

FITWRATUSALAAM

"WE ARE OF ALLAH, AND TO HIM WE SHALL RETURN"

Monday, May 23, 2016

GROWING UP WITH POETRY

GROWING UP WITH POETRY (D. RUBADIRI)

BUILDING THE NATION

By Christopher H. M. Barlow (Uganda)

Today I did my share
In building the nation.
I drove the permanent secretary
To an important urgent function
In fact to a luncheon at the Vic.

The menu reflected its importance
Cold Bell beer with small talk,
Then fried chicken with niceties
Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs
Ice-cream to cover the stereotype jokes
Coffee to keep the PS awake on return journey.

I drove the permanent secretary back.
He yawned many times in the back of the car
Then to keep awake, he suddenly asked,
Did you have any lunch friend?
I replied looking straight ahead
And secretly smiling at his belated concern
That I had not, but was sliming!

Upon which he said with a seriousness
That amused more than annoyed me,
Mwananchi, I too had none!
I attended to matters of state.

Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know,
And friend, it goes against my grain,
Causes me stomach ulcers and wind.
Ah, he continued, yawning again,
The pains we suffer in building the nation!
So the PS had ulcers too!
My ulcers I think are equally painful
Only they are caused by hunger,
No sumptuous lunches!

So two nation builders
Arrived home this evening
With terrible stomach pains
The result of building the nation –
Different ways.

INTRODUCTION.

Building the nation is a poem by a Ugandan poet *Christopher Henry Muwanga Barlow* that principally explores the lifestyle of African bourgeoisie who came to power after colonialism and ideally, simply replaced the coloniser. There is a need for African leaders to create hope for those they lead but they are caught up in the same evil lifestyle of their colonial predecessors. The aspects of nation building which were supposed to dominate public and political policies have been thrust to the periphery of human thought.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS.

DISILLUSIONMENT

The kind of disillusionment portrayed in the poem is that which Africans have towards their leaders who have adopted the very tenets of the colonisers from whom they got power. Essentially, the idea of nation building turns out to be a very complicated phenomenon where those who are central to the process have their efforts wasted by leaders who can implement policies.

The persona shows more disillusionment by stating that at the meeting “*the menu reflected its importance/ Cold Bell beer with small talks/ Then fried chicken with niceties/ wine.../ ice cream .../coffee...*” (lines 6-11). This reflects the triviality of a meeting where serious issues were supposed to be discussed.

LIES AND HYPOCRISY.

This has been a vital tool for most politicians when they want to win more votes from their ignorant masses. They make heaps of lies on the optimistic crowds but eventually everything turns out only a nightmare. The PS lies to the driver that he did not have any meal just as did the driver yet you and I know that he had a very heavy and sumptuous

lunch. He even shows his hypocrisy more clearly when he asks this question. *“then to keep awake he suddenly asked/Did you have any lunch friend?”*. It is rather sad to note that he does not ask whether the driver has eaten anything because he is concerned about his welfare, but it is simply to keep himself awake through the journey.

CLASSES.

In a broader way the poem thoroughly depicts two classes in one society. There is middle class and lower class. Both of them are supposed to mutually benefit from the national resources. Yet the middle class that is represented by the PS exploits the lower class that more often than not comprises those who are involved in the modes of production. For example the driver drives the PS to the place where there is feasting (eating) while the driver does not take part in the feasting. The role of both classes is building the nation, but the middle class has just become the parasites who feed on the national resources at the expense of the masses. They are not building the nation at all but building their stomachs.

MARGINALIZATION AND EXPLOITATION

Furthermore in the poem, the two parties represent the two strands of nation builders that are in most African states. On one side there are those represented by the driver (the local masses) while on the other hand we have high class being represented by the PS. The latter is very busy misquandering the public funds which can be used to rebuild the nations. The masses are the hardworking people whose benevolence is easily taken for granted by those in power. There are those who eat extravagantly and those who work on empty stomachs. The persona himself comes from the marginalized class. His disillusionment is caused by lifestyles of African leaders and informs his fellow countrymen what is actually happening.

AWARENESS

The poem paints a picture of awareness that those who are oppressed are now aware that those in power are exploiting them. This is an important step as long as the liberation of the oppressed is concerned. It is also a significant step if the nation is to realise sustainable development where the national resources will be mutually utilized for the benefit of not only the ruling class but the masses as well.

If we examine the end of the poem it seems to induce a kind of anger that should lead to vengeance (revenge). The persona is appealing to the oppressed to rise to the occasion and deal with the ruling class.

The fact that *“two nation builders/ arrived home this evening/with terrible stomach pain/the result of building the nation/different ways”* is more like an appeal to emotions where the persona seeks actions from the masses.

In a way, the persona calls for a reaction towards the ruling class's hypocritical nation building where they pretend to have welfare of the masses at heart while in real sense they just want to capitalize on their efforts.

VULNERABILITY OF HUMANITY.

Nevertheless, the persona seems to have hopes in some facts that both the African bourgeoisie and the proletariats have their points of vulnerability. They both suffer in one way or another because of their own actions and lifestyles. For instance the driver becomes sick because of lack of food while the PS becomes sick for eating too much.

So Ps has ulcers too!

My ulcers I think are equally painful

Only they are caused by hunger,

No sumptuous lunches!

MESSAGE.



If we wish to do well in nation building we must as public servants respect everything that belongs to the state; money, property, working hours etc.



If the high class is not careful with nation building one day the oppressed may revolt.

RELEVANCE

The poem is relevant in our country in a number of ways.



Today we have a lot of leaders who misuse the public funds while those who are involved in the means of production live in dire poverty.



Hypocrisy has also become a way of life.



Classes, exploitation and marginalization are also major issues in our society.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

What is the poem about?

The poem is about the concept of nation building as taken by African bourgeoisie class who came to power after colonialism. The poet shows that independence was just the change in colour but the leaders adopted the very tenets of their predecessors.

Who is the persona? How do you know?

The persona is a driver who represents the low class.

In line 3 he says “*I drove the permanent secretary*”

Suggest some literary and poetic devices used in the poem.

i. Alliteration

Highly delicate diplomatic duties..

And secretly smilng...

Cold Bell beer

ii. Barbarism

Mwananchi, I too had none!

iii. Onomatopoeia

Ah, he continued yawning again.

This is the sound of yawning

iv. Satire

To an important urgent function

In fact to a luncheon at the Vic.

Lunch is called an important urgent function, this is very satirical

v. Irony.

The title of the poem '***Building the Nation***' is ironical because the guys in the poem were not building the nation.

Why did the PS ask the question "*Did you have any lunch friend?*"

He asked the question just to keep himself awake throughout the journey and not because he is concerned by the welfare of the driver.

What is the tone of the poem?

The tone is both sad and ironical/satirical

The poet says in the last stanza '*so two nation builders arrived home this evening*' were the two people building the nation?.

Not really. The poet uses this as a satire to criticise the idea that people always claim to build the nation but they end up building their stomachs.

A FREEDOM SONG (BY Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (Kenya))

Atieno washes dishes,

Atieno plucks the chicken,

Atieno gets up early,

Beds her sucks down in the kitchen,

Atieno eight years old

Atieno yo.

Since she's my sister's child

Atieno needs no pay

While she works my wife can sit

Sewing each sunny day,

With her earning I support

Atieno yo.

Atieno's sly and jealous

Bad example to the kids

Since she minds them, like a school girl

Wants their dresses, shoes and beads.
Atieno ten years old,
Atieno yo.

Now my wife has gone to study
Atieno's less free,
Don't I feed her, school my own ones,
Pay the party, union fee
All for progress? Aren't you grateful,
Atieno yo?

Visitors need much attention,
Specially when I work nights.
That girl stays too long at market
Who will teach her what is right?
Atieno rising fourteen,
Atieno yo.

Atieno's had a baby
So we know that she is bad
Fifty-fifty it may live
To repeat the life she had,
Ending in post partum bleeding
Atieno yo.

Atieno's soon replaced
Meat and sugar more than all
She ate in such a narrow life
Were lavished in her funeral
Atieno's gone to glory
Atieno yo.

APPRECIATION OF THE POEM

INTRODUCTION

Marjorie was born in Britain in 1928 and travelled to Kenya to work as a missionary. She met and married Macgoye in 1960. This poem was written out of her experience in living among the Luo – a tribe of her husband. She criticises negligence of nurturing children among African societies. Without proper guidance, the young girl Atieno becomes pregnant which leads to her death.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS



What is the poem about?

The poem is about a young girl called Atieno who is mistreated by her own uncle. She works without pay and ends in death due to post partum bleeding.



What is the kind of the poem?

It is a narrative poem (telling a story) but it is a special kind of narrative poem called “a ballad”



How many stanzas are there?

It has seven stanzas, each with six verses (lines) of unequal length and a refrain “Atieno yo”



What is the tone of the poem?

The tone is sympathetic to the child.



Comment on the rhyming pattern.

Every second and forth lines end with rhyme,

Chicken/kitchen

Pay/day

Kids/beads

Free/fee

Night/ right

Bad/had

All/funeral



Who is the persona? How do you know?

The persona in the poem is Atieno’s uncle. This is revealed in the second stanza where he comments; “since she’s my sister’s child/Atieno needs no pay.



How does Atieno change over the years?

Atieno changes in behaviour in respect to her age. While she is eight she is just working at home but as she grows fourteen, after puberty hits she stays long at the market perhaps with boys. This eventually leads her to get impregnated.



Comment on the literary and poetic devices

Refrain

Every stanza ends with a refrain line “Atieno yo”

Alliteration

Pay party union fee

Atieno needs no pay

Rhetorical question

Who will teach her what is right?

Aren’t you grateful Atieno yo?

Poetic licence.

This is the freedom of the poet to break/violate certain grammatical rules to achieve a poetic effect.

“*Specially when I work night*” the correct one could be ‘***especially when I work at night***’.

Simile

“*She minds them like a school girl*”

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

CHILD LABOUR

The issue of child labour has become a burning issue that attracts the attention of most social activists. Many children are employed informally, in the streets, homes and some workplaces. We see them selling plastic bags, candies, washing cars, helping the military rebels etc. Atieno in the poem is just one case in point. She represents this class. She is working as a house girl at the age of 8 and strangely enough without pay. At this age she should have been in STD 2. Yet she is employed in her uncle’s home.

EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION

Despite the growing awareness of the violation of human rights, the world is still facing the problem of exploitation and oppression.

The young girl in the poem is not only exploited but also oppressed by her own uncle. Although she works and does all the domestic chores she is not paid nor given any good care. The poetess suggests that she even desires to have the dresses, shoes and beads of her cousins since she is not given one. Here says the poetess.

Atieno’s sly and jealousy/Bad example to the kids/ Since she minds them like a school girl/Wants their dresses, shoes and dresses.

Again in the second stanza she shows how Atieno’s efforts are wasted without gain.

Since she is my sister’s child/Atieno needs no pay

EARLY PREGNANCY

This is another common problem among the teenagers today. Parents are now very busy than at any point in human history. As a result teens have been left without proper parental care. Many girls today have failed to reach their educational goals because when they get pregnancy, they are kicked out of schools altogether. At the age of fourteen Atieno becomes pregnant. This is partly due to poor parental care. As the poetess says that her aunt has gone to study and uncle is busy with the work while poor Atieno has no one to teach her what is right.

Since she is still young to handle the delivery complications she dies of excessive post partum bleeding.

HYPOCRISY

There is hypocrisy from family level to national level when you come to think of it. Most stepparents mistreat their stepchildren at home but in the outside they want everybody to believe that they are taking good care of them. If you hear the tone of Atieno's uncle you will certainly discover some points of sympathy. But the question is; who is mistreating the young Atieno? It's her uncle. This is hypocrisy. On the funeral, we are told that meat and sugar more than all that Atieno had eaten in such a narrow life were lavished in her funeral. That translates into something like, "*I loved the child*" what a hypocrite!

POOR PARENTAL CARE.

While we are not told the reasons why Atieno is not living with her own biological parents, it is evident that most parents have left the responsibility of taking care of their children to the community like schools, churches or relatives. Because the parents are busy, they have no time to make regular follow-ups to check the kind of upbringing their children go through.

Parenting is the most important responsibility that parents are now avoiding. Atieno goes to work in her uncle's home at the age of eight, and her parents are not making follow-ups. Atieno's uncle is also portrayed as a bad parent since he mistreats his own niece.

RELEVANCE

As we have seen child labour, hypocrisy, exploitation, oppression, poor parental care and early pregnancies are all common phenomena in our country today. We see many children in the streets selling things like plastic bags, washing cars; helping the military rebels etc. many girls drop their studies due to early pregnancies. Every day we hear of violation and abuse of children rights and parents are very busy today to the point that they cannot spare time to be with their children and listen to their problems.

DEATH BE NOT PROUD (JOHN DONNE (England))

(NECTA 2009) with reference to the poem below highlight the central theme and relate it to what is currently happening in our society.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Might and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure- then from thee much more must flow;
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;

And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

INTRODUCTION

This sonnet is about making death seem not-so-scary. Death has got the real attitude problem in a sense that he thinks he is the biggest, worst meanest dude in town. Everybody treats him like the king of the underworld. They think he has the power to do the terrible things. Donne and other metaphysical poets in general are masters of surprise ending and this one is no exception. In traditional Christian theology, it is thought that when people die it's like they are asleep until the end of the world or the judgement day. The poem like most sonnets has centred on only one subject – death

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

MORTALITY / DEATH

The poem takes an assertive (clear) stand against mortality (death). It makes a paradoxical statement that mortality is itself mortal - which is to say death can die. But the speaker wouldn't make this statement if he doesn't fear that may be death is the end. He shows that although people fear death terribly but in the long run death will be no more and as a result there is no reason for fear.

He compares death with a 'short sleep' in which people sleep but there comes a day when they will wake up and live eternally and death shall be the loser.

He says;

*One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.*

DREAMS AND HOPES

The big dream and hope in the poem is to defeat death and go to heaven. The speaker is confident that his faith in God won't let him down. Nevertheless, that is a thing about faith it doesn't always come with a guarantee. However, the speaker shows that even himself, he has got no much option. He must die no matter what. The difference it makes however is that, when you die in God you will rise again and live eternally. This gives him enough hopes to face death.

COURAGE

The poem provides us with courage of confronting death without fear. Throughout the entire poem, the speaker grows more confident by showing that death is not the end of life. Although it claims people's lives now, a day is coming when death will take its own life. In such a case we certainly have nothing to fear.

He says;

*Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Might and dreadful, for though art not so.*

RELIGION and FAITH

The poem seems to be centred on the subject of religion. It is only in religious spheres people believe that after this life there comes a better life when this mortal body shall put on immortality and death shall be defeated forever.

Even though, Donne puts a clear demarcation that this chance of rising and living eternally is not just for everybody who simply die. He rather seems to be very meticulous by adopting a more specific statement that only the good people (*our best men*) are entitled to this privilege.

He says;

*And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones and soul's delivery*

THE AFTERLIFE

The poet has the hopes of the afterlife. He even shows that the afterlife is better than this life. For him death seems to be a blessing because it is only through death that people are capable of enjoying the afterlife.

Here says Donne;

*From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure - then from thee much more must flow,*

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

What type of the poem is this?

This poem is a sonnet because it is made up of 14 lines (verses)

In what sense is the “sleep of death a short sleep” (line 13)?

Although the dead remain in their tombs for hundreds of years, still Donne calls it a short sleep since the dead know nothing. From the day they die they remain unconscious and remember nothing until the day of resurrection.

The poem has no clear/overt reference to Christianity. Aside from the title how do you know that this is a religious poem?

It is only in the religious context people have the assurance of afterlife (life after death). It is the bible that describes death as a short sleep and further states that death will one day be no more in the new heaven and the new earth. (1Cor 15:26)

Comment on the figures of speech;

Personification.

Death is addressed as though it is a person. “*Death be not proud though some have called thee mighty and dreadful*” “*Death, thou shalt die*”

Symbolism

He has used common symbols in Christian theology “***sleep and rest***” to represent death.

“*One short sleep past, we wake eternally*” (line 13)

Apostrophe

Addressing a thing/person in its/his absence. The poet addresses death but death does not respond. Eg he says ‘*poor death*’ which is an embarrassing way to talk to someone who considers himself tough.

Metaphor. The poet compares ‘*rest and sleep*’ as the pictures of death. Also death is compared with a slave.

Synecdoche.

This implies using part of something to represent the whole.

In the poem he uses the “*bones of the best men*” to represent the whole physical body.

Rhetorical question. The speaker asks “*why swell’st thou then?*” it is just intended to make death realize that he has no reasons to be proud, and not seeking for a response.

Comment on the rhyming scheme.

Like most petrarchan sonnets, this sonnet has 14 lines and a rhyme scheme that goes ABBAABBA and the last six lines are CDDCAA

RELEVANCE

Today in our society, there are these two basic concepts about death. On one extreme there are those who believe that death is the end of life and human history. Therefore, when they come at the point of death they face it with fear. On the other extreme there are those especially in religion realm who believe that death is but another door to a better life. For them, death should not be proud because they aspire for afterlife which is better than the life we live now. They take death as a blessing and not as a doom.

THE GRACEFUL GIRRAFE CANNOT BECOME A MONKEY

Okot P B’TEK (Uganda)

My husband tells me

I have no ideas

Of modern beauty.

He says

I have stuck

To old-fashioned hair styles.

He says

I am stupid and very backward,

That my hair style

Makes him sick

Because I am dirty.

It is true

I cannot do my hair

As white women do.

Listen,

My father comes from Payira,

My mother is a woman of Koc!

I am a true Acoli

I am not a half-caste

I am not a slave girl;

My father was not brought home

By the spear

My mother was not exchanged

For a basket of millet.

Ask me what beauty is

To the Acoli

And I will tell you;

I will show it to you

If you give me a chance!

You once saw me,

You saw my hair style

And you admired it,

And the boys loved it

At the arena

Boys surrounded me

And fought for me.

My mother taught me

Acoli hair fashions;

Which fits the kind

Of hair of the Acoli,

And the occasion.

Listen,

Ostrich plumes differ

From chicken feathers,

A monkey's tail

Is different from that of a giraffe,

The crocodile's skin
Is not like the guinea fowl's,
And the hippo is naked, and hairless.

The hair of the Acoli
Is different from that of the Arabs;
The Indians' hair
Resembles the tail of a horse;
It is like sisal strings
And needs to be cut
With scissors.
It is black,
And is different from that of a white woman.

A white woman's hair
Is soft like silk;
It is light
And brownish like
That of a brown monkey,
And is very different from mine.
A black woman's hair
Is thick and curly;
It is true
Ring-worm sometimes eat up
A little girl's hair
And this is terrible;
But when hot porridge
Is put on the head
And the dance is held
Under the sausage-fruit tree
And the youths have sung

*You, Ring worm
Who is eating Duka's hair
Here is your porridge,*

Then the girl's hair
Begins to grow again
And the girl is pleased.

INTRODUCTION

This is a short extract from a long poem called “*song of Lawino*” which is almost entirely based on the conflict between old and new ways of life. So it is based on what Lawino thinks as a treasure for Africans as contrasted from what Ocol thinks on his side. (*Although their names do not appear anywhere throughout the poem*).

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Although the poem is but a small part of a long poem with several themes, still some of these broader themes can be narrowly extracted from this poem. These include; *identity and awareness, African culture vs European culture, traditional healing, protest and the position of women*.

IDENTITY AND AWARENESS

Africans need to be aware of their identity. In this poem Lawino reacts to her husband complaint. While Ocol keeps complaining and regretting for being an African, Lawino on the other hand turns her husband’s complaint into a praise-song for herself and her people. She does so by showing that she is aware of her identity as a black African woman and proud of it. Just like all other women of other races are proud of theirs Lawino sees no need why she should abandon hers. In lines 15-20 she says;

Listen

My father comes from Payira,

My mother is a woman of Koc!

I am a true Acoli

I am not a half-caste

I am not a slave girl

AFRICAN CULTURE vs EUROPEAN CULTURE

In ‘*Song of Lawino*’ the poet discusses a lot of conflicts in African culture against European culture in most aspects. This small part of the poem centres entirely on hairstyles alone. Lawino shows that all people were created naturally beautiful and should be proud of how they are. For Lawino there are no reasons for Africans to do their hair like white women because white women never wish to do theirs like Africans. She uses the images *ostrich plumes, chicken feathers, crocodile skin*, etc to show that every creature has a point of departure from other creatures. No one creature should ever try to change and be like any other. The same applies for people from different races.

TRADITIONAL HEALING

Moreover, Lawino shows how Africans used to deal with different social and natural phenomena. Although it might seem as a kind of incantation, but it helped to deal with unusual phenomena. For example she says if a ring-worm has eaten the little girl’s hair, all they do is put hot porridge on the head, hold a dance, sing a song, then the hair grows again. This traditional ritual is still relevant to some societies today.

PROTEST

Lawino shows an open protest against European culture that is invading African culture. She does all it takes to educate African women to love and care for what they have, believe in who they are, and what they want to do with their lives. She protests doing her hair like white women. She says;

It is true

I cannot do my hair

As white women do

POSITION OF WOMEN

True and strong upholder of African culture

Lawino in this poem represents a class of women who are proud of their culture and identity. They can't compromise their standards just to please their husbands

Care taker for children

Lawino shows that she behaves the way she does because her mother took time to teach her. It is always believed that most of the behaviours that we have, we picked them during childhood. It is up to parents to teach their children good manners and they will not abandon them to old age. She says; *my mother taught me/Acoli hair fashions/which fits the kind/of hair of the Acoli/and the occasion*

STUCTURAL ANALYSIS

What does the title of the poem “*the graceful giraffe cannot become a monkey*” mean?

The poet uses the symbol of the “giraffe” to represent the Acoli (Africans) and “monkey” as a symbol for whites. As the giraffe cannot become a monkey, neither can Africans become white people by their artificial designs.

Comment on the figures of speech.

Simile expression of comparison by using conjunctions

A white woman's hair is soft like silk

And brownish like that of a brown monkey

The Indian's hair resembles that of a horse, it is like sisal strings

Symbolism using one thing to represent another.

“a graceful giraffe” represents Africans

“A monkey” represents Europeans

i. **Personification** giving human qualities to inanimate beings.

Here the song is sung to a ring worm as though it is a human being

You, ringworm who is eating Dukas hair, here is your porridge

ii. **Anaphora** (repeating words at the beginning of neighboring clauses)

I am a true Acoli

I am not a half-caste

I am not a slave girl

Who is the persona in this poem? How do you know?

The persona is an African woman (Lawino) although her name is not in the poem. We know she is a woman because she says “*my husband tells me*” and the way she describes different hair styles.

How does Lawino see her identity?

Lawino sees her identity as something to be proud of because she believes that she is beautiful just the way she is and is not ready to change.

Who is surer of his/her identity? Lawino or her husband? Why do you say so?

Certainly, Lawino is surer of her identity. This is due to what she expresses from the beginning of the poem to the end. While she admits that all other women of other races are beautiful she is not ready to compromise her identity and be like them.

How does Lawino react to the complaint of her husband?

Lawino does not insult back her husband but rather she turns her husband’s complaints into a praise song about herself and her people. In the process she gently tries to advise her husband to regain the identity he is busy losing.

Who is Lawino speaking to in the poem?

Lawino is speaking to both her husband and Africans in general. When she says “*My husband tells me...*” she speaks to the audience (Africans) but then turns the attention to her husband “*you once saw me*” here she speaks specifically to her husband.

MESSAGE

Africans should be proud of their identity.

No matter what they do Africans will remain Africans.

RELEVANCE

The poem is relevant today in a number of aspects.

There are African women today who wish to do their hair like white women do.

There are black women who never wish to do their hair like white women. They remain natural and proud of their identity.

There are men who pressurize their wives to do their hair like whites.

AFRICA (BY David Diop (Senegal))

Africa my Africa

Africa of proud warriors in the ancestral savannahs

Africa of whom my grandmother sings

On the banks of the distant river

I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
The slavery of your children
Africa tell me Africa
Is this you this back that is bent
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun
But a grave voice answers me
Impetuous son that tree young and strong
That tree there
In splendid loneliness amidst white and faded flowers
That is Africa your Africa
That grows again patiently obstinately
And its fruit gradually acquires
The bitter taste of liberty.

INTRODUCTION

This poem is written by David Diop - A Black African who was born in France in 1927. His father was from Senegal and his mother from Cameroon and he grew up in France and West Africa aware of both cultures and traditions. He was deeply concerned by the question of independence from colonial rule.

This poem is a dramatic monologue where the speaker seems to be in conversation with Africa. The poem can be thematically divided into three parts; pre colonial Africa, colonial Africa and post colonial Africa.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS.

EXPLOITATION

There are evidences of exploitation in the poem in the fact that the poet expresses how the sweat of Africans was lost in vain.

The blood of your sweat

He sweat of your work

All this was done at a time when Africans were turned into slaves and worked for their masters without any benefit.

The work of your slavery

The slavery of your children

OPPRESSION AND HUMILIATION

Oppression and humiliation were common practices in colonial time. They were used to force Africans work for colonisers without objection. This has left scars to Africa that we still depend on them even when they seem to mistreat us.

This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation

This back trembling with red scars

And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun

IDENTITY AND AWARENESS

The poet however seems to be aware of his identity as black African. Although he grew up in France he shows that black blood flows in his veins, which is to say he is still an African regardless of where he grew up.

I have never known you

But your blood flows in my veins

The voice that answers Diop sums up his African identity.

Impetuous son that tree young and strong

That tree there

In splendid loneliness amidst white and faded flowers

That is Africa your Africa.

EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM

The poet concludes his poem by showing the effects that colonialism had on African continent. Nevertheless, he seems to be optimistic that at least Africa is growing up again just like a young tree.

That is Africa your Africa

That grows again patiently obstinately

What is the poem about?

The poem is about the effects colonialism has had on Africa. It traces the history of pre-colonial Africa, then shows the torture that Africans underwent in colonialism and how Africa is starting afresh like a young tree.

What does the symbol ‘*that tree young and strong*’ suggest?

First of all the symbol refers to Africa. It suggests that after colonialism Africa began to grow up again just as a young tree.

Why do the fruits acquire a bitter taste of liberty? Why does liberty taste bitter?

The fruits acquire a bitter taste because liberation of the oppressed is not a simple thing. It needs sacrifice and determination. Some people lose their lives in the process. So in such a case liberty is never sweet but bitter memories.

) What do these words symbolise?

'Scars', 'whip' and 'blood'. They stand for the torture that Africans went through in colonial time.

What is the tone of the poem? The tone changes from the beginning it is **happy** in the middle it becomes **sad** but at the end it becomes **optimistic**.

Why does the poet say that "black blood flows in his veins"?

Black blood in this poem symbolises Africanism as there is no blood that is black in colour. So he shows that although he grew up in France he is still aware of his African identity.

) How have the past effects of colonialism shaped the Africa's present?

The socio-political and economic state of Africa today was seriously affected during colonial time. So Africa was paralysed and is just starting afresh as a young tree while the colonisers are well off.

) Comment on the figures of speech and poetic devices.

Anadiplosis; the repetition in which the last expression of one statement becomes the first expression in the following statement

*The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
The slavery of your children*

Rhetorical question a question that does not need a reply.
Is that you this back that is bent

Symbolism

'Scars', 'whip' and 'blood'. They stand for the torture that Africans went through in colonial time.

Black blood- symbolises African identity

Personification.

The poet addresses Africa as though it is a human being and has blood that flows, and can sweat etc.

Alliteration- repetition of similar consonant sounds at the beginning of consecutive words

You beautiful black blood

Repetition (for emphasis)

The word Africa is repeated 7 times throughout the poem

Eg. **Africa my Africa.**

Under exaggeration.

Your beautiful black blood

This is under exaggeration because there is no black blood in colour.

MESSAGE

Colonialism paralysed Africa so it is up to us to make Africa's hope alive again.
We must know our identity as Africans, where we come from, where we are and what we need to do to get where we are going.

LET ME NOT TO THE MARRIAGE OF TRUE MINDS (W. SHAKESPEARE (ENGLAND))

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is a star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error, and upon me prov'd
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd

INTRODUCTION

This is a sonnet also called sonnet 116 written by a British metaphysical poet William Shakespeare (1564-1616) that tries to fill the vacuum of infidelity and unfaithfulness in marriage relationships. The poet shows that at least true love based on truth and understanding can exist. He presents two glorious lovers who come into relationship freely and are trustful to each other.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

TRUE LOVE

The kind of love that Shakespeare brings out here is the one that stands firmly even if there might be consequences to shake it. He says that such kind of a love does not alter/change when it alteration finds. For him true love is like "*an ever-fixed mark*" which will survive any crisis. In lines 7-8 he continues to say although we may be able to measure love to some degrees, this does not mean we truly understand it. Love's actual worthy cannot be known- it is a misery.

*O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;*

*It is a star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken*

This kind of love that Shakespeare expresses is the one that is unchangeable even when challenged by some circumstances. Love is not flat but he warns that even if it means to go through upside downs they should remain firm. It's like a North Star that guides the ship (bark) in deep sea.

On the marriage day there may really be no impediments (obstacles) but in the long run, changes of circumstances, outward appearance and other conducts may challenge the relationship. But lines 9-12 reaffirms that, this kind of love is unshakable throughout time and always remains so.

*Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.*

UNFAITHFUL LOVE

On the other hand he shows that there is another extreme of love that is not based on mutual love. If something happens to challenge the relationship it breaks away.

*.....Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:*

Lastly, in the final couplet the poet declares that if he is mistaken in his view of the unmoveable nature of true love then he must take back all his writings on love, truth and faith. Then he says if he judged love inappropriately no man has ever really loved in the ideal sense that the poet professes.

*If this be error, and upon me prov'd
I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd*

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Comment on the Tone of the poem.

The tone is lovely because the poet generally talks about love of two lovers

ii) What is the type Of the Poem?

It is a sonnet made up of 14 verses (line)

iii) Comment on the rhyming scheme/ Pattern

The poem has a regular rhyming pattern of
ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

iv). Comment on the Figures of speech and sound devices

Metaphor

Love is compared to the star

It is the star to every wandering bark

Allusion

The first two lines are a manifest of allusion to the words of the marriage service ***‘if any one of you knows cause of just impediments why these two persons should not be joined together in a holy matrimony’***

Alliteration

....compass come.

Personification

The poet uses abstract things like Time and Love as human beings to show that they can do or feel like human beings. He even uses pronoun ***‘his’*** when referring to them. Eg *Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks*

Is the poem relevant to your society?

In the society today there are people with true love though they are very few. Most of them fall in the category of love which changes with circumstances. When challenged by poor income, lack of a child, or any other challenge it easily breaks away though on the marriage day they admitted to remain together until death separates them. And that they will survive the coming impediments.

What lesson do you get from the poem?

We should cherish true love.

True love is unshakable and remains so throughout time.

What are impediments? What do you think the marriage of true minds is?

In actual sense impediments means obstacles/ hindrances. In marriage service this is a covenant that the couple should make to see to it that their love is free and willing.

What does the poet mean when he says that you can measure the height of a star but not its worth? How can you apply this to love?

Always we can only judge outward appearance of something but inward characters are difficult to be measured. So even in the case of love it is not what it always seems to be in the outside. Its worth lie deeper into the heart of someone. There is more to it than just outward appearance. No one can read someone else's heart.

In Shakespeare's day the word 'fool' could mean a servant. Why is love 'not Time's fool'?

Love is not Time's servant in a sense that love is timeless. It does not last with time but it endures forever as long as those in love have decided to remain in love no matter what circumstance may challenge their relationship.

I REMEMBER (Naomi Mnthali (Malawi))

I remember, Countrymen,
The days of 'Dawn Over the Land'.
Of hopes and expectations
When I truly understood
Slavery was a thing of the past –

We, the people of the land,
Had been freed.
I was there when slowly
Darkness set in.
The gradual destruction
Was there in front of me,
But I did not see it.
I continued, Countrymen, to live in the past.
And when I finally looked
It was too late, and even I
Had become a scavenger.

INTRODUCTION

This is a poem by a Malawian poetess Naomi Mnthali that tells a story of changes of power and of hopes being raised and disappointed. The poem refers to Malawian independence that brought hopes to the people of the land but later became only a nightmare or a daydream. Although it is about Malawian independence it can also describe other parts of African continent in general.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

DISILLUSIONMENT/DISAPPOINTMENT

Most freedom fighters did not ever imagine that the post independence life would be like this. When they were fighting for freedom they believed that things will actually change in their favour.

*I remember, Countrymen,
The days of 'Dawn Over the Land'
Of hopes and expectations
When I truly understood
Slavery was a thing of the past –*

That is however not what it turned out to be. They are still living the life of the past and life has even become worse since they live like scavengers.

*I was there when slowly
Darkness set in.
The gradual destruction
Was there in front of me,
But I did not see it*

BETRAYAL

The leaders who took power from the colonisers have betrayed the common people most of whom took part in the struggle for freedom. The common people live the same life they lived before independence. To them independence makes no sense.

The poet compares this situation with destruction that lay ahead but he did not notice it before.

*The gradual destruction
Was there in front of me,
But I did not see it*

He even shows that while some people live the modern life; he himself lives in the past.
The same kind of life they lived before independence.

I continued, countrymen, to live in the past.

And when I finally looked

It was too late, and even I

Had become a scavenger

POVERTY

A scavenger is an animal or a person who collects things by searching them from waste or unwanted objects. The poet seems to come from a poor class that was betrayed by the bourgeoisie class. This class always finds it hard to get their daily bread. They have become scavengers in their own free countries. They eat the leftovers thrown by the privileged few.

And when I finally looked

It was too late, and even I

Had become a scavenger

This situation is almost evident in all African countries

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

The poet talks about “the days of ‘Dawn over the land’” what do you think this means?

‘Days of dawn’ means the very days when independence was attained and became like the outbreak of a new day.

There is one metaphorical expression in the poem. Mention it.

The metaphor is ‘...I had become a scavenger’ he compares himself with a scavenger.

‘I was there when slowly darkness set in’ what does this statement imply?

The poet confesses that he was aware as things began to change to worse.

What type of poem is this?

It is a lyric poem but a special form of lyric poems called **aubade**. This is a poem about morning celebrating the coming of dawn.

What is the tone of the poem?

The tone is unhappy.

How many stanzas are there? And comment on the rhyming pattern.

The poem has only one stanza with irregular rhyming pattern and unequal length of verses.

Comment on the use of allusion.

The poet has employed allusion in the first two lines by citing the very specific historical event of Malawian independence. He shows that he actually remembers what happened.

Is the poem relevant to Tanzanians today?

Oh! Yes it is. Like most African countries the issue of betrayal by the bourgeoisie class is common. So even in Tanzania most people live in the same situation described by the poet.

What message do we draw from the poem?

Betrayal is not good in social and economic development.

Those in power should recognise that the resources of the nation should benefit both the proletariat class and the ruling class.

Independence was just a handover of authority from white colonisers to black colonisers, true independence is still to come.

Epilogue

Grace Nichols (Guyana)

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
From the root of the old
One
A new one has sprung

INTRODUCTION

This poem was written by a black woman from Guyana (Grace Nichols) who later moved to England. It expresses important ideas about separation and a new beginning.

The poet says she has “*lost her tongue*” what does that mean?

It means she has adopted a new language. She no longer speaks her native language.

Which ocean has she crossed?

While she has crossed the real geographical ocean (Pacific) from Guyana - Caribbean all the way to England, “***crossing the ocean***” could also imply or symbolise other changes that happen to people. As she crossed the ocean she never remained the same because even her language changed.

What does she mean when she says “*a new one has sprung from the root of the old one*”?

Here the poet talks something about the development of languages. We all know that languages are dynamic (always changing) and that they borrow words and even grammatical structure from each other. Languages like creoles come of the blend of two or more languages. So the language she speaks originates/emanates from the old one.

What is the theme of the poem?

The central theme is **separation and loss of identity**.

The poetess shows that when most people move away from their motherland they tend to lose their identity and adopt the culture of the foreign land including but not limited to language.

The poem could be about Grace herself who moved from Guyana to England.

It could also be addressing all the Caribbean who left their homes and went to England.

But also all those people who left their own countries to go to the Caribbean in the last few hundred years, especially all those who were taken from Africa in slavery;

All black people all over the world whose roots can be traced back to Africa over the centuries;

All people all over the world, as scientists think that human life originated in Africa thousands of years ago.

IF WE MUST DIE. (Claude McKay)

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot.
While round us bark the mad and angry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot
If we must die, o let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead.
O kinsmen! We must meet our common foe
Though far outnumbered. Let us show us brave
And for their thousand blows, deal one death blow
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous cowardly pack
Pressed to the wall dying but fighting back.

INTRODUCTION

Claude McKay was born in 1890 in Jamaica. He went to Kansas to study agriculture at the time when Ku Klux Klan was highly active. He was therefore forced to move to New York in 1914. In 1919 Washington DC newspaper gave stories of an alleged (suspected) sexual assault that was said to be committed by an African American. The stories sparked (caused) a series of twenty riots during the summer of 1919, beginning with white lynch mob (murderous group) that targeted blacks in Washington. There were 28 public

lynchings (killings) in the first half of the year and the following summer and fall came to be known as “**The Red Summer**” of 1919. This was the motivation behind McKay’s “**If We Must Die**”

He wrote the poem amid the violence and bloodshed of 1919, and in this poem he encourages his community to take action and fight back.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

What type of the poem is this?

It is a sonnet. It is made up of only one stanza with 14 verses.

Comment on the rhyming scheme.

The poem has a regular rhyming scheme that goes;
ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

What is the tone of the poem/poet?

The tone is serious and angry

Who is the persona? How do you know?

The persona is a black American who is oppressed, humiliated and persecuted. We know this from the history of the poet and the fact that blacks were hunted, penned (locked in small cells) and killed like hogs (pigs) in America.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot.

While round us bark the mad and angry dogs

What sufferings does the person experience?

They are hunted (arrested), penned (locked in small cells) with angry and mad dog guarding them and are sometimes killed without fair trial.

Is the persona afraid of death? Give reasons to justify your answer.

The persona is surely not afraid of death. The reasons for this are;

When you die fighting people will honor you. i.e. it is noble to die fighting. “*let us nobly die*”

Whether he fights or not, he is bound to die someday. “*What though before us lies an open grave?*”

Comment on the figures of speech and poetic devices

i. Rhetorical question

What though before us lies an open grave?”

ii. Metaphor

He compares the enemy/oppressors with the monsters. ‘*The monsters we defy*’

iii. Images

The poet paints the pictures of;

Hogs (pigs) = pigs are killed mercilessly so they should not die the same death.

Mad and angry dogs = this is the picture of the oppressor who guards the Blacks not to escape from punishment.

iv. Symbolism

“An Open grave” this symbolizes *death*. Which is to say whether we fight or not death is there waiting for us. Death is the ultimate finality of human life.

‘Blood’ is a symbol for sacrifice

v. **Repetition**

The phrase “*if we must die*” is repeated for emphasis

vi. **Hyperbole.**

“*For their thousand blows*”

vii. **Satire/Irony**

The poet mocks both the enemy and himself.

“*Like men we’ll face the murderous cowardly pack.*” He mocks the oppressor that he is coward like a group of wolves. But how can someone coward press you to the wall dying. He shows that he is himself weak/inferior to the enemy. Also shows that the enemy is capable of dealing a thousand death blows but he can deal only one.

) **The poet calls his enemy “*the murderous cowardly pack*” what does that mean?**

A pack is a group of dogs or wolves hunting together. He compares the oppressors as a cowardly pack because the Whites were hunting Africans in notorious mobs and not individually. This shows that they were coward as well.

To whom is the speaker talking?

The speaker calls for action from his fellow kinsmen (the oppressed) or more specifically Black-Americans.

Is the poem relevant today?

The poem is still relevant because it instills the sense of awareness, sacrifice and determination when it comes to fighting for our rights. Also it is very true that those who died fighting during this period of racial injustice in America are honored until now in the history of America. Think of Martin Luther King Jr, and Malcolm X.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS.

SACRIFICE

In the fight against oppression, sacrifice is a valuable commodity. Few People need to sacrifice their lives so that the majority may live in peace. In this poem the poet (McKay) calls for actions against the enemy (foe). However, he shows that the struggle may mean death. But if they must die, it is better to die fighting so that they may be honored later than dying while doing nothing.

He says

If we must die, o let us nobly die

So that our precious blood may not be shed

In vain! ...

HUMILIATION/TORTURE/OPPRESSION

The poet and his fellow kinsmen go through a series of torture and mistreatment from their enemy. They are arrested with no reason, jailed and killed like pigs. This is a situation which affected most African American in the time of racial injustice in America and when “**Jim Crow laws**” were in effect. The poet shows the experience they are going through by saying;

*If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot.
While round us bark the mad and angry dogs*

MOTALITY (DEATH)

Due to this politically charged situation death at least seems the best thing to help a person sort out what is important in life. The speaker speaks about death in a more practical sense - he is actually facing it. It is not the question of whether he will die or what will happen when he dies it is about how he will meet death. To him death is an opportunity to show strength, nobility and purpose.

*If we must die, o let us nobly die
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead.*

Unknown at 9:29 PM

Share

6 comments:



MYAKAYA WA BWINA October 11, 2018 at 3:29 AM

Safi sana kwa kuweka uchambuzi huu

[Reply](#)



Unknown October 15, 2018 at 3:42 AM

Beautifully written

[Reply](#)



Unknown June 10, 2019 at 2:19 AM

Thank you for your good analysis!

[Reply](#)



Unknown June 19, 2019 at 8:06 AM

This is too good not only to Tanzanian's but Ugandans too. Thanks alot
[Reply](#)



LUGWISHA JOSEPH July 20, 2019 at 2:55 AM

good
[Reply](#)



Musser March 22, 2020 at 6:51 PM

my GOD bless you
[Reply](#)

Enter your comment...

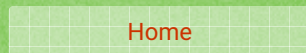


Comment as:

Google Accou ▼

[Publish](#)

[Preview](#)



[View web version](#)

About Me

Unknown

[View my complete profile](#)

Powered by [Blogger](#).