

Transition from the learning of one genre of literature to another

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The paper "Transition from the Learning of One Genre of Literature to Another" is a good example of a literature essay. The class experience has brought out the challenges of transitioning from the studying of one genre of literature to another. During the changing process, there is a tendency among many students to over-generalize and apply the rules of interpreting one genre of literature as taught to them when studying the next, something which I experienced a lot. However, this is wrong as every genre has some peculiarities in understanding and criticism. The structure, literary styles, length of sentences and lines and the overall effect on the audience of short stories differs significantly from that of poetry. Therefore, teachers should come up with creative ways of guiding the students to understand the differences between the two genres so as to avoid confusion among the students. Studying prose stories requires a detailed introduction especially on the unique writing style. I did not initially understand that in a work of prose, grammatical rules are applied strictly. The sentences are full, and this being a prose writer, the writer has more room to express his points fully. On the other hand, while teaching poetry, the teacher needs to make the students understand that the rules of writing poems differ significantly from all other types of writing (Hagger 315). There is the use of the poetic license, the language is highly compressed and the rules of grammar may not be observed the way they are in a short story. This is the first challenge encountered during the transition from the teaching of poetry to the teaching of short stories. For example, when asked which styles they had witnessed in the short story, I would point out styles which are typically associated with poetry, such as alliteration and rhyming words. However,

this challenge was easily overcome when I read explanations that the styles in each genre of writing are different, followed by enough exercises to distinguish the two. Also, the prose works usually presented a number of themes, styles, and characters, which meant they needed longer analyses than the poetry ones, which in some cases consisted of few characters or even a single one. For example, in the story "A Good Man is Hard to Find," the main themes are the existing struggle between good and evil forces in the world, and also family relationships. However, it takes long hours of reading before these themes become clear. On the other hand, the themes in the poem "When I Consider How My Light Is Seen", by John Milton, the religious theme is evident by the second line of the poem when the persona says "Ere half my days in this dark world and wide," an allusion to the seemingly sinful word as opposed to the bliss that Christians look forward to when they go to heaven. Lanham (230) argues the same way when he says that prose, by its very nature, allows for writers to use many words unlike poetry, which demands to compress of the poem in few words. He says that this sometimes makes getting the message of prose works difficult (Lanham 230). I quickly overcame this challenge by focusing on the story as a reader and taking some notes especially of the characters and brief descriptions of them. This helped to avoid confusion between them during analysis or examinations. Furthermore, there was a challenge in reading the obviously longer, and often uninteresting prose works. Some of the texts in prose required many hours of reading, unlike the poems which could be read in a few minutes. It quickly emerged that reading prose required a lot more input than reading poetry. Actually, poetry can be read effectively on a bus or in a

restaurant, but prose required more dedication. The extra time and energy so needed to study prose proved to be a challenge for me and other students. Furthermore, the long storyline associated with prose called for more retention power, and in some cases I found myself having to go back some pages to confirm the names of characters because some stories had a fairly high number of characters, such as the possible confusion between Ali and Gris in the story "Roman Fever" by Edith Wharton. Finally, when the change was made from poetry to prose, there was heightened tension and suspense that took much longer to resolve. There was an introduction of detailed character analysis with mention of aspects such as antagonist and protagonist, which had not been the case with the study of poetry. In fact, in poetry, there was no analysis of characters, the only person of interest has been the persona. For example, in the poem *Dover Beach* by Matthew Arnold, the persona can hardly be identified, and the only sensible response to the question "who is the persona" would be that the persona is "an observer". This means the writer was not interested in any characters or participants in the events of the poem but was only keen on the aspects he observes, which then comprise the subject matter of the poem. On the other hand, in the prose story "A Good Man is Hard to Find" by Flannery O'Connor, there is a detailed description of the characters, starting with the family of six that forms the core of the story and the villains they encounter. It therefore became clear, once the transition is made, that in prose, I would have to pay close attention to the characters of the story as opposed to poetry where only the subject matter was important, a point which is emphasized by Buswell and Lansky (7) when they argue that in poetry,

unlike in prose, the reader may not always show interest in the way a character feels or thinks. However, this challenge was overcome by doing some basic research on the ways of analyzing prose as opposed to the method of analyzing poetry. There are fundamental differences that I noticed when I transitioned from the study of poetry to the study of literature. Many of these differences arise from the structural and content differences between poetry and prose, although as demonstrated above, others occur due to the student's introduction and socialization with the reading of each of the genres. This is not to say that there are no similarities between the two genres. On the contrary, there is a lot of similarity between them, and some styles studied during the introduction to poetry were still applicable to prose, such as irony, symbolism, and satire. It is upon the teachers to try and make the transition from poetry to prose as smooth as possible so that the students can easily make the relationship meaningful and helpful in a literature class. The challenges have been helpful in making me better in understanding how to study each of the genres, and I believe in the future I will be a better student of literature regardless of the genre involved.