

**MODES OF LITERARY PRESENTATION: FOCUS ON THE  
AREAS OF DIVERGENCE.**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines the different modes of literary presentation. Literature which is said to be a way of literary expression is usually expressed in different literary ways. The thrust of this paper is to examine the three major different modes of literary presentation and to find out the factors that make for their individual differences. Each of these three major modes has its own characteristics which differentiate it from the others. The prose fiction for example, is usually in narrative form, drama appears in dialogue while poetry is usually in stanza form. To carry out this work effectively various works on Igbo literature in the related areas as well as literary works on the three major modes of literary presentation were studied by the researcher. The researcher actually observed that there are remarkable differences between these modes of literary presentation. These differences enable each mode to perform the functions which literature intends to perform. It is hoped*

*that this work will be useful to the students of literature as well as to the literary scholars and critics.*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Literature can be said to be the entire collection of books of high merit containing works which are products of creative use of imagination in a particular language. It can also be seen as a mode of expression. Expressions are done or inter-preted in literary ways.

From the start of our first encounter with literary works, we begin the process of literary criticism as we formulate questions, first of all, about the mode of presentation of the literary work. Literary works can be presented in three major modes, namely, fiction mode, drama and poetry modes depending on the issue the literary artist intends to attend to and the aims of the text. Each of these modes is independent of others for they have their individual nature and format.

### **1.1 DIFFERENT MODES OF LITERARY PRESENTATION**

There are three major different modes of literary presentation which include:

1. Fiction (Novel)
2. Drama
3. Poetry

Each of these different modes has its peculiar characteristics with which it can be identified. Let us now examine each of these modes of literary presentation with a focus on those factors that make for their individuals differences.

## 1.2 FICTION (NOVEL)

Fiction is usually in the mode or form of continuous story telling. It normally has a beginning, middle and end of the story. These three things usually have link from the beginning to the end and this makes the story a complete one. For example, any folktale that fails to get to the end is bound to be incomplete. Also in literary text like *Isi Akwu Dara n'Ala*, the story started from how Ada got married to Chike ended when the Nigeria Biafra war ended. Ada went to plead with the husband to forgive her all her wrong doings, but the husband turned down her request. That is to say that a good and complete story will begin well and get to the end for the message or lesson intended to pass across be achieved.

Secondly, fiction is usually a form of prose. The writing is not line by line as we have it in poetry. It is usually arranged in paragraphs. There is always a link between one paragraph and the other. Sometimes, a sentence starts from the beginning of the line while at other times it will start from any position that the previous sentence stopped. Some paragraphs are short while some others are long.

Thirdly, fiction is always in chapters. Nwadike (1992:63) notes that every chapter has the story it is telling which will be linked to the things that have been said previously.

Fourthly, complete sentences are used in writing stories. Sometimes depending on the writer's literary creativity, there could be a prologue, that is, words that point at what the reader is going to see in the story or, what the story is all about.

In addition, there are usually characters that are in the story, that is, people in the story that are expected to behave like normal human beings. We usually know their behaviour through what the writer says they do or say in the story.

Also in fictitious writing, the writer does a lot of explanation.

According to Kirszner and Mendel (2001:46) fictitious writings comprise of the short stories and novels. They opined that whereas the novel is an extended piece of narrative fiction, the short story is limited in length and scope.

In fiction, plot is the arrangement of actions which may consist of any kind of event or series of events, recounted in the story. Here, the question you ask about the plot or what happens as you read will shape your response to a story.

### **1.3 DRAMA**

Drama is different from novels and short stories, which are meant to be read. Dramatic works differ from other prose works in a number of other ways unlike novels and short stories. Plays do not usually have narrators to tell the audience what a character is thinking or what happened in the past; the audience knows only what the character reveals. Drama develops primarily by means of dialogue or the lines spoken by the characters. Unlike fiction, the plot and the action of drama unfold on the stage as the characters interact. Kirszner and Mandel (2001:1120) note that;

Playwrights employ various techniques to compensate for the absence of a narrator. For example, playwrights use monologues – extended speeches by one character. (A monologue in which a character expresses private

thoughts while alone on the stage is called a soliloquy). Playwrights can also use asides – brief comments by an actor who addresses the audience but it is not heard by the other characters – to reveal the thoughts of the speaker.

Like the observation of a narrator in fiction, these dramatic techniques give the audience insight into a character's motives and attitudes. In addition, make-ups, cosmetics, scenery and lighting, enhance a dramatic performance, as do actors' and directors' interpretations of dialogue and stage directions. Drama is usually in acts and scenes. All of them, just like in fiction chapter, are linked together, signifying that it is one play.

Also, in drama, there is always a prologue, in which an actor gives the background or explanations that the audience needs to follow in the rest of the drama and then the last explanation or epilogue, which is usually a kind of flash back – reminding the people of what happened in the drama particularly on the theme of the drama. Besides, in the drama, the names of the people that are going to engage in the dialogue in the play are usually marshalled out before they start to dialogue among themselves.

In the drama, some sentences are short while some are a bit long. In most cases, the characters say just one word and some other times they bring in phrases. We can see a typical example of this assertion in Akoma's *Obidiya* an Igbo play.

Onye Mbu: kaa umuafo

Ndi ozo: kaa diala

Ogbuu: nke ahu agaala

Omeife: O gala

Diogu: A supu ihu oru, a muo mma.

Ogbuu: Anyi ga-emeny omenala

Diogu: gwaa aka, kpupu isi

Diogu: megharia ahu

Ogbu: maka akuko

Diogu: I ma

Ogbu: na ekpem mmanya

Ha niile: Otu ekpem

Omeife : e mee ngwa e meghara odachi

Ha niile : Ezi uka (pp. 28 - 29).

A critical examination of this dialogue between Ogbuu, Diogu and Omeife, reveals that their words are very brief and this makes the play very interesting and glorious. Long sentences usually tend to make a play dull and uninteresting (Nwadike 1992).

#### **1.4 POETRY**

Poetry can simply be said to be a mode of expression. Certainly, reading poetry often requires hard work and concentration, because it is compressed, that is noted for economy of words. Poetry often omits exposition and explanation, and consequently readers must be willing to take the time to read closely to interpret ideas and supply missing connections. What can be said in ten pages in fiction can be

said in only four lines of poem. That is to say that poetry does not require too many words.

The plot or arrangement of poetry is solely different. It is usually arranged in stanzas unlike the prose. The mode of writing poetry is quite different from that of fiction.

The beginning of every line of poem starts at the same line. There is nothing like haphazard or random arrangement. Let us use a stanza of 'Uko N' Uju' in *Utara Nti* as a typical example of the mode of poetry.

Ego a,

A si na anyi nwere n'ijeli n'ijeli

Bu n'ikuku ka o di

Ego a

A si anyi na o bughi ya bu okwu

Bu naani n'akwukwo ka o di dgz.

(This money

That is said that we have in billions

Is only in the air

This money

That is said that it is not problem

Is just written in the book etc.)

We observe that at the beginning of every line of the poem, all of them start at the same spot. Also under the first line of poem all the initial

words start at the same line. This is an important characteristic of poetry. A poem can continue without being in stanzas or without demarcation. But it can also have more than one stanza as the case may be.

Again, the plot of poetry varies, depending on the poet. Some poets arrange their poems in four - four lines, six - six, eight - eight etc. however, some people do not attach importance to this. In this case the implication is that in one poem, one might have different types of plot or arrangement of words in each stanza. We can see a typical example of this in the poem titled 'Uko N' Uju' (Scarcity in the Midst of Plenty) in *Utara Nti*'. The poem has six stanzas and each of these stanzas has a different plot; that is, a different arrangement of words (*Utara Nti* P.29). Also another poem in the same poetry titled 'Aririo' (pleading) (P.30) has three stanzas and each of these stanzas has a different plot.

Moreover, poetry is not written in sentences but in lines. It is possible to have ten lines of poem or even more from a sentence. If we study the poem we cited as example, we will observe that the first three lines and the second three lines all constitute a sentence. Most of the time, a line of poem can give a complete meaning, while at other times, a line of poem will not confer any meaning until it runs more lines before it will have a complete meaning. This type of poem is referred to as run-on-line.

In the poetry book, unlike in the prose fiction, poems are usually arranged in the middle of the book. They are not arranged from one end of the book to the other end.

As a matter of fact, a line of poem can be just one word. Typical example of this is in the poem titled 'Ngwere in *Akpa – Uche*'. This poem is made-up of four stanzas. In each of the stanzas, the word 'Ngwere' is the first line of the poem. Also in the poem titled 'Imo' in *Utara Nti*, the word 'Imo' stands as a line of poem in three places – one line is in the first stanza and two lines in the second stanza of the poem.

Another crucial fact worthy of note is that in poetry, the name or title given to any poem is its topic. In a book of poetry book, if we have fifty poems, which many poets wrote on the same topic, every poet has his own thoughts and lessons to pass across. We can see a typical example of this in four poems by four different poets in *Akpa Uche* titled 'Onwu'. These poets are:

⌚ Obienyem, J.C

⌚ Nzeako, J.U.T

⌚ Ajaegbu C.W and

⌚ Emenike Chidi

A careful study of these poems reveals that though they bear the same title 'Onwu' they all have different views about 'Onwu' and as such, they have different messages and different lessons, to pass across.

We also noted that in poetry, capital letter is usually used to start a line of poem even when the line of poems is not the beginning a new line of thought or what is being discussed these three major modes of

literary presentation have different kinds which we do not intend to discuss in this work.

## **2.0 FACTORS THAT MAKE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES OF THE MODES OF LITERARY PRESENTATION**

In the first place, we observe that the three literary genres of fiction, drama and poetry have different modes of presentation. Fiction by its nature involves continuous story telling with numerous explanations to enable the readers grasp what the story is all about, the message intended to pass across and then the lesson(s) it is intended to teach. Hence fiction is meant to be read and understood.

Unlike fiction, drama is meant to be watched. Here unlike fiction, there is no narrator. The audience knows only what the character(s) reveal. Also whereas fiction is continuous story telling, drama is primarily spoken by the characters.

On the other hand, poetry is entirely different from both fiction and drama. Poetry is compressed. It is noted for economy of words. It omits exposition and explanation. Unlike fiction, reading poetry is more time consuming and difficult to understand. It teaches, praises, satirizes or ridicules people as the occasion warrants.

Another area of remarkable difference between the three modes of literary presentation is in their plotting. In fiction, most stories rely on a standard plot structure; conflict – a struggle of some sort and resolution. In drama, the plot and actions unfold on the stage as the characters interact. But in poetry, the plot varies. It has no fast and hard rule. It all depends on the poet. This is because of the poetic

licence that authorises the poet to manipulate the language as he wishes in his literary work. Some poets may wish to plot their poem in four lines in a stanza. Some may even forget about stanzas and just write their poem in continuous lines to the end.

Again, fictions have chapters and every chapter has a story it is telling which is often linked to the things that have been said previously. Drama on the other hand is usually in acts and scenes, although all of them are linked together signifying that it is only one play, whereas poetry appears in lines and stanzas as the case may be. There are no chapters in poetry. Unlike fiction and poetry, drama is mostly meant for entertainment as the spectators are opportuned to see things for themselves.

Unlike in fiction and poetry, in drama, the names of the people that are going to engage in the dialogue in the play are usually marshalled out before they start to dialogue among themselves.

Moreover, the mode of writing poem in poetry is strikingly different from that of fiction and drama. The beginning of every line of poem starts at the same line almost at the middle of the book. There is nothing like haphazard or random arrangement. Unlike in fiction and poetry, the playwright uses various techniques such as monologue and asides to compensate for the absence of a narrator.

Again among the three major modes of literary presentation, poetry is mostly noted for the use of various types of figures of speech which are meant for aesthetic purposes i.e. to beautify the language.

Lastly, in this issue of differences is that unlike in drama and poetry, in fiction, we have the short story and the novel. Typical examples of

novels are Ubesie's *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala*, *Juo Obinna* etc. A good example of a short story is D.N Achara's *Ala Bingo*.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

With the above instances, we have discovered that there are actually factors that make for the individual differences in the modes of literary presentation. As a matter of fact, each of the three major modes is very vital as far as literary works are concerned. We believe that the essence of having the different literary modes is to enable the artists – the novelist, the playwright and the poet manipulate language in different ways to affect people's lives in different dimensions.

The important thing however is that whichever literary mode that is being used with its varying factors, it is expected to perform the functions of literature which include:

- ⌘ Giving us a special awareness of what we already know.
- ⌘ Telling us what we do not know.
- ⌘ Moving our feelings.
- ⌘ Giving us pleasure.
- ⌘ Putting us in another world.
- ⌘ Using language in especially powerful ways.

In conclusion which ever mode a literary artist uses, the important question to ask however, is whether the work tells us something and

at the same time delights us. If a work does, it is a literary work no matter the mode.

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