



Creative Writing: A Synopsis

*Maria Jennifer Iyere

Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

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*Corresponding author: [Maria Jennifer Iyere \(PhD\)](#)

Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Federal University Gusau, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Abstract

Writing is one of the language skills. Effective communication presupposes proficiency in writing. Komaid (2017) notes that “writing is a fascinating process that involves a great deal of divergent thinking rather than focusing only on one idea.” This paper examines creative writing from discrete perspectives to give an incisive overview of the subject. Bodon (2000) defines “creativity” as “the ability to come up with new ideas that are surprising yet intelligible and also valuable in some way.” In a creative writing task, a writer engages in writer-reader interaction (communication). The process therefore has to do with arrangement and presentation of message. By examining crucial aspects of creative writing, this study attempts to be a springboard in emerging writers’ quest for comprehensive knowledge of the traditions of the craft, which include pedagogical insights on creative writing. McLoughlin (2008, p. 89) submits that “creative writing is about teaching the writer methodologies and practices that enable them to criticize and edit themselves.” This paper hinges on Tompkins (2000) postulations on reasons for writing, and concludes that creative writing is basically imaginative writing that is taught and learned through conventional principles, and it remains popular in the three basic genres of literature (literary writing): drama, prose and poetry.

Keywords: creative writing, drama, prose, poetry, synopsis.

1. Introduction

Language is a means of communication among humans as evident in written and spoken communication. Creative writing is a written text that is unique in creativity and language use. In this paper, fundamental views are presented on creative writing, a craft that is popular in contemporary scholarship across the world. The study examines the meaning, origin, theories and approaches to creative writing, besides other critical perspectives. Although creative writing is extensive, this study particularly examines the subject within the scope of drama, prose and poetry; indeed, creative writing is basically done through these three basic genres of literature. The French word genre means “kind”. In terms of origin, “genre” has link with the terms “gender” and genus. In contemporary English usage, genre means “a kind of literature”. Drama is written in the form of dialogue (conversational exchanges), with the use of characters, acts and scenes to convey themes of playwrights. Unlike drama, prose is a narrative with ample description of characters, settings, etc. as the plot unfolds towards realizing a writer’s thematic concerns. Given the fact that prose is not “dialogic”, it differs from drama in structure (form). Poetry has to do with poems. In form, it is conveyed as verses and stanzas. Sean O’ Brien (2007, p. 186) submits that “... the Greek root of the word poem – poiesia – means making, an act dependent on artistry, skill, practice and let it be said – a capacity not merely for taking endless pains but for enduring perpetual dissatisfaction.” This study is significant because budding writers are in dire need of tips for effective writing across genres.

2. Writing

According to Freeman (1967) cited in Acheoah (2019), writing is “the ability to select the strongest words, the most useful facts since it is the appropriate selection of these facts that engrave the image of a work in the reader’s mind.”

Writing is not an arbitrary task. Corroborating this claim, Hayes and Flower (1980), cited in Gokhan Cetinkaya (2015, p. 111) identify four major writing processes:

- i) Planning takes the writing assignment and long-term memory as input, which then produces a conceptual plan, for the document output. Planning includes sub-activities of generating (coming up with ideas), organizing (arranging those ideas logically in one's head), and goal setting (determining what effects one wants to achieve and modifying one's generating and organizing activities to achieve local or global goals).
- ii) Translating takes the conceptual plan for the document and produces text expressing the planned content.
- iii) In reviewing, the text produced so far is read, with modifications to improve it (revise) or correct errors (proof read).
- iv) Monitoring includes metacognitive processes that link and coordinate planning, translating, and reviewing ...

Stanley Oriola (2008), cited in Acheoah (ibid.) examines writing skills:

- a) Mental: This requires that a writer must be able to think clearly and be logical, sequential and coherent in how he organizes his ideas.
- b) Psychological: Ideas can only move freely within the various sensitive components of the human system, if a writer is emotionally stable and relaxed.
- c) Rhetorical: Writing, like every other practice, has its own rules. A writer must know the rules that are fundamental to his craft; or, else, the semantic depth expected of the work of such a writer will be missed so long as the structural order is flouted. This may result in expressions that are linguistically awkward or syntactically odd. A good writing must make a smooth, flow and 'floody' reading.
- d) Critical: A writer is expected to re-read a work, which he has completed. Beyond this, one should be able to judge or criticize a completed work so as to improve it; thus, writing is essentially re-writing.

Trask (1995, p. 1) cited in Acheoah (ibid.) observes that language, which differentiates man from other creatures, is the tool for writing. According to Babatunde (1998) cited in Acheoah (2019), writing is a process (a step-by-step activity) and an interaction. Anko (2004, pp. 254-256) cited in Acheoah (ibid.) notes that "the act of writing consists of stages, with the emphasis now shifted from "product-oriented approach" to "process-oriented approach"." Approaches to writing are essentially for the purpose of mastering writing skills. Tira Nur Fitria 2024, p. 2 posits that "mastering writing skills is a fundamental aspect of language acquisition for students ... The purpose of writing is to articulate thoughts, ideas, and emotions through the written word ... Through writing, individuals can effectively communicate their thoughts and feelings ... which is a critical ability for students to express their experiences creatively ... Writing is an effective tool for sharing information and ideas with reader (Qur'an, 2018), and it can also enhance the writer's knowledge and understanding by summarizing learned concepts ... Overall, writing is not solely about handwriting or writing techniques, but rather it is a means of expressing and comprehending ones knowledge."

3. Creative Writing: A Synopsis

An overview of creative writing presupposes insights on the definition, theories and approaches to the subject; this section of the paper is poised to examine these discrete components of the term "creative writing".

3.1 What is Creative Writing?

"Creativity, in general, is defined by Boden (2001, p. 95) as "the skill of coming out with new ideas that are surprising, intelligible, and also valuable in some way." According to Tira Nur Fintria (ibid. p. 2), "creativity is the power to invent and produce something that is both original and imaginative. It allows us to approach problems in unique ways, using our spontaneous thoughts to come up with a solution. Creativity can be expressed through a variety of mediums including works of art that possess aesthetic values and beauty. It arises from a natural desire within us to create ... and is born from a person's well-established and developed mind." Creativity is essential to innovation, novelty, and sustenance ..." (cited in Faiza Abdalla Elhussien Mohammed 2019, p. 233). Tira Nur Fitria (ibid. p. 1) opines that "creative writing is an innovative writing style that highlights narrative, character development, opinions and non-formal language styles. It is an art of expressing ideas and imagination in various forms of fiction and nonfiction, requiring the ability to stimulate readers' imagination and research skills, such as poetry, short stories, novels, epics, fairy tales, dram scripts, film scenarios, song lyrics, television scripts, advertising scripts, polular articles, opinions, news, etc..."

Exploring the freedom of self-expression, a creative writer covey a wide range of themes (corruption, immortality, diligence, divorce, death, etc.), ideas or messages with appealing language that differentiates creative writing from non-creative texts. Accentuating the fact that creative writing deploys appealing language in creating and showing things, Adèle Ramet (2007) submits that creative writing is "... having the power to create, that creates, showing, pertaining to, imagination ..."

The origin and development of creative writing is traceable to the 1920s with the activities of the University of Iowa. Mary Swander et al. (2007) reveals perspectives on the development of the art. Mary Swander et al. (ibid.) submit extensively:

In 2005, creative writing became very famous in higher education. In the UK, degrees (MA, MPhils, and PhDs) are now awarded in different aspects of creative writing: poetry, prose, playwriting, science, critical theory, journalism or creative writing pedagogy. The field is fast undergoing innovations even in classroom approaches ... until around 1990, most creative faculty followed the Engle teaching model without much reflection. A workshop teacher led small groups – The AWP Directors’ Handbook (2003: 5) recommends no more than fifteen, with twelve as ideal, but recognized that most workshop groups now are between eleven and twenty – through peer oral critiques of completed poems, stories, chapters of novels or plays. In the Engle model, the criticism was meant to be tough and could save the writer years of individual trial and error ... different institutions taught creative writing in one form or the other, using one approach or the other, as the field flourished internationally ...¹”

Creative writing is an activity-driven mental endeavour with obvious advantages to students. According to Tira Nur Fitria (ibid. p. 2), “creative writing is an activity that offers several benefits. As per Gunawan and Aziz (2018), students gain benefits such as a tool for self-expression, building pride, personal satisfaction, and self-esteem, increasing awareness and perception of their environment, and creating an active person.”

3.1 Theoretical Issues

This section of the paper comments briefly on the theoretical framework of the study, and theories of creative writing.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study hinges on Tompkins (2000). According to Tompkins (ibid.), there are seven reasons for writing:

- i) to entertain;
- ii) to foster artistic expression;
- iii) to explore the functions and values of writing;
- iv) to stimulate the imagination;
- v) to clarify thinking;
- vi) to search for identity; and
- vii) to learn to read and write.

The above submissions are germane to the writing of fiction and nonfiction.

3.2 Theories of Creative Writing

Theories of creative writing are essentially conventions, principles and methodologies for creative writing tasks. In this regard, aims, objectives and approaches to creative writing are divergent. Swander et al. (ibid.) present theories of creative writing thus:

- i) The Romantic Myth: This theory emphasizes talents of individual as the basis of effective creative writing rather than classroom inputs such as teaching, activities and exercises. Originality in creative writing is greatly emphasized in the Romantic Myth Theory.
- ii) Bloom and Bate Theory: According to the Bloom and Bate Theory, contemporary writers are confronted with the problem of demonstrating originality owing to the fame of predating great writers.
- iii) Compositional Theory: The thrust of the Compositional Theory of creative writing is that non-literary writings are not as difficult as literary writings such as creative writing. Wandy Bishop who leads this theory, argues that courses in writing are course-based and are so crucial that creative writing should be taught the same ways that writing is taught in classrooms.
- iv) Non-traditional Academic Approach: This approach holds the view that workshops should be used for effective teaching of creative writing, thus subjecting students’ work to critical assessment and evaluation for effective learning of the craft.
- v) Critical Theory: The thrust of this theory is that already published literary texts can be explored for effective learning of creative writing. In this way, learners are expected to interpret the process, aims, content and style of writing by studying contextual underpinnings of published literary texts.

4. Approaches to Creative Writing

Creative writing is done by hinging on a wide range of approaches that are evident in the literature. There are discrete skills to be mastered by students of the craft. Interestingly, differences in approaches are informed by the categories of skills to be mastered in the teaching and learning process. Gokhan Cetinkaya (ibid. p. 115) gives clues to different activity-based approaches to creative writing. These include: story completion; writing stories, tales, plays, essays, poems, diaries; free writing technique; writing about a concept or a proverb, the activities in the teacher’s or student’s

books; composition; picture interpretation; concept pool activity; direct writing method; proverb and idiom box activity; and writing club.

Involvement in creative writing, like in other kinds of writing, is a good way of developing confidence in the art. Originality is partly a product of self-confidence in creative writing.

Gokhan Cetinkaya (ibid. p. 118) reports that strategies for effective creative writing include:

- i) Reading should be endeared;
- ii) We should make students like writing;
- iii) There should be a separate class hour for this; there shouldn't be any grading;
- iv) Class hours should be increased;
- v) Materials should be interesting to students;
- vi) In-service training;
- vii) The classrooms should be turned into a free-thinking platform;
- viii) Awarding;
- ix) The students should be guided so that they can express themselves;
- x) Creative Writing method training at university;
- xi) Overcoming prejudices against writing;
- xii) Student-centered classes by making students participate;
- xiii) Bringing famous authors with young students;
- xiv) Preventing the students' family problems;
- xv) Samples regarding the Creative Writing technique; and
- xvi) Creative thinking.

The above strategies are very crucial if the numerous experiences and ideas of writers are to be expressed with ease. Approaches to effective creative writing cannot be exhaustive. Several tips abound in the literature in this regard. For example, Wallace (1926) presents four stages of the creative process:

- i) . Preparation;
- ii) ii. Incubation;
- iii) iii. Illumination; and
- iv) iv. Verification.

For more insights on approaches to creative writing, see Chandler, G. (1999), Dougherty, P. (2001), Erdoghan T. (2013), Harper, G. and Kroll, J. (2008).

Creative writing is done via application of the rules of language, even though writers are free to violate such conventions for literary effects. A good writer is therefore knowledgeable in the grammar and vocabulary of the language used for conveying a creative text. Vocabulary is simply diction. Ramey (2007, p. 48) submits that "perfect use of diction presupposes the use of ordinary clear words (which make writing understandable) and strange words (which make writing unique)." Considering the crucial functions of the showing and telling techniques in literary (creative) writing, a writer's repertoire of vocabulary is a vital tool for creative writing across genres. For example, in literary writers' use of the "showing technique", events are presented through adequate description of characters' actions. Language is useful in the description of different contexts, locations, periods and times in a creative text. Specific language choices are essentially immersed in the conventions of writing. Even in being original, writers are guided by conventions of writing. Lauri Ramey (ibid. p. 48) notes that "Aristotle's view of originality acknowledges the modification of conventions of writing – such modification, though may be amazing, should be consistent in style²." The pedagogical contents of creative writing capture different conventions for approaching and mastering creative writing on the part of students. Tira Nur Fitria (ibid. p. 1) submits that "... engaging in creative writing in English can be a fulfilling activity that boosts students' creativity, trains their imagination, and enhances their English skills. To enhance their creative writing abilities, students need to read diverse literary works, practice writing regularly, explore different language styles, use writing prompts, and welcome feedback from peers or instructors. By mastering these skills in English, students can improve their ability to express themselves, develop their imagination, enhance their language and vocabulary, and effectively convey their messages. Some tactics to improve creative writing skills include reading literature from different genres, writing on a consistent basis, experimenting with different language styles, utilizing writing prompts, and being receptive to constructive criticism from others." In addition, Morley (2007), cited in Faiza Abdalla Elhussien Mohammed (ibid. p. 125) presents seven methods of creative writing as follows:

First, is the preparation, which includes active reading, imitation, research, play and reflection. *Second*, is to plan using brainstorming. *Third*, incubation that creates an incoming wave of the subconscious that washes over the pages you will write. *Fourth*, beginning, begin rewriting some of these sentences or lines of meaning and start the forward stagger into writing. *Fifth*, flowing, is to maintain a steady flow of work, even a mechanical word count,

putting in the hours, and writing quickly and uninhibitedly, *Sixth*, the silent reservoir, is to give yourself the time to recover your eloquence through silence. You will find, as you do so, that the reservoir fills quickly, and words and phrases rise. *Seven*, and finally, breakthroughs and finish.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Creative writing tasks transcend being fun and hobby to writers. It is an established rule-governed activity. Students are therefore taught to explore their latent talents in imagination, creativity and innovation. Indeed, strategies deployed in creative writing activities culminate in the development of writers or students in the craft (art). As in non-strictly creative writings, personal development in written communication is crucial; formal instructional settings (schools) have a great role to play in this regard, particularly if one considers the benefits of proficiency in writing. According to Komaidi (2017), “writing activities offer several benefits. Firstly, writing generates curiosity and trains sensitivity to see reality, which is not usually owned by non-writers. Secondly, it encourages us to look for non-references such as books, magazines, newspapers, journals, etc. which increase our knowledge. It trains us to organize our thoughts and arguments in a coherent, systematic, and logical way which helps to convey our opinions or thoughts to others effectively. Fourthly, writing reduces tension and stress by expressing our emotions through writing. In writing, a writer creates a world alone, free from interference from others. Fifthly, when our writing is published by mass media or a publisher, we obtain inner satisfaction and earn an honorarium that helps us economically. Sixthly, popular writing that is read by many people makes the author increasingly popular and known to the public reader, which sometimes makes someone feel satisfied and appreciated by others.”

Faiza Abdalla Elhussien Mohammed (ibid. p. 233) submits that “creative writing goal is not just assisting and enabling learning; it can also provide alternative ways of expressing and demonstrating teaching ... Unfortunately, schools don’t pay much attention to teach creatively ...” Language proficiency for the craft are taught in schools. Commenting on the role of language proficiency in creative writing, Faiza Abdalla Elhussien Mohammed (ibid.) asserts that “developing English language students’ writing skills, in general, and creative writing skills in particular, are seen as difficult tasks for non-native speakers. They need mastery of its mechanism and process such as contents, organizations, vocabulary, punctuations, spelling firstly, and creativity secondly.” The application of the principles or approaches to creative writing is instrumental in good performance in writing tasks. Thomas (2014, p. 21) cited in Faiza Abdalla Elhussien Mohammed (ibid.) contends that “the power to be creative is written each one, but the challenge is to open ourselves up to it ... There are many keys to keep in your mind to write creatively: curiosity, passion, determination, awareness, energy, sensibility, a listening ear, and an observant eye³.” This study is a synopsis of creative writing. It gives an incisive overview of the art by examining crucial components therein.

Notes

¹ However, views vary on the origin of creative writing. For example, Ramey (ibid. p. 42) reports that “creative writing as an academic subject developed at approximately the same time as English, and out of the same desire, which was to rectify the ‘impracticality’ of philology ...”

² Ramey (ibid. pp. 49-50) submits elaborately:

Shakespeare himself stole the plot of King Lear from other versions that already existed. This shocks us today where we view ‘originality’ as the hallmark of literary creativity. But Young himself wrote as late as 1759 that he had seen nothing previously written on the concept of literary originality. Shakespeare did something quite traditional by sending the Cinderella myth and shocked his audience by giving it a tragic ending, which presumably he believed reflected his era. When Bond wrote Lear in 1971, he was performing the same traditional literary operation as Shakespeare. The plays of Bond and Shakespeare are part of a tradition of authors and texts speaking to each other through allusion, one of the most ancient literary tropes.

³ The author posits that “creative writing competence is the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors that study tries to improve to build individual’s ability to: a) apply flexible writing skills appropriate to a variety of writing tasks and genres; b) organize a piece of writing into a coherent and readable piece of writing; c) create their fiction and nonfiction; d) ability to criticize and analyze several genres of writing.” (cf. p. 236)

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