

**UNIVERSITY FELIX HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY**

**Department of English**

**INITIATION TO LIERATURE**

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**General purpose:** This course deals with the definition of literature and its major characteristics. It also considers the substance of literature and looks at its conventional nature, conflict, ambiguity, the specific to general phenomenon and the purpose for literature studies. By the end, students will know the different components of literature and its relevance in African modern society..

### **1-Definition of literature**

The term literature takes its origin from the adjective literate which means ability to read and write. As such, literature refers to writings in prose or verse, printed and unprinted materials meant to give instruction and education to people. In the view of Agyekum, “Literature is the artistic, imaginative and creative expression of individual and group expresses, nature and values of a group of people over a certain period of time by the medium of language whether written or oral. It is a representation of life experience and reality of the world through linguistic creativity and imagination” (1999: 7). In other words, literature is regarded as “Artistic creation through language and its products” (Chapman, 1992: 619). Here, literature is compared to any artistic work except that the raw material for the production of literature is language. In literature, something is constructed which is related to “real experience”. What has been created in language is known only through language. It is through the language that nature and reality is reflected. In literature, there is much more freedom and license for language is relaxed.

Literature is also considered as an initiation of life. This implies that literature brings about a strong link between man and nature, reality, metaphysics and fantasy. Whatever happens between man and any of these elements.

### **2-What can be found through Literature and why study Literature?**

The language of any country is a precious possession, and like all precious possessions, it needs to be cared for and cherished by the people. Literature offers two basic functions: utility-function and aesthetic-beauty. The level of each function in a literary art may depend on the type; whether fiction, poetry or drama. Literature is the use imaginative language and it has meaning beyond referential meaning of the individual words. In literature, there is a conscious, deliberate and consistent exploitation of language for aesthetic purposes.

Non-literature\_\_\_\_\_Literature

Hogins (1984) identifies a lot of things that can be found in literature. These elements of literature have a lot to offer to mankind. In essence, they are the things that the authors contribute to the society, and the individuals in it need to study literature.

## **2- Literature offers a form of escape**

Through literature you are released from the bounds that entangle yourself. You are able to experience what it is to be poor, rich, lovely, sad, etc. simply through your own imagination. Literature can also function to relieve the writer, presenter, readers or audience from the pressures of emotions. When people express pent up emotions they get relieved. Through the use of indirection and creativity in literary work, artists can comment on administration without being committed. They can always defend themselves under the cover of the ambiguity of literary language. When literature offers us an escape from life, the same literature provides us with a new in-route and equipment to return to our status quo. Literature operates in dualism, it can make an unmake; both happiness and sadness can be found in genres of literature especially songs and drama. Literature will offer us an imitation or replica to life and will also help us to understand life better. Through literature we recognize and perceive aspects our situations and ourselves better (Scholes and Sullivan, 1988: 6).

## **3-The components of literature**

Literature can be divided into three major areas which are Prose, Poetry and Drama (Imaginative writing is usually grouped under these main heads: drama, fiction, poetry). These divisions are referred to as genres of literature. Genre is a concept used in literature to classify the distinct categories or divisions into which literary works are grouped according to structure and style. Each major genre can in turn be divided into smaller genres.

### **3-1-Prose**

Prose is defined as ordinary non-metrical form of written or spoken language. Prose is the language of day-to-day interactions. It is the commonest and the most popular out of the genres of literature. A planned transfer of prose into writing is called a novel.

#### **3-1-1-Kinds of Prose**

Prose is divided into **fiction** and non-fiction.

**-Fiction** is a writing derived from the imagination of the author rather than from fact. It is make-believe. fiction: is more associated with novels and stories. Examples of fiction include the following:

- a) *Novel* - extended fictional prose narrative
- b) *Novella*- a fiction of intermediate length.
- c) *Epistolary novel* – a prose in which the narrative is carried forward by letters written by one or more of the characters. An example *So Long Letter* by Mariama Ba.
- d) *Memoir*: this is a written account of memorable experiences in an author's life.

**-Non-fiction:** It is the direct opposition of fiction. It is drawn from history or fact of the author rather than from his imagination.

**-Autobiography:** the prefix “auto” means self. Hence autobiography means self-written. This is the true account of a person's life as recorded by the same person. Examples: *The African Child* by Camara Laye, *Zambia shall be free* by Kenneth Kaunda

**-Biography:** biography is the story of a person's life written by another person.

### 3-1-2-Features of prose

#### a) *The story:*

- **One of the most important elements of a novel**
- An element by which a literary work may be described as a novel
- **It may be a vehicle for the author's ideas or opinions about a particular issue**
- It is chiefly presented through narration. There is no one method of narrating the story in the novel to another.

The story may be told:

- By means of letters from one person in the novel to another
- By the character-narrator who makes comments and passes all the judgments (*A Man of the People*)
- The first person method or the autobiographical method.

#### b) **Characters**

These are participants or actors in any work of art. A character is a person or animal who takes part in the action of a literary work. Characterization is the act creating and developing a character. There are two primary methods of characterization: direct and indirect. In direct characterization, a writer simply states a character's traits. In indirect characterization, character is revealed by one of the following means:

1. By words, thoughts, or actions of the character
2. By descriptions of the character's appearance or background

3. By what other characters say about the character
  4. By the ways in which other characters react toward the character
- Two senses: -the *person* who appears in the novel; -the *nature* or *temperament* of that person.

The following are some terms used to describe various types of characters:

- The main character in a literary work is the one on whom the work focuses.
- Major characters in a literary work include the main character and any other characters who play significant roles
- A minor character is one who does not play a significant role.
- A flat character is one who is one-dimensional. A static character is one who does not change in course of a work
- A stock character
- A round character is one who is complex and multi-faced, like a real person
- A dynamic character is one who changes in the course of a work
- Ways in which the novelist reveals characters:
  - They may be revealed through *action*: the character may be depicted as impulsive, cowardly, cruel, kind... the action has a direct impact on the reader and, consequently, further comment by the novelist may not be necessary.
  - Another way is through *description*
  - *Speech* can also be made to reveal character.
  - The novelist may reveal character through an analysis of the character's particular predicament or his moral nature
- **A character-sketch**
  - What the character says about himself, how, why, when, where, and to whom he says it
  - What he says about other characters, how, why, when, where, and to whom he says it
  - What other characters say about him, how, why, when, where, and to whom he says it
  - His behaviour, thoughts, beliefs, etc.
  - What the novelist says about him

**c) Six things to look for**

- Things that are emphasized
- Things that are repeated

- Things that are related
- Things that are alike
- Things that are unlike
- Things that are true to life

#### **d) The setting of background**

The story and the characters must exist in a particular time and space. The setting may be a ship's cabin, a forest, a city, a room or a combination of these in which the characters speak, think and behave in their own particular ways.

- Some novelists give a full description of the setting. Other novelists rarely do so
- Apart from providing space for the story and characters the setting performs other function as well. The setting must be seen as the environment. A description of the environment may help in describing character.
- The setting may actually determine the behavior, the thoughts, the fortunes of the characters.

#### **e) The theme**

The central idea of a prose

- For what purpose the novelist has organized the story, characters and the setting into a novel?
- What is the central pre-occupation or theme of the novel?

#### **4-Poetry**

- Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the help of reasoning. It is also the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.
- Poetry is the sort of writing stimulated by emotion, expressing a deep feeling that cannot be well-expressed in ordinary writing.
- The language of poetry is richer than that of drama and Prose.

#### **Structure of a poem**

A study of the structure covers:

- Refrain: it serves as a link between all the stanzas and so acts as a unifying device

- Repetition: repetition particular words serves as an emphasis; usually much of the meaning of the poem centres round those repeated words and their constant appearance serves as a means of consolidation.
- Word-length affecting speeds: the pace or speed of a poem is closely bound with the immediacy of the poet's message.

**The validity of the poet's message :** To view it against the background of the moral values of our own society as well as our own personal values.

**The aesthetic value:** A judgement of the artistry of the poet and how this pleases or displeases us.

## **5-THE DYNAMICS & THE ACTING FORCES**

A literary story is invariably an intellectual journey comprised of three steps.

### **5-1-The Initial State**

It corresponds to the preparation and the presentation of an operating program. We are given the elements that will start the whole process or **the cause of the story**. The **Initial State** necessarily includes **the triggering** event (what causes the action to take place).

### **5-2-The Transformational Process**

It is about the carrying out of the Initial State program. It concerns all the events that will help promote the achievement of the program. The interest of the dynamics is to show the combination and interaction of the acting forces, ie all the elements, all the entities that have an incidence on the program either in a positive or a negative way. Acting forces are classified into six (6) categories according to Greimas

#### **5-2-1Senders or addresser**

**The Senders or addresser** is the entity, individual or agent that frames the program (which can be a wish, an order). So the sender plays a key function in that program and he starts the whole course of action.

#### **5-2-2-Addressee**

It is **the recipient** of the program. He deals with the entities the program is addressed to.

#### **5-1-3-Question or Object**

It equates with the contents of the program. It is what is been done, the dream which is to be achieved, the order which is to be complied within.

**5-1-4-Actuator or subject**

It is the individual or entity supposed to be the implementation agent; its role is to translate into reality the contents of the program.

**5-1-5-Allies or supporters**

They are the supporters of the subjects and as a result they work toward the fulfillment of the program. In other terms they stand as a realization of the program.

**5-1-6-The Opponents**

Finally come the opponents who are the exact adversaries to the allies. There are the opponents of the allies in the sense that their duty is to make the achievement of the program unfeasible, unworkable.

Sender	Quest	Addressee
	Actuator	
Allies		Opponents

**6-Structural component of a plot:**

Gordon and Kuehner (1999:4) summarized the structural components of a plot as follows: exposition, initiating incident, rising action, climax, falling action and the resolution or denouement. Every plot must have a structure, which is in the form of a pyramid. If readers are to comprehend the plot of a story, the beginning must include exposition. It is the exposition that provides the information about the setting, the major and minor characters and the situation.

-The exposition deal with the explanatory information a reader needs to understand and appreciate fully the situation in the story and how the events unfolds.

-There is an initiating incident that will alter the situation established in the exposition and then sets the conflict in motion. Thus the middle of the story presents a complication or conflict within the main character between the character and in nature or between characters.

-The climax is considered as the point of greatest conflict, the emotional high point, the peak of action or suspense, the turning point in the plot, the point at which one of

the opposing forces gains the advantage. It is at the climax where the main character decides and takes an action that will either enrich or endanger this situation.

-There are certain events that immediately follow the climax and these are referred to as the falling action. In novels, the falling action of the story may be fairly long; in short stories, it tends to be fairly short.

-The falling action gradually leads to the end that presents the resolution, a solution or unraveling of the conflict, sometimes called the denouement.

### **Acting Schema**

Initiating incident-climax -resolution

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