NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

COURSE CODE: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

COURSE TITLE: ENG 172

ENG 172
INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

Course Team: Prof. A. R. Yesufu (Course Developer/Writer) – NOUN
Prof. A. E. Eruvbetine (Editor) – UNILAG
Dr. I. Omolara Daniel (Programme Leader) – NOUN
Dr. A. M. Yakubu (Course Coordinator) – NOUN

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INTRODUCTION

ENG 172: Introduction to Poetry

ENG 172 is a one semester course of two credit units. It is designed for English Language students and others in related departments who are required to take language and literature courses as electives. The course has fourteen units which cover almost all the introductory information a student would need to understand poetry as a genre of literature. This requisite information include: the nature of poetry as literature, definitions, uses, elements, techniques and devices of poetry and, finally, how to criticise or appreciate a poem.

You are expected to go through this course guide carefully to know what the course is all about, the course materials you need, the tutor-marked assignments and some other necessary information. Please attend your tutorial classes for practical discussion of some of the various aspects of the genre of poetry. By the time you are through with the course, you would be confident enough to appreciate poetry having acquired the necessary knowledge of what poetry is and how to recognise good and effective poetry from the poor and ineffective. Thus you should also be able to analyse or criticise a poem by focusing attention on its form (manner/style) and content (matter/subject), etc. Going through this course will equip you specially for this purpose. Let me assure you that this course is a very interesting one and it would prepare you for your future encounters with poetry as a field of study. Welcome on board.

Course Aim

This course is designed to expose you to the nature, uses, elements, techniques and devices of poetry. Its aim is to:

- enable you acquire an understanding of the character of poetry as a genre of

literature

- introduce you to the functions of poetry in society
- enable you to understand the elements, techniques/devices, and forms of poetry
- impart to you the requisite knowledge that would enable you distinguish between effective and ineffective poetry
- encourage you (through tutor-marked assignments) to criticise set poems.

Course Objectives

The objectives of a course are the things you are expected to be able to do at the end of the course. These objectives will guide you when going through the study and they will also help you in self assessment and where you need to improve on your learning and study habits. By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. define poetry as a form of writing or literature
2. discuss the elements of poetry that you have been taught in the course
3. identify the different forms of poetry through their characteristic features
2. comment on the qualities of any given poem to demonstrate the skills of criticism/appreciation you have acquired in this course.

Working through the course

In this course, you have fourteen study units to go through. In each of the study units, you are expected to study the contents very well before attempting the questions. You should pay attention to the objectives of each study unit so that you can be properly guided through the unit. You should be prepared to do a lot of thinking and writing in this course because it is designed to make you do so. The assessment will be through (1) self assessment exercises meant to enable you measure your level of understanding of the units contained in this course material and (2) tutor-marked assignments which you are expected to do and

turn in at the appropriate time. You are also expected to write a final examination at the end of the course. The time for the examination will be communicated to you.

Course Materials

The major components of the course are:

1. The Course guide

2. The Study units

3. The Textbooks

4. The Assignment files

5. The Presentation schedule

Study units

There are three modules which are divided into fourteen units in this course. Each study unit constitutes a week's work and this is preceded by the objectives which you are expected to study before going through the unit. The objectives spell out what you are expected to be able to do at the end of the unit. In each study unit, you also have the reading materials and the self assessment exercises. The tutor-marked assignments; the study units, the tutorials, all put together, will help you to achieve the stated objectives for this course.

In addition to the above, unlike other courses where you just read and take notes, ENG 172 requires much involvement of your imaginative faculty since the study of poetry is essentially a study of what 'bodies forth' from the writer's intense imagination. You are also expected to do a lot of writing. However, this does not mean that the theoretical foundation, which this course is meant to impart to you is not important; it is very important if you are to master the various manifestations of poetry.

The Modules and study units are as follows:

Module 1   The Nature of Poetry as Literature

Unit one   What is literature (definitions; oral/written; imaginative; creative; suggestive)

Unit two   What is poetry (definitions)

Unit three   Elements of poetry: imagery; sound; rhythm; diction

Unit four   Major form/types of poetry

Unit five   Functions or uses of poetry as a form of literature

Module 2   Techniques and literary devices of poetry

Unit one   Tropes: irony; paradox; simile; metaphor; personification; etc

Unit two   Rhetorical figures: contrast; antithesis; apostrophe; hyperbole; etc.

Unit three   Types of Verse: blank, heroic, free

Unit four   Foot; Syllable; metre and types

Unit five   Duration/quantity

Module 3   Analysis of Poetry

Unit one   Through matter or sense

Unit two   Through manner or method

Unit three   Through evaluation of manner/method vis-à-vis meaning

Unit four   Practice through selected poems for illustration

Unit five   Useful literary/Poetic terms

Set textbooks and Other References

Each unit has a list of recommended reference textbooks and materials for further reading. These are meant to deepen your knowledge of the course. Try to get as many as possible and go through them for necessary assistance while going through the unit and before attempting the exercises.

Assessment File

You will be assessed in two ways in this course: (a) the tutor-marked

assignments and (b) a written examination. You are expected to do the assignments and submit them to your tutorial facilitator for formal assessment in accordance with the stated deadlines in the presentation schedule and the Assignment file. Your tutor-marked assignments will account for 30% of the total course mark.

Tutor-marked assignment

ENG 172 is a course that involves a sizeable number of practical works, and this translates to a lot of tutor-marked assignments at the end of every unit which you are expected to do. You are also expected to master as many critical/literary terms that have particular relevance to the study of poetry and possibly discuss them in class/study groups or with your tutorial facilitator. You will be assessed on the aspects and activities of this course material but only four of them will be selected for continuous assessment. Send the completed assignments (when due) together with the tutor-marked assignment form to your tutorial facilitator. Make sure you send in your assignment before the stated deadline. However, if you have a genuine reason to submit late, seek the permission of your tutorial facilitator.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for ENG 172 will be a two hour paper in which you are expected to answer all questions in sections A and B and a specified number of questions in section C. Each question is one mark, giving you a total of seventy marks for the examination. The thirty marks for the course work and the seventy marks for the examination give a total of one hundred marks (i.e. 30+70=100). The structure or pattern of the questions will be MCQs, FIQs and essay. Revise properly before the examination date.

Course Marking Scheme

The following table shows how the actual course mark is broken down

Assessment	Marks
Assignments	Four Assignments; best three marks count as 30% of course work.
Final Examination	70%
Total	100%

Presentation Schedule

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

Course Overview

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
	Course Guide	1	
	Module 1: The Nature of Poetry as Literature		
1	What is literature	1	Assignment 1
2	What is poetry – definitions	2	Assignment 2
3	Elements of poetry	3	Assignment 3
4	Major types of poetry – the impersonal forms	4	Assignment 4
5	Major types of poetry – the personal or romantic forms	5	Assignment 5
	Module 2: Techniques and Devices of		

	Poetry		
1	Tropes: Irony; paradox; metaphor; personification; simile; metonymy; synecdoche; etc.	6	Assignment 6
2	Rhetorical figures: Contrast; antithesis; apostrophe; hyperbole; onomatopoeia; oxymoron; etc.	7	Assignment 7
3	Types of Verse: Blank; Heroic; Free.	8	Assignment 8
4	Syllable; metre and types	9	Assignment 9
5	Duration/quantity	10	Assignment 10
	Module 3: Analysis of Poetry		
1	Through matter or subject	11	Assignment 11
2	Through manner or method	12	Assignment 12
3	Through evaluation of manner vis-à-vis meaning	13	Assignment 13
4	Practice through selected poems for illustration	14	Assignment 14
	Revision	15	
	Examination	16	
	Total	**17**	

How to get the most from this Course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suits you best. Think of it as reading the lecturer instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give

you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from your course guides. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it. Follow the following advice carefully:

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment
2. Organise a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend in each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write your own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the Introduction and the Objectives for the Unit
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you

will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.

7. Review the objectives for each unit to inform that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.

8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule

9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

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

11. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up to date course information will be continuously available there.

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 tutorial hours for this course. The dates, times and location of these tutorial sessions will be communicated to you as well as the name and phone number of your tutorial facilitator. You will also be notified of your tutorial group.

As you relate with your tutorial facilitator, he/she will mark and correct your assignments and also keep a close watch on your performance in the tutor-marked assignments and attendance at tutorials. Feel free to contact your tutorial

facilitator by phone or e-mail if you have any problem with the contents of any of the study units.

Summary

ENG 172 is designed to introduce you to the nature, uses, different types of poetry as well as how to appreciate poetry based on your understanding of what a given poem is and what makes it effective or ineffective. On completion, you should be well equipped with all the necessary skills needed to criticise any type of poem.

I wish you the best as you go through this course.

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INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

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Unit three   Elements of Poetry

Unit four   Major Forms or Types of Poetry

Unit five   Functions or Uses of Poetry as a form of literature

MODULE 1

UNIT 1: THE NATURE OF POETRY AS LITRATURE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Literature is the art which imitates life in words with the twin objectives of entertaining and edifying. There has always been the yet unresolved argument as to whether literature inheres in the matter, subject or object that it concerns itself with or in its manner or style of expressing this matter of focus. While these arguments are valid in locating literature in a particular space in the array of other written forms produced by man, it is the major characteristics of the art that defines it most precisely. In this regard, literature is best seen as the body of work (written or oral) in which man's record of his experiences is given artistic form. Accordingly, literature embodies the most basic issues of life which the American poet, Ezra Pound, has seen as "the news that remains news" because of its perennial currency. It is in this vision that lies the quality of universality of the art. Besides, the literary cosmos is best marked by its qualities of imagination, creativity and suggestiveness. These qualities are most explicitly discernible in Poetry, our focus in this course, which is the oldest of the major forms or genres of literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:
 - define and identify the essentials of literature
 - understand be able to identify the formal markers of literature
 - identify the differences between literature and other forms of writing
 - discuss the features of literature that lend it its universality

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

In this unit, you will learn about literature as the art form that mirrors life in deliberately chosen words or diction with the purpose of pleasing, teaching and developing the readers' or listeners' faculty of reasoning or thinking. You will also learn, as a means of preparing the ground for your proper understanding of

the study of poetry, the major forms or genres of literature. The study of works of literature broadens our horizon, refines our sensibilities as well as deepens our understanding of man and human nature generally.

3.1   What is Literature

Literature is writing in which ideas of permanent and universal values or interests are expressed in a deliberately embellished language the purpose of which is to please (both sensually and intellectually) and teach by indirection. Compare this definition that gives us a clear idea of literature as both content (what is said) and medium (how content is expressed) to the following definition by Ezra Pound: "Literature is language charged with meaning". "Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree" (ABC 28).

The polarity of opinion regarding the exact nature of literature captures the age-old debate on whether literature or literariness should be judged merely by the subject or content of a work or by the style of its expression. We shall leave this question for now because you will have to form your own opinion as you get to understand the workings of literature and be able to defend it with facts or illustrations.

However, some of the foremost things that a reader needs to know about literature are its constitutive elements or characteristics, viz: imagination, creativity, suggestion or indirection.

3.1.1 Imagination

Literature thrives essentially on imaginative constructs which means that it is a form of composition that relies heavily on the composer's or writer's mental journeys that take him beyond the realms of the given to a world of fantasy or of

the mind. Hence, the literary artist is not always bound by the ordinary daily experiences of man. For example, a raconteur or story teller almost always takes his audience to improbable and indeterminable lands and times which are products of his imagination. Writers have led their readers through lands of giants, one-eyed monsters, flying humans, speaking animal and forests; all these are emanations from their imagination. Some have presented environments that could best be described as replicas of heaven or hell in a bid to show the readers or audience the two poles of bliss/desire and repugnance/suffering and pain. Franz Kafka in his story "Metamorphosis" has given to written literature the unforgettable image of a young insurance executive who woke up in the morning to find that he had metamorphosed into a cockroach. All the extraordinary events and characters are products of literary invention or imagination. Imagination also comes into play in the literary artist's use of events and experiences in his social environment but imbuing them with imagined aspects or qualities which raise them above the ordinary.

The imagination of the literary artist is also clearly visible in his use of language to express his experiences, be they real or imagined. A good artist always find or imagines a fresh way of expressing ordinary experiences thereby raising them to a level that appears to be out of the ordinary. For example in the simple but extraordinary expression "He watches from his mountain walls/And like a thunderbolt he falls", the Victorian poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, establishes a similarity between the speed of a thunderbolt and that of an eagle descending from a height to catch its prey. The poet has used his imagination to create this scene and the reader's imagination is similarly excited. It is this collaboration that James Reeves so aptly describes in the statement/ that "most good poetry demands study and interpretation; it costs its maker much effort of thought, imagination and feeling, and it is worthy of corresponding efforts by its readers" (*The Poet's World* xxi).

Aristotle's opinion, in his comparison of history and poetry, is instructive in this discussion of literary imagination; he asserted that poetry (the poet) is superior to history (the historian) because the former is philosophical expressing the probable while the latter is factual thriving on what has been.

3.1.2 Creativity

There is a very thin line that separates creativity that constitutes the bedrock of literature from imagination that we have discussed above. For one, they are both essential qualities and products of the artist; it is the competent artist that imagines the best forms that his matter and manner would take. Similarly, it is the artist who creates a fictive world in which his imagination plays among symbols to produce his work. So, in essence, the two qualities overlap to give us a rounded or full understanding of the true nature of literature. The literary artist at the moment of creation is, in the words of Andrew Lang (Blakeney xv qtd by Brooke), "a born visionary and mystic, beholding things unapparent, believing in experiences that were never actual". For example, British poets like William Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William B Yeats who believed/claimed that some of their major works were handed to them by some supernatural mediums or agencies are of this mould. Some of their poems at times had their origins in historical and legendary materials which were then imbued with the extraordinary poetic touch. It is this faculty that gave to English literature, among many others, such great poems of the extraordinary and supernatural as Blake's "Jerusalem" and "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell"; Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan"; and Yeats' poems that incorporated the occult and mythology of Irish folklore.

1.3 Suggestion/Indirection

There is no other quality of literature that distinguishes it more succinctly from other forms of writing than this quality of suggestiveness. While other forms of

writing could claim to be both imaginative and creative in their own ways, they are definitely not marked by the quality of indirection or suggestiveness which is the exclusive domain of literary language. In fact, most factual writings such as works on the sciences, history, geography, etc cannot afford to be purely suggestive in the manner that literature, especially poetry, is. Acclaimed literary critics, such as William Empson, have recommended a certain degree of ambiguity for a work of literature worth the label. Empson, in his discussion of what he identified as the seven types of ambiguity, has stated the virtue of indirection in literary language. The French Symbolist poet, Mallarme, also averred that the essence of an object is destroyed by direct naming when he said that "poetry lies in the contemplation of things in the image emanating from the reveries which things arouse in us.... To name an object is largely to destroy poetic enjoyment, which comes from gradual divination. The ideal is to suggest the object" (Adams 168). The effect of suggestion is achieved through figurative language in poetry and generally through language that is plurisignative or has multiple meanings. In the view of I. A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks, indirection or suggestiveness is best achieved through the use of irony and paradox. The latter critic has commented in his *The Well-Wrought Urn* that "paradox is the language that is appropriate and inevitable to poetry. It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox" (3). In its commonest / barest extreme, suggestiveness or indirection could be achieved by a writer by deliberately restraining himself from calling an object by its name while using words and expressions that suggest the object. The following is a very good example of a poet's description of an object (a .....) by indirection:

> I like to see it lap the miles
> And lick the valleys up,
> And stop to feed itself at tanks

And then prodigious step

Around a pile of mountains,
And supercilious peer
In shanties by the sides of the roads,
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides
And crawl between
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanzas
He then chase itself downhill

And neigh like Boanergesf
Then prompter than a star,
Stop, docile and omnipotent,
At its own stable door.

<div align="center">Emily Dickinson</div>

Self Assessment Exercise 1.1

1. What is the object that the poet has treated without mentioning its name?
2. Identify the words or expressions that suggest what this object is
3. What effect does the poet achieve by not naming the object directly?

3.2 Forms or Genres of Literature

Literature, as you must have learnt in your previous studies, comprises some major types or forms or genres. These major types, which could be further reduced to sub-types or categories, are three and they are poetry, drama and novel or prose fiction. It is important for you to note that these literary types are

not defined or based on thematic focus, since all three types often share common themes as literature. They are categorised strictly by their stylistic features. Thus the best approach to the study or understanding of these major forms is by noting their elements or defining characteristics which are as follows:

3.2.1 Poetry

This is the oldest of the three major forms of literature with roots deep in the rituals and religious observances of antiquity. Thus it was mainly oral, performance-driven and public as it was, more often than not, a tool for supplication, communal tribal celebration and celebration of the supernatural as well as appreciation of the gifts of nature. From these early beginnings developed the personal and impersonal forms of poetry represented by the lyric on the one hand and the traditional epic and ballad on the other. Since we shall dwell on this form (poetry) in more detail in subsequent sections of this course material, we shall now move on to briefly enumerate the defining characteristics, namely: **imagery, sound, rhythm** and **diction.**

- Imagery is the sensory language used in poetry. By sensory we imply that the language appeals to or affects the senses of the reader or audience.
- Sound is the auditory aspect or quality inherent in poetry. The importance of this characteristic lies in the fact that poetry is meant to be heard and in its original form it was a song and most short lyrics today still retain this character.
- Rhythm is the wave-like movement discernible in poetry. It accounts, along with sound, for the musical quality in poetry.
- Diction refers to the special choice or selection of words utilised by the poet in his work.

3.2.2 Drama

Drama was to second to evolve of the three major genres of literature and like

poetry it had its origins in ritual, song and dance. Hence a comprehensive definition of drama takes into account these defining strands as you will notice in the definition that follows: Drama is a story told through action by actors who impersonate the characters of the story. It is a work of literature designed to be presented on a stage in a theatre by persons who impersonate or imitate the characters of other persons, speak and perform prescribed dialogues and actions. For drama to exist there must be characters who imitate or impersonate the speeches and actions of other persons on a stage in a theatre; hence the defining characteristics or elements of this form are: **action**, **plot, dialogue, character (isation)** and **setting.**

3.2.3   Novel/Prose Fiction

The novel is an extended fictitious prose writing or narrative with human beings or humanised nonhumans engaged in actions over a period of time, and displaying varieties of human characters engaged in human relationships in situations that simulate life. In other words, the novel is a make-believe account of the sequence of the lives of human beings. As a literary genre, it attained recognition as a widely practised form of literature at a later time than the other two major literary genres although its antecedents were already present in the oral modes and poetic narratives of past eras.

Despite its relative newness in relation to poetry and drama, the novel has developed by leaps and bounds to be the most popular and widely read of the three and has successfully embraced/accommodated such subcategories as science fiction, fantasy, utopia, biography and autobiography within its fold. And the unifying factors they share are the following elements or defining features: **story**, **plot, setting**   and **characterisation.**

Self assessment exercise 2

1. Name the three major forms of literature
2. For each of these forms, give two examples each and give adequate reason for your choice of the texts

3.3 Functions/Uses of Literature

As we have mentioned in passing above, literature serves some important purposes in human society, the two major ones being entertainment/pleasure and teaching of values. Along the lines of these two uses, critics have made large claims of the roles of literature to include being the conscience or gadfly of society whereby the writer is seen as the sensitive moral point of society who is constantly chiding errant humanity and pointing them in the right direction to take to ensure that social harmony and health are maintained. PB Shelley, the Romantic poet, regards poetry (by extension literature generally) as "at once the centre and circumference of knowledge" in one breathe and as the unacknowledged legislator of the world.

While the above views of what literature is and is capable of doing in society may be debatable, depending on where one stands in what PC Snow referred to as the "Two Cultures", there is no doubt that literature entertains and edifies through the creation of beauty, expression of thought and expression of emotions.

Self assessment exercise 3

Discuss with reference to specific works how literature entertains and teaches.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have been able to go through some of the basic concepts of literature as an art form in this unit. This knowledge will serve you as a good reference point as

you study any of the forms of literature and poetry in particular.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt about the following:

1. the concept of literature as an imaginative and creative construct that communicates its thoughts through suggestion/ indirection.

2. the major forms or genres of literature and thei stylistic markers such as imagery, sound, rhythm and diction (poetry); action, dialogue, plot and character(isation) and setting (drama); story, plot, setting and characterisation (novel).

3. The main functions of literature in society, viz: pleasure and instruction.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

With adequate examples, give and explain a comprehensive definition of literature.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Abrams, M.H. (1971). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Adams, Hazard (1961). *The Contexts of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt.

Aristotle. "On the Art of Poetry". *Classical Literary Criticism*. Edited T.S. Dorsch. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Blakeney, E.H., ed. (1926). *Selections from Shelley*. English Literature Series. No. 92. London: Macmillan.

Brooke, Stopford (1926). Introduction. E.H. Blakeney. *Selection from Shelley*.

Brooks, Cleanth (1975). *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.

Heese, Marie and Robin Lawton (1988). The *New Owl Critic: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Cape Town: Nasou.

Holman, C. Hugh (1972). *A Handbook to Literature*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

Reeves, James, ed. (1972). *The Poets' World. An Anthology of English Poetry*. London: Heinemann.

UNIT 2: WHAT IS POETRY?

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will learn the basic considerations in the study of poetry. Poetry, as we have indicated in the foregoing Unit, is considered the most ancient of the three major genres of literature. Accordingly, we have to begin by seeing it as a form of literary expression with all the defining qualities of literature such as 1) imagination 2) creativity 3) suggestiveness or indirection 4) as a mirror reflecting the individual's perception of life experiences. Generally speaking, these qualities apply to both oral and written forms of poetry but the medium of expression and transmission are markedly different. Nonetheless, both manifestations of poetry share identical content, form and effect. This is to say that irrespective of the obvious difference between these forms of poetry their sources and end-purpose are the emotions and imagination of the writer on the one hand and the reader or audience on the other; they convey significant truths about the human condition and they employ a language that is deliberately adorned by the use of figurative expressions. This will become clearer to you by

the time we define poetry by way of setting it apart as a specific genres of literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Identify poetry as a form of literature
2. Define poetry
3. Explain some of the operative/recurrent words or terms in a good definition of poetry

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

The impulse responsible for man's creation of poetry, whether oral or written, are as varied as there are individual differences and individual situations of life. However, three main motivations are generally discernible by critics, namely:

- Imitative (Mimetic): The innate human instinct to imitate things, which one can observe even in young children and monkeys.

- Aesthetic/Emotional: The natural pleasure of recognising good or effective mimicry. This is why Aristotle referred to poetry as "an imitative art".

- Musical: The impulse or instinct for tune, music and rhythm as means of expressing and thus giving vent to emotions.

These motivations by and large would apply in the consideration of other literary and even plastic art forms but they assume greater significance in the study of poetry, the type we are undertaking in this course.

To illustrate the workings of these impulses, let us consider the following scenario, which encapsulates the three principles listed above, that must be familiar to you: For most of you, your first experience of poetry, when you began to recognise sounds and notes, must have been the imitative sounds

contained in the lullabies to which your mother or elder siblings treated you. While you definitely could not have understood a word of the sing songs, the occasional incorporation or introduction of common sounds of birds and other animals as well as appropriately paced repetition of words and sounds must equally have had some calming effect on you. As you grew up you must have applied this same method to achieve the same ends in your relation with your younger ones; the imitative content and their pleasing effects on both you and your younger ones as you grew are rudiments of the poetic instinct that we carry along with us into adulthood.

In the lullabies, you have inherent imitation, music and beauty/emotions. The lullabies and such other utilitarian songs and practices show that poetry has been and is always with us as human beings.

Nonetheless, this course is specifically designed to focus attention on written poetry, which means that we shall define poetry as a written form, but which by reason of common origins, share similar properties with its oral antecedent.

3.1 What is Poetry?

Since poetry means different things to different people, we shall not answer this question by providing a single definition until we have considered a good number of available definitions. The implication of this statement is that there is no one standard definition of poetry that can satisfy all possible shades of opinions; rather an aggregate(d) definition that contains aspects of some popular views or definitions representative of various critical approaches to literature might just be the most sensible way to take. These latter views take cognisance of basic concepts and words such as composition, words and their arrangement, expression, emotion/feeling/passion, perception, thought, rhythm, imagination, etc.

3.1.1 Definitions of Poetry

The following are well-known definitions of poetry which illustrate the varied view of this genre:

- Poetry is the 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.*

- I would define poetry of words 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*

- Poetry is the imaginative expression of strong feeling, usually rhythmical...the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquillity. *– William Wordsworth*

- 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*

- Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds.   *– Percy Bysshe Shelley*

- An actual poem is the succession of experiences – sounds, images, thoughts, emotions – through which we pass when we are reading as poetically as we can.   *- Andrew Bradley*

- ...the rhythmic, inevitably narrative, movement from an overclothed blindness to a naked vision. *– Dylan Thomas*

- If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold that 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*

From the above definitions or explanations of what poetry is, it is clear as we have said earlier on that there cannot be a single definition that will be comprehensive enough to accommodate the various shades of opinions and schools of thought regarding the exact nature of the genre. While one cannot correctly adjudge one definition as superior, better or more comprehensive than another, it is true that each of them has its point of emphasis which in turn places it in one or the other of the great literary/creative debate over content, style and effect. It is thus clear that Edgar Allan Poe's conception of poetry as expressed above emphasises style or form over content and effect while, on the other hand, both William Wordsworth and Edwin Arlington Robinson focus more attention on content and effect in their definitions to reflect their English and American Romantic pedigrees respectively. In this regard, you should take particular note of Emily Dickinson's own idea of poetry whose essential criterion is the effect it has on her and is capable of having on a reader. In a final analysis, one cannot fault any one of these definitions given the special interests and period fascinations that shape them.

Besides the individual emphases noted in the definitions we have used as samples above, we should take note of the occurrence of some common words and phrases such as emotions/feelings, rhythm/rhythmical, truth, pleasure, imaginative expression, language, etc which underscore the protean nature of poetry and which make it susceptible to being conceived of variously by definers the way the proverbial blind men saw and defined the elephant.

Finally, we may attempt a definition that strives to distil the various elements of the explanations we have made so far as follows: Poetry is a form of composition in verse form especially one expressing deep feelings or noble thought in a rhythmic and generally beautiful or embellished language written with the aim of communicating an experience. This definition contains the grains

of the essential elements of the genre of poetry (imagery, rhythm, sound and diction) to which we will turn our attention in the next unit of this course material.

Self Assessment Exercise

In your own words, attempt a definition of poetry.

4.0   CONCLUSION

Poetry is the oldest of the major literary genres that has been part of the traditions of man through the ages; it has manifested in most human ritual activities as well as served as a ready means of entertainment in traditional festivals. Yet, in spite of its long history and perennial occurrence and employment in important human activities, it has defied common definition because it seems to strike different people differently.

5.0   SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt several definitions and explanations of poetry as a literary genre. While a common definition has not been found and this is exemplified by the multiplicity of samples of definitions examined, we have provided a definition that has incorporated the major strands of the various explanations common to different traditions and periods of literary history.

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

What do you consider as the major difference between Edwin Arlington Robinson's and Emily Dickinson's conceptions of poetry?

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3: ELEMENTS OF POETRY – IMAGERY, RHYTHM, SOUND, DICTION

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As we have established in the foregoing units, poetry is one of the major genres of literature and in order for us have a proper understanding of its nature, it is necessary for us to possess an adequate knowledge of the elements or salient features that differentiate/distinguish it from the other two literary genres – the novel/prose fiction and drama. These elements which constitute the tools by which poets convey the thoughts and experiences they wish to communicate include: imagery; rhythm; sound; diction. They are the very essence of poetic study or criticism and a full comprehension of their meaning and functions in the realisation of the total experience of any poem is of paramount importance.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Name the major elements of poetry
2. Explain the major elements of poetry
3. Discuss the functions of these elements of poetry
4. Apply your understanding of these elements in your appreciation of any given poem.

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Imagery

In simple terms, imagery is a collective term used to denote the images in a poem or all the objects and qualities of sense perception in a poem. In other words, it is a language that represents sense experience as graphically as possible. Thus it is the sensory content of a poem or a literary work in general that is meant to evoke a picture or an idea in the mind of a reader or the audience, in the case of poetry. You must have had this experience on occasions when you read a poem and images or pictures of the ideas and objects described or mentioned in the lines appeared in your mind's eye or are flashed on the mirror of your mind; you seemed to have seen these pictures right before you on the page or in the spaces in front of you.

Due to this power of imagery in poetry, poets utilise it to achieve the following important effects in their works:

- Arouse specific emotions in the reader or audience of their poems
- Create beauty which is an important quality of poetry
- Communicate thoughts
- Achieve concretion of life experiences and ideas that are otherwise abstract

Accordingly, it is through imagery that the sense impressions and experiences evoked in a poem acquire necessary vividness and clarity.

The following are the main types of imagery that you would always find used either individually or in combination by poets in their works:

- **Auditory**

This is the type of imagery, words or cluster of words that evoke the sense of hearing or a specific sound. Quite often, the auditory image manifests through the figure of sound known as onomatopoeia, that is a combination of words whose sound seems to resemble or echo the sound it denotes: "hum", "murmur", "bang", "crack", "hiss", "screech" "hoot". Examples of the use of auditory imagery are the following excerpts from JP Clark's "Night Rain" and Niyi Osundare's "Raindrum":

1. It is **drumming** hard here
   And I suppose everywhere
   Droning with insistent ardour upon
   Our roof thatch and shed

   (Clark)

2. The roof **sizzle** at the waking touch,
   Talkative like **kettledrums**
   Tightened by the iron fingers of drought

   (Osundare, "Raindrum")

3. Then the priest commanding
   Intones the charge, and the latest
   Instruments of slaughter **stutter** out
   A message mortal...

   (Clark, "Benin Sacrifice")

A sensitive reading of the first two excerpts above by you would definitely make you 'hear' the drumming, droning, sizzling and talkative drops of the rain that

sound like kettledrums on the thatch roof of the personae's abodes as well as on the dessicated earth "licked clean by the fiery tongue of drought". In the third excerpt, the sound of the machine guns ('instruments of slaughter') is mimicked or conveyed through the onomatopoeic word "stutter". The sound of the drum beat is common to both poets' realisation of the experience conveyed in their poems. You will agree that the sense of hearing they express is what you are conversant with and would easily appreciate.

- **Olfactory**

Images of this type evoke our sense of smell whether sweet, pungent, fragrant, etc. An example of this is:

1. The air was heavy with **odours**
   Of diarrhoea of unwashed children

2.   'ARE YOU
   LIGHT
   OR VERY DARK?' Button B. Button A. Stench
   Of **rancid breath** of public hide-and-speak.

The lines "odours of diarrhoea of unwashed children" and "stench of rancid breath" virtually transport the reader, through his or her imagination, to the settings of the poems and make one a co-perceiver of the odours described by the poets.

- **Tactile**

This refers to the images that appeal to one's sense of touch. A good example of this is the memorable line from James Shirley's poem "The Glories of our Blood and State":

Death lays his **icy** hand on kings (Reeves 104).

This line makes someone feel by imagination the cold hand of death as it seizes its victim. You must have often read in obituary announcements the mention or reference to the "cold hands of death" that have snatched away a loved one; this expression accentuates the sense of touch by the use of "icy" to underscore the coldness of death.

A similar poetic process takes place in these lines from Okinba Launko's poem titled "Separation", where the coldness and aloneness of separation of people, probably former lovers, are given a concrete approximation in the comparison/simile in the two last lines of the following quotation:

> So welcome again,
> The old loneliness. I hear you spring awake and hiss,
> **Cold** as the touch of steel
> In a **harmattan night**; (p.   )

The combination of "cold" and "harmattan nights" in the above lines, no doubt, sends a familiar feeling through your mind and body; the harmattan season is associated with the cold draught of the wind that blows from the Sahara Desert and most of us have felt it.

- **Gustatory**

The images that evoke our sense of taste go by this name.

1.   I like to see it **lap** the miles
     And **lick** the valleys up,
     And stop to **feed** itself at tanks
     And then prodigious step

                    (Emily Dickinson   )

2.   My husband's tongue

      is **bitter** like the roots of the

      Lyono lily

      ....

      It is ferocious

      like the **poison** of a barren

      Woman

      And **corrosive like the juice** of

      the gourd

                                        (p'Bitek *Song of Lawino*   )

- **Visual**

Quite often our sense of sight or vision is evoked by merely reading lines of poetry where a poet has effectively utilised words or language that effectively create appropriate pictures in the reader's mind. Such resultant images are referred to as visual images or imagery; for example:

      ....   children

      With washed-out ribs and dried-up

      Bottoms struggling in laboured

      Steps behind blown empty bellies

                                        (Achebe *Beware Soul Brother*)

On reading these lines, one cannot help but visualise in his mind a picture of emaciated children – the sad relics of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war of the nineteen sixties; the children are mere ghosts of their former selves: their erstwhile robust bodies have now turned skeletal and their bottoms are shrivelled and all these physical changes accentuate the "blown empty bellies", symptomatic of kwashiorkor.

- **Kinaesthetic**

Kinaesthetic imagery refers to those images that call forth in the mind of the reader the perception of movement. In other words, these are images that appeal to the reader's sense of movement or motion. Examples of this type of imagery are:

1.   And 'mid these **dancing rocks** at once and ever

         It **flung up** momently the sacred river.

         Five miles **meandering with a mazy motion**

         Through wood and dale **the sacred river ran**.

         Then reached the caverns measureless to man,

         And **sank in tumult** to a lifeless ocean:

                                   Coleridge "Kubla Khan" (Reeves 177)

2.   From the west

         Clouds come hurrying with the wind

         Turning

         Sharply

         Here and there

         Like a plague of locust

         Whirling

         Tossing up things on its tail

         Like a madman chasing nothing

                         Rubadiri. "An African Thunderstorm"

The lines, phrases and words I have highlighted above convey the impression of movement, which a reader of the poems from which they have been excerpted cannot fail to realise in their minds' eyes.

A very useful approach to the understanding of imagery is by seeing it as "a

description of something **concrete** whereby the writer conveys an impression of something else" (Heese and Lawton 82). While this definition introduces a new set of words/terms/register that would further aid our understanding of how an image works in a poem or in the realisation of the meaning of a poem, it also focuses our attention on the necessary association of similar and dissimilar objects or ideas in imagery as well as the expansion by accretion of the scope of words made possible by its usage. In this regard, we should note that 'concrete' means something that is perceivable or palpable to some of the senses we have discussed above while **'abstract'** means the opposite; that is, an idea that could neither be seen, felt nor touched, etc. The use of imagery makes it possible for the poet to bridge the gap between the abstract and the concrete in his perennial effort, in the words of Shakespeare, to give "to airy nothing a local habitation and a name" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, V. i). A good example of this description of something abstract through concrete objects or entities could be seen in the closing stanza of George Herbert's poem "Virtue" as follows:

> Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
> Like seasoned timber, never gives;
> But though the whole world turn to coal,
>   Then chiefly lives

In these lines, the abstract and reified 'virtue', which gropes towards concretion in the equally impalpable 'virtuous soul', achieves a fully perceivable state in the comparison "like seasoned timber" that does not break even when the hardest of pressures is exerted on it.

In all the examples we have used in the above section on the well-known types of imagery, we have to realise by now that the ability of the reader to perceive and share fully in the pictures and sensations the poet has captured in his verse comes or is achieved through the apt use of figures of speech and figures of

thought such as **simile, metaphor, personification, apostrophe, metonymy, synecdoche, onomatopoeia,** among others. It is through the employment of these figures that the poet achieves the desired figurative expression of thought as well as impresses his ideas in the minds of the readers. Indeed, accordingly, it is through this process of collaboration that, in the words of James Reeves we make the best poems "part of our own lives and we make our own lives richer and more full of meaning" (*The Poet's World*, xxx).

Self Assessment Exercise

1.   What is the difference between a figure of speech and a figure of thought?

2.   For each of the figures of speech or thought mentioned above, give a suitable definition of your own.

3.   Give an example each of four of these figures and then analyse them.

3.2   Rhythm

Rhythm is derived from the Greek word which translates in English into 'flow'. As one of the elements of poetry, it is considered as the most important of a poet's technical resources. In practical terms, it is the alternation of periods of effort with periods of relaxation. According to RN Egudu,

> Rhythm can be compared with a beat or pulse; and as a beat or pulse [it] implies the presence of movement in which there is the recurrence of identical points, rhythm can also be said to mean movement. Any action in which motion is involved therefore has some rhythm. A moving vehicle shows rhythm; and a flowing stream exhibits rhythm. Also the rise and fall of the water in the ocean is rhythmical. (34)

Similarly, Reeves sees rhythm as "a form of repetition – the repetition of a particular pattern of light and heavy syllables" (xxxvii) while Abrams defines it as "a recognisable though variable pattern in the beat of the stresses in the stream of sound" (93).

You should take note of the words 'beat', pulse', 'recurrence' and repetition' in the above definitions of rhythm; they underscore the fact that rhythm obeys or follows a basic movement of the pendulum of the metronome, which marks the underlying approximate equivalent time intervals between specific sounds in music. It is equally important to note that the repetition that characterises rhythm in poetry, as in music, is variable and alternates between stressed and unstressed syllables. This variation removes monotony and accounts for the variable combinations of sound patterns to which we attribute the music in poetry. Have you ever imagined a song or a poem that maintains the same rhythm throughout without variations in low and high tones or between light and heavy syllables? Definitely, it would be a very boring song or poem. The American poet and critic, Ezra Pound, has in his characteristic suave manner commented on this flaw by saying that "the writer of bad verse is a bore because he does not perceive time and time relations, and cannot therefore delimit them in an interesting manner, by means of longer and shorter, heavier and lighter syllables, and the varying qualities of sound inseparable from the words of his speech" (*ABC*, 199).

This leads us to the functions of appropriate rhythms in poetry. Generally, it contributes greatly to the emotional content and effect of poetry. As with tones in our every day discourses, the poet uses different rhythms to convey different moods or emotions to the reader or listener: he uses a long line and a slow rhythm to express a sombre and studious mood; a light tripping rhythm to express a feeling of joy and gayety. It may be smooth, staccato, fast or slow,

abrupt and disjointed or jerky. Thus rhythm is intricately connected with the form and the meaning expressed by the poet as well as provide both emotional and intellectual pleasure for the reader or audience. For example, the following excerpts illustrate the deployment of effective rhythmic patterns to achieve these different emotional effects:

1. His gol/den locks/ Time hath/ to sil/ver turned; (10)

    O Time/ too swift,/ O Swift/ness ne/ver cea/sing! (11)

  His youth/ 'gainst time/ and age/ hath e/ver spurned, (10)

    But spurned/ in vain;/ youth wa/neth by/ in/crea/sing: (11)

  Beau/ty, strength,/ youth are/ flo/wers but fa/ding seen; (10)

  Du/ty, faith,/ love/ are/ roots,/ and/ ev/er green. (10)

                    George Peele (Reeves 51 – 52)

2. Come, come away, to the tavern I say, 10

  For now at home 'tis washing day; 8

  Leave your prittle-prattle, and fill us a pottle, 12

  You are not so wise as Aristotle. 10

  Drawer come away, let's make it holy day: 10

  Anon, anon, anon, Sir, what is't you say? 11

                    Anon (Reeves 21).

From our discussion so far, it is clear that the wave-like recurrence of sound and motion that constitutes poetic rhythm has its foundation or basis in the pattern of stresses and the length of lines of poetry. This aspect of the nature of rhythm necessitates a knowledge of the metrical schemes, be they 'regular' (basic metre) or 'irregular' (deviation from the basic metre). Metre has been defined "as a repetitive and symmetrical pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables on which

a poem is based" and is usually indicated by the symbols or marks: (˘) for stressed syllables and (¯) for unstressed syllables.

The following is a table of the four common feet in English poetry with their sounds and examples:

Name of foot	Name of metre	Sound	Example
Iamb	Iambic	Ďa Dum	Return
Trochee	Trochaic	Dūm Ďa	turning, running
anapaest	Anapaestic	Ďa Ďa Dum	resurrect, jubilate
Dactyl	Dactylic	Dum Ďa Ďa	curious, serious, furious

Self Assessment Exercise

What is rhythm and of what significance is it in the art of poetry?

3.3 Sound

Sound is one of the most pleasing features in a poem. Along with rhythm, it constitutes the foundation of the musical quality that is associated with poetry as a form of literature. Accordingly, its functions in a poem are similar to those of rhythm which we have discussed in the preceding section on rhythm. The nature or significance of sound in a poem can be better appreciated when the poem is read aloud. This, however, does not mean that the aural qualities are not realised when a poem is read silently: for the experienced reader, these qualities remain and are realised as inherent parts of the total poem; instead of the vocalised realisation that marks reading aloud, these qualities are achieved through a process of sub-vocal enunciation. When effectively deployed in a poem, sound effects enable the reader to achieve a state of mind in which he can more readily appreciate the emotions and meanings conveyed in the poem by the writer. In the words of Heese and Lawton, "much of the delight to be derived from the reading

of poetry stems from the pleasure experienced in contemplating patterns which are not only decorative but significant" (33).

Generally, sound effects in poetry not only give aural/auditory pleasure to the reader, they equally give added significance to the words used by the poet. In other words, sound in poetry is used to convey meaning, emotions and pleasure. For example, the poet employs such literary devices as alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia, repetition, refrain, etc., to place desired emphasis on particular words as well as achieve specific emotions or sensations in his work. It is important that the sound be appropriate to the experience or action presented in a line, stanza or on work in its entirety. The effects produced by sound in a poem could be good or bad depending on how skilful the poet is.

The following examples would illustrate some of the sound effects, such as **alliteration**, **assonance**, **consonance**, **repetition**, and **rhyme**, commonly used by poets and their effects when skilfully applied:

1. I have given you hands which you turn from worship,
   I have given you speech, for endless palaver,
   I have given you my Law, and you set up commissions,
   I have given you lips, to express friendly sentiments,
   I have given you hearts, for reciprocal distrust.
   I have given you power of choice, and you only alternate
   Between futile speculation and unconsidered action.

   (Eliot, Choruses from 'The Rock III' 115)

2. The fair **b**reeze **b**lew, the white **f**oam **f**lew,
   The **f**urrow **f**ollow'd **f**ree;
   We were the first that ever burst

Into that **s**ilent **s**ea.

3. **S**wiftly, **s**wiftly flew the **s**hip,

   Yet **s**he **s**ailed **s**oftly too:

   Sweetly, **s**weetly **b**lew the **b**reeze –

   On me alone it blew.

4. The ice was here, the ice was there,

   The ice was all around:

   It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl;d,

   Like noises in a swound!

<div align="right">Samuel T Coleridge (Reeves 181, 182, 195)</div>

You should take your time to appreciate these stanzas from the poet's memorable art/literary ballad "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Indeed, you should find a suitable anthology of English poetry and read this poem in its entirety because it is a sort of compendium from which one could draw illustrations of most of the devices and elements studied in this course. In terms of music, there is much sense in Pound's assertion that "the way to learn the music of verse is to listen to it" (*ABC* 56). Listening does not just imply listening to someone else read aloud lines of poetry; you can equally listen to yourself as you read just the way you listen to yourself as you sing a song.

Self Assessment Exercise

Attempt a critical appreciation of the poet's use of sound devices and their effects in any one of the stanzas above.

3.3   Diction

Diction in very simple terms means the use of words in oral or written discourse;

the peculiar choice of words used by the poet or his vocabulary considered for their meaning and association rather than for their aural qualities. More expansively, Abrams has defined the term as "the selection of words in a work of literature. A writer's diction can be analysed under such categories as the degree to which his vocabulary is abstract or concrete, Latinate or Anglo-Saxon in origin, colloquial or formal, technical or common, literal or figurative" (131). Accordingly, nothing is a clearer indication of the interests, habit of mind and the period of a poet than his diction – the words he uses in his poems. Different periods in English literature have chosen and popularised various forms of poetic diction. In addition to the categories mentioned in Abrams' definition above, a poet's diction can also be described as plain or ornate, homely or exotic, contemporary or archaic, familiar or cryptic, etc., and each kind has its attractions as well as its limitations. You should be able to analyse any given poem to determine the dominant pattern of the diction or selection of words employed by a poet in his work.

Compare the following excerpts in terms of the diction used by the poets. You will discover on reading the lines that there is a world of difference between the poets' peculiar choice of words in their works, as represented in these lines; you should also be able to categorise the diction as well as explain the reasons behind your categories.

1. It comes so quickly
    The bird of death
    From evil forests of Soviet technology

    A man crossing the road
    to greet a friend
    is much too slow (Achebe "Air Raid", *BSB* 15)

2. In the greyness
    and drizzle of one despondent
    dawn unstirred by harbingers
    of sunbreak a vulture
    perching high on broken
    bone of a dead tree
    nestled close to his
    mate (Achebe "Vultures", *BSB* 39)

4.0 CONCLUSION

Poetry has been variously defined by different poets and critics over the ages – while some would prefer to see it as the subject or content that is written about by the poet, others emphasise that it is the manner of expressing this contents that should determine the essential nature of poetry. Nonetheless, irrespective of the positions of these schools of thought, there is consensus on the major elements that, by and large, distinguish poetry from other forms of writing, viz: imagery; rhythm; sound; diction.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have focused attention on the elements of poetry that differentiate it from the other major genres of literature, drama and the novel. With some suitable examples, we have been able to indicate as well as demonstrate the nature of these elements and their contribution to the effectiveness or quality of a poem. We have learnt that the elements – imagery, rhythm, sound and diction – are the vehicles that the poet utilises to convey his thoughts and emotions as well as delight his readers.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Achebe

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4: MAJOR TYPES OF POETRY – THE IMPERSONAL FORMS

CONTENT

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

     3.1 Epic

     3.2 Ballad

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked

7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will equip you with a detailed study of the major forms or types of poetry with special emphasis on their distinguishing features; it is necessary that you be able to know the type of poem that you are dealing with at any point in time**.**

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognise and explain the different forms of poetry
2. Describe in detail each type of poetry
3. Distinguish between the different forms of poetry on the basis of their individual characteristics
4. Determine and rationalise the type of poem you may have to appreciate in a professional manner.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

Nowadays it has become the norm to speak of the various types of poetry and it is therefore pertinent for us to note that these types developed at different periods in the long history of written English poetry. To the earliest and mostly communal types such as the epic and the ballad have been added other forms, whose roots may be traceable to these earlier forms, but are mainly of the lyrical stock that are concerned with the expression of the intense personal emotions or feelings of the poet on a specific subject. These major forms are also referred to as the "fixed forms" in poetry due to the fact that they are made up of traditional patterns or structures of rhymes and line lengths which control the entire poem. Of all these traditional patterns that of the sonnet is considered as the most important.

The major forms or types we shall study in this unit are: the epic; the ballad; the ode; the sonnet; the elegy; and the lyric.

3.1. The Epic

The epic is a poem composed or written on a grand scale, usually in many separate books or volumes, concerned with the exploits of some great national, historical or legendary character or hero. In other words, an epic celebrates in the form of a continuous narrative the feats of one or more heroic characters of history or tradition. Accordingly, as a rule, the epic treats a theme of lofty nature and consequently its characters are usually of high social standing or are very powerful forces. As is to be expected, the narrative of an epic is presented in such a way that the actions of the subject intimate and comment on the values and destiny of a particular people or race in spite of its episodic nature.

There are two major types of the epic, namely: the primary (folk) and the secondary (art) epics. A primary epic is the type that draws its sustenance mainly

from the oral tradition of a people hence the label 'folk', while the secondary epic is a modification and reorganised version by identifiable or known authors. This latter type is, as a result of its very basis and nature, written with much literary sophistication by poets who imitate the primary epic in both subject and manner.

3.1.1 Characteristics of an Epic

Whether folk or art, epics share a set of common general characteristics and conventions as follows:

1. The poet commences his narration by stating his theme and invokes the Muse to inspire and instruct him in his task

2. The story begins 'in medias res', that is in the middle of things and proceeds to recount the great deeds of the heroes with objectivity.

3. The action in which supernatural forces participate is one, great and entire

4. Story is of great length and scope with the action taking place over a long period of time and extending over several nations, the world of the poet;s day or the imagined universe.

5. The hero who is a person of great stature and legendary and historical significance and performs superhuman actions is more of the concern of the audience or reader because he symbolises the aspirations and destiny of his nation or race.

6. Narrative style is grand and alternates between the sublime or sustained elevation and grand simplicity.

7. Story includes elaborate formal speeches by the main characters.

8. The constituent episodes of narrative easily arise from the main story and, as a result, there are no parts that could be detached from it without loss to the whole.

9. Epic poet incorporates a long list of warriors, armies, war machines which necessitate employment of the fitting vehicle of the epic simile or extended comparison.

(NB: List which is by now normative relies mostly on Holman, Abrams, etc.)

Well known examples of the epic in English literature include the following:

- Traditional/folk/primary – Homer's *Iliad*, *Odyssey*; Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*; the Indian *Mahabharata,* the French *Chanson de Roland* and the Spanish *El Cid.*

- Art/Literary/Secondary – Virgil's Aeneid; Milton's *Paradise Lost.*

The term epic has also been loosely applied to other works, both poetry and prose, written on a grand scale and attempt or aspire to the spirit of the epic in matter/subject and manner/style. These include Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick,* Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace,* Ezra Pound's *Cantos* and Niane's *Sundiata.*

3.2   Ballad

The ballad, one of the earliest form of poetry, is a song that tells a story or conversely a story told through song. Thus a ballad is a short narrative poem, adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical in structure, divided into stanzas of four lines (quatrains) rhyming alternately and characterised by complete impersonality as far as the author or singer is concerned.

As in the epic, there are two main types of the ballad, namely: the **folk** ballad (also referred to as the popular or traditional ballad) and the **art** or literary ballad. These terms equally intimate the origins and nature of this type of poetry similar to the distinctions we have seen in the epic genre. Accordingly, a folk ballad is anonymous but we can safely infer that there must have been a poet

since all poems are mostly composed by individual poets. According to Hugh Holman "debate still rages as to whether the ballad originates with an individual composer or as a group or communal activity" (52). Whether as individual or group composition, the personal emotions of the composer or poet do not manifest in his work. There is no first person singular (I), but where it strays in, it is always found in the context of the speech by identifiable characters in the poem to whom it refers. In studying the folk ballad, we are studying the poetry of the traditional people as different from the poetry of art as in the art ballad whose writer, who may modify and use folk materials, is known. Thus, oral transmission is the medium of spreading the song of the folk ballad.

There are different sub-categories of the ballad which include the ballads of history, of love, of humour and of domestic tragedy. Others include ballads of the domestic border and ballads derived from epic materials.

3.2.1 Features of the Ballad

Some common characteristic features of the ballad as a form of poetry should be noted to enable you identify, describe and critique when required, as follows:

1. Impersonality and unsentimentality.
2. Anonymity of authorship and consequent lack of authorial comments
3. Simple repetition.
4. Incremental repetition meant to slow down action and thus add to suspense and emphasise the points in a dialogue.
5. Focus on a single episode.
6. Use of dialogue to make action of story dramatic and compress and remove unnecessary descriptions and points.
7. Absence or minimal utilisation of figures of speech.
8. Use of refrains which aids musicality in the poem as well as perform the functions of repetition noted above (in #4).

9. Stereotype or stock epithets and concrete diction.
10. Quatrain stanzas.

As a general rule, the ballad uses a common measure of a four line stanza rhyming abab ; abcb or xaxa.

You should note that in this rhyming pattern the first and third lines could rhyme (represented as 'a' in abab), while the second and fourth lines (represented as 'b') **must** rhyme. In some ballads, however, the first and third lines may not rhyme (as in abcb and xaxa, where 'x' represents 'no rhyme' and this deviation does not disqualify such lines as ballad stanzas.

The following are notable examples of the folk ballad and the art ballad which you should read in any good anthology of English poetry:

Folk/Popular/Traditional ballad – "Sir Patrick Spens", "The Wife at Usher's Well", "The Daemon Lover", "Edward", "The Three Ravens", "Lord Randal" and "The Twa Corbies".

Extracts:

(1)   Edward

 "Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
        Edward, Edward?
 Why does your brand sae drop wi' blude,
        And why sae sad gang ye, O?" -
 "O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,
        Mither, Mither;
 O I hae kill'd my hawk sae gude,
        And I had nae mair but he, O".

(Reeves 4-6)

(2)   Sir Patrick Spens

 The king sits in Dunfermline town
     Drinking the blude-red wine,
"O whare will I get a skeely skipper
     To sail this new ship o' mine?"

 O up and spak an eldern knight,
     Sat at the king's right knee;
"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
     That ever sailed the sea."

                              (Reeves 7-10)

Art/Literary ballad – Scott's "Proud Maisie", John Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci", Samuel T Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Robert Burns's "A Red, Red Rose" and "Anna", Gerard M Hopkins's "Felix Randal".

(1)   A Red, Red Rose
      O my love is like a red, red rose
           That's newly sprung in June:
      O my love is like the melody,
           That's sweetly played in tune.

       As fair thou art, my bonnie lass,
           So deep in love am I;
      And I will love thee still, my dear,
           Till a' the seas gang dry.

                                   (Reeves 60)
(2)   Belle Dame sans Merci
 "What can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

Alone and palely loitering?

The sedge has withered from the lake,

And no birds sing.

"O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,

So haggard and so woe-begone?

The squirrel's granary is full,

And the harvest's done

(Reeves 212-214)

Self Assessment Exercise

1. List and discuss the similarities and differences between the epic and the ballad as types of poetry.

2. Using the extracts above as examples, examine the main features of the popular and art ballads as poetic sub-categories.

4.0 CONCLUSION

5.0 SUMMARY

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Holman, Hugh, ed. (1972). *A Handbook of Literature*. Indianapolis:

Bobbs-Merrill.

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UNIT 5: MAJOR TYPES OF POETRY – PERSONAL OR ROMANTIC FORMS

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will equip you with a detailed study of the major forms or types of poetry with special emphasis on their distinguishing features; it is necessary that you be able to know the type of poem that you are dealing with at any point in time**.**

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognise and explain the different forms of poetry
2. Describe in detail each type of poetry
3. Distinguish between the different forms of poetry on the basis of their individual characteristics

4.   Determine and rationalise in a professional manner the type of poem you may have to appreciate.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Ode

An ode is a rhymed or rarely unrhymed lyric poem often in the form of an address, expressive of exalted or enthusiastic emotion (usually of exalted style and enthusiastic tone), especially one of varied or irregular metre. An ode is usually between 50 and 200 lines long and it was originally intended to be sung or at least recited. It has been defined by Gosse as "any strain of enthusiastic and exalted lyrical verse, directed to a fixed purpose, and dealing progressively with one dignified theme" (qtd Holman 363).

In its earliest Greek form established by the poet Pindar, it was choral or sung by a group of people who constituted the personas who moved in a dance rhythm in the dramatic poetry that was the main matrix for the ode/form. More explicitly, Holman tells us that the term ode "connotes certain qualities both of manner and form. In manner, the ode is an elaborate lyric, expressed in language dignified, sincere, and imaginative and intellectual in tone. In form the ode is more complicated than most of the lyric types. Perhaps the essential distinction of form is the division into strophes: the strophe, antistrophe, and epode" (363). The dance movements of the chorus are as follows:

 trophe (movement to the left)
Antistrophe (movement to the right)
Epode (Chorus stands still).

The great period of the ode in English poetry began with Abraham Cowley who in the seventeenth century popularised the Pindaric ode in English. There are

three main types of odes in English poetry, namely: the Pindaric (regular) the Horatian and the Irregular. The Pindaric ode is a complex poem of some length on a subject of public interest or on an abstract quality, written in rhyming or irregular pattern. On the other hand, the Horatian type modelled on the odes of the Roman poet Horace, is less complex, calm, meditative and restrained and contain only one strophe (homostrophic). Famous examples are Milton's "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity", "To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652"; Gray's "The Progress of Poesy"; the romantic odes including Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality", Keats's "Ode to the Nightingale," "Ode to Autumn," and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind".

Excerpts

(1)   "To the Lord General Cromwell, May 1652"
(2)   "Ode to Autumn"
(3)   "Ode to the West Wind"

3.2   Elegy

An elegy is a sustained and formal poem setting forth the poet's meditations upon death or another solemn theme (Holman 183). The meditation is often occasioned by the death of a particular person, a painful loss or a general calamity that touches not just the poet as an individual but a wider spectrum of persons in his community or man generally. Thus the poem may also be a generalised observation or the expression of a solemn mood. Other poetic types that are akin to the elegy and whose labels are often misused in reference to the elegy are (1) the dirge, a short, less formal and usually in the form of a text to be sung, with sub-types such as **threnody** which is mainly an equivalent to the dirge and **monody** which is an elegy presented as an utterance by one person.

The following are popular examples of the elegy in English literature: John Milton's "Lycidas"; Alfred Tennyson's "In Memoriam"; WH Auden's "In Memory of WB Yeats" and William Gray's "Elegy, Written in a Country Churchyard". You should find a suitable anthology of English poetry and read these poems so as to be able to identify and discuss an elegy, no matter the variant, that you come across one.

An ancient category of the elegy is the pastoral elegy in which the poet or mourner and the dead or the one mourned, who is also a poet, are characterised as shepherds. The name pastoral is derived from the Greek word *pastor,* which means shepherd. MH Abrams, using one of the notable examples of the pastoral elegy, has identified seven fundamental conventions that have marked this poetic form from its earliest Greek form through the Renaissance as follows:

1. The invocation of the muses and frequent references to other figures from classical mythology.

2. All of nature is implicated or joins in mourning the shepherd's death.

3. The mourner charges with negligence the nymphs or other guardians of the dead.

4. There is a procession of mourners.

5. The poet raises questions about the justice of divine providence and goes on to comments on the decadence of his contemporary society in seeming digressions which are often integral to the development of the mourner's line of thought as in "Lycidas".

6. In Post-Renaissance elegies, flowers are brought in to deck the hearse in an elaborate passage.

7. There is a closing consolation, especially in Christian elegies, where the tone of the poem changes from that of grief and despair to joy and assurance and an epiphanic realisation that death is a necessary prelude to a higher life.

Bearing in mind the above general thematic and stylistic characteristics of the elegy as a poetic form, we will now take a look at a local example to illustrate the universal application of these features in the following Igbo (Nigeria) piece:

> My brother, death has crushed my heart.
> My brother has left me at crossroads
> My brother has left me hanging over the fire like a
>   parcel of meat to dry
> But a parcel of meat over the fire will still have
>   Somebody to touch it.
> Death has reaped me up like cocoyam and peeled
>   off my tubers
> My left hand has turned to my back
> Death has turned me into bitterness itself
> My mirror is broken
> My own is past
>
> (Egudu & Nwoga,)

3.3   Sonnet

The sonnet is a poem generally expressive of a single, complete thought, idea, or sentiment. It is made up of 14 lines, usually five-foot iambic pentameters, with lines arranged according to one of certain definite rhyme schemes. Holman defines this poetic form as "a lyric form of fourteen lines, **highly arbitrary in form, and following one or another of several rhyme schemes**". You should take note of the section of this definition that I have highlighted; we shall have cause to refer back to it as we study the various structural and prosodic manifestations of the sonnet.

There are three main types of the sonnet; these are the Petrarchan or Italian; the Miltonic; the Shakespearean or Elizabethan. We should note that although the

sonnet was originally an Italian poetic form, hence the name of the prototypic form - Petrarchan/Italian, it had a very large following in the English poetic tradition beginning from the sixteenth century. The earliest English or Elizabethan sonneteers are Isaac Wyatt, Phillip Sidney ("Astrophel and Stella" sequence), Edmund Spenser ("Amoretti" sequence) and they set the tone by deploying their poems as vehicles for impassioned amorous, religious, and friendly adulation.

3.3.1   Petrarchan/Italian: This type consists of two parts or systems as they are called – a major part known as the octave made up of the first eight lines; a minor part called the sestet made up of the last six lines. There is usually a pause or turn in idea or thought at the end of the octave. This turn or break in sense is known technically as the 'volta'. This structure conventionally goes hand in hand with the thematic content of the poem in that a statement of a problem, a situation or an incident in the octave is followed by a resolution in the sestet. The rhyme scheme of the octave is: abba, abba and this is fixed or invariable. On the other hand, the rhyme scheme of the sestet varies, but it may consist of any arrangement of two or three rhymes as long as the last two lines do not form a couplet that is, they do not rhyme. Thus, the usual arrangement in the sestet is: cdcdcd or cdecde. An example of this type in English poetry is William Wordsworth's "The World is too much with us".
[Poem]

3.3.2   Miltonic: This type is similar to the Italian form discussed above, but the only difference is that the Miltonic does not observe the pause or turn at the end of the octave; rather the poet lets the octave to run-on into the sestet. Suitable examples of this type are: John Milton's "On His Blindness"; "On the late massacre at Piedmont" and Sonnet XXIII "Methought I saw my late espoused saint".

[Poem]

3.3.3   Shakespearean/Elizabethan/English: This type differs markedly from both the Petrarchan and Miltonic forms. It consists of three quatrains and a final rhyming couplet and its rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg. At times the division of material found in the Petrarchan sonnet is also present here or there is repetition with variation of the statement in the three quatrains with the final couplet presenting a neat and laconic encapsulation of the central thought in the poem. The volta sometimes occurs between the twelfth and thirteenth lines.

The following are examples of this type: "Shall I compare thee to a summer day?"; "Let me not to the marriage of true minds"; William Shakespeare's "Since Brass nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea"

We said we would refer back to the highlighted part of Holman's definition in the opening paragraph of section 3.5: we have seen how the sonnet follows "one or another of several rhyme schemes" in our examination of the areas of congruence and divergence in the structures and rhyme patterns of the three main types of sonnet. Although the arbitrariness of form has largely been shown in the differences among the three types explained above, we should still add that this characteristic alludes to the idiosyncratic manipulations of the basic markers of the sonnet such as the number of lines (14) as well as the number of feet per line (5 iambic feet). These deviations were mainly experimental as demonstrated in Gerard Manley Hopkins' "Felix Randall" as well as in several well-known pieces by the American poets such as William Carlos Williams, e.e. cummings, and John Crowe Ransom.

3.4   Lyric
In its original form, the lyric was a poem sung to the accompaniment of a lyre –

a classical stringed musical instrument. In the Greek classical period, it was sung by a single singer and was thus differentiated from the 'choric', which was performed by a group of singers. The term is now applied to describe any poem that is light in tone, could be adapted into song and reflects the personal mood or feeling of the singer or poet rather than narrate a story. This quality or characteristic constitutes the main difference between it as a poetic type and the ballad and the epic which concentrate on extra-personal subjects or themes. The lyric does not follow any rigid metrical law (unlike the sonnet) by which it is identified and it is for this reason that it is often regarded as a mode of writing rather than as a form.

The subjects of the lyric poet are as varied as his moods; thus he is at one time writing about love and at other times he is expressing his feelings towards nature or merely giving vent to his personal observations on life generally. However, the idea of unity of mood, of thought, of feeling, and of style is essential to the lyric.

Since the true quality of the lyric is the personal element, that is, as a vehicle of the poet's mood, a means of expressing his individual sensibility, the ode, the sonnet as well as the elegy are lyrics. As such all the examples of these latter form cited in the preceding sections of this unit can rightly be studied as lyrics.

4.0   CONCLUSION

5.0   SUMMARY

6.0　TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

7.0　REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Egudu, RN and DI Nwoga. *Igbo Traditional Verse*. London: Heinemann.

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MODULE 2: TECHNIQUES AND LITERARY DEVICES OF POETRY

Unit 1   Tropes: Irony; Paradox; Metaphor, Simile; personification; metonymy; synecdoche; etc

Unit 2   Rhetorical Figures: Antithesis; apostrophe; Contrast; Onomatopoeia; hyperbole; oxymoron; etc

Unit 3   Types of Verse: Blank, Heroic, Free

Unit 4   Movement and sound in poetry: Syllable; Foot, Metre and types

Unit 5   Movement and sound in poetry: Duration/Quantity

UNIT 1 – IRONY; PARADOX; CONTRAST; ETC
CONTENT

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

       3.1 Irony

       3.2 Paradox

       3.3 Metaphor

       3.4 Simile

       3.5 Personification

       3.6 Metonymy

       3.7 Synecdoche

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

We should recall at this point the emphasis we placed on the figurative or connotative nature of the language of poetry in our consideration of several definitions of the genre in Unit I of Module I. Among other points, we stressed that poetry communicates experiences in language deliberately selected and arranged by the poet to create specific emotional as well as intellectual responses through meaning, sound and rhythm. Another related point we made was that poetry, in line with the general nature of literature, communicates experiences through indirection. This deliberately contrived and indirect/suggestive language of poetry is achieved, mainly, through some figurative usages among which are irony, paradox, metaphor, simile, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, etc, which we shall discuss in this unit.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

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

1. Identify the figures of speech used to communicate experiences or ideas in a poem
2. Explain the point of comparison in the figurative expression
3. Discuss the aptness/effectiveness or otherwise of the figurative usage

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Irony

Irony is one of the most typical figures of speech in poetry. Hugh Holman has defined it as "a broad term referring to the recognition of a reality different from the masking reality". Put more simply, it is a figure of speech in which the denotative, literal or ordinary meaning of a word or expression is more or less the direct opposite of the sense intended by the speaker or, in this case, the poet. You should be able to identify this poetic device by paying close attention to the contexts in which the ironic words or expressions are used in a poem.

For example, irony could manifest in a context in which a patently ugly and unpleasant event or object is described as beautiful/attractive and pleasing/satisfying, e.g. when an unattractive person is referred to as the most beautiful or attractive person; a dwarf is described as a palm tree or the African 'iroko' and a hopeless situation is said to be a hopeful or cheering one. These are examples of verbal irony and they illustrate the manner in which irony as a figure of speech stands logic on its head through expression or usage that is built upon a discrepancy between what is asserted and what is actually the case. Let us also examine the opening lines of JP Clark's short poem titled "The Cleaners" to illustrate how this type of irony works as follows:

> Look at the crew
>
> Who after each disastrous race
>
> Take over a public place
>
> To wash it new.
>
> They are themselves so full
>
> Of muck ... ...   (*State of the Union*   )

To begin with, the title of the poem is ironic because it runs contrary to the moral quality expected of whoever would lay claim to being a cleaner. The irony is further strengthened by the fact that "the crew" referred to is depicted as a group of persons who pretend to be morally above board as opposed to the those who were responsible for the disastrous race that instigates their reaction; and their professed intention is to wash clean the proverbial political "Augean stable" when they themselves are not better than those they have ousted.

You as close readers should be able to identify and enjoy this form of verbal duplicity which is the stock in trade of the ironist because its contradiction is apparent.

However, there is the more complex type of irony which best reveals the characteristic feature of irony as a dominant structural ingredient in an ironic poem; where the persona or speaker in a poem assumes the position of a well-meaning or disinterested neutral person to express ideas that appear to be earnest but which essentially are not to be taken literally. A good example of this form of irony is "A Modest Proposal" by the Irish poet, Jonathan Swift, in which the persona acts as a caring professional economist who proffers economic solutions to end the poverty in his impoverished society by suggesting outrageously impossible steps to be taken by the authority. It is highly recommended that you read this poem in a good anthology of English poetry.

Other forms of irony are the **situational, cosmic and dramatic** which are more frequently used in dramatic works.

3.2.   Paradox

Paradox is a statement or expression which at first seems to be contradictory or senseless but which on further or closer examination contains much truth. As a poetic device, it usually contains an element of surprise or shock that is revealing of the potentials of words in poetry and literature in general. The truth that is contained in paradox is often realised against a religious or philosophical background. For example, the concept of the Fortunate Fall, as expressed by a medieval lyricist, when taken literally does not make an apparent sense, but when read against the Biblical/religious background of Man's fall from divine favour in the Garden of Eden, it conveys the truth of the interplay of the Fall and the advent and mission of Christ on earth. The truth that transforms an apparently 'unfortunate fall' or disfavour into a fortunate ascendancy is that it provides the necessity for the redemptive career of Christ.

Similarly, the paradox that runs through John Donne's sonnet titled "Death Be not Proud" can only be fully appreciated against an understanding and acceptance of the religious concept that death is not a terrible end-all of man's ontology; that death is a needful interlude between man's existence in this world and his transition to the next world:

> Death be not proud, though some have called thee
>
> Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe
>
> .... why swell'st thou then?
>
> ....
>
> One short sleepe past, we wake eternally,
>
> And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

<div align="right">Gardner 83</div>

The elements of contradiction and shock combine here to give us a classic example of the workings of a paradox; initially the idea that death is not mighty and dreadful does not sound rational until the poet provides convincing reasons to back up his statement and concludes by proving it so by showing that it is a mere necessary prelude to man's resurrection that would signal the end/demise of death! This typical shock resulting from a new awareness of an inherent truth in an apparently absurd statement is also couched in a philosophical garb in the following poem by William Wordsworth titled "My Heart Leaps Up":

> My heart leaps up when I behold
>
>   A rainbow in the sky;
>
> So it was when my life began;
>
> So is it now I am a man;
>
> So be when I shall grow old,
>
>   Or let me die!
>
> The Child is father of Man;

> And I could wish my days to be
>
> Bound each to each by natural piety.

In this essentially Romantic poem, the poet gives lasting expression to the philosophy that a child's potentials are a presage of what he would become at maturity. But by the way it is expressed, it conveys, on the surface, the ridiculous and contradictory impression that the child is actually the father of man. It is only on close scrutiny against the Romantic philosophy of the evolution of the child with all its positive and negative implications that its embedded truth is realised.

JP Clark also offers us a fitting example of the use of paradox to reinforce poetic meaning in "Letter from Kampala", a piece that conveys the familial sentiments of the persona who is engaged on a journey away from home as follows:

> At this other end of Africa
>
> It is of you alone
>
> I think at home,
>
> And the children:
>
> I go further in order
>
> To get home to you.   (*A Decade of Tongues*, 95)

Taken literally, the two last lines would contradict the home sickness of a person who is actually missing his wife and children, because he deliberately goes farther away from them/home instead of moving in a reversed direction towards home. However, the truth in this seemingly absurd progression is that, in order to complete his journey and return to his family, the traveller has to reach the farthest limit of his journey. He will not achieve this if he stays at the beginning of the journey.

3.3 Metonymy

This involves the use of an object or idea to stand for or signify some other thing with which it is closely associated, but which is not necessarily an integral part of it. In this type of figure/trope, we commonly speak of "the king" as "the crown", an object closely associated with kingship but not an organic part of the person of the king or royalty. Similarly, the "scythe" and the "spade" are made to stand for the peasantry that is closely associated with two objects as in the following examples:

> The glories of our blood and state
>
> Are shadows, not substantial things,
>
> There is no armour against fate,
>
> > Death lays his icy hand on kings;
>
> > > Sceptre and crown
>
> > > Must tumble down,
>
> And in the dust be equal made
>
> With the poor crooked scythe and spade.
>
> > > James Shirley "The Glories of Our Blood and State"
> > >
> > > (Reeves 104)

Other examples are:

1. After much strife on the streets, ***the green berets*** were called in handle the situation (i.e. the soldiers).

2. The man who lives across the street goes after any ***skirt*** in the neighbourhood (any female).

3.4 Synecdoche

This is a figure of speech in which a person, place or thing/object is made to stand for the whole or conversely the whole is made to stand for a part. You should note that, as in the metonymy, this figure works on the basis of association or relationship; but unlike the metonymy, however, the part is an

integral part of the whole as the whole is often a whole because it subsumes the part. In addition, for the synecdoche to be effective and clear, it must be based on an important or a main part of the whole and should be manifestly associated with the topic being discussed or in focus as in these examples:

1. More **hands** are needed to execute the task (i.e. workmen).
2. The worker finds it difficult to cater for more **mouths** in his family (i.e. persons).
3. I gave commands; / And all smiles stopped together (i.e.

3.5 Simile

A simile is a figure of speech/trope in which two things or actions are directly compared because of some inherent qualities they share in common, although they may be totally different in other respects. The term hints at the similarities or similitude that underlies the natures of the two objects or actions being compared and which are normally linked by the operative word 'like' or 'as'. As in a metaphor, the ability of a poet or writer to see and effectively establish similitude in a simile in two patently dissimilar things is considered as a mark of genius as long as the comparison remains fresh and striking. Consider the following examples and try your hands on as many fresh and striking examples as possible:

1. The youthful hue /Sits on thy skin like morning dew
2. My love is like a red, red rose/That's newly sprung in June
3. I cannot sleep

   But my head just stops

   Like a broken down car!
4. He talks endlessly,

   And some of the things he says

   Are painful and hurtful,

Like an unripe boil.

5. The roof sizzle at the waking touch,

    Talkative like kettledrums

    Tightened by the iron fingers of drought

    Osundare "Raindrum"

3.6 Metaphor

A metaphor is a contracted simile whereby the two similar entities are implicitly equated with one another, thus dispensing with the comparative words, "like" and "as". The similes above can be contracted into metaphors as follows:

1. The youthful hue is morning dew
2. My love is a red rose that's newly sprung in June
3. My head is a broken down car
4. And some of the things he says are an unripe boil
5. The roof is talkative kettledrums

Another example I want you to take a close look at for its ingenious equation is *"Beauty is but a flower which wrinkles will devour".*

3.7 Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which inanimate objects, animals or abstract ideas are endowed with human form, character, or sensibilities. Thus to personify an object or thing is to attribute to it human life or feelings. Heese and Lawton described it as "another kind of image where the 'something concrete' relates to human beings, while the 'something else' is not human" (83). Examples:

1. Summer's lease hath all too short a date:

    Sometime too hot the *eye of heaven* shines,

    And often is *his gold complexion* dimmed:

    Shakespeare, "Shall I Compare... (Reeves 62)

2.   The keen wind

   Knifes through his

   Torn trousers

   Licking his bruised knee

   Witth rough fenile ***tongue***

   ...   ...

   The small toe

   On the left foot

   Slowly ***weeps*** blood

                    (p'Bitek, *Song of Ocol* 122)

3.   Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

   Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

   Conspiring with him how to load and bless

   With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run

                    John Keats "Ode to Autumn" (Reeves 211)

4.0   CONCLUSION

5.0   SUMMARY

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2:   RHETORICAL FIGURES OF SPEECH

CONTENT

1.0   INTRODUCTION

We should recall at this point the emphasis we placed on the figurative or connotative nature of the language of poetry in our consideration of several definitions of the genre in Unit I of Module I. Among other points, we stressed that poetry communicates experiences in language deliberately selected and arranged by the poet to create specific emotional as well as intellectual responses through meaning, sound and rhythm. Another related point we made was that poetry, in line with the general nature of literature, communicates experiences through indirection. This deliberately contrived and indirect/suggestive language of poetry is achieved, mainly, through some figurative usages among which are irony, paradox, metaphor, simile, apostrophe, personification, metonymy, synecdoche, etc, which we shall discuss in this unit.

2.0   OBJECTIVES

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

4. Identify the figures of speech used to communicate experiences or ideas in a poem

5. Explain the point of comparison in the figurative expression

6. Discuss the aptness/effectiveness or otherwise of the figurative usage

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Contrast

Contrast has been defined by RN Egudu as "the technique of juxtaposing 'unlike characters, ideas, or images for the purpose of furthering or heightening an effect'". He continues, "like irony, or paradox, contrast is a device of finding direction by indirection which ... is part of what poetry is" (77). On the other hand, Hugh Holman refers to it as a rhetorical device and goes on to stress its function of emphasis and clarity whenever it is deployed in a poem or any other form of writing. In simple terms, contrast comes into play and its effect is effectively felt when ideas, objects, persons, situations are placed side by side in a context in which their opposite qualities are made clear and striking. It is important to note that if these ideas, persons, objects, etc are made to stand alone, the clarity engendered by this device of contrast would be lacking. It is in this sense that Egudu has seen the device as a veritable means of "finding direction by indirection"; it serves to throw into sharp relief the differences between the ideas, objects, situations or characters contrasted/juxtaposed. The following examples will illustrate the workings of contrast in a poem.

In the poem "Loser of Everything" by David Mandessi Diop, contrast achieves the poet's desired effect of highlighting the stark different realities in two historical periods in the national life of postcolonial society; a natural and peaceful

order depicted in nature imagery (in the first ten lines) and a ravished and militarised order represented in images of machines and corruption (in the last ten lines). By juxtaposing these two contrasting orders, the socio-political existence in a typical pre-colonial African setting and that in a colonial regime become very clear and heightened.

> The sun used to laugh in my hut
>
> And my women were lovely and lissom
>
> Like palms in the evening breeze.
>
> My children would glide over the mighty river
>
> Of deadly depths
>
> And my canoes would battle with crocodiles.
>
> The motherly moon accompanied our dances
>
> The heavy frantic rhythm of the tom-tom,
>
> Tom-tom of joy, tom-tom of carefree life.
>
>   Amid the fires of liberty.
>
> Then one day, Silence...
>
> It seemed the rays of the sun went out
>
> In my hut empty of meaning.
>
> My women crushed their painted mouths
>
> On the thin hard lips of steel-eyed conquerors
>
> And my children left their peaceful nakedness
>
> For the uniform of iron and blood.
>
> Your voice went out too
>
> The irons of slavery tore my heart to pieces
>
> Tom-tom of my nights, tom-toms of my fathers.
>
> *Hammer Blows*

Another example of the use of contrast is available in the poem "Virtue" by the English metaphysical poet, George Herbert as follows:

> Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,

The bridal of earth and sky,

The dew shall weep thy fall tonight

For thou must die

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave

Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye,

Thy root is ever in its grave;

And thou must die.

Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,

A box where sweets compacted lie,

My music shows ye have your closes,

And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,

Like seasoned timber, never gives;

But though the whole world turn to coal,

Then chiefly lives.

<div align="center">Helen Gardner</div>

To underscore the endless currency of the abstract Virtue, it is juxtaposed with the ephemeral "Sweet day", "Sweet rose", "Sweet spring" which must all inevitably die. By placing these phenomena beside the "sweet and virtuous soul", the difference between them is shown by indirection as they 'speak' by themselves.

3.2   Apostrophe

As we have seen so far in our examination of the devices and examples of their uses in the sections above, poets are consistently seeking and utilizing different techniques to concretise, emphasise, and heighten meaning in their works. We

have seen how this is achieved through irony, paradox, contrast. We shall now turn our attention to apostrophe which is a direct and straight forward "address either to an absent person or to an abstract or inanimate entity" (Abrams 149). Poets use the apostrophe to the give the impression or sense of immediacy as well as the emotional involvement/outpouring in their works; that is, it enables both the poet and the reader to have a feeling of nearness and a sense of presence of the person or entity addressed in a poem. You will agree with me that this usage equally aids the reader's imaginative realisation of meaning in a poem. Let us consider the following examples to illustrate these qualities and functions of this rhetorical figure of speech:

1. Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain
    Where health and plenty cheer the labouring swain

    <div style="text-align:right">Oliver Goldsmith "The Deserted Village"</div>

2. O dawn
    Where do you hide your paint at night
    That cool breath, that scent
    With which you sweeten the early air?

    O dawn
    What language do you use
    To instruct the birds to sing
    Their early songs
    And insects to sound
    The rhythm of an African heartbeat?

    <div style="text-align:right">Susan Lwanga "Daybreak"</div>

3. Before you, mother Idoto,
            naked I stand,
    before your watery presence,

a prodigal

leaning on an oilbean,

lost in your legend...

<div align="center">Christopher Okigbo "Idoto"</div>

In these three excerpts, the poets address abstract and inanimate objects or entities as if they were living and sensate. As we have mentioned above, the device is a ready tool for the poet's emotional expression and this is evident in the direct addresses in the forms of eulogy and adulation directed to the village of Auburn that is no more (in excerpt 1), the evanescent dawn (as in excerpt 2) and a revered female godhead, Idoto (in excerpt 3).

3.3   Antithesis

This is a rhetorical figure of speech achieved by the poet by juxtaposing or placing side by side two contrasting phrases or statements to create expressional balance. In the words of Abrams, it "is a contrast or opposition in meaning, emphasised by a parallel in grammatical structure" (10). An interesting quality of this device is its wittiness and ability to surprise through abrupt apposition. As ingenious and attractive as it may be in a poem, Hugh Holman (35 – 36) has cautioned that it could lose its significance and surprise if overused. He then advises that "true antithetical structure demands that there be not only an opposition of ides, but that the opposition in different parts be manifested through similar grammatical structure – the noun "wretches" being opposed by the noun "jury-men" and the verb "hang" by the verb "dine", as in the following example:

The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,

And wretches hang that jury-men may dine

Other examples of antithesis that obey the above structure and are likely to be familiar to you:

1. To err is human, to forgive divine
2. For many are called, but few are chosen
3. Once bitten, twice shy

3.4   Hyperbole

This is the use of deliberate exaggeration or overstatement for emphasis or to achieve a humorous effect, without any intention to deceive the reader or audience. It is the opposite of *litotes.* (Look this up in a dictionary of glossary of literary terms). As in common usage amongst you and your friends, you should be in a position to appreciate the deployment and effect of exaggeration in communication. Take, for example, when you walk into your friend's room after a long day of back-to-back lectures and say: "I want to eat a basin of eba". Certainly, you know that you are not capable of eating that quantity of food; but you have made the statement to emphasise how hungry you are as well as to achieve humour. The following excerpts from Robert Burn's poem, "A Red, Red Rose", will equally illustrate the nature and effect of hyperbole:

O my love is like a red, red rose
　　That's newly sprung in June:
O my love is like the melody,
　　That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair thou art, my bonnie lass,
　　So deep in love am I;
And I will love thee still, my dear,
　　Till a' the seas gang dry.

> **Till a' the seas gang dry**, my dear,
>   And **the rocks melt wi' the sun**;
> And I will love thee still, my dear,
>   While **the sands o' life shall run**.

> And fare thee weel, my only love!
>   And fare thee weel awhile!
> And **I will come again**, my love,
>   **Tho' it were ten thousand mile**.

You should take note of the words and lines highlighted in the stanzas and attempt to appreciate, enjoy and be able to discuss their effectiveness as hyperbole.

3.5   Onomatopoeia

This rhetorical figure, according to Abrams, "is applied to a word, or a combination of words, whose sound seems to resemble the sound it denotes: 'hiss', 'buzz', 'rattle', 'bang'" (118). In other words, this figure involves the use of words whose pronunciation echo or suggest their meaning. For example, the highlighted words in the following lines excerpted from Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" intimate their meaning through an artful matching of sound to sense:

1. The ice was all around:
    It **crack'd**, **growl'd**, and **roar,d**

2. With heavy **thump**, ...
    They dropp'd one by one

3.   And every soul, it pass'd me by
    Like the **whizz** of my crossbow!

The closing lines of David Rubadiri's "An African Thunderstorm" also contains some words whose sounds resemble and suggest their meaning, as follows:

As **jaggered** blinding flashes

Rumble, tremble, and **crack**

3.6 Oxymoron

In oxymoron, two words or phrases of opposite or contrary/contrasting meanings are placed side by side to achieve a rhetorical effect. While such a juxtaposition may seem to be "pointedly foolish", it achieves sharp emphasis in the context in which it is used. Examples are the following phrases and expressions: bitter-sweet; loving hate; pleasing pain; kindly unkind; I burn and freeze; resounding silence; conspicuous absence; a dearness that lacerates; etc.

4.0 CONCLUSION

5.0 SUMMARY

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3: TYPES OF VERSE

CONTENT

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

  3.1 Blank verse

  3.2 Heroic verse

  3.4 Free verse

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As we have already stressed in the earlier units in module I, the best way to read and enjoy poetry is to read it aloud. Although some poems could be enjoyed "as a visual experience" through the appreciation of their structures on the page, they are ultimately meant to be heard and seen. This is why special attention to the sound and rhythmic patterns in a poem is a key to the full appreciation of a poem; hence the importance of an understanding of the skilful deployment of stressed and unstressed syllables in verse forms to convey speech rhythm and emotions.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit you will be able to:

1. identify the three verse forms discussed

2. distinguish between the types of verse

3. discuss the effect of rhymed and unrhymed meters in lines of poertry/verse

3.0   MAIN CONTENT

3.1   Blank Verse

This is a type of metrical composition which typically consists of lines of unrhymed iambic pentameters and was the dominant verse used for English dramatic and narrative poetry since the 16th century. In England it was first adapted by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey in his translation of some books of Virgil's Aeneid. Its original sources or homes were classical Greece and Rome from where it was adapted by the Italian Renaissance writers. It is called blank verse because, as opposed to the conventions of metrical compositions, it was not in stanzas, rather it was marked by verse paragraphs that set off each sustained unit of meaning. In the hands of a capable poet, it is "a supple instrument uniquely capable of conveying speech rhythm and emotional overtones" (Encarta).

Such famous English poets and playwrights as John Milton in "Paradise Lost", Alfred Tennyson in his narrative verses and William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlow and other Elizabethans in their plays.

3.2   Heroic Verse

This is iambic pentameter lines rhyming in twos, aa bb cc, etc. It is called heroic because it was the medium or form used for heroic/epic poetry and plays in English. However, it evolved from the 14th century when it was the medium utilised by Geoffrey Chaucer and was usually written in the ten syllable (decasyllabic) lines. It became use became widespread and popular in the 17th and 18th centuries at which time it became known as heroic couplet.

It is the smallest unit of verse forms and as such it is quite restrictive as can be demonstrated in the following examples drawn from the works of two great poets of Augustan or 18th century English poetry:

1. First follow Nature, and your judgement frame

   By her just standard, which is still the same.

   Alexander Pope, "Essay on Criticism"

2. All human things are subject to decay,

   And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.

   John Dryden, "McFlecknoe".

There are two distinct types of the heroic couplet namely, the closed and the open. The closed couplet is that in which the end of the two lines of the couplet coincides with the end of either a sentence, a complete thought or a self-contained unit of syntax, with a pause at the end of the first line and a termination of that unit of thought at the end of the second line. Consider the two examples above. Thus, this type constitutes a stanza but it is not separated from the lines that precede or follow it. On the other hand, in the open couplet, the syntax is not symmetrical, the lines run-on, and rhyme is a mere ornament rather than marking the end of the verse as in the vibrant and rhythmical opening lines of Chaucer's prologue to The Canterbury Tales:

   Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote

   The drogte of Marche hath perced to the rote,

   And bathed every veyne in Swich locour

   Of which vertu engendred is the flour;

   Whan Zephirus eek with his breeth

   Inspired hath in every holt and heet

   The tendre croppes....

3.3 Free Verse

In the words of Heese and Lawton, free verse "may be defined as rhythmical lines varying in length, adhering to no fixed metrical pattern, and usually unrhymed (48). These characteristics were meant to free poetry from the

restrictions of formal metrical patterns and approximate the free rhythm of natural speech. In this sense, free verse (verse libre as it was called by the French) is written with a general rhythm rather than any pattern of metre or line length; it has a vague rhythm based largely on repetition, balance and variation of phrases or parallel grammatical structure. There is no doubt that the absence of regular stress pattern or metre may lead to the misconception that this type of verse is arbitrary and lacks the discipline imposed by conventional rhythmic pattern. To correct this misconception, TS Eliot has rightly quipped that no verse is free for the man who wants to do a good job since the absence of metre does not indicate absence of rhythm. You should be able to detect the rhythmic pattern achieved in a poem written in free verse through the peculiar variations in line length, repetition, etc adopted by the poet.

The French Symbolist poets of the late 19th century and the American Walt Whitman as well as most modern poets, especially the Imagists of the 20th century, made effective use of free verse. The following lines excerpted from TS Eliot's "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" are typical of the verse form:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table;
> Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
> The muttering retreats
> Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

You should take note of the varied/irregular line lengths, the absence of a consciously contrived rhyme scheme and the vague rhythm that approximates the rhythm of natural speech.

Self Assessment Exercise 3.1

4.0   CONCLUSION

5.0   SUMMARY

6.0   TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

7.0   REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

UNIT 4: MOVEMENT AND SOUND IN POETRY

CONTENT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

2.0 OBJECTIVES

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1

3.2

3.3

4.0 CONCLUSION

5.0 SUMMARY

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING