman chasing nothing.

From David Rubadiri's "An African Thunderstorm"

(B)

The price seemed reasonable, location
 Indifferent.
 The Landlady swore she lived
 Off premises.
 Nothing remained
 But self-confession. "Madam", I warned.

"I hate a wasted journey- I am an African." Silence. Silenced
 transmission of
 Pressurized good-breeding.
 Voice, when it came,
 Lipstick-coated, long gold-rolled
 Cigarette-holder-pipped....

From Wole Soyinka's "Telephone Conversation"

Poetic language is unique. The poet chooses his words in such a way that together they will be able to produce the desired emotional effect, convey the message and at the same create the desired effect and rhythmic pattern.

The choice of words reflects the intentions of the poet, the effects s/he wants to create and even the poet's target audience. The poet uses figurative language and figures of speech.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Which of the two poems above could be said to have been presented in an obscure language?

4.0 SUMMARY

Theme is the central idea in a poem. It is the core message that the poet communicates to the reader or the audience. The subject matter is the topic of discussion in the poem. It is usually found in the title of the poem. In most cases, this central idea that constitutes the theme is based on an experience by the poet. He then expresses this experience using the right words and appropriate sounds to create the rhythmic balance which makes

poetry a beautiful experience.

5.0 CONCLUSION

You have learnt in this unit that the theme of the poem is the underlying idea which is different from the subject matter, the topic of discussion in the poem. You learnt also that an experience is worth expressing in poetry if it has a universal appeal and that you should try to express it in a unique way to imprint your mark of originality on it. The basic tools in poetry are words. You have therefore learnt that an appropriate choice of words helps to create rhythm which is the hallmark of poetry.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

In your own words differentiate between theme and subject matter in a poem.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 CREATIVE BLOCKS: EMOTION IN TRANQUILITY**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Creative Blocks
 - 3.2 Emotion
 - 3.3 Emotion in Tranquility
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be introduced to the creative blocks in poetry. By creative blocks we mean the basic steps in writing a poem. These steps are not rigid so may vary from one poet to the other. We will try to lead you through the process, from the moment the poet conceptualizes an idea to the time he writes the poem.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify creative blocks in the world around you and within you determine the place of emotion in poetry; and
- distinguish between the expression of emotion by people in their daily lives and the expression of emotion in poetry.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 Creative Blocks**

Playwrights and novelists in most cases start their creative writing with the development of a synopsis or an outline. The poet in most cases does not need an outline since he does not necessarily write a story with a plot line. Poems are short in form and express emotions of fear, joy, admiration and many other forms of feelings. What then are the creative blocks for the poet? According to William Wordsworth, poetry is a “spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility”. If this is so, it means that the poet in most cases creates as s/he imagines the idea. He writes the way he feels as he pours his emotions on paper. This explains why a few lines of a cry of anguish could constitute a beautiful poem. This is against the case of the novelist or playwright stated above where the idea is put down, a story created based on that idea and the writer

decides how to present it, whether to use chronological or episodic plot. The writer there takes a decision on the age, disposition and qualification of the character.

The creative block which forms the foundation of the poetic building is a fertile imagination. The poem comes from the poet's imagination. It however starts from a germinal idea which he conceives before he writes or develops as the poet writes. Sometimes, it comes out wrongly and he will have to start all over again. Sometimes, instantly as it is for most poems, the first draft metamorphoses into the main poem except for a few revising and retouching here and there in order to get a perfect form.

In writing your poem, learn to take one idea at a time, work on one poem at a time until you conclude it. Learn to write or work serenely and happily as the poem flows in your mind. Allow the poem to flow and don't force yourself to write except when you have the inspiration to do so. Once you are focused on the idea, whether you have written the entire poem or not, try to add one block at a time and "cement a little every day, rather than add new fertilizers" until you get your final draft (Hall 152). This means that if you should revise and revise the original poem until you are satisfied that the idea is clear and the right emotion is conveyed in a rhythmic grace.

Some people erroneously believe that artists, poets inclusive are weird or abnormal human beings. I hope that you are not one of those who hold this view especially in contemporary Nigeria where literary artists rank among the elite in the society. Among the literary artists are university lecturers, medical doctors, pharmacists, engineers and other professionals. So as you conceive the idea, and write for your next poem remain human by going to normal places, visiting your usual joints and doing exactly what you feel like doing. However, as the inspiration comes, always try to put it down immediately in your note pad. At such times, you can afford to forgo the joints, the exciting or places, friends and other good times because you could do that afterwards but once the inspiration comes it may be difficult to be recalled afterwards. That does not mean that you should be a recluse because you are writing a poem.

Each time you start a poem, concentrate on it and forget the other poems you want to write and think only of the one you are writing at the moment. Thinking about the poem is not wondering about what to write but about how to put finishing touches on what you have written. Many poems are written at a sitting because as the experience crystallizes into an idea and takes shape in your mind, the poem flows. Once it starts flowing, allow the poem to lead you. If you do that, you may not have a lot to revise. My experience as a playwright is that I hear the characters interacting in my head and I record what they are saying quickly. I do not claim to be a poet since I have not published any poem.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Use your experience of a person who cheated you or somebody else well known to you to write a five-line verse of poem. Read your poem to your colleague.

However an experience in 1990 forced me to write the poem below. It is not a perfect poem but just to illustrate the need to move with your note pad and to record your experience as soon as you have the inspiration. Before the incident, I had the notion that an academic environment should present an ideal place where there should be rule of law and respect for human dignity. Unfortunately, I was disappointed. On that fateful day, two lecturers who I had respect for very much abused themselves in the public in what I considered 'gutter language'. It was so horrible, at least for me, that one of them told the other that he could not father a child and that one retorted that he would rather stay childless than to father sickle cell anemic children. One said that the other was not a man because his wife was paying their rent. Instantly, I started scribbling on my note pad what came to my mind. The product of that scribbling is hereby recorded.

I No wan Go School

I happi say I be illiterate
 I dey live mai life jeje
 I no dey envi anybody
 I no dey jealous anybody.
 I dey content with wetin I get
 Mai wife no dey fight for right.

I no wan go school becos,
 I no wan be like Prof. dis or Dr. dat Wey dey
 abuse each other for public Pass 'agbero' wey
 dey motor park..
 Dem say na education.
 Dem say na emancipation.
 Dem say na liberation.

I no wan go school becos
 I no wan be like Prof. dis or Dr. dat
 Wey ask im wife
 To feed dem family Make im pay rent
 Wife to buy uniform
 Make im pay school fees
 Wife say im want equality
 Husband give am equality

But for responsibility only
 I no wan go school becos
 I no wan be like Prof. dis or Dr. dat
 Wey sabi gossip pass dey lectures
 Wey dem dey deliver
 For backbiting
 Dem dey

For slandering, Dem pafuka
 If na so people
 Wey go school dey behave, Walahi Talahi
 I hapi say I be Illiterate

Later, I looked at it but did not review it much. I was disgusted with the action of these lecturers and recorded my feeling on paper. I used pidgin because of the person of the illiterate man that I used.

3.2 Emotion

Emotion refers to strong feelings in a person. It could be a feeling of love, joy, pain, anger, sorrow and many other forms of feeling. It reflects the state of a person's mind, fond feelings or an agitation of the mind. The emotion could be real, fake, exaggerated or controlled. You hear often when people are asked to control their emotions. The emotion could be that of grief or hurt which are usually manifested through shedding of tears (crying). Joyous emotions can also be expressed through tears of joy. Emotion is therefore that strong feelings in our minds that are manifested through our actions.

For the poet, his emotion is expressed on paper with words. Thus a painful emotion well expressed could elicit tears from the reader. Sometimes, you find a reader smiling to himself while reading a poem. It means that the emotion expressed by the poet has been communicated very well. Wordsworth calls it powerful emotion. Now that you are being introduced to writing of poems, you should try to record your emotions. The only tools you need are pen, paper or computer and the right choice of words. In poetry, the writer composes the poem the moment something strikes him/her. Some poets claim that the poems appear to them the way they are written. Coleridge for instance, claims that "Kubla Khan" was a product of a dream stimulated by opium (*Norton Anthology* 61). All the lines are documented the way he saw them in that dream. He was in a trance/dream and the poem appeared to him but unfortunately, a visitor came and disrupted his flow of thought and he lost most of the lines and never recovered them again. This means that that particular poem is not a product of rational action. This means that the poem flowed in the poet's mind the way it appears in the fragment in the published.

3.3 Emotion in Tranquility

You can only create when you are at peace with yourself. You may find yourself in a noisy environment, depending on you and your creative attitude; you could still recoil into yourself and write. To recollect an idea in tranquility also means writing as you observe but most people agree that a poet creates better in a quiet and peaceful environment. This is true but poems have been written in buses and other public places. The important factor for any poet is to find how and where he/she creates better. Find your rhythm and the best environment for the realization of your poetic imaginations.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the role of emotion in poetry? Write a short poem bringing out different shades of emotion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Generally, creative writing involves a process of discovery of oneself and environment. When you conceive/conceptualise a poem, you discover your disposition towards the idea or emotion you go on to express it in the poem. The poet also discovers the environment in a very special way as s/he views things or objects differently. Certain issues or objects that are taken for granted are seen and given new insights. If for instance, you read Milton's "An Ode on a Grecian Urn", you will wonder if all the things said in admiration and expression of the emotions evoked by the Grecian urn are just for an ordinary flower vase. The poet sees and expresses what we all take for granted, in a special way and we now view that object, issue or environment differently.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have tried to explore the creative blocks in poetry. You have learnt that a poet creates differently from the novelist and the playwright. This is because poetry is an emotional exercise so could be started and completed in a very short period. A poet could record his emotion the way he feels it and instantly that becomes a poem. You also learnt that this emotion must be recorded for it to be a poem because if it remains in the poet's imagination, nobody will know about it, hence the recollection of that emotion in tranquility.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List the basic steps in poetry writing.

7.0 REFERENCE/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 IMAGERY AND ALLUSION: EXPANDING THE SCOPE**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Imagery
 - 3.2 Allusion
 - 3.3 Figures of Speech
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be introduced to the creative blocks that help you to expand your scope in poetry. Imagery, allusion, and figure of speech help the poet to present so much in few words to achieve the desired condensed language that is the hallmark of poetry.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- identify the position of imagery in poetry identify allusions in poems;
- identify figures of speech in poems; and
- distinguish between ordinary language and poetic language.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 Imagery**

Imagery is a collective term for images which present in the mind the likeness of an object, human beings, other animate or inanimate objects or even events. It helps to bring an idea or a picture to the mind or the imagination. An image may not present an exact picture but allows the reader to see through his mind's eye or imagination an appearance which closely resembles the original. It helps the reader to form a mental picture of what is being presented. When these mental pictures (images), figures of speech are presented in general or collectively, it is called imagery. Imagery is used to enhance the aesthetics of the poem. Aesthetics is very important in poetry-writing because, every poet strives to express himself

beautifully so that the poem can provide artistic or aesthetic pleasure for the reader.

Imagery is referred to as “a central component of almost all imaginative literature and is often said to be the chief element in poetry” (Ojaide27). There are two types of imagery - literal and figurative. Literal imagery is used to describe things or events in such a way as to evoke the things referred to. In literal imagery, it is easy to identify the object that is being represented. It is highlighted through vivid descriptions. Figurative imagery works also through description but here the object is likened to something else. Imagery helps the poet to concretize ideas and feelings in a poem so that the reader can actually imagine what the poet is saying. It helps to give the poet's feelings “tangible and real existence rather than a purely intellectual one. It provides the reader with a sense of vividness and immediacy” (Ndem25). Figurative imagery is akin to symbolism because all symbols depend on images. Imagery helps to make the scenes created in a poem to be more realistic to the reader. Figurative language embraces image and imagery. Image is usually a mental picture of something. It involves other senses of hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

How is poetic language different from ordinary language?

Poetry expresses the poet's own feeling and temperament. In most cases it is created to instruct and at the same time give artistic pleasure. The poet therefore tries to instruct through an embellished and sometimes, lofty language. He/she uses imagery and figures of speech, assembles appropriate words that will aid the realization of his goal of conveying his message as well as giving artistic pleasure. In some poems, the message is easily discernable while in some it is difficult to decipher the meaning. Some poems are written in simple conversational language while some are shrouded in images and figures of speech. It depends on the style adopted and the creative imagination or the talent of a particular poet. “I” could be and often is the person speaking in a poem. Many poems written in the first person “I” are likely to have recognizable traits of the poet's own person, circumstances, aspirations, experiences or states of mind. The justification for this claim is that the poet's emotion expressed in the poem comes from within him.

Wordsworth insists that the source of a poem is not in the outside world but in the individual. It means therefore that since the essential materials for the poem are the inner feelings of the poet though based on external people and events. The important factor is that the poet presents his poem in a language that is understood by his audience. In oral poetry, the problem of obscurity does not necessarily arise because the poet uses familiar images drawn from his immediate environment which the audience is also familiar with. Also the oral poet renders his poem in a language that is understood by his audience. In literary poetry, on the other hand, the poet may have been familiar with the “rules” that govern the type of poetry he is writing and deliberately chooses the images in line with the rules to achieve the desired effect on the audience. Although modern poets write with the intention of achieving a global acceptance, the images are still drawn

mostly from the environment of the poet or the setting of the poem. Images are important in poems because they help to highlight in precise forms, the variety of themes and forms. The imageries help the poets to achieve the desired coherence of content and form and for deeper explanation of their subject matters.

The scope from which images or external objects are drawn in poetry are expanded "... transformed or irradiated by the author's feelings" (*Norton Anthology* 613). Coleridge insists that great works of literature are produced through "a self-originating and self – organizing process that begins with a seed-like idea in the poets imagination, grows by assimilating the poets feelings and the diverse materials of sense – experience", (*Norton Anthology* 614) and evolves into an organized whole in which the parts that are integrally related to each other and to the whole. The subject of poetry ranges from the "universal to the particular from humankind to nation or ethnic group from animals to plants from animate to inanimate objects" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 32). Imagery help the poet to create vivid pictures. In most cases, imageries are draw from nature.

It is important for a poet to know how to use and apply imagery in poems to achieve a logical whole. They are necessary devices which he needs to create an image in the reader's mind. Imagery, in addition to other figures of speech, helps to create the desired rhythmic grace in a poem and to make the poem really poetic. An effective use of imagery and figures of speech sets apart a good poet from a mediocre. Imagery and figures of speech are presented in words and it is the proper organization of the words that produces rhythm in a poem. And the appropriate use of imagery gives the poem its uniqueness and provides liveliness and vibrancy.

Some Nigerian poets adopt Pidgin English as the mode of communication in their poems and with appropriate use of imagery, the poems are interesting. This medium was popularized by Aig Imoukhuede and Ezenwa-Ohaeto. Most of the poems in pidgin are satirical. Pidgin, according to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, is a medium of communication that provides a bridge between the orality of verbal communication and the formality of the written words which enables the writer expand the dimensions of orality in literature (Ohaeto 27). Many of them are usually direct social commentaries and are easy to understand. My poem above may not be a very good example so I hereby present "How I Go Believe You" from Ezenwa-Ohaeto's *If to Say I be Soja*:

HOW I GO BELIEVE YOU You
 say you no get kobo
 But your dress dey expensive
 Your shoe na imported
 De car you get too cost
 De thing way you bi

Just talk loud pass your word
 You say you no get kobo
 How I go believe you,

You say Kontri no rich
 Oil money you carry alone
 You say make I dey manage
 De food your dog chop
 My family never see for one year
 You say Kontri no rich again
 How I go believe you.

You say you be honest man
 Public property you don steal
 You go award plenty contract
 With ten percent for your account
 You say you no bi bad man
 How I go believe you,

You say you get better plan
 All bad people na your friend
 When you make small ceremony
 Na only thief people go full dere
 Dose wey you dey help na rogues
 You say you get better plan
 How I how I go believe,

You say you like us plenty
 For morning you flog us koboko
 For afternoon your dog bite us
 For evening you put us for detention
 Your boys dey harass us plenty
 You say you like us plenty
 How I go believe you.

<p>As a teacher in a primary or secondary school, you are strongly advised not to expose your pupils and students to pidgin English at these early levels of education. Pidgin English can damage their English and earn them failure in school certificate English examinations. At lower levels of education, discourage your students from reading, speaking and writing pidgin English.</p>

On
e
pro
min
ent
feat

ure of pidgin English is that it explores social realities in a humorous and lighthearted manner. The use of humour is intrinsic but it differs depending on the effect which the poet intends to achieve. The humour in

Frank Aig-Imoukhuede's *Pidgin Stew* and *Sufferhead* differs from the humour in Mamman Vatsa's *Tori for Geti Bowleg* and both differ from the humour in the poem above. As stated above, most poems in pidgin are satiric and satire is a genre of comedy. The language itself sounds humorous even when serious issues are being communicated. So if you intend to write in pidgin, remember that humour is "seen as part of the creative quality that has heightened the communicatory aspects of pidgin literature" and that it "enables the writer in pidgin to explore social realities insightfully, and interestingly

because it is achieved through hilarious allusions, ironic perceptions, succinct imagery and the tabulation of incongruities in human behaviour” (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 14).

3.2 Allusion

Allusion is an indirect reference in passing to an object, idea or a human being dead or alive. In allusion, a thing is referred to without explicit mention, explanation, or with suggestion of further associations. Because of this casual reference, it is difficult for the reader to decipher what is alluded to in some poems. A reader who is not familiar with the bible, for instance, may not be able to detect the allusion in John Milton’s poem below.

3.3 Figures of Speech

Figures of speech are used mainly to “associate or compare dissimilar things” (Ojaide 28). The aim is to create an image in the mind of the reader. There are many figures of speech but we will mention only a few here. You should get a good dictionary of literary terms to learn more about figures of speech. You need to get acquainted with them for you to be able to use them while writing your own poems. The ones we will consider briefly here are simile, metaphor and personification.

Simile compares two unlike things with the use of “as” or “like”. Metaphor also compares two unlike things without the use of as or like. For example, “he is as strong as a tiger” (simile). “He is a tiger” (metaphor). Personification aids the poet attribute human characteristics to non human beings, objects or ideas. We will analyse the poem below and try to present the poetic devices we have been discussing so far.

ON HIS BLINDNESS

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

I fondly ask, But patience, to prevent
 That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need
 Either man’s work or his own gifts who best
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
 Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed
 And post o’er land and ocean without rest;
 They also serve who only stand and wait.

Allusion

If you are a Christian, you would recall the parable of the gold coins in Mathew 25: 15-30

where servants were given a gold coin each by their master. All of them invested the money and made profit for their master but one of them buried his one coin in the ground where it was lodged and was useless. When the master returned, the servant is called to present an account and he did not make any profit so his master scolded him and said that at least he would have kept his money in the bank where it would have yielded an interest.

You have seen how I explained the underlined words which together form the biblical allusion in the poem. Milton alludes to the uselessness of his eyes to the uselessness of a gold coin buried in the ground. However, it is important to note that the soul is eager and able to serve (not useless). Indeed Milton, in spite of his handicap, went on to produce monumental poetry using the daughter as scrivener. Allusion in the hands of a skilful poet expands the scope of the reader's knowledge and understanding of the world. Here, the awareness and virtues the reader would gain are:

- (1) Endurance and courage in suffering
- (2) Life of absolute trust in God
- (3) No condition is permanent

Theme

The theme of the poem is the relationship in service between human being and God. John Milton became blind when he was about forty-six years, due to the kind of work he was doing which involved interpreting and translating Latin. And that is why the fourteen-line poem (sonnet) starts on a note of reminiscence as he says "When I consider how my life spent/Ere half my days in this dark world and wide". His life provokes some thought in him. Part of the thought is that it is useless for anyone to waste his/her talent. It is not proper for anyone to leave one's talent unused especially when one knows that one must account to God, how one's talent entrusted to him has been used.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Write a simple poem on MY HOME. Your poem should reflect a theme, setting allusion and figure of speech. Read your poem to a colleague of yours.

A rhetorical question of line seven, "Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?" is a response to his predicament. He wonders whether God would give somebody a gift of a bag of salt and accompany the gift with a rainfall. His mind tells him that "God doth not need/Either man's work or his own gifts", meaning that God does not need our services or our labour or efforts. What is important to God is our love for Him and for our fellow human beings. Charity, faithfulness and obedience to God's will. That is, his "mild yoke" which pleases God so much. In God's kingdom, the angels and other divine beings worship Him in obedience and "serve him best" endlessly, "o'er land and ocean without rest".

The poem teaches us that whatever condition we find ourselves in this world, whether good or bad we have to accept it as we see it, because there is a purpose behind every action. In the poem, the poet recognizes the omnipotence and omnipresent qualities of

God and notwithstanding his blindness, determines to serve God with all his strength hence"...my soul more bent/to serve therewith my Maker..." God does not give us anything in life because of our righteousness, though that may enhance it because he does not need our work, according to the poet.

Diction

The diction is simple, straightforward and condensed. The first eight lines (octave) provide a question, while the last six lines (sextet) supply the answer. The poem is a Miltonic sonnet which rhymes ABBA, ABBA, CDE, CDE. The run-on-lines of the poem add to its descriptive vividness. One other thing noticeable about the pattern is that the lines are made up of about ten syllables which is the hallmark of a sonnet.

Imagery/Symbolism

The dominant images in the poem help to illuminate the relationship between man and God and the poet's blindness words like "world", "soul", "Maker", "God", "mild yoke", "kingly", all point to this. "Thousands at his bidding speed", "stand and wait", help the reader to see in his/her imagination, thousands of angels that worship God all the time.

Mood/Tone

There is a general feeling of regret and hope. The poet's blindness makes him sad but as he remembers his "Maker", a new lease of hope rekindles in him and he expresses it with a tone of determination and resignation.

Alliteration

The rhyming scheme in the poem makes the piece musical and some other alliterative words add to this, e.g.; ...this... world and wide ('w' alliterates), "patience to prevent" ('p' alliterates), "...serve who... stand" ('s' alliterates). Note also that in "God doth not", 'o' assonates.

Euphemism

The poet makes light a serious ailment like blindness and thereby reduces the high voltage of emotion that ordinarily would be deployed to describe the situation. So, when the poet says "my light is spent" "... half my days", "...one talent/lodged with me useless", "mild yoke" "bidding speed", he is being euphemistic.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The novelist and the playwright have enough time and space to present their stories. The poet presents his works in a very limited space. Sometimes, time is not considered since poetry thrives on emotions that are recorded without regard to time. What we mean by

time here is that a story for instance starts from the morning and ends in the evening but poet who expresses joy at the sight of a loved one does not present the joy in a way that it lasts from morning till the evening. The poet is able to present the poem in the limited space because he makes use of imagery, allusions and figures of speech. These devices aid the presentation of a poem in a condensed language. This brings out the differences between the poet and an ordinary person which is that the poet feels the joy found in nature and renders it in such a way that the reader feels it or shares it with the poet.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt more about imagery, allusions and figures of speech. You have also learnt that the poet needs these devices because in poetry, much is said in very few words. This is achieved through connotative and denotative language. Imageries fall under connotative language where a word could connote other things depending on the meaning and the picture the poet wants to evoke.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What do you understand by figures of speech in poetry. List at least six figures of speech.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 5 THE MATERIAL OF POEMS: LEGEND AND HISTORY**CONTENTS**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Materials from History and Legends
 - 3.2 Myth
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be introduced to myth, legend and history as possible areas from which you could draw your poetic materials. We will also present a historical poem for illustration.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- determine the place of myth and legend in poetry; and
- describe how history could be utilized as material for poetry enumerate the ways you could apply myth, legend, or history in writing your poem.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT**3.1 Materials from History and Legends**

All over the world, people had oral poetry embedded in their cultures before the literary poetry. The materials for some of the poems especially the epic are drawn from history and legends. Good examples of such poems are the Iliad, Odyssey, Sundiata and many others. The History of the Hebrews was that of bitterness and struggles against foreign masters from their bondage in Egypt through wars in their journey to Canaan, the Promised Land and series of exiles. Thus their political and economic history ended in series of disasters. Local cohesion and universal solidarity eluded them for most of the times. Consequently, there was no serious peaceful and harmonious existence which could produce great artists. Thus “they left behind them no painting or sculptor and little or no secular literature, no drama for example, nor any epic poetry (but) left a religious literature, the Bible. (Mack 3) However, the Bible contains many poetic expressions which could have passed for classical poems if they were recorded as secular literature.

The Greeks produced great literature because of the level of civilization and brilliant culture that existed in ancient Greece. Despite the dark age of Greece, Homer produced two great poems – the Iliad and the Odyssey which are based on their history and legend. Iliad is a Greek epic that is based on the Trojan wars for the recovery of Helen of Troy, the wife of an Achaean Prince, Menelaus. Odyssey is another epic by Homer that presents the peace, after the war. It is concerned with the return of the heroes that survived, especially the return of Odysseus of Ithaca.

The Romans did not just produce great warriors and conquerors, they also patronized art. They were said to have conquered half of the world before they began to write. A prominent Roman poet was Virgil who wrote the Aeneid, the Roman epic which he could not complete before his death in 19th B.C. It is a historical poem based on his love for Dido, the Queen of Carthage and the fall of Troy. Another great poem drawn from legend is Beowulf. It is believed that Beowulf marks the beginning of English literature. It is an epic poem which traces the legend of the Danish rulers, and relates the legendary killing of two monsters, Grendel and his mother by Beowulf, the hero in the poem. He also kills a dragon but was mortally wounded.

During the Renaissance, John Milton wrote an epic poem, “Paradise Lost” based another legend of the defeat of Lucifer in heaven. The Augustans, who belong to the “Neo Classical Period” or the Age of Reason, laid more emphasis on the intellect and the human mind. They drew inspiration from the classical Roman Age and looked upon that period for poetic models. In their poems, they directed their attention to “intricate interchanges and conflicts between aspects of human life” (Mack 1). They emphasized adherence to convention in terms of form and content. Satire flourished in that tradition as exemplified in Alexander Pope’s “Rape of the Lock”.

The Romantics were more interested in nature and the lowly life but still paid attention to history and legend. They were more concerned with life as it was lived especially by the lower class. That perhaps explains why they emphasized the language of ordinary people in poetry. As a poet, before you could draw your material from history, or legend, but you must be familiar with that particular legend or historical event. This is because historical events are factual and not imaginary. So first of all, you learn the facts of the particular historical event you want to portray before putting it in a poetic form. Remember that like in drama and fiction, you are not expected to reproduce history accurately the way it is recorded by historians but you could borrow the material and present it in an artistic form in your own unique manner.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Create a simple romantic poem to be read to a person you dearly love. Read the poem to that lover.

Like the Romantics many contemporary poets write from their imagination and present

issues that are regarded as commonplace in their poems. Modern poets in an attempt to reject old conventions produce a new tradition. They draw their materials from history, legend and contemporary life depicting its rapid change, technological advancements with its positive and negative effects. They react to present historical events or draw from legends and present the poems in contemporary modes of expression. Poets redefine history and legend to suit contemporary experience.

A very good example of a historical poem is David Rubadiri's "Stanley Meets, Mutesa". It is a Malawian poem that recounts the visit of Henry Morton Stanley, a nineteenth – century explorer who made journeys to Africa. In one of such journeys, the one recounted in the poem below, he meets Mutesa, the king of Buganda who was regarded as the most powerful king in East Africa. The result of this encounter is the spread of British influence in that area and the establishment of the Ugandan protectorate in 1894. In the poem, Rubadiri, imaginatively recreates this visit recounting the difficulties which the travellers encountered on their way, how they were received in the court of Mutesa and the significance of the meeting.

Stanley Meets Mutesa

Such a time of it they had;
 The heat of the day
 The chill of the night
 And the mosquitoes that followed.
 Such was the time and
 They bound for a kingdom.

The thin weary line of carriers
 With tattered dirty rags to cover their backs; The
 battered bulky chests
 That kept on falling off their shaven heads. Their
 tempers high and hot
 The sun fierce and scorching
 With it rose their spirits
 With its fall their hopes
 As each day sweated their bodies dry and
 Flies clung in clumps on their sweat-scented backs.
 Such was the march

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

Then came the afternoon of a hungry march, A
 hot and hungry march it was;
 The Nile and the Nyanza
 Lay like two twins
 Azure across the green countryside..
 The march leapt on chanting
 Like young gazelles to a water-hole. Hearts beat
 faster
 Loads felt lighter
 As the cool water lapt their sore soft feet. No
 more the dread of hungry hyenas
 But only tales of valour when
 At Mutesa's court fires are lit.
 No more the burning heat of the day
 But song, laughter and dance.

The village looks on behind banana groves, Children
 peer behind reed fences.
 Such was the welcome
 No singing women to chant a welcome
 Or drums to greet the white ambassador; Only a
 few silent nods from aged faces And one
 rumbling drum roll
 To summon Mutesa's court to parley
 For the country was not sure.
 The gate of reeds is flung open,
 There is silence
 But only a moment's silence –
 The tall black king steps forward,
 He towers over the thin bearded white man
 Then grabbing his lean white hand
 Manages to whisper
 'Mtu Mweupe karibu'
 White man you are welcome.

The gate of polished reed closes behind them

And the west is let in. – **David Rubadiri**

In this poem, there is an allusion to another poem, "Journey of the Magi" by T.S. Eliot in terms of the hard times faced by the travelers. The opening stanza of this poem is:

A cold morning we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year
 For a journey, and such a long journey
 The ways deep, and the weather sharp

The very dead of winter.

In the same way, such difficulties are expressed in the first stanza of “Stanley Meets Mutesa”. Go back, read that first stanza and compare it with the one above.

This is a narrative poem in which the poet uses the persona “we”. The first stanza sets the tone of suffering encountered by the travellers. You see what we have been discussing about poetic diction and images. In line two, instead of explaining how the travellers trudge under the heat of the sun during the day, the poet says simply “the heat of the day”. Also expressions like “tattered dirty rags” and “battered bulky chest” do not only describe the poor state of the travellers and their heavy loads, but also help to heighten the mood and rhythm of the poem. They help to create a picture of the deplorable state of the crew.

The death of horses and human beings are described in a condensed language thus:

...a wary pony dropped
Left for the vultures on the plains
...a human skeleton collapsed. Left for
the mosaic on the plains

The human skeleton here presents the image of someone that has emaciated so much that what is left is a virtual skeleton. The imagery of human suffering is evoked with words like “sweat-scented backs” “shaved heads” under “sun fierce” and scorching” “bodies dry” and many others. There is also the image of a harsh weather condition seen in words like “chill”, “heat”, “hot” compare this with “the weather sharp” and “the very dead of winter”, T. S. Eliot’s “Journey of the Magi”.

The poem ends with

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

The last line, here, refers to the colonization of that African State.

This is a historical account but the poet’s feelings towards this encounter between Africa and the Whiteman is discernable. It is a feeling of sadness. This is highlighted in the description of the Africans who carried the load of the Whiteman.

The mood of the poem is that of suffering, hardship and frustration and the tone is that of helplessness, hopelessness in the first part of the poem and that of resignation and the mood of apprehension in the second part.

Also, the cold reception they received in the court of Mutesa shows that they are not really welcome. There are no songs or chants instead children peer behind the fence while the adults nod silently.

3.2 Myth

Just like the poem above is based on a historical experience, a poem could also be written based on myth. The poet explores a mythical figure or incident in a poem.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Read the poem “Casualties” by J. P. Clark and state the historical event it is based on and the feelings of the poet about the subject matter expressed in the poem.

4.0 CONCLUSION

All along, we have emphasized that poetry thrives on emotion. This means that in most cases, the poem is a consequence of the poet’s feelings because poetry is an imaginary art. The element of imagination is not absent in all forms of poetry because the poet imaginatively uses material from history legend or mythology to produce a poem. The main story or a segment of the historical event for instance is usually present in the poem. The difference lies in the employment of appropriate poetic devices to produce an aesthetically satisfying poem. We have also been concerned with the expression of emotions. In some cases, the poet decides to write a poem based on a myth, legend or history. However, feelings play an important role here too because through the presentation of the subject matter, the poet’s feeling is discernable. If for instance, a poet writes a poem based on the Nigerian Civil War, the poet’s alignment with either Nigeria or Biafra would be discernable or even obvious.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have seen in this unit that in as much as poetry is the record of a poet's emotion, the poet could also write a poem based on a myth, legend or a historical event. You have also seen that even when the material of a poem is from history, for instance, the emotion of the poet is still present.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What do you think is the poet's feelings in the poem "Stanley Meets Mutesa".

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 6 THE FINISHED PRODUCT

CONTENTS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will be introduced to revision in poetry and how it helps in the poet to produce good work. At the end of your poetic exercise, you are expected to revise what you have written to ensure that your emotion is presented in a coordinated manner. In this unit you will be led through the analysis of a very simple and popular poem “Abiku” by J. P. Clark. The intention is to illustrate how he has utilised the concept of “Abiku” to produce a very good poem.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- revise your poem to produce the final copy identify poetic devices in a poem;
- identify the theme in a poem; and
- undertake a general analysis of a poem.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Revising a Poem

The immediate act of composition of a poem is spontaneous. It arises from an impulse to create or record an experience or feelings. At the stage of recording

this feeling the poet writes as the ideas flow and at the point, he does not care about rules and regulations. But once that first sketch of that “spontaneous overflow of powerful

emotions” is put on paper, it is followed by a reflection. This reflection may be likened to Wordsworth’s “recollection in tranquility”. It is at this tranquil stage that the poem is refined. The poet arranges and rearranges the poem to achieve the desired rhythm and musicality. He ensures that he has chosen the right diction and that images, figures of speech and figures of sound are applied appropriately. He also ensures that he has made the right allusions, chosen the appropriate setting, set the right atmosphere/ mood and tone. He arranges his poem in lines and or stanzas to create the desired body or form. He re-reads and revises the poem to ensure that he has conveyed his intended message and that his theme is discernable. By the time he concludes his revision, the poem assumes its final form. That is when we say that the sense has been refined and the poem as it appears is produced.

3.2 Analysis of “Abiku” by J. P. Clark

3.2.1 Theme

The theme of reincarnation is explored in the poem. It is treated from the perspective of an Abiku. The concept of “Abiku” is one of the cultural beliefs of some Nigerians. “Abiku” in Yoruba is “Ogbanje” among the Igbos. It is a child who is believed to have the powers to die and re-enter the mother’s womb to be born again. The baby could do this as many times as it wishes. This causes a lot of heartache and torment for the parents.

In the poem, a moving plea is made to the abiku who is considered wicked because of the sorrow the child causes its mother. The appeal is for the abiku to pity its mother, to be considerate and stay like a normal child. This would bring solace and joy to the mother but if it refuses to do that it should ‘stay out’ permanently – to die and not return again. This is because the child’s “coming and going these several seasons” is a means of tormenting the mother who suffers the pains of pregnancy and pangs of childbirth several times and yet remains childless. The act of going through a pregnancy and giving birth is enough burden for a woman so you can imagine how it would be for a woman who gives birth several times only for the child to die each time she gives birth to it.

3.2.2 Diction

The diction is simple and clear. The poet’s rhetorical technique aids the tight structure of the poem. He makes good use of imagery, figures of speech like repetitions, alliteration, assonance and other forms as is presented below.

Many words used in the poem are familiar in the village setting. “Baobab tree”, “thatch”, “eaves” “bamboo walls”, “fresh fish”, “bats”, “owls”, “fire”, “rack”, etc. These words are chosen carefully and applied appropriately to make the poem an enjoyable one. The proper sound- patterned words enhance the musicality and rhythm of the poem yet helps to capture the agonizing state of the mother of the abiku child.

3.2.3 Mood/tone

The mood induced by the tone is undoubtedly that of unhappiness, frustration, disappointment and sorrow. The coming and going of the abiku these several years affects the general state of the household. The effect is that of gloom, tiredness and resignation to fate. The overall tones captured in the poem are that of agony and an appeal for sympathy.

3.2.4 Figures of Speech

Assonance: Some of the expressions that assonate in the poem are:

“Coming and going” (‘O’ assonates); and “And at harmattan, the bamboo...” (‘a’ assonates).

In the poem, the above stressed vowels agreement help to energise the poet’s views and clarify same.

Simile: When one considers the following lines, they register in our minds’ eye resulting in a better and deeper appreciation of the poem even when we close our eyes, for instance: “Serrating down your back and front like beak of the sword-fish”.

Alliteration: The following alliterative expressions which make the poem melodious, musical, rhythmical and motion-like are used in the poem.

“Several seasons” (‘s’ alliterates); “Through the thatch” (‘t’ alliterates); “Brim the banks” (‘b’ alliterates), “Fresh fish” (‘f’ alliterates), “Many more” (‘m’ alliterates), “Step in, step in and stay” (‘s’ alliterates), and “Many more mouths” (‘m’ alliterates)

Repetition: The effective use of repetition in the last stanza of the poem as in: “Step in, step in and stay” and “her body is tired,/Tired”, has made the invitation of the spirit child and the excruciating pains of the mother very emphatic and serious.

Synecdoche: This is when a part stands for a whole or vice versa. In the poem “Seasons” represent years, the “healthy stock” stands for lineage/ancestry/ancestral abode and “several fingers” stand for many personalities, and “More mouths” stand for more children.

3.2.5 Imagery

Many examples of vivid pictures abound in the poem especially in the emotive descriptions of Abiku; consider the following:

- (1) “We know the knife-scars serrating (teeth-like cutting) down your back and fronts”

- (2) “And both your ears, notched as a bondsman to this house”
- (3) “When floods brim the banks”
- (4) “And the bats and the owls often tear in at night through the eaves”

All these help to make this poem beautiful and satisfying

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Try to identify other poetic devices used in the poem.

3.3 Glossary of Selected Poetic Terms

We present here selected literary terms culled from the books listed in the reference section. These terms are expected to guide you in your choice of words for the poem you intend to write.

Abstract

Abstract is the opposite of concrete. A sentence can be described as abstract if it makes a general statement about a class of persons or objects or if its object is an abstraction – that is, a quality considered apart from its object – such as wealth and beauty. “Honesty is the best policy” is an abstract statement, but “Hotchkiss is a thief” is concrete. The latter statement refers to a particular object rather than to a general class of objects.

Accent

The special emphasis given to one syllable over others in pronouncing a word or to one word over others in say a phrase. It is used in poetry to determine the metre.

Aestheticism

This is a term loosely applied to an English literary movement of the second half of the nineteenth century. The roots of the movement lay in the reverence for beauty instilled by Keats and the Pre-Raphaelites.

Allusion

A rhetorical term applied to that figure of speech that makes casual reference to a famous historical or literary figure or event. “He, like the Prodigal son Returns Home”. Prodigal here is an allusion to the Biblical prodigal son who returns to his father after spending his father’s fortune recklessly.

Ambiguity

This occurs when double or multiple meanings are attached to words or to situations. Figurative language is somewhat ambiguous. While ambiguity is never desirable in normal formal writing, it is useful in poetry. It brings several meanings that can illuminate more fully the complexities of the experience that the writing offers.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Write a poem of just seven lines. The poem should reflect imagery, abstract, mood and simile.

Anthology

A collection of poetry or prose, sometimes divided into categories such as lyric verse, satiric verse, etc.

Antithesis

The placing of a word or an idea that is in contrast to it or that its opposite. This figure of speech is characterized by strongly contrasting words, clauses, sentences, or ideas. It is a balancing of one term against another for impressiveness and emphasis. “Unlike we stand, divided we fall”

Anticlimax

This is the opposite of climax. Instead of an action in a play/novel moving from the lowest point to the highest, it moves in a reverse order. If the work of art peters out after a climax, the weak ending is anticlimactic.

Atmosphere

It is the mood which is established by the totality of a literary work.

Blank verse

It is an Unrhymed verse, particularly that form of unrhymed heroic verse which is commonly employed in English dramatic and epic poetry. Blank verse consists of lines of 10 syllables each, the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, and tenth syllables bearing the accents (iambic pentameter).

Couplet

Two lines in immediate succession usually, but not necessarily of the same length, forming a pair, and generally marked as such by rhyming with each other. A pair of lines joined by rhyme is considered a couplet, whether it forms part of a stanza, or constitutes a metrical group by itself. The grave’s a fine and private place but none, I think, do thee embrace (from “To His Coy Mistress”).

Denotation

This refers to the specific, exact meaning of a word, independent of its emotional coloration or associations. Connotation which is the opposite of denotation refers to the references and associations which a word has collected in the course of its use in addition to its denotation.

Dramatic Monologue

A poem which reveals “a soul in action” through the conversation of one character in a dramatic situation. The character is speaking to an identifiable but silent listener in a dramatic moment in the speaker’s life. The circumstances surrounding the conversation, one side of which we “hear” as the dramatic monologue, are made clear by implication in the poem, and a deep meaning into the character of the speaker is given. E.g. Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess”, Alfred, and Lord Tennyson’s “Tithonus”

Elegy

An elegy is a sustained and formal poem which presents the poet’s meditations upon death or upon a grave theme. The meditation often is occasioned by the death of a particular person, but it may be a generalized observation or the expression of a solemn mood. E.g. Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”.

Emotive language

Language designed to evoke or express emotional reactions towards its subject, as opposed to referential language.

Empathy

Signifies an experience in which we identify ourselves with an object of perception and seem to participate in its physical sensations, especially of posture and motion. The experience is sometimes described metaphorically as “an involuntary projection of ourselves into an object,” animate or inanimate.

Epigram

In Greek literature, a poetical inscription placed upon a tomb or monument. Later it was extended to encompass any very short poem – amorous, elegiac, meditative, complimentary, antidotal, or satiric – which is polished, terse, and pointed. Usually an epigram ends with a surprising or witty turn of thought. It is usually a short emphatic witty saying that involves antithesis or a paradox. It is similar in form to a proverb but it is a creation of the individual writer.

Euphemism

A mild, delicate, or indirect word or expression used in place of a plainer and more accurate one, which by reason of its meaning or association might be offensive, unpleasant or embarrassing.

Figurative Language

Intentional departure from the normal order, construction or meaning of words in order to infuse strength and freshness of expression in the poem to create a pictorial effect. It helps the poet draw an analogy, or to discover and illustrate similarities in otherwise dissimilar things.

Form

A term used to designate the organization of the elements in a work in relation to its total effect. For example, verse form refers to the organization of rhythmic units in a line and stanza form refers to the organization of the verses. Form is the pattern or structure or organization which is employed to give expression to the content of a literary piece.

Hyperbole

It connotes a figure of speech in which emphasis is achieved by deliberate exaggeration. Like many such figures, it appears in ordinary speech as well as in verse. Such common expression as “They were packed in the subway like sardines”, is an example of hyperbole.

Image

An image is a literal and concrete representation of a sensory experience or of an object that can be known by one or more of the senses. The image is one of the distinctive elements of the “language of art”, the means by which experience in its richness and emotional complexity is communicated. The image is, therefore, a portion of the essence of the meaning of the literary work, not ever properly a mere decoration.

Imagery

Descriptive representation; sensory content of a literary work; figurative language intended to evoke a picture or an idea in the mind of the reader.

Imagination

The power or process of using all the faculties so as to realize with intensity what is not perceived, and to do this in a way that integrates and orders everything thus present to the mind so that reality is enhanced thereby.

Innuendo

It gives an oblique hint or an indirect intimation about a person or thing; an inferential suggestion, commonly used in a bad sense, but sometimes in an innocent one.

Internal Rhyme

An internal rhyme occurs within a single verse. It may serve several functions; giving pleasure in itself, pointing up the rhythmical structure, or, breaking a long line into shorter units.

Invective

Harsh, abusive language directed against a person or cause; vituperative writing.

Irony

This is a device by which a writer expresses a meaning contradictory to the stated or ostensible one. There are many techniques for achieving irony. The writer may, for example, make it clear that the meaning he intends is the opposite of his literal one or he may construct a discrepancy between an expectation and its fulfillment or between the appearance of a situation and the reality that underlies it. Whatever his technique, the writer demands that the reader perceive the concealed meaning that lies beneath his surface statement.

Lament

A poem expressing some great grief, usually more intense and more personal than that expressed in a complaint.

Lampoon

Writing which ridicules and satirizes the character or personal appearance of a person in a bitter, scurrilous manner.

Malapropism

A blunder in speech or writing caused by the substitution of a word for another similar in sound but different in meaning.

Metaphor

A figure of speech in which a term or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable, in order to suggest a resemblance. "He is a lion"

Metonymy

A common figure of speech which is characterized by the substitution of a term naming an object closely associated with the word in mind for the word itself. In this way we commonly speak of the king as “the crown: an object closely associated with kingship thus being made to stand for “king”.

Mock Epic or Mock Heroic

Terms frequently used interchangeably to designate a literary form which burlesques epic poetry by treating a trivial subject in the “grand style”, or which uses the epic formulas to make ridiculous a trivial subject by ludicrously overstating it. When the mock poem is much shorter than a true epic some prefer to call it mock heroic, a term also applied to poems which mock romances than epics. Ordinary usage, however, employs the terms interchangeably. E.g. Alexander Pope, “Rape of the Lock” John Dryden, “The Dunciad”.

Objectivity

A quality in a literary work of impersonality, of freedom from the expression of personal sentiments, attitudes, or emotions by the author.

Onomatopoeia

The naming of anything by a more or less exact reproduction of the sound which it makes, or something audible connected with it. E.g. “The bee is buzzing”.

Oxymoron

A figure employed in an expression or statement which is apparently self-contradictory but in which a point is involved as in “cruel kindness” or “to make haste slowly”.

Paradox

A statement or opinion seemingly self-contradictory or absurd, that may actually be well-founded or true. E.g. “The Nile and the Nyanza lay like two twins” (From “Stanley Meets Mutesa” Rubadiri)

Personification

A figure of speech in which inanimate objects or abstract ideas are endowed with human qualities or actions. E.g. “The grass is singing”.

Plagiarism

Literary theft. A writer who steals the plot of some obscure, forgotten story and uses it as new in a story of his own is a plagiarist.

Poetic License

A privilege or liberty taken by a poet of departing from normal order, diction, rhyme, or pronunciation to produce a desired effect.

Pun

A play on words that are alike or nearly alike in sound but differ in meaning and which results in an odd or ludicrous idea.

E.g.

History's art not fact

History...Herstory History

Sees sees seas

Politics politricks politricks

(From *Riot in Heaven*: Tess Onwueme)

Rhyme

The repetition of the same or similar sounds, whether vowels, consonants or a combination of these in one or more syllables, usually stressed and occurring at determined and recognizable intervals. Masculine or male rhymes are those in which the final syllable is accented, while feminine or double rhymes are those in which the final syllables are unaccented. Internal rhyme refers to rhyme which occurs within the line, as in "the splendour falls on castle walls".

Rhythm

In language, the sense of movement attributable to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a line of prose or poetry or to the lengths of sounds in quantitative verse. In verse, the rhythm is determined by the metrical pattern, whereas in prose or free verse, it is the effect of an arrangement of words more nearly approximating natural speech.

Romantic

A term used of literature that is centred upon the inner rather than upon the outer world and that tries to convey the writer's feelings in a manner uniquely expressive of his experience and his personality though not in traditional formal patterns. These features distinguish it from classical writing. The Romantic Movement that started at the close of the eighteenth century was a reaction against the formalism of a period dominated by a mechanistic view of life. Romanticism, another name for this reaction, applies also to any trend that exalts nature above artifice, sensibility above intellect, the foreign above the familiar, energy above restraint, and the search for an absolute above concern with the here and now. The romantic is one who takes this attitude. One of the prominent poets of the Romantic period is William Wordsworth.

Sarcasm

A form of verbal irony, in which, under the guise of praise a caustic and bitter expression of strong and personal disapproval is given. Sarcasm is personal, jeering, intended to hurt, and is intended as a sneering taunt.

Satire

A literary work or mode of writing intended to arouse ridicule, contempt, or disgust at abuses and follies of man and his institutions, and aimed at the correction of malpractices by inspiring both indignation and laughter with a mixture of criticism and wit. E.g. Wole Soyinka, "Telephone Conversation" Jonathan Swift, "A Modest Proposal" Samuel Johnson, "Vanity of Human Wishes".

Simile

The comparing or likening of two things that have some strong point or points of resemblances, both of which are mentioned and the comparisons directly stated. It compares something to something else using words like *as* and *like*. "He is as brave as a lion"

Stanza

A recurrent grouping of two or more lines of a poem; in terms of length, metrical form, and, often, rime-scheme. However, the division into stanzas is sometimes made according to thought as well as form, in which case the stanza is a unit not unlike a paragraph of prose. Strophe is another term used for stanza, but one should avoid verse in this sense, since verse is properly reserved to indicate a single line of poetry.

Structure

This refers to the planned framework of a piece of literature. Though such external matters as kind of language used (French or English), prose or verse, or kind of verse, or type of sentence are sometimes referred to as "structural" features, the term usually is applied to the general plan or outline. Thus the scheme of topics (as revealed in a topical outline) determines the structure of a formal essay. The logical division of the action of a drama and also the mechanical division into acts and scenes are matters of structure. In a narrative the plot itself is the structural element. Often the author advertises his structure as a means of securing clearness, while at other times the artistic purpose of the author leads him to conceal his structure (as in narratives) or subordinate it altogether (as in some informal essays). In the novel today, as the most reliable as well as the most revealing key to the two, structure is used to define not only verse form and formal arrangement but also the sequence of images and ideas which unite to convey the meaning of the poem.

Style

This is the arrangement of words in a manner which at once best expresses the individuality of the author and the idea and intent in his mind. The best style, for any given purpose, is that which most nearly approximates a perfect adaptation of one's language to one's ideas. Style, then, is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed, and the individuality of the author.

A study of styles for the purpose of analysis will include such general qualities as: diction, sentence structure and variety, imagery, rhythm, coherence, emphasis, and arrangement of ideas.

Symbol

On the most literal level a symbol is something which is itself and yet stands for or suggests or means something else; as a flag is a piece of coloured cloth which stands for a nation. All language is symbolic in this sense, and many of the objects which we commonly use in daily life are. Literal symbols are of two broad types: one includes those which embody within and suggest time and eternity; the voyage suggests life; and phallic symbols are universally recognized. Such symbols are used widely in the world's literature. The other type of symbol secures its suggestiveness not from qualities inherent in itself but from the way in which it is used in a given work. Thus in *Moby-Dick* the voyage, the land, the ocean – these objects are pregnant with meanings that seem almost independent of Melville's use of them in his story; on the other hand, the white whale is invested with meaning – and differing meanings for different crew members – through the handling of materials in the novel. Similarly, in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, rain, which is merely a physical fact in the opening chapter, is converted into a symbol of death through the uses to which it is put in the book.

Symbolism

In its broad sense, symbolism is the use of one object to represent or suggest another; or, in literature, the use of symbols in writing, particularly the serious and extensive use of such symbols.

Symbolism is also the name given to a literary movement which originated in France in the last half of the nineteenth century, strongly influenced Irish and of British writing around the turn of the century, and has been a dominant force in much British and American poetry in the twentieth century. It sees the immediate, unique, and personal emotional response as the proper subject of art and its full expression as the ultimate aim of art.

Synecdoche

A form of metaphor which in mentioning a part, signifies the whole or vice-versa. In order to be clear, a good synecdoche must be based on an important part of the whole and not a minor part and, usually, the part selected to stand for the whole must be the part most directly associated with the subject under discussion.

Theme

The central or dominating idea in a literary work. In non-fiction prose it may be thought of as the general topic of discussion, the subject of the discourse, the thesis. In poetry, fiction, and drama it is the abstract concept which is made concrete through its representation in person, action and image in the work.

Tone

Tone is used in contemporary criticism, as a term designating the attitudes toward the subject and toward the audience implied in a literary work. In such a usage, a work may have a tone that is formal, informal, intimate, solemn, sombre, playful, serious, ironic, condescending, or any of many other possible attitudes. Clearly, tone in this sense contributes in a major way to the effect and the effectiveness of a literary work.

In another sense, tone is used to designate the mood of the work itself and the various devices that are used to create that mood. In this sense, tone results from combinations and variation of such things as metre, alliteration, assonance, consonance, diction, sentence structure, repetition, imagery, symbolism, etc.

Unity

The concept that a literary work shall have in it some organizing principle to which all its parts are related so that, viewed in the light of that principle, the work is an organic whole. A work which has unity is cohesive in its parts, complete, self-contained, and integrated.

Universality

A critical term frequently employed to indicate the presence in a piece of writing of an appeal to all readers of all time. When writing presents the great human emotions common to all peoples of all civilizations – jealousy, love, pride, courage, etc – in literary form and through characters and actions that remain meaningful to other ages, it may be said to have universality. Of all qualities which make for universality in literature, the successful portrayals of human character are the most important.

Verse

A verse is a line in a poem, especially one that has a formal structure, or sometimes used synonymously with stanza, notably in hymnology.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The poet writes a poem, whether it was planned, or recorded as the one given in a dream or trance or as an outpouring of emotions. At the end of the exercise, the poem is revised to ensure that the desired rhythmic balance is achieved. The poet ensures that images, figurative language and figures of speech are used appropriately to convey the intended message. This revision also ensures that the final product expresses the poet's emotion appropriately.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt the importance of revision in poetry writing. You have also evaluated a poem “Abiku” by J.P. Clark and have seen how he employed the poetic devices to present an experience. You have also been exposed to some other poetic terms that are described briefly. You should make an effort to learn more about them. This knowledge is necessary for every poet.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List five figures of speech used by J. P. Clark in the poem “Abiku” and explain them.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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