

NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

EHG 105



Introduction to Literature II Module 3

ENG 105 Introduction to Literature II

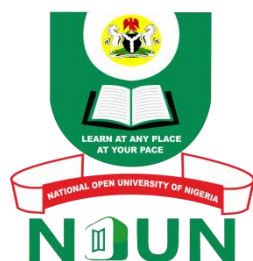
Module 3

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Module 3

Unit I The Nature of Drama

1.0 Introduction

If your outlook on poetry has been shaped mainly by your interaction with written poetry in the school environment, you are likely to have a limited experience of poetry. You will then see every poem as the work of an identifiable writer which can be read and enjoyed privately even when there is no prospect of ever meeting the author. On the contrary, every society seems to have a tradition of oral literature in which the emphasis is on the physical encounter between the poet and the

2.0 Objective

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

- recognize some of the features in African oral poetry in “Salute to the Elephant”.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Background to “Salute to the Elephant”

The poem we are studying in this unit, “Salute to the Elephant”, is taken from the Yoruba oral tradition. It is greatly indebted to *Ijala*, the tradition of poetry associated with hunters among the Yorubas. *Ijala* simply relies heavily on the Yoruba praise tradition, *oriki*, and the object of admiration may be fellow hunters, Ogun, the patron god of Yoruba hunters, or animals. “Salute to the Elephant” is preoccupied with praising the elephant.

4.0 Conclusion

“Salute to the Elephant” is a product of the oral poetic imagination. What it has in common with “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats is the commitment to celebrating the object that constitutes its focus.

5.0 Summary

Whatever we regard as the pleasure and literary merit of the poem is just a partial reflection of the full experience of the poem. The poem is best enjoyed in the context of performance in which the appropriate musical accompaniment, dance and the involvement of the audience will give life to the poem.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

“In terms of its preoccupation and method, ‘Salute to the Elephant’ can only be properly understood as operating in the oral tradition”. Justify this statement.

7.0 Reference/Further Reading

Finnegan, Ruth, (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.

Unit 2 Dramatic Elements and Devices

1.0 Introduction

You will recall that, in introducing our discussion of the African tradition of oral poetry in the last unit we drew attention to the fact that many of the songs that circulate orally in most African communities cannot be traced to particular individuals who can be regarded as their composers. This is not always the case.

Certain composers within the oral tradition can be identified. In fact, in some cases, their imprints can easily be recognized in their compositions. This is the case with Komi Ekpe, the composer of the song/poem we shall study in this poem. His work operates in the tradition of poetry of abuse called **halo** among the Ewe people. The Ewes are found in Ghana, Togo and Benin Republic.

2.0 Objectives

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

- identify the features of the song of abuse
- analyze the sample poem.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Poetry of Abuse

Different societies have their own ways of classifying poetry. It will be wrong for you to assume that just, because the English poetic tradition recognises such forms as the ode, the sonnet, the ballad and others, the same classificatory scheme must exist in African oral poetry.

In fact, different societies in Africa have their ways of classifying the poetic forms within their cultural environments. Even though certain poetic types occur in many cultural environments, each society has a unique way of classifying its poetry. The reason for this is obvious: poetic expression is closely tied to culture. The fact that certain poetic forms exist in a society may be a reflection of their cultural identity.

4.0 Conclusion

The song of abuse is just a form of oral poetry. It was meant to be performed and not just read. Reading the transcribed version, which has also been translated from Ewe, does not give you a good experience of it. The element of performance distinguishes oral from written poetry.

In reality, the performance of poetry in the traditional African context could involve drumming, clapping, audience participation, and the use of such musical accompaniment as the rattle or the gong.

5.0 Summary

The song of abuse is not just meant to entertain. It represents a deliberate effort at self-assertion and an important channel for dramatizing conflicts in African communities. Some contemporary African poets are either consciously or otherwise drawing on this tradition. The influence of the poetry of abuse is evident in varying degrees in the works of Kofi Awoonor, Kofi Anyidoho (Ewe), Niyi Osundare, Femi Fatoba (Yoruba), Tanure Ojaide (Urhobo), and Okof p' Bitek (Acholi, Uganda).

You need to note however, that all that we have in the works of these poets take the form of either the adaptation of the tradition of insult or the application of the principle in the criticism of the conduct of public office holders in post-independence Africa.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

Compare “Salute to the Elephant” And Komi Ekpe’s “Hm hm hm. Beware”, paying attention to Subject matter and technique.

7.0 Reference/Further Reading

Awoonor, Kofi. (1974). *Guardians of the Sacred Word: We Poetry*. New York: Nok Publishers.

Unit 3 Introducing Drama – Tragedy

1.0 Introduction

You would have observed that, in the previous units, we have been studying each poem in the context of the information available to us about the circumstances that produced them. The information may be related to the cultural practice or the socio-political situation of autobiographical details surrounding the writing of the poem.

2.0 Objectives

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

- recognize the practical criticism of poetry as an aspect of the study of poetry
- identify the elements of poetry that are relevant to its criticism.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Nature of Poetry

You have been reading some poems in this course. If you are asked to say something about poetry you are most likely to restate what so many students believe about poetry – that it is difficult. This is not always true. What many people do not realize is that poetry is closer to us than we would like to see it. You are probably from a society in which every stage in life or experience – birth, wedding, child naming, etc, is marked with a ceremony. Each of such ceremonies attracts people and singing is often brought in.

You may also be attending a church where hymns are sung. If any of these does not apply to you, you may have been fond of singing lullabies to children to make them sleep. All these activities have poetry. The problem we often have is with the formal study of poetry. The foregoing should convince you that poetry, apart from being the oldest and commonest of all the literary genres, is also the closest to us.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit, we have examined some elements of poetry that you will normally need to consider in your own criticism of poetry. Even though not all of these elements will be important in your appreciation of every poem, there is a need to pay close attention to them. All that matters is that you know how to recognize them.

5.0 Summary

The elements of poetry that you need to be familiar with are so many that it is not possible for us to exhaust the discussion in this unit. We shall continue with the topic in the next unit.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss the theme of any FOUR poems you have studied in this course.

7.0 Reference/Further Reading

Books, C & Warren, R. P. (1983). *Understanding Poetry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Unit 4 Textual Analysis of Drama: Medieval English Drama – Everyman

1.0 Introduction

In the last two units we have examined the elements of poetry. The units are meant to acquaint you with what we often consider in the appreciation of poetry. The point has to be made, however, that the appreciation of literature or what we call literary criticism, is a skill you develop with practice.

Familiarity with the elements of poetry that we have considered is always necessary. But having these concepts is just to prepare you for the appreciation of poetry itself. We intend to put the principles into practice in this unit by demonstrating the procedure for the practical appreciation of poetry.

2.0 Objectives

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

- identify the procedure for the appreciation of poetry.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Reading the Poem for Subject Matter

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

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

4.0 Conclusion

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

5.0 Summary

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

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

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

7.0 Reference/Further Reading

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