

ACADEMIC SYLLABUS

- **DISCIPLINE : African Studies/ POETRY**
- **LEVELS : Licence 3**

COURSE TITLE : AFRICAN POETRY, READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM

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- **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

To point out what is happening in African poetry

To enlighten the notion of the poet as visionary, oracle, prophet, and social consciousness

- **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- **COURSE CONTENT PER SESSION**

Introduction

- A poem is a highly ordered artistic creation and that the only way one can see its full beauty displayed and understand it thoroughly is to be able to accept it on its own terms.
- A poem must be seen as a cumulative verbal entity through which the poet expresses a vision of life hidden to the less imaginative
- “We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians, and poets”.
- Every great event such as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied to understand what is happening in African poetry, one must first consider **the literary tradition** out of which African poets write, a tradition in which music plays an important part along with a number of other distinguishing element, a tradition that allows form continuity rich in variety and promise.

- poets of what one can term The African Consciousness are poets of purpose: Atukei Okai, Kofi Anyidoho, Barolong Seboni, Jack Mapanje, Niyi Osundare with songs, words, and music suited to the occasion
- There are two overlapping and intersecting traditions in African poetry, the folk and the formal, and there exist clusters of themes around the idea of liberation/ freedom, an idea which is energized by the oral tradition,

CHAPTER 1- PHASES OR LITERARY GENERATION

- 1) ***A period of experiment***: the work of the writer tends to be exploratory, he is attempting to find a new vision by throwing off techniques associated with the modes of experience he is rejecting.
- 2) ***A period of maturity***, during which writers, having assimilated what was learned in the first phase, are able to take technique as such for granted. The great writer is usually concerned with technique only as an aspect of the particular work in hand at the moment.
- 3) ***A period of consolidation***, during which genuine artists are carried along on a wave, exploring further aspects of the new vision, enlarging it, and sometimes producing work comparable to and even weightier than the work of the preceding phase. The writer has become a stylist.
Poetry is like the other arts in that it is continually offering us new ways of seeing our environment and our experiences.

The influential poets are

- a) J. P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor, Wole Soyinka, Dennis Brutus , to quote just a few.
- b) (innovations and experiments of the modernists)
- c) Niyi Osundare, Okai Atukwei, Ben Okri, Barolong Seboni, Kofi Anyidoho, (the sense of community and identity, concern with national as well as personal identity)

CHAPTER 2: AFRICAN POETIC REFERENCES

- African linguistic elegance can be seen in naming and enumerating techniques; drum or griot rhythmic effects; hyperbolic imagery common to African vernacular speech, compressed and cryptic imagery, and “worrying the line”, expression for “changes in word order, repetitions of phrases within the line itself.
- The use of **repetition/ recurrence and improvisation** as tradition-derived patterns which find their most characteristic shape in performance: rhythm in music, dance and **language**
- Untroubled voice: call and response pattern: the statement-variation-response sequence which is the essence of **African Romance- Poetry in Dialogue**. The importance of the call-and-call response pattern is its continual affirmation of collective voice.
- **Retention theory**: looks at **Africanisms** or **survivals** from African culture. As the Yoruba proverb states: “However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source”. **Retention is rhyming game in which one opponent attacks another by reciting traditional insults directed at the other opponent’s relatives.**
- The game is a test of keeping one’s cool as well as a test of creative skills. It derives from the African tradition of institutional insults and ancestor derision Cf Abuse poetry or Halo poetry.

Chapter2: Reader-response criticism : Affective stylistics and subjective reader-response theory

CHAPTER 3 - AFRICAN TRADITIONAL POETRY

There is no modern/ new without the traditional/old and old without new. Ojaide (1996:30) posits that:

Modern African poetic aesthetics are unique in possessing a repertory of authentic African features. This authenticity manifests itself in the use of concrete images derived from the

fauna and flora, proverbs, indigenous rhythms, verbal tropes and concepts of space and time to establish a poetic form.

Poetry stems from the culture of a society. The models of the first literary African poets were likely to be genteel or antedate to current poetic practices.

Poetry- the main male orator in West African society was the griot, a combination of poet, musician and historian. He was known as Okeyame in Ghana, Diali in Mali and Jali in the Gambia. The griot acted as both history book and newspaper, with similarities to the European court jester or travelling troubadour..

Many African societies allow poets an unusual freedom of speech to criticise those in power, but a major role for the poet in southern African society was that of **the *imbongi***, or praise singer.

- Poetry is cultural heritage of almost peoples. Kipling calls it “uncounted folk” : ***oriki*, dirge poetry, the heroic poetry**, poetry in dialogue..

Poetry is meant to be recited or sung orally. African poetry moved from oral to written, setting the boundaries between old African poetry and modern African poetry. The written form is regarded as the modern on the basis of the period it represents and its medium of presentation. **Original African poetry is oral.**

- African societies have rich traditions of meaningful oral poetry
- Poetry and religion are related
- There are other forms of oral traditional poetry unrelated to religion: the songs and lyrics, dirges, incantations, praise songs, heroic recitations and chants

Note: these traditional poems

- Possess the same beauty of imagery and language

Traditional poetry is of course essentially oral, and its full force is best realized when performed:

° The influential poet is Okot p'Bitek . *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*

CHAPTER 4: QUESTIONS READER-RESPONSE CRITICS ASK ABOUT LITERARY TEXTS

- How does the interaction of text and reader create meaning? For example, what events are omitted, unexplained or incomplete?
 - a) **Affective stylistics:** How does what the **text does to** the reader differ from what **the text says** or means?

Look for things that are...

- a) **Emphasized**
 - Amount of space:** a poem can emphasize something by devoting a large portion of space to it
 - Stated purpose:** the speaker in the poem may emphasize points by telling us straight out what he or she is up to.
 - Order:** a third way to emphasize something is to give it a strategic placement in the section of the poem. This comes before that; or this follows that.
- b) **Repeated**
 - Repetition reinforces:**
 - Terms, phrases, and clauses
 - Characters or speakers: they reappear
 - Incidents and circumstances
- c) **Related**
 - Questions and answers
 - Cause and effect ricocheting around the text
- d) **Alike, likeness**
 - Similes
 - Metaphors
- e) **Unlike, opposition, contrast, and differences**
 - Use of but, and yet
 - Metaphors
 - Irony
- f) **True to life:** things that help us see truth in realistic terms

b) Subjective reader-response: to produce meaning or knowledge. Meaning is not an objective reality waiting to be discovered; it is constructed by reader to fulfill specific needs.

Give a personal appraisal, assessment of the content

Chapter 4: Projecting the reader: a reader-response analysis of *AFRICAN ROMANCE* BY IFEOMA CHINWUBA

Chinwuba is a very society-conscious writer, and is always exploring and exposing something of the dichotomy that exists in human situation, something of the shadow between the idea and the reality.

AFRICAN ROMANCE: a long poem in a new art form; in the tradition of elegy that is to say, on the common theme of expressing sorrow at some loss. The lines of the poem are **prosaic**, rendered in ordinary language structure. The poet mixes her styles at will, including the elegiac and the meditative. It is a **dramatic poem**. In dramatic poetry events are described in the words of the speaker. Dramatic poetry re-creates an event, using dialogue or monologue as well as description. In a dramatic poem we see the characters interacting with and talking to one another, and as a result it seems as if we are actually witnessing the event.

The most important thing this new development of African poetry has introduced is the restoration of poetry to a public event in the African tradition.

In *African Romance*, though the poem/poet/reader is bound to the printed text, success depends upon

- the speaking voices, without which the poem is rather substanceless on the page
- The intensification of the dramatic impact
- The internal structure which is that of a dialogue or a debate: a debate between four sets of values, symbolized in persons of MALAMA, MAIGIDA, Kinspeople, and the CAREER MISTRESS

It is something of a “free” and not organic structure

The truth is that MAIGIDA is passionless and, as such, sounds airy and unconvincing. Indeed he is at his most powerful when he is faithfully airing biases

STYLE AND LANGUAGE

- “ *Double writing or Dialogism*: the long poem is simultaneous production of texts from Western and African sources (by incorporating oral features) : The use of vernacular words; an equivalent cannot be found in English or where the local African word will be better, perhaps with the help of a glossary, this can be very effective. The oral emphasis is revealed by textual manipulation of what might be described as African ideophonic linguistic resource or *ideophonic sequences*.

- The use of:

- *Parallel structures* and repetition
- *Rhetorical questions* and the engaged poetic voice
- a *confident-like tone*. This is, of course a ploy to get the reader interested
- Images full of nuance and suggestion
- Satire in which certain individuals, institutions, types of behavior, or humanity in general are ridiculed or criticized in a humorous manner.. the purpose of satire is to promote changes in society or humanity. Satire is a writing that mocks at the follies of individuals or society to foster a change for the better.

THEMES

- **The poetic discourse as “identity kit”** or the social notion of discourse (discursive practices): In *African Romance* “discourse” goes beyond language use to include power relations and hierarchical structures in society displayed through words, actions, values and beliefs. Discourse here signals the common sets of things, interests, goals, and activities that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a group..

METHOD OF ASSESSMENT :

Type of evaluation

- A written examination at the end of the course
- The student will submit a brief term -paper (5-8p) analyzing an

excerpt from *African Romance*

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