



**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA  
INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**BACHELOR OF ARTS WITH EDUCATION  
(B.A EDUCATION)**

**MODULE NO: 1**

**LIT 1100: Studies in Writing Skills and Literature**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **Module Structure**

- I. Introduction
- II. The Aim of the Module
- III. Module Objectives [Learning outcomes]
- IV. Assessment
- V. Prescribed and Recommended Readings
- VI. Time frame
- VII. Study skills [Learning tips]
- VIII. Need help [Studying at a distance]

The module is divided into 4 units. Each unit addresses some of the learning outcomes. You will be asked to complete various tasks so that you can demonstrate your competence in achieving the learning outcomes.

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## Introduction

Welcome to Module I on Studies in Writing Skills and Literature (LIT1100)

In this module we shall learn about literature, its meaning and functions in society, as well as the various forms of literature, that is, poetry, drama, prose fiction and non-fiction prose. We shall also learn about literary criticism – that is, the various approaches to the study of literature. In addition we shall learn how to write a literary essay. This module is the first in the series for LIT 1100.

### Aim

The aim of the course is to give the learner a clear understanding of the concept, genres and functions of literature as well as what is involved in writing an academic essay.



### Objectives

By the end of the module, you should be able to:

- I. Demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the nature of literature.
- II. Explain the various types of literature.
- III. Explain the relationship between literature and literary criticism.
- IV. Write a literary essay.



### Assessment

Your work in this module will be assessed as follows:

- One test worth 10%
- Two essays worth 40%
- A written examination set by the University of Zambia at the end of the module (worth 50% of the final mark).

In summary, you will be assessed as follows:

#### **Continuous Assessment: 50%**

2 essays – 20% each

1 test – 10%

Final Examination: 50%



### Prescribed Readings

1. Abrams, M H. (1981). A Glossary of Literary Terms, Fourth Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
2. Roberts, Edgar V. and Henry E Jacobs (2007). Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.



### Recommended Readings

1. Abrams, M H and Stephen Greenbelt (Eds.) (2000). The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Vol 2. New York: W W Norton & Company.
2. Barnet, Sylvan, Morton Berman and William Burto (Eds.) (1981) An Introduction to Literature, Seventh Edition. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
3. Gwynn, R S. (2006). Drama: A Pocket Anthology, Third Edition. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
4. Miruka, Okumba (1994). Encounter with Oral Literature. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
5. Kirszner, Laurie G. and Stephen R Mandell (2004). Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Thomson and Heinle.

You are encouraged, however, to read beyond the prescribed and recommended readings listed above in order to deepen and broaden your understanding of drama. You may find the references provided at the end of the module beneficial, but you are also encouraged to utilise other sources of information such as the University library, which is a wealthy source of data both from published books and unpublished theses. You may also do well to utilise public libraries, where available. Finally, learn how to use the internet as a vital source of data.



### **Time frame**

You are expected to spend at least 50 hours of study time on this module. However, you will also have contact with lecturers from the University of Zambia from time to time in the course of studying the module. You are advised to maximise the time available for study as well as contact with the lecturers in order to fully benefit from the course.

### **Study Skills**

In case you have not studied by distance before, we shall avail you a number of ideas on how to maximise your learning experience:

1. Set goals such as: I will succeed in this course. At the beginning of the module, break the lessons into manageable chunks. You might not have time to do a full lesson in one night, so plan how much you can do, then stick to it until you are done.
2. Establish a regular study/learning schedule.
3. Determine what time is best for you to study.
4. Have a dedicated study place with all the supplies you might need.
5. Tell people what you are doing because only then are you more likely to stick to a course.
6. Ask someone to proofread your work before you submit it.
7. If you do not understand something ask your local learning centre or your tutor, who will be able to help you.
8. Search for the meaning of principles and concepts instead of merely memorising them.



### **Need help?**

In case you have difficulties during the duration of the course, please get in touch with the Director, Institute of Distance Education, or the resident lecturer in your province.

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## Unit 1

### What is Literature?

#### 1.1 Introduction

In this unit we look at the various definitions of literature and the nature of literature. This unit is intended to set the foundation for you to understand the units that follow. You will be required to undertake a number of activities.



#### 1.2 Objectives

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

1. Explain the meaning of literature.
2. Explain the relationship between written and oral literature.
3. Discuss the relationship between literature and literary works.



#### 1.3 Reflection

What do you understand by the word 'literature'? Take a few minutes to write down, in your own words, what you think literature means.

#### 1.4 Definition of Literature

In its broadest sense, the word 'literature' refers to anything written. Thus, for example, we can talk about textbooks on physics or agriculture as forms of literature. Such literature, however, is read more for the purpose of obtaining information on physics or agriculture, not so much for the purpose of pleasure.

The kind of literature we are talking about in this module, and indeed this course, is the type written mainly for pleasure. In this kind of literature, the writer undergoes a feeling of pleasure by writing and intends for the reader to equally derive pleasure from the process of reading. Literature can give pleasure to the reader because of its power to imitate life (Landy 1992: 3). The more we are able to identify with the characters in a work of literature, the more reflective it is of life, the more pleasure we derive from reading, and the more highly we rate the writer. Landy (1992: 3) justifiably argues that

literature 'exists because it pleases us'. She adds: 'And it pleases us by imitating life – or, more precisely, by displaying its writers' visions of life as it is or as the writers think it should be.'

In order to produce works that please us, writers essentially use words; but these words are carefully chosen and constructed to not only attract the reader's attention but also to please the reader. This is what Robert Frost refers to as 'performance in words' (Barnet et al 2004: 3) on the part of the writer. Literature, as dealt with in the context of this course, is manifested in such forms as the short story, novel, dramatic play, and poetry.

There is no single definition of literature that is agreed worldwide. You will realise that instead there is a variety of definitions. This is because there is some degree of vagueness associated with the term. We shall now turn to some of the definitions so as to have a broader understanding of the concept of literature and to enrich our discussion.

The *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Cuddon 1991: 505) defines it thus: 'A vague term which usually denotes works which belong to the major genres: epic, drama, lyric, novel, short story, ode.' Cuddon (505-6) adds: 'If we describe something as "literature", as opposed to anything else, the term carries with it qualitative connotations which imply that the work in question has superior qualities; that it is well above the ordinary run of written works.' The 'qualitative connotations' and 'superior qualities' refer to the performance in words – the way the words are used by the writer. Writers use words to share their ideas and vision with their readers. Thus, a work of literature is not complete if no one has read it and responded to it.

Asheli (2011) gives us four other available definitions of literature.

- Literature is the work of art that uses language to reflect social realities.
- Literature is the mirror of the society in which it is produced.
- Literature refers to words artfully arranged to stimulate feelings and impart understanding.
- Literature is an imaginative work of art that uses language to reflect social realities.

You will notice, if you look carefully, that the above definitions are all related in some way. When we look at literature as a work of art it means we are acknowledging that it is a product of creativity, or a creative work. In addition, a work of art is intended to give pleasure to the reader, the listener (as in the case of music), or the beholder (as in the case of visual art). There are many social realities that are reflected, or can be reflected, by literature. In fact, any social reality may be reflected by literature: war, peace,

interpersonal relationships, anger, disunity in families, failed romantic relationships, unfulfilled or fulfilled dreams and ambitions, among others.

Have you read Chinua Achebe's famous novel, *Things Fall Apart*? In this creative work Achebe artistically reflects the challenges and realities of Igbo society during the late nineteenth century, when Europeans began to settle in Africa, particularly in the Igbo communities of Nigeria. The novel reflects the nature and peculiarities of Igbo culture as it was at the time, and how it clashed with western culture. Even if you did not live during the period Achebe writes about, by reading his novel you get a fair idea of the culture and belief system of the Igbo people.

The perception of literature as a mirror is also anchored on the idea of it being a means of reflecting society. In other words, literature is perceived as a mirror reflecting society back to itself. This view of literature is very old and started with the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In fact Aristotle used the term 'mimesis,' or 'imitation,' to argue for his view of literature as a reflection of society. In other words, according to Aristotle, literature is an imitation of life or society.

Critics of this view, however, have argued that literature cannot truly be said to be a mirror of society because of the simple fact that it is, as implied above, the produce of an individual's limited view of society as they experience or know it. The critics further argue that, while a mirror can provide an objective reflection, a person can have biases because of their cultural or social experiences as an individual.

The view of literature as 'words artfully arranged to stimulate feelings and impart understanding' not only draws out attention to the centrality of words to a work of literature, but also the importance of the reader or audience. It is the reader or audience whose feelings should be stimulated and to whom understanding should be imparted. In order to create such impact on the audience, the writer must therefore choose his or her words carefully and deliberately. This is what makes the reading of literature pleasurable and entertaining.

The perception of literature as an imaginative work of art is based on the fact that literature is the product of the imaginative creativity of a writer. The work is not only imaginative but artistic – meaning that, while all of us can use our imagination, not all of us can use it artistically. The notion that literature is an art means that there is craftsmanship involved in its creation. It also means that the writer uses deliberately chosen techniques to present a piece of literature. The imaginative nature of literature has led some scholars to argue that creative works of literature are better classified as Imaginative Literature essentially because the writer produces a world and situations from their own imagination. As we shall see later, however, in this module Imaginative

Literature refers to three of the four genres of literature, namely, prose fiction, poetry, and drama.



## 1.5 Reflection

Which of the above definitions of literature are you inclined to agree with, and why?

## 1.6 Genres of Literature

Cuddon (1991: 366) is a French term meaning 'a kind, a literary type or class'. In other words, a genre is simply a type or class of literature. There are four categories or genres of literature.

- Prose fiction
- Poetry
- Drama
- Non-fiction prose

The first three categories – prose fiction, poetry and drama – are what are more correctly classified as Imaginative Literature, because they are all products of the imagination. The fourth category, non-fiction prose, is not considered imaginative because, as the name indicates, it is not fiction – meaning it is not a product of the creative imagination. On the contrary, it is prose dealing with non-imagined situations. Hence this category includes, among others, newspapers, magazines, autobiography and biography.

### 1.6.1 Prose Fiction

Prose fiction is also referred to as Narrative Fiction, and includes parables, romances, myths, and the more commonly known short story and novel. These forms of literature are essentially built on the process of narration, hence their being referred to as narrative fiction. Fictional works normally focus on one or a few major characters who

develop in the course of the story. Generally novels have more characters than short stories or parables.

### **1.6.2 Poetry**

Just like literature, poetry is not easy to define. There are therefore many definitions of poetry, none of which is universally agreed or applicable. We shall leave the more detailed treatment of poetry to module 3. You ought to be aware, however, that one of the reasons why poetry is not easy to define is because every society has had its form of poetry. In Zambia, for instance, poetry existed even before the arrival of Europeans and their forms of poetry. On occasions such as funerals or traditional ceremonies, for example, traditional forms of Zambian poetry are performed. During the Kuomboka ceremony of the Lozi or the Umutomboko ceremony of the Lunda, for example, praise poetry is a common feature. Among the Tonga, a traditional form of poetry called 'kuyabila' is very popular.

### **1.6.3 Drama**

In simple terms, drama refers to the dramatic play. However, drama may also be defined as an 'art-form involving the physical embodiment of a story' (Hodgson 1988: 102). This is because a play is written to be physically performed. In other words, the story of the play is physically acted out. Thus Cuddon (1991: 259) defines drama as 'any work meant to be performed on a stage by actors'. You shall however be accorded the opportunity to learn more about drama in modules 4 and 5.

### **1.6.4 Non-fiction Prose**

As indicated above, non-fiction prose is, unlike the other three genres of literature, not categorised as imaginative literature. This course is more concerned with imaginative literature than non-fiction prose.

## **1.7 Oral Literature**

Thus far we have discussed literature as a written form of expression. However, this position leaves out a huge chunk of literature which is essentially oral in nature – that is,

produced orally rather than in written form. This to a large extent is the kind of literature associated with pre-literate societies, that is, societies without a writing tradition or system. If we are to understand literature in its fullest and broadest sense, therefore, we need to include oral forms of literature from the oral traditions of Africa or, in this case, Zambia.

Since the term literature tends to be associated with, and understood to refer to, written texts, some African scholars, such as Taban Lo Liyong, Pio Zirimu and Austin Bukonya have used the term 'orature' to refer to oral literature (Okombo and Nandwa 1992: 8). Oral literature is by definition and nature larger than what is captured by written literature especially because it includes aspects of performance and cannot be detached from its cultural context.

### **1.6.1 Riddles**

Riddles belong to the broad category of oral literature known as Fixed Forms, which also includes proverbs, puns, tongue twisters, idioms, wise sayings, euphemes and dictums. The main distinctive feature of the fixed forms is that they are brief, compact and normally cannot be changed despite being passed on orally from one generation to the next.



### **1.7.2 Reflection**

Do you know any riddles from the Zambian culture in general or from the culture of your ethnic group? Can you write a few of them down? What social function do you think riddles in general serve?

### **1.7.3 Proverbs**

Every culture has two aspects, the material and the social. Material forms of cultural expression include physical products such as buildings, tools, clothes and clothing, musical instruments, etc. These are sometimes referred to as tangible cultural heritage. Social forms of culture are the intangible forms, what are sometimes referred to as

intangible cultural heritage, and they include language, history, beliefs, customs, norms, etc. Proverbs fall in the latter category of cultural heritage.



#### **1.7.4 Reflection**

What do you think is the social function of proverbs? Why are they important? Can you write down a few proverbs from your ethnic group?

#### **1.7.5 Oral Poetry**

Oral poetry is not very different from written poetry, the main difference being that it is performed. Otherwise it also uses versified language and is an expression of feelings, ideas and thoughts. Oral poetry is mainly composed and delivered through oral means. It is often characterised by dramatisation of some parts of the poem.



#### **1.7.6 Reflection**

Have you had the opportunity to listen to an oral poetry delivery at a traditional function, especially during traditional ceremonies? Are you familiar with any traditional oral poem? What do you find most interesting about the oral poetry?

#### **1.7.7 Oral Narratives**

The oral narrative, also known as folk tale, is the best known form of African oral literature, and in Zambia it is commonly associated with stories of the hare, known by a variety of names among Zambian ethnic groups and regions of the country. The names include 'kalulu' among the Bembas and Ngonis, 'shakame' among the Lozi, and 'sulwe' among the Tonga.



### 1.7.8 Reflection

Do you know any oral narrative from your ethnic group or indeed any other Zambian ethnic group? What do you think the narrative teaches? What in your view is the role of the oral narrative in societies that use it?

## Unit 2

### Critical Approaches to the Reading of Literature

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this unit we focus on giving you an overview of the various approaches to the reading of literature. You need to appreciate the fact that a critical reading of literary texts is only possible with the application of systematic approaches to reading.



#### 2.2 Objectives

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

1. List the various types of critical approaches to the reading of literature.
2. Explain the characteristics of the critical approaches handled in this unit.
3. Analyse short texts using any of the critical approaches learnt.



#### 2.3 Reflection

Do you think it is healthy for readers to have very different opinions about a text of literature? Do you think it is possible for any two readers to have the same opinion about all the literary texts they have read?

#### 2.4 The Story of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant

Have you ever heard of the story of six blind men and an elephant? Read it below.

Once upon a time there lived six blind men in a village. One day the other villagers told them there was an elephant in the village. Curious to know what an elephant was like, they all became determined to feel it with their hands. Thus each one of them touched it, carefully feeling it.

Then the men sat down to discuss their experience. The man who had touched the elephant's leg confidently declared, 'The elephant is like a pillar!' However, the man who had touched the elephant's tail quickly countered, equally convinced of his opinion: 'That is not true! The elephant is like a rope.' The argument heated up when the third man, who had touched the elephant's trunk, chipped in: 'Both of you are wrong. It is like the thick branch of a tree!'

'Wrong!' shouted the fourth man. 'It is like a big hand fan.' He said this because he had felt the elephant's ear. He was however also contradicted by the fifth man who, having touched the elephant's belly, argued that it was like a huge wall. 'It is like a snake!' interjected the sixth man, who had touched the elephant's tusk.

The argument escalated, with each of the six men strongly arguing out his case and insisting the others were all wrong. The men were almost coming to blows when a wise man, who was passing by, stopped and asked them, 'What is the matter?' They explained the nature of the argument, each one of them still insisting his was right and the rest were not. The wise man, who was not blind, calmly said to the six men: 'All of you are right. Each one of you has touched the elephant, except you have touched only a feature of it. Your argument has been caused by the fact that each one of you thinks the part you touched is the whole elephant. It is true the elephant has all those features. There is therefore no need for you to quarrel.'

The six men understood the advice and were all happy that at least each one of them was right. The moral of this story, which originated from India, is that sometimes we fail to see the truth because we do not have the same perspective on issues like another person. We reject their view and think only ours is right. There could be different ways of stating a truth.

## **2.5 One Elephant, Different Perspectives**

The story of the elephant and the six blind men provides us with some lessons regarding the approaches to the reading of literature. Think of the elephant as a literary text – a novel, for example. If you and five other students of this course read a particular novel such as *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, it is not possible that you would all

end up with the same conclusions. This is because your reading, understanding and evaluation of the text would be determined by a variety of factors, including: how much you know about Achebe's other works and his writing style; how much you know about the theories of literature, if any; even your personal belief system and world view, among other factors.

Scholars of literature have over the centuries evolved ways of reading literary texts, or approaches. Each approach offers us a unique way to read a text, and each approach offers us a particular view of the text. It is like touching particular parts of the elephants – which also depends largely on the manner or angle of approach to the elephant. Each approach to the reading of a literary text is therefore valid and 'true' in itself, but, as in the case of the elephant story, you cannot get the full picture of the text by only looking at it from one approach. Each approach will yield some 'truth' but not the whole truth – just a feature of the whole picture. This scenario may best be summarised thus: 'one text, many perspectives'; 'same text, different perspectives'.

## **2.6 Approaches to Literature**

More specifically, approaches to the reading of literary texts are called Critical Approaches. This is because such reading of literature is associated with literary criticism, which refers to works (books and journal articles) written by experts who describe, analyse, interpret, or evaluate a work of literature (Kirszner and Mandell 2004). Critical approaches are tools used by literary critics, but are also available for use by students of literature like you. You are encouraged to understand critical approaches and how they may be used to read and analyse literary works.

As Roberts et al (2007) argue, many of the critical approaches to literature were developed during the twentieth century to create a discipline of literary studies comparable with disciplines in the natural and social sciences. Roberts et al (2007: 2011) argue thus: 'Literary critics have often borrowed liberally from other disciplines (eg., history, psychology, politics, anthropology) but have primarily aimed at developing literature as a study in its own right.'

What makes a critical approach to the reading of literature different from ordinary reading is that it applies literary theory to the reading, as opposed to merely reading for pleasure. As Booker (1996: 1) states, 'Literary theory is probably as old as literature itself. The ancient Greeks certainly devoted a great deal of theoretical reflection to literature, and works such as Aristotle's *Poetics* remain among the most important founding texts of literary theory.' The theories of literary analysis developed by Aristotle and expounded in his book remain relevant to this day.

Literary criticism concerns itself with a number of questions, some of which are captured by Roberts et al (2007: 2011):

At the heart of various critical approaches are many fundamental questions. What is literature? What does it do? Is its concern primarily to tell stories, to divert attention, to entertain, to communicate ideas, to persuade, and to teach, or is it to express and define emotions? To what degree is literature an art, as opposed to a medium for imparting knowledge? What more does it do than express ideas? How does it get its ideas across? What can it contribute to intellectual, artistic, political, and social thought and history? How is literature used, and how and why is it misused? Is it private? Public? What theoretical and technical expertise may be invoked to enhance literary studies? How valuable was literature in the past, and how valuable is it now? To what degree should literature be in the vanguard of social and political change?

You will notice from the types of questions associated with a critical reading of literature that a critical approach to the reading of literature goes deeper and further than a mere reading for the purpose of enjoyment or entertainment. Once you understand the theories of critical approaches to literature, you will notice the difference in your understanding and quality of analysis when you re-read the literary works you read in the past.

Now we would like to draw your attention to the various available critical approaches. We are not able, in this module, to delve into the details of each. The scope of this module only allows us to give you an idea of each approach. However, you will learn

about these critical approaches in detail in LIT 2710 (Classical, Romantic and Modern Criticism). The critical approaches include:

- Moral/Intellectual Approach
- Topical/Historical
- New Critical/Formalist
- Structuralism
- Feminist
- Marxist
- Psychological
- Archetypal
- Deconstructionism
- Reader-Response

You need to note here that the above list is by no means exhaustive. It only includes the most commonly used approaches, and the best known. There are other critical approaches that are less used such as: ecocriticism, also known as green studies (concerned with the relationship between literature and nature); geocriticism, also known as spatial literary studies (concerned with the elements of space and time in narratives). Other approaches include literary stylistics (which explores texts through the relationship between literature and linguistics). You also need to note that other scholars may refer to some of the above categories using different terms, but the most important thing is the concept. Below we shall discuss some of the approaches so that you can have an idea of how they work.

### **2.6.1 Moral/Intellectual Approach**

This approach is concerned with the content of a literary text – the ideas and values conveyed by the text. This approach is as old as literature itself because, traditionally, literature, whether written or oral, was aimed at disseminating and inculcating religion, philosophy and morality. A good example of such literature is the narrative tale, such as the type centred on the hare in Zambian folklore. When we study a piece of literature from the moral/philosophical approach, we concern ourselves not only with determining the lesson or message being projected, but also with whether the work is true or important. Does the text help the reader live a better life? How relevant is the text to social life? What are the themes of the work and what is their significance to the characters in the text as well as people in real life?

One of the weaknesses of this approach, however, is that it fails to recognise the fact that much of modern literature does not set out to teach a particular lesson or moral, but leaves it to the reader to determine how to interpret a work. Critics of the approach further argue that the propensity to hunt for a ‘message’ in a work of literature reduces its artistic value, bringing it down to the level of a sermon or political speech.

### **2.6.2 Topical/Historical Approach**

This approach focuses on the relationship between literature and the historical period it deals with. In this regard then the proponents of this approach stress the importance of the socio-historical context of the work. For example, they would be interested in the relationship between events or situations in the story and how they are related to real life events and situations of the period of time covered by the text. If the setting of a text is Lusaka in the early 60’s, this approach would be interested to find out what Lusaka was like in the 1960’s, then relate the text to the reality in historical perspective.

One of the advantages of this approach is that it helps identify anachronisms in a text. The word anachronism is made up of two Greek words, ‘ana,’ which means ‘against,’ and ‘chronos,’ which means ‘time’. Thus an anachronism in literature is the placement of an object, event, custom or person in the wrong period of time. To illustrate the point, we shall take you back to the example of the text set in the 60’s in Lusaka. If upon

reading the text you came across a reference to a mobile phone conversation between two of the characters, that would indeed be anachronistic because there were no mobile phones in use in Lusaka, or anywhere in the world for that matter, during the 60's. Sometimes, however, the reference might be to something – a thing, person or event – that may not be as obvious as a mobile phone; in which case you would then have to conduct some research using historical and other sources to establish the truth.

You need to be aware, however, that the topical/historical approach is also concerned with the background information, or personal context, of the author, as it springs from the assumption that the background and experiences of the author have can influence the author's attitude to a topic, as well as the style and content. One of the assumptions in this regard, for instance, is that a European may not write about Africa and Africans the same way as an African who knows and understands African culture.

One of the criticisms of this approach is that it leaves the user vulnerable to the danger of focusing on matters external to the text rather than the text itself. It is possible, the opponents of the approach argue, to get all the necessary external data on the historical facts surrounding the text and the author, but still not grasp the essence of the text itself.

### **2.6.3 New Critical/Formalist Approach**

This approach is also known simply as the New Criticism and is widely used in modern literary studies. It partly developed out of dissatisfaction with the topical/historical approach. The main argument of this approach is that a study of literature must be concerned primarily with the text itself as a formal, independent work of art. Thus the approach is in part concerned with literary devices used in a text such as point of view, tone, character, setting, plot, among others, because according to the proponents of the approach these devices are part of the form of the text. The form and content are more important than external factors.

Critics of the Formalist approach, however, have argued that it is an error to completely ignore the historical and authorial factors which give the text its context. They further argue that external sources do have some value in helping us understand literary texts.

#### **2.6.4 Structuralist Approach**

This approach stresses the need to establish relationships and connections among elements that appear to be separate and unique. Thus a structuralist is interested in determining the forms that unify all literature. Structuralists are able to analyse and compare texts that belong to different cultures and periods of time. Thus, for example, they may be interested in determining the common or related features between folk tales in Zambia and those from other cultures. The structural approach is therefore similar in some way to the field of study called comparative literature, which involves comparison of literatures from different cultures, time periods or genres.

Structuralism is concerned with comprehensive description of structures of a text. It is interested in various structures of the text, including language structures are utilised in linguistics. Thus structuralists are concerned with the interpretation of language and the role of linguistic structures in a work of literature – for example the grammar and how it might occur in various types of literature. Style determines language structures, and vice versa.

#### **2.6.5 Feminist Approach**

As the name suggests, feminist criticism is associated with feminist ideas. It uses feminist principles and theories to analyse literary texts. This is because it is a product of the women's movement of the 1960's. Feminist critics are concerned with how texts deal with the relationship between men and women, and how they deal with female characters and male characters. They are concerned with how social norms affect the way texts are written and interpreted, especially with regard to the place of men and women. Feminist critics tend to dismiss works that portray women negatively.

Critics of the approach, however, argue that it reduces texts to debate forums on feminist ideas. They also argue that feminism blinds its proponents from seeing a text from other angles or appreciating its beauty because they are too preoccupied with how it treats female characters.

### **2.6.6 Marxist Approach**

While feminist criticism has its roots in the feminist movement, the Marxist approach has its roots in the Marxist ideology attributed to Karl Marx (1818-1883). Marx argued that the economic struggle is central to life and the development of any society, and that this struggle was essentially between capitalist oppressors and the oppressed working people. Thus, while feminist criticism is concerned with the place of women in the literary text, Marxist criticism is concerned with the place of the economically oppressed in a work of literature. In essence the approach judges works of literature from the economic perspective. What is the economic status of the characters? How does their economic status affect their standing and role in society? Thus, the worth of a story is judged mainly on the basis of economic considerations.

Critics of the approach argue that it focuses on economic issues at expense of, or while giving little attention to, the aesthetic features of the work. The worth of a literary text, critics argue, cannot be judged solely or even mainly on the basis of how it handles the economic dynamics affecting the different characters.

### **2.6.7 Psychological/Psychoanalytical Approach**

This approach owes part of its theoretical foundation to the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Freud's psychoanalysis argued that behaviour is 'caused by hidden and unconscious motives' (Roberts et al 2007: 2025). Literary critics saw this concept as key to the understanding of characters in a work of fiction. The psychological or psychoanalytical approach, therefore, stresses the importance of psychological factors in the interpretation of characters in a literary work. Advocates of this approach concern themselves with the psychological motives behind the behaviour of characters in a work of fiction. The 'hidden' motives referred to earlier may be linked to childhood experiences and the type of relationship one had as a child while interacting with parents.



## 2.7 Reflection

Are you able to apply one of the above critical approaches to a short story of your choice?

## Unit 3

### Elements of Fiction

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this unit we focus on the Elements of Fiction, those elements that give fiction its form and content, and that are used as devices to create works of fiction. In order to competently analyse works of fiction, it is important to understand these elements and their role in the text. The elements include character/characterisation, setting, plot, storyline, narrator, point of view, theme, among others.



#### 3.2 Objectives

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

1. Explain the various elements of fiction.
2. Demonstrate how the various elements of fiction are related.
3. Explain the role of the elements in the development of a work of fiction.



#### 3.3 Reflection

What is the difference between theme and subject? Or would you say they mean the same thing? Can they be used in the same way in a work of fiction?

#### 3.4 *The Necklace* – Guy de Maupassant

\*INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

*This is an online version of the short story by French writer Guy de Maupassant. Born in 1850, Maupassant, who died in 1893, is considered one of the masters of the short story form of fiction. He was part of the naturalist movement of writers, who generally*

*portrayed human life and social experience in pessimistic terms. They also tended to reflect the disillusionment associated with the human experience. Maupassant wrote 300 shorts stories, six novels, three travel books and one volume of poetry. "The Necklace," also known as "The Diamond Necklace," is one of Maupassant's most famous works and was first published on 17 February 1884 in the French newspaper **Le Gaulois**. The purpose of including this short story is to afford you an opportunity to relate the elements of fiction to an actual short story.*

\*\*\*\*

She was one of those pretty and charming girls born, as though fate had blundered over her, into a family of artisans. She had no marriage portion, no expectations, no means of getting known, understood, loved, and wedded by a man of wealth and distinction; and she let herself be married off to a little clerk in the Ministry of Education. Her tastes were simple because she had never been able to afford any other, but she was as unhappy as though she had married beneath her; for women have no caste or class, their beauty, grace, and charm serving them for birth or family, their natural delicacy, their instinctive elegance, their nimbleness of wit, are their only mark of rank, and put the slum girl on a level with the highest lady in the land.

She suffered endlessly, feeling herself born for every delicacy and luxury. She suffered from the poorness of her house, from its mean walls, worn chairs, and ugly curtains. All these things, of which other women of her class would not even have been aware, tormented and insulted her. The sight of the little Breton girl who came to do the work in her little house aroused heart-broken regrets and hopeless dreams in her mind. She imagined silent antechambers, heavy with Oriental tapestries, lit by torches in lofty bronze sockets, with two tall footmen in knee-breeches sleeping in large arm-chairs, overcome by the heavy warmth of the stove. She imagined vast saloons hung with antique silks, exquisite pieces of furniture supporting priceless ornaments, and small, charming, perfumed rooms, created just for little parties of intimate friends, men who were famous and sought after, whose homage roused every other woman's envious longings.

When she sat down for dinner at the round table covered with a three-days-old cloth, opposite her husband, who took the cover off the soup-tureen, exclaiming delightedly: "Aha! Scotch broth! What could be better?" she imagined delicate meals, gleaming silver, tapestries peopling the walls with folk of a past age and strange birds in faery forests; she imagined delicate food served in marvellous dishes, murmured gallantries, listened to with an inscrutable smile as one trifled with the rosy flesh of trout or wings of asparagus chicken.

She had no clothes, no jewels, nothing. And these were the only things she loved; she felt that she was made for them. She had longed so eagerly to charm, to be desired, to be wildly attractive and sought after.

She had a rich friend, an old school friend whom she refused to visit, because she suffered so keenly when she returned home. She would weep whole days, with grief, regret, despair, and misery.

\*

One evening her husband came home with an exultant air, holding a large envelope in his hand.

"Here's something for you," he said.

Swiftly she tore the paper and drew out a printed card on which were these words:

"The Minister of Education and Madame Ramponneau request the pleasure of the company of Monsieur and Madame Loisel at the Ministry on the evening of Monday, January the 18th."

Instead of being delighted, as her husband hoped, she flung the invitation petulantly across the table, murmuring:

"What do you want me to do with this?"

"Why, darling, I thought you'd be pleased. You never go out, and this is a great occasion. I had tremendous trouble to get it. Every one wants one; it's very select, and very few go to the clerks. You'll see all the really big people there."

She looked at him out of furious eyes, and said impatiently: "And what do you suppose I am to wear at such an affair?"

He had not thought about it; he stammered:

"Why, the dress you go to the theatre in. It looks very nice, to me . . ."

He stopped, stupefied and utterly at a loss when he saw that his wife was beginning to cry. Two large tears ran slowly down from the corners of her eyes towards the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter with you? What's the matter with you?" he faltered.

But with a violent effort she overcame her grief and replied in a calm voice, wiping her wet cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I haven't a dress and so I can't go to this party. Give your invitation to some friend of yours whose wife will be turned out better than I shall."

He was heart-broken.

"Look here, Mathilde," he persisted. "What would be the cost of a suitable dress, which you could use on other occasions as well, something very simple?"

She thought for several seconds, reckoning up prices and also wondering for how large a sum she could ask without bringing upon herself an immediate refusal and an exclamation of horror from the careful-minded clerk.

At last she replied with some hesitation:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could do it on four hundred francs."

He grew slightly pale, for this was exactly the amount he had been saving for a gun, intending to get a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre with some friends who went lark-shooting there on Sundays.

Nevertheless he said: "Very well. I'll give you four hundred francs. But try and get a really nice dress with the money."

The day of the party drew near, and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy and anxious. Her dress was ready, however. One evening her husband said to her:

"What's the matter with you? You've been very odd for the last three days."

"I'm utterly miserable at not having any jewels, not a single stone, to wear," she replied. "I shall look absolutely no one. I would almost rather not go to the party."

"Wear flowers," he said. "They're very smart at this time of the year. For ten francs you could get two or three gorgeous roses."

She was not convinced.

"No . . . there's nothing so humiliating as looking poor in the middle of a lot of rich women."

"How stupid you are!" exclaimed her husband. "Go and see Madame Forestier and ask her to lend you some jewels. You know her quite well enough for that."

She uttered a cry of delight.

"That's true. I never thought of it."

Next day she went to see her friend and told her her trouble.

Madame Forestier went to her dressing-table, took up a large box, brought it to Madame Loisel, opened it, and said:

"Choose, my dear."

First she saw some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian cross in gold and gems, of exquisite workmanship. She tried the effect of the jewels before the mirror, hesitating, unable to make up her mind to leave them, to give them up. She kept on asking:

"Haven't you anything else?"

"Yes. Look for yourself. I don't know what you would like best."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin case, a superb diamond necklace; her heart began to beat covetously. Her hands trembled as she lifted it. She fastened it round her neck, upon her high dress, and remained in ecstasy at sight of herself.

Then, with hesitation, she asked in anguish:

"Could you lend me this, just this alone?"

"Yes, of course."

She flung herself on her friend's breast, embraced her frenziedly, and went away with her treasure. The day of the party arrived. Madame Loisel was a success. She was the prettiest woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling, and quite above herself with happiness. All the men stared at her, inquired her name, and asked to be introduced to her. All the Under-Secretaries of State were eager to waltz with her. The Minister noticed her.

She danced madly, ecstatically, drunk with pleasure, with no thought for anything, in the triumph of her beauty, in the pride of her success, in a cloud of happiness made up of this universal homage and admiration, of the desires she had aroused, of the completeness of a victory so dear to her feminine heart.

She left about four o'clock in the morning. Since midnight her husband had been dozing in a deserted little room, in company with three other men whose wives were having a good time. He threw over her shoulders the garments he had brought for them to go home in, modest everyday clothes, whose poverty clashed with the beauty of the ball-dress. She was conscious of this and was anxious to hurry away, so that she should not be noticed by the other women putting on their costly furs.

Loisel restrained her.

"Wait a little. You'll catch cold in the open. I'm going to fetch a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the staircase. When they were out in the street they could not find a cab; they began to look for one, shouting at the drivers whom they saw passing in the distance.

They walked down towards the Seine, desperate and shivering. At last they found on the quay one of those old nightprowling carriages which are only to be seen in Paris after dark, as though they were ashamed of their shabbiness in the daylight.

It brought them to their door in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they walked up to their own apartment. It was the end, for her. As for him, he was thinking that he must be at the office at ten.

She took off the garments in which she had wrapped her shoulders, so as to see herself in all her glory before the mirror. But suddenly she uttered a cry. The necklace was no longer round her neck!

"What's the matter with you?" asked her husband, already half undressed.

She turned towards him in the utmost distress.

"I . . . I . . . I've no longer got Madame Forestier's necklace. . . ."

He started with astonishment.

"What! . . . Impossible!"

They searched in the folds of her dress, in the folds of the coat, in the pockets, everywhere. They could not find it.

"Are you sure that you still had it on when you came away from the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I touched it in the hall at the Ministry."

"But if you had lost it in the street, we should have heard it fall."

"Yes. Probably we should. Did you take the number of the cab?"

"No. You didn't notice it, did you?"

"No."

They stared at one another, dumbfounded. At last Loisel put on his clothes again.

"I'll go over all the ground we walked," he said, "and see if I can't find it."

And he went out. She remained in her evening clothes, lacking strength to get into bed, huddled on a chair, without volition or power of thought.

Her husband returned about seven. He had found nothing.

He went to the police station, to the newspapers, to offer a reward, to the cab companies, everywhere that a ray of hope impelled him.

She waited all day long, in the same state of bewilderment at this fearful catastrophe.

Loisel came home at night, his face lined and pale; he had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," he said, "and tell her that you've broken the clasp of her necklace and are getting it mended. That will give us time to look about us."

She wrote at his dictation.

\*

By the end of a week they had lost all hope.

Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must see about replacing the diamonds."

Next day they took the box which had held the necklace and went to the jewellers whose name was inside. He consulted his books.

"It was not I who sold this necklace, Madame; I must have merely supplied the clasp."

Then they went from jeweller to jeweller, searching for another necklace like the first, consulting their memories, both ill with remorse and anguish of mind.

In a shop at the Palais-Royal they found a string of diamonds which seemed to them exactly like the one they were looking for. It was worth forty thousand francs. They were allowed to have it for thirty-six thousand.

They begged the jeweller not to sell it for three days. And they arranged matters on the understanding that it would be taken back for thirty-four thousand francs, if the first one were found before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs left to him by his father. He intended to borrow the rest.

He did borrow it, getting a thousand from one man, five hundred from another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes of hand, entered into ruinous agreements, did business with usurers and the whole tribe of money-lenders. He mortgaged the whole remaining years of his existence, risked his signature without even knowing if he could honour it, and, appalled at the agonising face of the future, at the black misery

about to fall upon him, at the prospect of every possible physical privation and moral torture, he went to get the new necklace and put down upon the jeweller's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace to Madame Forestier, the latter said to her in a chilly voice:

"You ought to have brought it back sooner; I might have needed it."

She did not, as her friend had feared, open the case. If she had noticed the substitution, what would she have thought? What would she have said? Would she not have taken her for a thief?

\*

Madame Loisel came to know the ghastly life of abject poverty. From the very first she played her part heroically. This fearful debt must be paid off. She would pay it. The servant was dismissed. They changed their flat; they took a garret under the roof.

She came to know the heavy work of the house, the hateful duties of the kitchen. She washed the plates, wearing out her pink nails on the coarse pottery and the bottoms of pans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and dish-cloths, and hung them out to dry on a string; every morning she took the dustbin down into the street and carried up the water, stopping on each landing to get her breath. And, clad like a poor woman, she went to the fruiterer, to the grocer, to the butcher, a basket on her arm, haggling, insulted, fighting for every wretched halfpenny of her money.

Every month notes had to be paid off, others renewed, time gained.

Her husband worked in the evenings at putting straight a merchant's accounts, and often at night he did copying at twopence-halfpenny a page.

And this life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years everything was paid off, everything, the usurer's charges and the accumulation of superimposed interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become like all the other strong, hard, coarse women of poor households. Her hair was badly done, her skirts were awry, her hands were red. She spoke in a shrill voice, and the water slopped all over the floor when she scrubbed it. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down by the window and thought of that evening long ago, of the ball at which she had been so beautiful and so much admired.

What would have happened if she had never lost those jewels. Who knows? Who knows? How strange life is, how fickle! How little is needed to ruin or to save!

One Sunday, as she had gone for a walk along the Champs-Elysees to freshen herself after the labours of the week, she caught sight suddenly of a woman who was taking a child out for a walk. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still attractive.

Madame Loisel was conscious of some emotion. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all. Why not?

She went up to her.

"Good morning, Jeanne."

The other did not recognise her, and was surprised at being thus familiarly addressed by a poor woman.

"But . . . Madame . . ." she stammered. "I don't know . . . you must be making a mistake."

"No . . . I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh! . . . my poor Mathilde, how you have changed! . . ."

"Yes, I've had some hard times since I saw you last; and many sorrows . . . and all on your account."

"On my account! . . . How was that?"

"You remember the diamond necklace you lent me for the ball at the Ministry?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"How could you? Why, you brought it back."

"I brought you another one just like it. And for the last ten years we have been paying for it. You realise it wasn't easy for us; we had no money. . . . Well, it's paid for at last, and I'm glad indeed."

Madame Forestier had halted.

"You say you bought a diamond necklace to replace mine?"

"Yes. You hadn't noticed it? They were very much alike."

And she smiled in proud and innocent happiness.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her two hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! But mine was imitation. It was worth at the very most five hundred francs! . . ."



### 3.5 Reflection

What lessons would you say the story contains for the reader? What do you find most interesting about this story? Does the ending of the story make you sad, angry, happy or disgusted? Do you think Mathilde deserves pity or contempt?

If you re-read the story from the psychological perspective, what issues do you think would come out? How do you think a Marxist reading of the story would look at Mathilde's situation?

### 3.6 Elements of Fiction

You will recall that literature has four genres: poetry, drama, prose fiction and non-fiction prose. In this module, however, we shall deal a little more with prose fiction because poetry and drama are also dealt with in more detail in other modules. In its original sense, fiction meant anything made up. Today, however, the term fiction refers to prose stories particularly the short story and novel; hence it is also referred to as prose fiction. Fiction emanates from the imaginative and creative powers of the author rather than from factual or historical situations. However, while both fiction and drama deal with stories, the main difference is that in fiction stories are characterised by narration – that is, the recounting or telling of events or actions in a particular sequence. We shall now turn to the elements of fiction. We shall not be able to deal with all of them, but we shall handle some of the critical ones. Sometimes we shall make reference to the contents of “The Necklace” in order to explain or illustrate a point.

#### 3.6.1 Verisimilitude

Although fiction is a product of the author's imagination and creative process and not necessarily a product of history, it is nonetheless based on realism or verisimilitude. In other words, although the world of fiction is not factual and real, it is however based on reality – that is, it seeks to reflect reality as perceived by the author and reconstructed. There is a connection between literature and life, and between life and art in general, because every product of literature is ultimately a product of the culture or society which

produces it. Also, we are able to relate to the contents of a work of literature because they are based on life as we know it. Literature reflects life.



### 3.6.2 Reflection

To what extent, and in what ways, would you say “The Necklace” is a reflection of real life?

### 3.6.3 Setting

Setting refers to the ‘time and place where the events found in a literary work took place’ (Asheli 2011: 70). The literary work here can be a poem, play, short story or novel, and the setting can include the description of places, backgrounds and objects in the environment where the action takes place. The setting may include actual names of places and people, real or imaginary physical features (such as mountains, lakes, rivers, vegetation, buildings, etc), actual events in the history of the place, social context in which the events occur, the culture of the place described in the story, the language or even accent of the characters described, among others.

You will notice if you look carefully that the examples of setting given above fall into two broad categories – place and time. Hence there are two types of setting: Time and Place. The time setting enables us to know *when* the events took place, while the place setting enables us to know *where* the events took place. The place setting is also referred to as *spatial setting* since it relates to space.



#### 3.6.3.1 Reflection

From your reading of “The Necklace,” what would you say about the time and spatial settings of the story?

### 3.6.4 Character/Characterisation

A character is a person or thing that is given a role to play in a literary work. Roberts et al (2007) define a character as ‘a verbal representation of a person’ while some scholars define a character as an imaginary person that literary writers create and use to carry the messages the writers wish to convey. Kirszner and Mandell (2004: 111) define a character as ‘a fictional representation of a person – usually (but not necessarily) a psychologically realistic depiction’. Writers utilise action, speech, commentary and description to present characters who exhibit human qualities or emotions such as hate, love, disappointment, joy and sadness, among others.

Writers create characters by means of characterisation, which may be defined as the process of giving attributes to a character. It may also be defined as the portrayal or description of a character. Kirszner and Mandell (2004: 111) define characterisation as ‘the way writers develop characters and reveal those characters’ traits to readers’. In short, characterisation refers to the manner in which writers present and reveal characters to their audience.



#### 3.6.4.1 Reflection

Can you list the characters presented in “The Necklace”? Which ones do you like and which ones do you dislike, and why? Which character would you say is ‘foolish’ and why?

#### 3.6.4.2 Types of Character

In life, in any given event, not every participant plays the same role, and not every participant has the same impact on the event. Similarly, in fiction the characters not only play different roles but the significance of the role they play differs from character to character. Thus characters in the same work of fiction or play can belong to a wide range of different categories.

### **(i) Main/Major and Minor Characters**

Some characters are considered to be main or major characters, while others are minor, depending on the level of significance of their role in the story. Mathilde, for example, is a major or main character in “The Necklace”.

### **(ii) Dynamic/Round and Static/Flat Characters**

A dynamic or round character is one who is modified by actions and therefore changes and grows with the passage of time. For example, at the beginning of the story the character may be ignorant of some facts and therefore behave wrongly, but by the end of the story the character might collect enough facts to change their actions or mentality. Another way of looking at dynamic characters is that we are told enough about them for us to think of them as three-dimensional, authentic, believable, original and true to life.

On the other hand, a static or flat character is one who does not change in the course of the story, or exhibits very minimal changes, if any. The attributes, attitudes and mentality of such a character remain the same throughout the story, to the extent that their behaviour becomes predictable. This type of character may also be referred to as one-dimensional.



#### **Reflection**

Would you say Mathilde changes in the course of the story? Which character or characters would you classify as static or flat?

### **(iii) Protagonist and Antagonist**

The terms protagonist and antagonist originated in ancient Greek drama. Protagonist literally means ‘first actor’, that is, main actor or principal actor. The protagonist was introduced to Greek drama in the sixth century B.C. by Thespis of Icaria. Later, Aeschylus added the ‘deuteragonist’ or second actor, while the ‘tritagonist’ or third actor was added by Sophocles. In today’s usage in drama and fiction, the protagonist is

simply the main or central character of a story, or the hero (heroine) – for example Mathilde in “The Necklace” is the heroine.

The antagonist, on the other hand, is simply the character who opposes the hero or heroine – or protagonist - of the story. Sometimes this character is referred to as the villain because of their opposition to the hero or heroine. Thus, while the reader generally tends to love or like the protagonist, they tend to dislike or hate the antagonist.

### **(iii) Motivation**

It is not always easy to understand characters in a story, particularly round or dynamic characters, because they tend to be complex. Like real people, they have mood swings, they struggle with decisions, resist or succumb to temptations, they harbour fears and dreams, etc. We need not necessarily approve of a character’s behaviour, but the most important consideration is whether or not the behaviour is *plausible*. Does the behaviour make sense in light of related circumstances? Why has the character acted or spoken in a particular way? This is what we mean by *motivation*. We need to know the reasons behind the behaviour for us to accept or believe it. Why, for example, does Mathilde act the way she does?

### **3.6.5 Plot**

Plot refers to the way in which a story’s events are arranged. In a literary work, as in real life, events happen at different times, and in a particular sequence. Thus, in a story, for events to make sense they must be arranged in a certain order. A plot is not a random of incidents but rather a logical connection of such incidents showing a meaningful relationship between the incidents. There must be a causal link between incidents or events in a story. How does one incident affect another? What, for instance, causes Mathilde to do what she does?

There are two types of plot: the linear and the non-linear. A linear plot, also known as a chronological plot, is one in which incidents are arranged in series based on the time sequence in which they occur. A non-linear plot, on the other hand, is the type which

includes flashbacks – or the last incidents are placed first. That is why this type of plot is sometime referred to as the flashback plot.

### **3.6.6 Theme**

The theme should not be confused with the subject of a literary work. The subject is the topic the work deals with, whereas the theme is the writer's interpretation of the subject, or the central or dominant idea formulated by the writer from the subject matter. Thus, for example, you can have two writers writing on the same subject matter but producing different themes. The two may write about corruption, but one may appear to support it while the other may appear to oppose it. A work of fiction may have more than one theme emanating from the subject. For example, in "The Necklace" some of the themes Maupassant brings out are the importance of honesty and tension between appearance and reality – the necklace is not worth as much as it appears to be because the diamond is a fake one.

### **3.6.7 Style**

Style refers to the unique manner in which a particular writer writes their work or expresses himself or herself in verse or prose. Thus, style can enable us to identify a particular writer because no two writers have exactly the same style. Think of style in terms of dressing. You do not dress the same as the next person, and your style of dress can enable us to identify you.

You can therefore determine or recognise the style of a particular writer from the way they use language: their choice of vocabulary (what is also called diction) or grammar, the use of certain figures of speech. In his famous novel *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, Chinua Achebe uses a good number of proverbs; but Maupassant does not.

### **3.6.8 Point of View**

Point of view refers to the person who tells the story in a literary work, or the vantage point or angle from which the events of the story are presented or narrated. Think of this scenario: an accident occurs at a street corner – a taxi driver hits a person trying to cross the road. There are witnesses to the accident, but they cannot all see the same

thing, although the common fact among them is the occurrence of the accident. They cannot see the same details. Imagine that one witness sees the accident from the tenth floor window of an adjacent building; another witness sees the event from ground level, just ten metres from the spot where it occurs. Yet another person witnesses the incident from a passing vehicle, and then there is the passenger in the taxi who is also a witness.

You will agree that the four would not be able to give exactly the same account of the accident, even if they would all agree that the accident did occur. This is because of two factors. First, their position in relation to the angle of observation, or their vantage point. Two, their position in relation to the distance to the spot where the incident occurs. Some would see more details than others; in fact, those closest to the accident spot would have the advantage of hearing more sounds related to the accident.

### **3.6.9 Narrator**

The narrator is the person who narrates the events of a story. In terms of the above accident scenario, if any of the four witnesses told the story, they would be the narrator. The narrator is not the same as the writer. Let us return to the accident scene as laid out above. Imagine that a journalist arrives on the scene in order to write a story for a newspaper. The journalist might decide to hear the story from any of the four witnesses, or indeed from all of them. However, although the journalist would write the account of the witnesses, he or she would merely be the writer of the story, not the witness.

To write a story, therefore, the writer chooses the narrator, who may not have the same views or personality as the writer. The term 'persona' is often used for such a narrator. Persona means 'mask'. Indeed, the writer assumes a mask to tell the story. The persona can either be one of the characters participating in the events, or one that observes them as a non-participant.

### **3.6.9.1 First-Person Narrator**

The first-person narrator is also known as the I-narrator, or sometimes the we-narrator. Often the first-person narrator is a major character. This narration is marked by the use of the pronoun 'I' or 'we'.

### **3.6.9.2 Third-Person Narrator**

Unlike the first-person narrator, the third-person narrator is not one of the characters in the story. This is the kind of narrator used by Maupassant in the above story. This kind of narration is marked by the use of the pronouns 'he,' 'she,' 'they.' There are three types of third-person narrators: omniscient, limited omniscient, and objective narrator.

#### **(i) Omniscient Narrator**

This kind of narrator is all-knowing – that is, he or she can know everything about everything and everyone in the story, and can potentially disclose everything. In this case the narrator not only presents action and dialogue but also reports what goes on in the minds of the characters, or is able to tell us their thoughts. Since the omniscient narrator is not part of the proceedings in the story, their knowledge is limited to the experiences and thoughts of the participating characters.

#### **(ii) Limited Omniscient Narrator**

In this kind of narration, the narrator is limited to the experiences of a single character. In other words, this narration will tell you everything that one character experiences with their senses, but not what they do not experience.

#### **(iii) Objective Narrator**

This type of narrator remains entirely outside the minds of the characters. We are not told anything about the thoughts of the characters. We see events the way we would in a movie or play, with no access to the thoughts or attitudes of the characters. The narrator merely presents dialogue and recounts events the way they happen. The

reader is therefore allowed to interpret events on his or her own without any interference from the narrator.

### **3.6.9.3 Second-Person Narrator**

This is the least commonly used form of narration. The narrator speaks to someone else who is addressed with the pronoun 'you.' There are two main ways in which the second-person is used. In the first type of situation, a narrator (usually a first-person speaker) tells a listener what he or she has done and said at a past time. This might involve the retelling of events, such as when the listener was a child. In the second type of situation, some narrators appear to address a 'you' but are instead referring mainly to themselves in preference to using the 'I'. In other cases, the narrator uses the indefinite 'you,' in which case the 'you' does not refer or apply to a specific listener but rather to anyone at all. The 'you' in this regard is non-gender specific.

### **3.6.10 Suspense**

Suspense refers to a 'state of uncertainty, anticipation and curiosity as to the outcome of a story or play, or any kind of narrative in verse or prose' (Cuddon 1991: 937). Suspense is a technique by which the outcome of an event or incident is deliberately delayed by the writer particularly at the time the reader is eagerly following the story. This causes the reader to become enthusiastic in following the story so as to find out the outcome. In "The Necklace" Maupassant creates suspense – causing us to read on until we find out what happens to Mathilde; and there is a twist right at the end of the story when we learn that the diamond that had been the cause of so much misery and stress for Mathilde was actually fake.

## Unit 4

### Writing a Literary Essay

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this unit you are accorded the opportunity to learn how to write a literary essay, or an essay in literature. It is important for you to know that not all essays are written the same way; the way essays are written in history is not the same way they are written in literature. You will be able to learn about the two types of essay in literature – the expository and argumentative.



#### 4.2 Objectives

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

1. Explain the various parts of a literary essay.
2. Explain the difference between the expository and argumentative essays.
3. Discuss the significance of language in the construction of the essay.
4. Demonstrate the use of the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system in the essay.

#### 4.3 Types of Essay

There are two types of essay – the expository and argumentative type.

##### 4.3.1 Expository Essay

This is the type of essay whose main aim is to explain an idea, thing or phenomenon. For example, an essay talking about the importance of a balanced diet or the features of a novel. An expository novel generally deals with issues that are obvious and straightforward and generally agreed on. Thus, for example, there is no debate on the importance of the balanced diet. Some of the actions associated with the expository essay include: illustrating, elucidating, defining, etc.

### 4.3.2 Argumentative Essay

As the name suggests, an argumentative essay is one in which the writer argues for a particular point of view, or defends a proposition that is not accepted by everyone. Most of the essays you will be required to write fall under this category, because you are expected to argue out your points. Actions associated with this type of essay include: evaluating, analysing, examining, etc.

## 4.4 Preparing to Write the Essay

### 4.4.1 Understanding the essay question

The first and most important step is to understand the essay question. What are you being asked to do? You can know by paying close attention to the instruction words – that is, the action words of the question. Look at the essay questions below:

- (i) Illustrate the dangers of corruption to the Zambian economy.
- (ii) Analyse the role of Christian missionaries in the downfall of Umuofia in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*.
- (iii) Demonstrate the foolishness of character X in novel Y.
- (iv) Evaluate the impact of the amended constitution on the Zambian political scene.
- (v) Compare and contrast Zambians and South Africans.
- (vi) "Politics is a dirty game." Discuss.
- (vii) Explain the significance of education to the process of modernisation.

The underlined instruction words provide a guide for the kind of action required for each essay question. Each of the words requires a specific type of action from the writer. Analysing is not the same as explaining; similarly evaluating is not the same as illustrating or demonstrating. Comparing means finding the similarities while contrasting means finding the differences. Once you know what is required of you, then you may proceed to work on the essay.

#### **4.4.2 Working on the draft**

Work on a draft, listing the necessary points, depending on the instructions and whether it is an expository or argumentative essay. If it is an argumentative essay, come up with points for and against the proposition in question. You may come up with position A and position B, then jot down points in favour of each. However, you must ensure you pick strong points. Then decide which position you are most comfortable with.

#### **4.4.3 The essay plan**

Before turning the draft into an actual essay, it helps to first work on an essay plan. The essay plan can take the format below.

- Title
- Introduction
- Body
- Conclusion

##### **(i) Title**

This serves the purpose of giving the reader an idea of the content of the essay. The title must be related to, and in a way must reflect, the content of the essay. Do not fall prey to writing sensational titles that bear no relationship to the content.

##### **(ii) Introduction**

The notes under the introduction must reflect or give an indication of what is to come in the main body of the essay. This section must also contain a Thesis statement: that is, a statement that clearly states the main point of the essay or, in the case of an argumentative essay, the statement must state the essay's position. In addition, it is important that the section includes a 'hook' or statement that immediately captures the attention of the reader.

##### **(ii) Body**

Each paragraph must begin with a point on the Topic sentence, or a sentence that gives an indication of the content of each paragraph. There should also be a note about what

has to be said in support of the topic sentence. Each paragraph must only have one major point, followed by illustrations or further information in support of the topic sentence.

#### (iii) Conclusion

The conclusion must have points wrapping up what is said in the main body. In addition, it must restate the position of the essay as indicated in the thesis statement. There must therefore be a logical link between the conclusion and the main body.

#### **4.4.4 Organising the points**

The points must be selected in order of importance or strength. In other words, start with the strongest point in the first paragraph. This is for the reason that you need to immediately capture the attention of the reader. Your second strongest or second best point must be used in the paragraph just before the conclusion. In between the two put your weaker or less interesting points. The placement of the second best point in the penultimate paragraph is meant to rekindle the reader's interest after reading weaker points.

#### **4.4.5 Transitions**

In order to enhance cohesion in the text, there is need for you to transition smoothly between one paragraph and the next. In other words, you need to use conjunctions to facilitate the smooth transition. Conjunctions are expressions such as: Therefore, despite, in spite of, nevertheless, nonetheless, regardless of that, in addition, additionally, furthermore, finally, in conclusion, etc.

#### **4.5 Writing the Essay**

It is advisable that you write the first draft before the final essay, so that you have the opportunity to make adjustments where necessary. The draft should contain more details than the essay plan; something akin to adding flesh to the bones of the essay plan. The final essay must ensure that there are no repetitions or contradictions. In addition ensure that you do not make significant statements that lack supporting

evidence from appropriate sources; also ensure that the grammar and punctuation are as expected.

#### **4.5.1 Essay Format**

The final essay must have the following format:

- Title page
- Introduction
- Main body
- Conclusion
- Bibliography/References

The title page needs to contain the following information: full title of the course, with course code. It must also include the essay question in full, not a paraphrased version. In addition, the title page must clearly display the student's name and that of the lecturer or tutor; as well as the due date of the assignment.

#### **4.6 Referencing System**

4.6.1 The literary essay we have been discussing is purely academic in nature. Therefore, you need to be aware that the contents of the essay should be supported by references to credible sources. If you do not acknowledge your sources your essay amounts to a work of plagiarism, or presenting other people's ideas or writings as if they are your own. On the other hand, acknowledging your sources strengthens your points and gives it a greater degree of credibility.

4.6.2 One of the most common forms of plagiarism is the lifting of information from the internet. Avoid cutting and pasting ideas from the internet. It is a lazy way of doing your work. Internet sources should be acknowledged in the same way as book sources. However, you are advised to avoid quoting from unreliable internet sites, particularly Wikipedia. This is because Wikipedia has no quality control mechanism: anyone can add any information to a text. The added information might or might not be correct.

4.6.3 In order to acknowledge sources of information, academic essays utilise referencing systems, and there are a number of them, such as the Harvard citation style, the Modern Language Association (MLA) citation style, and the American Psychological Association (APA) citation style, among others. In this course, however, we mainly use the APA style. You are advised to check on the APA style on the internet or other sources, especially because the system keeps on being updated.

## **Module Summary**

Now that you are done with the module, you need to remind yourself of what has been discussed in the four units. In Unit 1 we have focused on the question of the nature of literature, while in Unit 2 we shifted our focus to the critical approaches to the reading of literature. Unit 3 has afforded you the opportunity to get acquainted with the elements of fiction. Finally, in Unit 4 we have concerned ourselves with the writing of a literary essay.

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