

MODULE 3 POETRY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will introduce you to practical steps in the process of writing a poem. We will review our writing habit, see the importance of a writer's notebook to a writer, especially the poet. We have learnt so far that poetry writing is spontaneous. It is possible for a poet to start and write a poem in a very short time though she/he is expected to revise the poem later. In this unit, we will look at poetic writing from another perspective. Here, we will try to write a poem through a gradual process.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- develop your own writing habit;
- get your own notebook;
- record your observations;
- record events;
- record part of what you have read;
- record news items; and
- choose a method.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Writing Habit

We have talked a lot about inspirations, ideas, themes which could come to the writer or emanate from his/her imagination and so on. Do not make the mistake of believing that you will have to fold your hands and wait for inspiration. Some people erroneously fear that if they write in a formal setting/environment or at routine times, there would be no inspiration or that they may not write well. You need to understand that even if you are inspired at public places or in what one may regard as odd places, you still need some skills and discipline to make it work. You recall the example we have with Akachi Ezeigbo's "Inspiration Bug". She got the inspiration but was able to get an excellent story from it. She is able to do that because she has learnt the skills, having been practicing it, and has indeed made writing a habit. She has written many novels and collections of short stories because she has over the years developed a good writing habit. According to Aristotle, "Excellence is not an act, but a habit" (1999:18); create time for writing, do not wait for inspiration, instead Court inspiration; make yourself Available. Inspiration comes most often through the habit of work, unexpectedly, in form of sudden ideas, ways and means, Wonderful words and phrases, and sometimes completes breakthroughs (Anderson 2000:17).

The implication here is that if you want to succeed as a writer, you must develop a writer's habit; once you start writing, learn to practice regularly. One of the ways of developing a writing habit is to keep a notebook. So get a notebook now.

3.2 Writer's Notebook

A notebook is an essential companion for any writer. We noted earlier that your own life, what you see, experience, think, and feel, other people's experiences are sources of inspiration for the writer. If these experiences are not recorded, the tendency is that they will be obliterated from our memory. In your life, there are incidents you can recollect vividly but there are some you may have forgotten. To

illustrate this point, ask yourself, how many of your classmates in the primary and secondary schools you still remember their names. As we grow older, events grow dimmer in our memories. This is why you need a notebook. Sometimes too, there could be an inspiration but if it is not recorded, it fades and you may not be able to recollect it again.

This notebook should contain whatever will be helpful to you or what ‘fuels’ your writing. The notebook should be small so that you can carry it around always. You may choose to keep another notebook, a bigger one, at home or office for further and more reflective writing. You will choose how to organize your notebook. You may choose to create sections, for example, a section for recording your personal thoughts and feelings and another section for recording events ‘outside’ your personal feelings or imagination. On the other hand, you may wish to record spontaneously whatever comes to your mind or whatever you encounter; either way, the notebook is a useful companion for a writer.

3.2.1 Observations

Just like the playwright, the poet is keenly interested in the environment. As you go about in your daily activities, at school, in your office, everywhere, jot down anything that strikes you as interesting. These could be ideas, aspects of conversations, expressions and so on. Once you train your mind to be alert to your environment through constant practice, you will marvel at the success you will achieve in developing your writer’s habit. If you capture your impressions immediately and not later, they will be fresh and before you realize it, you find yourself developing the impression.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

- (1) As you are walking along the street or relaxing in front of your house at night, focus your attention on the dark night. Jot your impression on your notebook. You could use torchlight to see your recordings.
- (2) Try to develop your impression into four or more short phrases or sentences when you get to a more illuminated place.
- (3) Compare your impression with the ones below which are excerpts from poems on night.

Your hand is heavy, night upon my brow, I bear no heart mercuric like the clouds,
Exacerbation from your subtle plough Hide me now when night children haunt
the earth I must hear none. These misted calls will yet Undo me, naked, unbidden,
at nights muted birth (Soyinka: “Night” p. 46)

When nights deepen
The touts tumble in eager

The wrecks limp in excited
 Diplomatic cars drive in anxious
 Each carts away a bunch...
 The ocean of night
 Flows across the earth
 Where they prowl streets for power
 A night alive with tremors of panthers
 (Ezenwa-Ohaeto "Night of Funerals" p. 31 – 32)

c. Night, companion and master
 night, dictator and director
 night has the pages of memory
 keep the dreams in your mind
 let darkness cloak your brow
 fondle your thoughts and deeds
 walk with the dusk into the night
 (Ezenwa-Ohaeto "The Mouth of the Night" p. 25)

d. I live in the dark quarters of the world
 without light, without life,
 they are slave quarters
 worlds of misery. Dark quarters
 where will is watered down
 and men have been confused
 with things
 (Agostinho Neto "Night" p. 50)
 Sleep well, my love, sleep well;
 The harbour lights glaze over restless docks
 Police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;
 From shanties creaking iron-sheets
 Violence like a bug infested rag is tossed
 And fear is imminent as sound in the hand-swing bell;
 The long day's anger pants from sand and rocks;
 But for this breathing night at least;
 My land, my love, sleep well
 (Dennis Brutus "Nightsong: City" p. 24)

You can see that the dark night connotes different things for the poets above and their impressions are recorded. Get the anthologies as listed in 7.0 below and read the poems in full.

In your exercise above try to make use of similes and metaphors in a comparison that can enhance your writing as you see night in a new way apart from being the period for sleep and of rest. Try to see likeness in unlike things.

3.2.2 Recording Events

Use your notebook to record events around you. What is your reaction to people who are engaged in a heated argument or disagreement? How do you react to celebrations, mishaps, violence, relationships and other events? Remember that you can never transfer these events the way they occur in reality into your notebook. You can only paraphrase but it is better to jot, in addition, your reaction or impression. However, remember that you are to jot **only** those things you feel would be useful to you in your writing career. You may not use them immediately, so, your notebook becomes a kind of bank or storehouse of/for materials for your poem sooner or later. If however a poem flows from a particular event, do not hesitate to put it down in full as it flows. However, you can paraphrase if you lack the time and space to record it fully but try to do that as soon as possible.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Go to any major bus stop or garage and listen to the sing-song calls by the touts or conductors and the hustle and bustle of the commuters. Record your impression in your notebook, to be used in a poem “Bus-Stop” “Motor Park” or “Motor Garage”.

3.2.3 Record of Readings

If you want to be a successful writer you must be a keen reader. Reading exposes you to the works of others, widens your scope, enriches your vocabulary and expands your horizon on styles and techniques in your chosen field. Apart from reading poems, you should read the experiences of poets, how they get their inspiration and create desired effects in their poems.

In reading the poems, you draw inspiration and learn from the masterpieces. You can also learn from the badly written ones. How, you may ask? You review the flawed poems, detect the faults and try to avoid such pitfalls in your own poem.

- (1) Read the poem below. It is an excerpt from a poem written by one of my students at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Continuing Education Programme (CEP) Lagos Outreach. It is a good poem but try to detect the flaws in it.
- (2) Record the faults in your notebook.
- (3) Rewrite the poem by taking care of the flaws.

My Name

I have a great treasure to keep,
It is indeed my name,

Its worth exceed that of gold
 And a value greater than diamond
 What treasure must I protect?
 It is indeed my name,
 A good name is an unfading glory,
 And an honour to brag of

- *Ojiri, Blessing Ijeoma (300 Level)*

3.3 Drafting

You start your poem with a draft, and may have several drafts before you get your final poem. This means that writing a poem is not necessarily a single action but a continuous process. Once you get your first draft, each subsequent draft is a revision of the preceding one. You could choose any of the jottings in your notebook and write your first draft. Do not bother about the technique, the sequence or grammar but write what comes to your mind. After that, revise it as many times as possible. As you are revising, you will be arranging, rearranging and paying attention to grammatical structure.

As a student writer, you need to make an effort to write. Do not wait for inspiration, start a poem now based on your observations and jottings. At this stage, don't worry about the definition of a poem; do not worry about rhyme, images or figures of speech. Just sit down, choose a subject from your notebook and write for about 10 – 15 minutes without pausing. The subject you choose must engage you enough for you to write on it. It must be interesting for you to continue the writing. Don't just imagine them, but put them down on paper. According to W. N. Herbert "Thinking on paper is the beginning of drafting, and it's always easier to tidy up a messy set of notes than to touch a neat draft" (2000:71). The implication here is that if you have a "neat draft" you will not need to revise anything.

In case you are recording your draft in the computer, save every stage of the draft. You can do that by printing each draft. You may have to refer to them before the final copy.

Just like the dramatist, the poet considers his/her audience. Though the poem is an expression of your inner feeling, you must keep your audience in mind. Your poem reaches its perfection stage with a good revision of your drafts. When you conclude, read the poem aloud to yourself and later to a close friend. These will help immensely as you get a final draft that is thematically relevant and artistically satisfying.

Below are two poems written by students during a writers workshop organised by The Women Writers of Nigeria (WRITER). These poems were written spontaneously by the participants so we regard them as first drafts.

POEM

Doors, Doors, Doors

There are different types of doors,
Doors of success, doors of failure,
Doors of life, doors of death,
Doors of peace, doors of chaos,
Doors of joy, doors of sadness,
Doors of laughter, doors of cries,
Doors of heaven, doors of hell,
I keep praying to God Almighty, to open the door of success, love, life,
peace, joy, laughter and heaven unto me but I hope and pray that I don't
even smell the key to the door of failure, death chaos, sadness, cries, and
least of all hell.

- *Adesemoye Abiola, 11 yrs, International School, UNILAG, SS 1*

Earth

The Earth, the Earth, the Earth
A very funny place to stay
A very big and round place
Filled with peace love and harmony
A place with rich and poor
A place with innocent and guilty
A place with the fine and the ugly
A place where people sin and pray
A place with peace and love. There is no place like it
The Earth

-*Ziandi Funmilola, Queen's College 11 years, JSS 2*

1. Revise one of the poems.
2. Read the first draft.
3. Revise it again.
4. Read it in the class and listen to comments by your classmates.
5. Incorporate their suggestions which you feel are necessary.
6. Produce the final draft.
7. Compare it with the original draft.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Writing a poem is not as easy as pouring your overflow of powerful emotions on paper. It involves many processes. The processes include recording your observations in your notebook and using them to write your first draft. It is not compulsory that you will use the jottings in your notebook for all the poems you write. You might write impulsively but in any case, it needs to be recorded in a draft. You will have as many drafts as possible as you revise each draft. If you revise your drafts painstakingly, the result will be an entertaining poem.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have introduced you to the first steps in poetry writing. If you adhered to the steps and did the self-assessment exercises, you would be surprised that you will have at least a poem before you now. If you do, congratulations! However, it is not yet a masterpiece. In the next unit, we will consider some of the techniques that would make it a masterpiece.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Aristotle, quoted in Sher, Gait (1999). *One Continuous Mistake: Four Noble Truths for Writers*, London: Penguin.

Anderson, Linda (2000). "The Creative Process" in Linda Anderson (ed) *Creative Writing: A Workbook with Readings*. London: Routledge. Herbert, W. (2000) "Writing Poetry" in Linda Anderson (ed) *Creative Writing: A Workbook with Readings*. London: Routledge.

Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2003). *The Voice of the Night Masquerade*. Ibadan: Krafts.

Brutus, Dennis (2003). "Nightsong: City" in K. E. Senanu and T. Vincent (eds) *A Selection of African Poetry*. New Edition. Harlow, Essex. Longman.

Neto, Agostinto (2003) "Night" in K. E. Senanu and T. Vincent (ed) *A Selection of African Poetry*. New Edition. Harlow, Essex: Longman.

Soyinka, Wole (1986). *Idanre and Other Poems* London: Methuen.

UNIT 2 THE VOICE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

You may have written a poem by now though without attention to the fundamentals of poetry writing. In this unit, you will be introduced to the voice of the poet. We have all along been discussing the poet's imagination, emotion and expression. In this unit, we are going to look at the concrete expression – how the poet presents his or her poem. In this regard, we will start with the title. It is deliberate as you will see as we go on.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- choose the title of your poem;
- present your poem from a particular perspective; and
- choose a persona for your poem.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Title

I have decided to start our main discussion in this unit with the title. You will recall that we have produced a draft poem in the last unit. Our draft is still untitled.

You were asked to just continue writing.

The title is very important because the reader sees your title before reading your poem. Your title, to a large extent attracts the reader to your poem. You should therefore be careful in choosing your title. Remember that your title reflects the subject of your poem. We have two types of title – descriptive and evocative.

The descriptive title is usually direct and summarizes the poem. Most titles are descriptive. The evocative title is more enticing but does not really reflect the subject. The descriptive title, has an air of authority that is like a definition, J. P. Clark’s “Night Rain” is a descriptive title which talks about rain on a particular night and in a particular place.

Sometimes, it is difficult to draw a line between the two as a title could be evocative and descriptive. “Night Rain” above is also evocative, it raises an unresolved question. What is special about night rain? Is it on a particular night or does it refer to all the rains that fall at night? Does it reflect night rain in Maiduguri, Jos, Awka or Yenagoa?

This categorization is not very important for now. In your draft, choose a title that to a large extent reflects the subject of your poem. Let your title be direct and not obscure. List about five possible titles and, like in every outline, arrange and rearrange with the most viable on top of your table of preferences. Eliminate the rest but like your drafts, do not discard them completely. Ensure that the one you have chosen will arrest your readers’ attention and make your work memorable.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Find below a list of titles. Choose one of them and write a draft that will reflect that title.

- Mother
- Friends
- Colours
- Love
- Friendship
- My dream

3.2 The Voice

What is voice in poetry? Every one of us has a unique way of speaking. The inflexion of tone, the accent and how we reflect other nuances of the particular language we speak is what I refer to here as the voice. Just as we have a unique way of speaking, we also have a unique way of writing.

However, this does not mean that all the poems we write must be presented in a particular style or pattern. Some scholars talk of public and private poets. In my own understanding the public poets treat public issues that touch generality of populace. They highlight injustice in the society and therefore choose to speak for the poor people. They therefore become the voice for the voiceless, using their poems to speak out against the ills in society.

On the other hand, the private poet is content with expressing the beauty and tranquility around him/her or about other issues. They present personal or private issues or emotion and perspectives. The public poet writes in voices that are strong and critical while voices of the private poet are passive, soothing and placid.

The voice here could be likened to tone in poetry but I deliberately decided to use voice, you choose your own voice. If you read the poems on “Night” you will notice that all the poets use night as a metaphor to criticize by highlighting the ills in that society. The poet’s voice is to a large extent influenced by his/her background, education, upbringing and other mannerisms she/he has acquired as she/he was growing up.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Read the two poems below and indicate the public and private voices.

And so it came to pass...

And so it came to pass
 Many seasons after the death of one Saviour
 That a new crop of saviours, armed with party programmes
 Came cascading down our rivers of hope;
 Poised for the poisoning of our Atlantic reservoir
 They sought out the foxes in the family
 To whom they gave their thirty pieces of silver
 In local and foreign exchange
 For the secrets of the passage –
 Way into the castle of our skins...
 Men we had taken for fearless warriors
 As protectors of our secret recipes
 Suddenly turned crabs, carapace and all

Shedding shame like water from duck-backs,
 Seeing sideways beyond the good of all
 To the comfort of the selves;
 And with their divination bags of tricks
 Slung over arrogant shoulders
 They crawl over our dreams
 Under the cover of moonless nights
 Sidestepping traps, destroying hope
 They turn our green august of rains,
 Of showers with which to persuade crops
 Towards harvest-circles
 Around whose fire we would have exchanged
 Happy tales of toil
 Into an orgy of furious flames
 And so it came to pass
 That our saviours gave us a gift of tragedy
 For which we are too dumb-struck to find a melody.

- *Funso Aiyejina*

The Dry Season

The year is withering; the wind
 Blows down the leaves;
 Men stand under eaves
 And overhear the secrets
 Of the cold dry wind,
 Of the half-bare trees.
 The grasses are tall and tinted,
 Straw-gold hues of dryness,
 And the contradicting awryness,
 Of the dusty roads a –scatter
 With the pools of colourful leaves,
 With ghosts of the dreaming year.
 And soon, soon the fires,
 The fires will begin to burn,
 The hawk will flutter and turn
 On its wings and swoop for the mouse,
 The dogs will run for the hare,
 The hare for its little life.

- *Kwesi Brew*

3.3 Persona

We know that poetry is mainly about self-expression. However, that does not mean that the pronoun 'I' which we find in some poems refer to the poet. In some cases the poet gives a particular voice to a character in the poem. That character is

called the persona. The poet masks him/herself with that persona and speaks through the persona.

Speaking through a persona is usually very effective as the persona could be a male, while the poet is a female. The important factor here is that you must ensure that the experiences are related appropriately. The gender or the age of the poet could be different from that of the persona but the poet in the poem masks him/herself by assuming the personality of the character whose experiences are being presented.

The persona can be a historical figure, a character from somebody else's fiction, an object or a phenomenon. In trying to speak through other voices, the poet gains more insights into the nature of that group. A very good example of the use of persona is found in Wole Soyinka's "Abiku".

In fact Wole Soyinka uses persona a lot as many of his poems are presented in the 1st person pronoun "I". Read all his poems in the Anthology edited by Senanu and Vincent and identify the persona in each poem.

3.4 Narrative

Some poems like other genres of literature tell a story. The only difference here is that the story is told in verse. However, there are narrative poems like the epics that are not presented strictly in verse.

Apart from epic, many poets use verse to tell stories that have recognizable plot lines and are close to reality. Poets have written poems about nature, relationships and other issues in verse. Here is an example

Moon in the Bucket

Look!
 Look out there
 In the bucket
 The rusty bucket
 With water unclean
 Look!
 A luminous plate is floating –
 The moon, dancing to the gentle night wind
 Look! All you shout across the wall
 With a million hates. Look at the dancing moon
 It is peace unsoiled by the murk
 And dirt of this bucket war.

- *Gabriel Imomotime Okara*

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Think of an **unusual** incident that happened to you recently or something odd you have witnessed or heard reported in the news. You will have many of them in your notebook. Choose one of them.

- Write about the incident for about 10 – 15 minutes without pausing or stopping.
- Write it in a narrative form using the 3rd person pronoun. Concentrate on the details filling in from your imagination when necessary.
- Prepare your draft for revisions.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this last exercise, I have asked you to move away from reality. This is to show that you can write about both imagined and unrealistic incidents. For centuries, poets have written about issues of this world and about those in heaven and hell. So in the exercise above, try to move beyond the ordinary, from your immediate surrounding and feelings to explore other issues.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been introduced to voice in poetry. You need to choose your own voice and mode of presentation. You will decide to present your poem through a persona, using your own voice or through a third person.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a draft on “Abiku” “Ogbanje” or “An Angel”.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Senanu, K. E. & Vincent (ed) (2003). *A Selection of African Poetry*. New Edition. Harlow Essex. Longman.

UNIT 3 STRUCTURE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last two units, we have tried to write a story but did not bother about how to arrange it in a particular order. In this unit we will try to arrange that story to give it a particular shape. This arrangement is called the structure. The structure of a poem helps to a large extent in the determination of the type of it is.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- construct the form of your poem;
- present your story in a particular sequence;
- divide your story into stanzas; and
- present it in a rhyming pattern.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Form

Form is the pattern and structure of the poem. It also refers to style, the devices and techniques used by the writer. Generally, in literature we talk of content

and form. Content is the theme and subject matter while form is how the theme is expressed in the work. In this case, form encapsulates all the stylistic elements that the writer utilizes in explicating his/her theme. Conventionally, the novelist presents his/her work in chapters, the playwrights in acts and scenes and the poet in lines and stanzas. The poet utilizes words to produce rhythm which is the hallmark of poetry.

In prose and drama, words are arranged continuously from the left margin to the right margin of the page. But in poetry it is not like that. The poem is arranged in lines that are usually very short except in narrative poems. Unlike the novelists and the playwright, the poet is conscious of producing a kind of musicality which we call rhythm. She/he arranges the words in a special way to achieve that effect. In doing this, the poem assumes a particular shape. Each poet presents his/her poem in a form which suits his/her purpose or that would best convey his/her message and emotion to the audience.

Each poem is significant and peculiar in its own way, so, we do not expect a poet to present all his poems in a particular structure. Here are three short poems from a collection of poems by Abdul Yesufu.

1. You are...

Your beauty weaves a spell
That makes me dream of sleeping and dreaming
Your eyes are morning mimosa
On the fields of my initiation
The gems sheltered behind your nectars are cassava pulp
The Kilimanjaro peak is Cimmerian beside them
And the smile that dances on your cheeks
Depletes the mystic smile of Mona Lisa

2. River Nile at Jinga: A Haiku

A Mighty teardrop
Breaking away from the Swollen eye
Of the overburdened watery Nyanza

3. Of Despair and Hope

Flow on
Black stream of despair
Flow on
Over deep undercurrents of faith
Like paraffin on water
I will not be drowned
Flow on
My roots are moored

In the resilience

You have seen that the structure of each poem is different.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Arrange the story you wrote in the last unit in a particular order to produce the form (shape) you desire. Do this in 10 mins.

3.2 Metre

The most important aspect of poetry is that the poet creates sound patterns. Just like in learning to speak a language you do not just know its grammar and syntax but you also learn to pronounce it correctly. In pronouncing words, you create a sound pattern dictated by the stressed and unstressed syllables. You are trying to write your poem in English language therefore you should note that the “English words usually have their stress on the second syllable; another general rule is that strong stresses in most cases have a weak stress separating them e.g. division (Maxwell-Mahon 62). This means that the word has three syllables in which the central one is stressed.

Metre in poetry therefore is established by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in its lines. This metric pattern helps you, as stated earlier, to create sound patterns which in turn produce the rhythmic pattern in a poem.

The units of stressed and unstressed syllables in a poem are called feet, and the number of feet determines the type of metre. For instance, when there are five feet consisting of an unstressed syllable and a stressed syllable in each line of a poem especially as in a sonnet, it is called pentimetre. We will concentrate on the identification of feet and metre in a poem. Let us take two lines from a poem we have used for illustration earlier and identify the feet there in.

Sleep well, my love, sleep well
The harbour lights glaze over restless docks
(Dennis Brutus “Night Song City”)

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Follow this pattern and try to put stress on each syllable of two lines of the poem you are trying to write. You can substitute some of the words with other words to enable you create the feet you desire.

3.3 Line

Line in poetry as the name implies, is a line of words in the poem. Each line may or may not make sense when it stands alone. A line ranges from one word to as many words as possible. It may be a phrase, a sentence or just one or two words that do not qualify to be called a phrase. Let us look at some examples below.

Your preoccupation in creating your line is not the meaning but the sound pattern. However you will bear in mind that in the end of a stanza, or a few lines, the words should make sense. Some poets use the punctuation mark to demarcate each unit of thought or to enhance the rhythm of the poem. The punctuation could be at the end of a line or in the middle. Let us read Kalu Uka's "Earth to Earth" below:

As if man hung here unblown,
 Their middlewed buds of love like pollen
 Late caught, damp in a swollen
 Drop of rain; or like the hot
 Tear that chills a fevered pit
 After heads into bodies socket

You may have observed that this first stanza of the poem flows from the first line to the last without a full stop. If you read the rest of the poem you will encounter the full stop in the third stanza.

It means that you can choose to break your sentence, clause, and phrase at any point in order to make your poem meaningful. The following tips by W. H. Herbert will help you in the determination of where and when to break a line.

Where you choose to break a phrase in
 Order to begin a new line has a
 Consequence for the entire poem. If we
 Break it at the end of a clause or
 Sentence, then we reinforce grammatical
 Sense with an unspoken emphasis. If we
 Break within a phrase, then we introduce a sense

Through the poem, almost demanding that We make sense of the line by reading
 on. Conversely, if we break within a phrase And follow that with a space, whether
 an Indention or a stanza break, then we
 Create a note of suspension, implying That the normal progression of a
 Sentence can contain spaces where
 The reader can pause

3.3 Rhyme

We have talked about sound patterns in poetry and in discussing line, we imply that the poem is expected to convey a meaning. In other words, it must make sense. You must therefore try to create a balance between sound and sense. If not you would be babbling. Rhyme helps to project sound pattern in a poem.

It involves an act of linkage, an awareness of pattern. It explores the “associativeness of sound [and] doesn’t simply take place at the end of lines...” (Herbert 224). Rhyme could occur at any point in a poem. This is achieved through literary devices like assonance, consonance and alliteration. In a poem, rhyme contributes to a large extent, to form. It aids the “integration of the sound of language with the particular shape, tone and sense of a poem” (Herbert 224).

You may have noticed that a lot of modern poets do not pay much attention to rhyme. That should not bother you because not all poems are conventional in the real sense of the word. Ensure that you pay particular attention to rhyme in your poem. Enrich and enlarge your vocabulary so that you can easily select words that rhyme and at the same time convey your emotion and meaning to your audience. Rhyme is the occurrence of similar sound patterns/rhyming words in the last stressed vowel and speech sounds following it. Assonance and alliteration are also identified in a poem through similar sound patterns.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

1. Read the “Night Song City” again and note the rhyming of words like ‘streets’ and ‘sheets’ and in the first line.
2. Identify other words that rhyme in the poem and note their effects in the sound musical quality of the poem.

3.4 Stanza

Stanza is simply the division of your poem into segments or groups of lines according to fixed conventional patterns. In a poem, “the basic unit of poetic form is the *verse*, which is the *line*. Lines are organised into longer unit of thought and feelings called *stanza*. (Akporobaro, 2008:88). There are as different types of stanza forms as there are poems. The number of lines in each stanza that is organised in a particular rhyme pattern produce different types of stanzaic forms like the couplet, tercet, quatrain and many others. I do not want to go into the stanza forms obtained in classical literature because not all contemporary poets adhere to those conventions. However here as some examples of well- known stanzaic forms:

Couplet

This is one of the basic forms of poetry and consists of two lines of verse with similar end-rhymes. Ideally, it is a two-line stanza with “both grammatical structure and idea complete within itself” (Akporobaro, 2008:88).

Example:

A birth is death awaited
A death is birth anticipated;

...

I walk in the chains of memories
 What bond links these memories,
 - *From Ezenwa-Ohaeto "The living and the dead"*

Tercet

This is a stanza of three lines in which each line ends with the same rhyme.

Example:

The moon kisses
 My daughter's emerging breasts
 And my son's dimples dimples.
 - *From Okot p'Bitek "Cattle egret"*

Quatrain

A stanza of a poem with four lines.

The important factor is for you to know that you could present your poem in a stanza form or in a continuous form. There is no rule on the number of line that should be grouped to make up a stanza. It ranges from one line to as many lines as possible. This is evident in the poem below.

Song of Malaya (excerpts)

Sister prostitutes
 Wherever you are
 I salute you
 Wealth and health
 To us all
 I Kabiru
 Welcome ashore
 You vigorous young sailor,
 I see you scanning the horizon
 In search of dry land
 I hear your heart drumming
 Tum-tum-tu-tu-tum...
 That time bomb
 Pulsating in your loin
 Surely weighs you down
 Oh...oh
 (Okot P' Bitek)

Each stanza is separated by a consciously created gap. That gap indicates the separation of stanzas.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Read as many poems as you can and note the construction of the stanzas.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The structure of a poem is very important. It gives your poem its unique character. You can only build this structure by paying serious attention to your choice of words, the arrangement of the words into lines and subsequently into stanzas.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been led through the basic steps in structuring your poem. You have been exposed, through some practical steps, to the creation of line, rhyme, and stanza in your poem.

6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Divide the poem you have written into stanzas, bearing in mind the rhyming scheme of the poem.

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UNIT 4 POETIC LANGUAGE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Images
 - 3.1.1 Literal image
 - 3.1.2. Figurative image
 - 3.2 Symbols
 - 3.3 Figures of speech
 - 3.4 Sound devices
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

So far, we have been trying to write a poem. By now we have a framework of what we might refer to as a poem. We have tried to present it in a particular form or pattern. In this unit, we will revisit that poem and try to re-write it, using appropriate poetic language.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- identify and use images/imagery in a poem;
- identify and utilize symbols in a poem;
- identify and use figures of speech in a poem;
- identify and use figures of sounds in a poem; and
- infuse these poetic elements into your own poem.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.

- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

Poetic language is unique and through constant practice and reading, you will master it. The poet uses the written words to make the audience to see, to hear and to feel the objects, emotions and ideas he expresses or describes in his/her poem. In a very small space, she/he leads the audience to have a glimpse of the truth she/he conveys through the poem. Poetic language is realised through the choice of words/diction. Prose is defined by Coleridge as words in their best order and poetry as the *best words* in their *best order*. It means that the arrangement of words in a very good pattern is the hallmark of literature, but in poetry the poet must make sure that she/he chooses the best words. This is vital because she/he does not have the time and space which the novelist and, to a lesser extent the playwright, has. Moreso, you need to choose the best words that will help you in the expression of your emotion and human situations. It does not matter the type of poem, from the lengthy narrative poem like the epic, to the short lyric that expresses emotion in songlike form; from the ballad and the sonnet to the avant garde and contemporary poems that have defied classification, the choice of words is very important.

Akporobaro summarises poetic language thus:

whereas prose or scientific language is lucid, clear, abstract and denotative, poetical language is figurative and embellished so as to be emotive, picturesque, connotative, suggestive and evocative (pp. 24 – 25).

3.1 Image

In poetry, the poet recreates his/her “sensory and intellectual experiences in the minds of his readers” (Maxwell-Mahon, 1984:57). Words are the only tools she/he needs in this recreative enterprise. The words she/he chooses determine the success or failure of the enterprise. It is impossible for anyone to describe something or an experience exactly as it is, so the poet relies on the imagination of his readers to bridge the gap between the things/experiences and the words used to describe them. This is achieved through the choice of words, images and symbols.

An image, according to *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* is (as it relates to this work):

1. a mental picture that you have of what somebody or something is like or looks like;
2. a copy of something or somebody in form of picture or statue; or

3. a word or phrase used with a different meaning from its normal one, in order to describe something in a way that produces a strong picture in the mind; to look very like somebody/something else (p. 743).

The last definition gives a clearer picture of an image as a literal and concrete representation of a sensory experience of an object, an idea or an experience. Imagery is the language that produces pictures in the minds of people reading or listening (p. 743). It is the act of presenting images in a poetry.

If you understand what image is and are able to use it in your poem, you would then be in a position to familiarize your “readers with unknown or exotic phenomena and defamiliarise the overtly familiar... represent the world to us as we have never seen it before. In both cases, it expands the range of our experience” (Herbert, 2006:207). In other words, with an appropriate use of images you can make unfamiliar things familiar and the common ones unfamiliar.

It means that by the use of image, you would be presenting comparisons between like terms and unlike terms. You should be able to transmit your impressions of objects ideas and human experiences. For instance the poem below is about a salaried worker who is unable to meet his financial obligations.

PAY DAY

The Pay-day
 Is a gay day
 For the ‘salarian’
 If only he forgets
 The landlord’s share
 Of the booty he laboured for
 The bill he must pay
 For the fledging power supply
 The dues he owes for the tap
 That is too shy to spit
 The brother-in-law’s fees
 That cry for settlement
 Or the madam’s wardrobe
 That begs for an update
 For peace to reign
 The contribution to the village
 For aged parents’ upkeep
 Ah, the mechanic’s demand
 For the automobile’s overhauling
 He looks at the chopped sole of his shoes
 The tiny holes on his trouser
 The fade on his shirt

All are wolves
Against his meager pay sheep.

– *Solomon Iguanre*

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What image of the ‘salarian’ does the poem present?

Note that if the images are not applied appropriately they could mar your poetry. An image can disrupt the free flow of thought in your poem so be careful and cautious in the use of image. There are two types images the literal and the figurative.

3.1.1. Literal Image

As the name implies, the literal image in a poem gives the real meaning of the images that are used in the poem. The poets here paint the picture or represents objects in actuality or as you see them in reality. A good example is seen in some of the nursery rhymes that we are familiar with.

Apart from nursery rhymes, some poets use literal images. Such poems are accessible; they are very easy to understand. Many budding poets start with the application of literal images in their poems. The poem below captures the image of a mother caring for her emaciated starving son during the war. The image:

Refugee Mother and Child

No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother’s tenderness
for a son she soon would have to forget.
The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies. Most
mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother’s
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then –
singing in her eyes - began carefully
to part it...In another life this
would have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers

on a tiny grave.

- Chinua Achebe

3.1.2 Figurative Image

Figurative image extends the literal meaning of an object /idea/experience to other meanings. It is an extension of factual, ordinary and familiar descriptions to enable the reader see things in new and more striking ways. It helps the poet paint pictures and stir appropriate feelings. In the poem below, Olu Obafemi presents religious leaders as the Do-Gooders.

Do-Gooders

The bloated stomachs
 In stinking gutters
 The naked ribs
 Of sprawling skeletons
 5 Hoot for a Time bomb.
 I say
 Horror begets horror
 To nullify horror
 The flatulent do-gooders
 10 Climbing pulpits
 In deserted churches
 Damnable mosques
 Wretched palm-groves;
 The vicar and the Imam
 15 The babalawo and the Aladura
 Who close your eyes and open theirs
 Who chew the flesh and you the bone
 Must be tied to stakes
 Blazed in flames and flakes
 20 Clear woe
 With an all-ending woe
 That woe may NEVER BE

- Olu Obafemi

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

1. List words/phrases that help to accentuate the image of suffering in the poem.
2. Underline the lines in the poem that evoke the image of deceit and exploitative tendencies of religious leaders.
3. Revisit the poem you are writing. Identify the image you are presenting and choose the best words to convey it (them)

3.2. Symbols

A symbol is a word, an object, person or a group of words that retains its meaning and could be used to convey another meaning. For instance, a sword is a weapon but it represents war, or justice. Symbol stands for something which it represents. A cross in the literal sense is an intersection but a symbol of Christianity or on further extension, a symbol of the crucified Christ – suffering, sacrifice, redemption. For the Catholics, the Eucharistic bread and wine are symbols of Christ’s body and blood while the host in the monstrance is a symbol of Christ’s eternal presence with his people and also symbolizes Christ himself. Many of the titles of novels, poems and plays are symbols.

The meaning and significance of a symbol crystalises within the framework of a system of ideas or things of which the symbol is also a part. This means that an object assumes a symbolic meaning within a particular context. Some scholars believe that “some of the poems, which are considered great, are those, which have a symbolic significance like in the poem below.

Guiles and Smiles

You smile you laugh
 And pat me on the back and say
 That everything is okay
 But I know that nothing is okay.
 You say to me that I’m welcome
 The welcome of Antipas to Jean Baptiste
 I already see my crown on a platter
 A thoughtless token to slake the sizzling caprice
 Of dancing beauty
 You cuddle me in amity
 Your cheeks touch mine one after the other
 But I am not deceived
 As if a magic mirror threw the muck of your mind
 On a screen of celluloid
 I see your designs
 Your Hand of friendship is the coil of a python
 Killing with its patina of burnished beauty
 Your genial smile the scowl of Iblis
 Your willing welcome that of the lion
 To the stray duiker to his den
 Since I know the masks that your snares wear
 I will on brave muted toes of the wind sidestep them
 And arrive at the last station of my journey
 The lone hunter in a Tutuolan forest of the spirits
 Who has seen more wonders than one tongue can tell

- *Abdrasheed Yesufu*

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Identify two words in the fourth stanza used as symbols to suggest that the friendship is fake.

3.4 Figures of Speech

These are literary devices which the poet uses to appeal to the imagination of the reader. These devices help him/her to evoke appropriate pictures in the minds of the reader. In the last unit of your course material – Creative Writing I, I listed some literary devices. I believe that by now you must have acquainted yourself with all of them. The commonest forms are “simile” and “metaphor”, and many others. I want to draw your attention to “metonymy” because it helps the poet in his use of images and symbols in the poem. Metonymy is the employment of a feature or an attribute of an object to stand for the whole of that object in “the pen is mightier than the sword”, pen here represents the act of writing and what is written while sword stands for conflict, war or the act of destruction by force/intellect vs. brute force/might. The mastery of the figures of speech will help you in the creation of a great poem.

3.5 Sound Devices

The figures of sound are similar to the figures of speech. The difference is that they aid the sound which creates rhythm in a poem. The figures of sound could be in form of the sound of a particular word as we find in Onomatopoeia. Here the sound evokes the image of the object, animal or person. For instance, the “buzzing of the bee” or “mewing of a cat” try to create the sounds made by a flying bee and a cat respectively.

The figures of sound can also come in the form of the repetition of the same consonant sounds (alliteration) or the same vowel sounds (assonance and consonance).

Sound in poetry does not exist in isolation but in a “reflective relation to meaning, form and mood of the poem”. It reinforces and suggests the meaning and is in turn evoked and suggested by the meanings of the poem (Akporobaro, 2008:141); so figures of sound enhance the meaning of a given poem by evoking a wide range of ideas and meanings.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Poetry thrives on imagination. The poet imagines and creates his or her poem. He uses images, symbols, figures of speech and sound to create a picture that appeal

to the readers' imagination. These poetic devices help the poet to say so much in such a little space.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have encountered more poetic devices that help the poet to recreate his mental pictures on paper. Some of the pictures convey literal meanings while some of the meanings are shrouded in symbols.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Revisit your poem and identify figures of speech and figures of sound in it. If you are not satisfied, re-write it and infuse more literary devices.

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UNIT 5 THE POEM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objective
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Writing a poem
 - 3.2 Poetic license
 - 3.3 Re-drafting
 - 3.4 The final draft
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will lead you to different definitions of poetry by poets/critics throughout the ages. The intent is to show that poetry means different things to different people but some basic elements like the peculiarity of poetical language and rhythm seem to be constant. This is expected to help you in writing your poem. This is because it will help you to define poetry in your own words, and to apply your definition or any other one in writing your poem.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- examine various definitions of poetry;
- define poetry in your own words; and
- apply your definition or any other one in writing your own poem.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Writing a poem

Let us examine the classical meaning of poetry and some definitions of poetry. You may wonder why I left the definition of poetry till now. The reason is that I assumed that you have a basic knowledge poetry and poem right from your primary school through secondary school. The essence of this section is to reinforce that knowledge now to assist you in writing your own poem.

The terms poem, poet, poetry, poetic and poetics are derived from the Greek word “poesis” which denotatively means “making or to make”. As you know already, the poet is the person who writes a poem, poetic is generally associated with poems and poems are embodiments of poetry. Poetry according to Agwonorobo Eruubetine, poetry is “a type of discourse which addresses its effect through rhythm, sound patterns, imagery... evokes emotions, sensations... conveys loftiness of tone...(and, lends force to ideas” (2002:8). It is really difficult to put the poetical experience in a straight-jacket definition. This is why we have decided to present some attempts at the definition of poetry by some scholars culled from F. B. O. Akporobaro’s *Introduction to Poetry*, as follows:

1. I would define the poetry of as the rhythmical creation of beauty. Its sole arbiter is taste. With the intellect or with the conscience it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with duty or with truth.
- *Edgar Allan Poe*
2. Poetry is the imaginative expression of strong feeling, usually rhythmical, the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility
- *William Wordsworth*
3. The proper and immediate object of science is the acquirement or communication of truth; the proper and immediate object of poetry is the communication of pleasure.
- *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*
4. Poetry a criticism of life under the condition fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and beauty
- *Matthew Arnord*
5. Absolute poetry is the concrete and artistic of the human mind in emotional and rhythmical language.
- *Theodore Watts Dunton*
6. Speech framed to be heard for its own sake and interest even over and above its interest of meaning.
- *Gerard Manley Hopkins*

7. An actual poem is the succession of experiences – sounds, images, and thoughts, emotions – through which we pass when we are reading as poetically as we can.
- *Andrew Bradley*
8. The rhythmic inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision.
- *Dylan Thomas*
9. The presentment, in musical form, to the imagination, of noble grounds for the noble emotions
- *John Ruskin*
10. If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry.
- *Emily Dickinson*
11. Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said. All poetry, great or small, does this.
- *Edwin Arlington Robinson*
12. The art, which uses words as both speech and song to reveal the realities that the senses record, the feeling salute, the mind perceives, and the happing imagination orders.
- *Babette Deutsch*

He then summarises the definitions above in the following way:

1. Poetry is the arrangement of words in verse, especially a rhythmical composition, sometimes rhymed and expressing human experiences, ideas and imagination
2. poetry exploits the modes of rhythm, imagery and experiences to transform thoughts and feelings into artistic forms of expression
3. emotions, thoughts, intuitions and personal experiences are the subject matter and sources of poetry
4. poetry differs from ordinary speech by being more selective in its use of words and symbolism
5. as an artistic form of expression, poetry has specific forms or modes of being. These forms are its genres.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define poetry in your own words.

3.2 Poetic Licence

Poetic licence refers to the right or privilege which allows a poet to depart from the normal form or convention in writing his poem. This departure could be in the use of diction, rhyme, metrical pattern and other conventions. This means that a poet can deviate or depart completely from the accepted convention in writing poems. In many such cases, the poet's intention is to establish a particular poetic effect. This perhaps is what has given rise to different forms in poetry. Some poets no longer pay proper attention to diction, rhyme, imagery to ensure that their poems conform to the order of metrical pattern. This is because they have the poetic licence to write the way they feel. However, do not claim that you have poetic licence, so you use archaic words or spell words wrongly. The emphasis is/should be on language deviation or the poet's freedom from conventional rules of language.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Read the poem you have written. Which definition above suits your poem? Underline the deviations from conventional use of language which you could call poetic licence.

3.3. Re-drafting

This is the most important aspect of creative writing generally and writing of a poem in particular. Most often, when we are reading what we have written, the tendency is for us to read what is in our minds/heads. Sometimes, in creative writing, the meaning of the final work is not the original meaning you started with. The same goes for the form. As you were being led through the process of writing a poem in this module, you have re-drafted your poem several times.

Now, get your poem and start the actual re-drafting. Pay particular attention to your idea/meaning, the diction, the figures of speech/sound patterns the images and finally the form. One good step that helps in re-drafting is to read your poem aloud to yourself and to another person. Then, re-draft, paying particular attention to the areas of deficiency. Finally, give the poem to another person, someone who has a good ear and a good mind or, at least, passable knowledge of poetry. Evaluate the person's opinion and incorporate the necessary ones.

3.4 The Final Draft

You may wonder why I call it the final draft instead of the poem. You are a student and what you have at this stage is still subject to evaluation by your guide/facilitator. What he or she approves becomes your poem.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Poetry is an experience which has defied a single definition like “drama is an imitation of life”. However, scholars have attempted to define it. The definitions are influenced by the individual’s perceptions of poetry. Poetic licence is the right of the poet to use language in whatever form in his poem to fashion his/her poem in whatever form.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have reviewed various definitions of poetry and have produced your own definition. You have also re-drafted and edited your poem to produce the final draft.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Present your poem for evaluation.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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