

CHAPTER 6 ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED POEMS

Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the analysis of selected works in African and English poetry. It is aimed at practising what were discussed in the previous chapter on poetry (Chapter 3). Note the ways in which each poem is discussed and be guided by the method in further study of poems.

The following poems are to be studied in this chapter: “Fulani Creation Story”, “The Fence”, “Expelled”, “Boy on a Swing”, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”, “Ambassadors of Poverty” and “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal”.

Poem for Study 1: “Fulani Creation Story”

FULANI CREATION STORY

“At the beginning, there was a huge drop of milk.

Then Doondari came and he created the stone.

Then the stone created iron;

And iron created fire;

And fire created water;

And water created air.

Then Doondari descended the second time,

And he took the five elements

And he shaped them into man.

But Man was proud.

Then Doondari created Blindness, and blindness defeated Man.

But when blindness became too proud,

Doondari created Sleep, and sleep defeated Blindness;

But when sleep became too proud,

Doondari created Worry, and worry defeated Sleep;

But when worry became too proud,

Doondari created Death, and death defeated Worry.

But when Death became too proud,

Doondari descended for the third time,

And he came as Gueno, the Eternal One,

and Gueno defeated Death.”

Background

Before the arrival of foreign cultures and traditions into Africa, every traditional African society has its own story of how the world was created. This creation stories affect the ways of life of the people. One of these African stories is the Fulani creation story. This poem is an account of creation popular among the Fulani people.

Because the African traditional society was a pre-literate society, these creation stories have no authorship. These societies are noted for their oral traditions. Therefore, poems are rendered only by the word of mouth and are passed from one generation to another. The “Fulani Creation Story” falls under this category.

Subject Matter

The poem is an account of the activities of the Supreme Being called Doondari. The poem is divided into two major parts. The first part dwells on the creation of the earth and all its resources. The second part is on the creation of man, and the consequence of such creation. In the end, Doondari conquers Death which was caused by man’s foolish and unreasonable actions.

Analysis of Stanzas

The first stanza of the poem starts with the fall of a huge drop of milk. Milk is an essential human diet. For every human being to survive, he or she has to depend on milk as a baby. Therefore, milk, in this poem, signifies life.

Then, there is the introduction of the creator, Doondari, who creates the mother earth (stone).

The second stanza dwells more on the creative powers of Doondari. The five elements of life which are water, air, fire, earth and iron are mentioned in the order of creation. The creation of these five elements shows the way for the coming of man.

Stanza three narrates how Doondari used the five elements to create man.

The fourth stanza is a one-line stanza. It stresses the fall of man through pride. Stanza five lists the various consequences of pride.

The last stanza depicts the defeat of Death, that is the eventual result of man's fall. Here, Doondari comes in form of another being Gueno, with the aim of conquering Death and establishing his authority.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem.

(a) The theme of creation

The poet addresses the process of creation. Although this creation story belongs to the Fulani people, it shares similar ideas with other creation stories around the world. In some other versions of the creation story, there are different patterns of how the world was created.

(b) Omnipotence of the Supreme Being

In every creation story, there is always an omnipotent Supreme Being, that is God. The poem shows the great authority of Doondari whose power is immeasurable.

(c) Rebellious attitude of man

Despite the love and attention given to man, including control over all things, man still proves to be ungrateful, selfish and dissatisfied. According to the poem, everything created is to suit man. However, the third stanza reveals the rebellious nature of man, "*But Man was proud.*"

(d) The fall of man

This is also a universal theme in all creation stories. The rebellious nature of man eventually leads to his downfall as shown in stanza three. The consequences of rebellion and pride are sorrow, pain and death. The fall of man also indicates that despite man's intelligence and control over all other creations, he proves to be weak.

(e) The theme of salvation

God's love for man is consistent. This is shown in his effort to restore his friendship with man and his authority over the world. According to the poem, Doondari came down the third time in form of the Eternal One, who defeated Death. This shows the salvation of man from the clutches of sin and death.

Language and Style

The poem is lyrical in nature, and it takes a narrative form. The language is song-like and easy to understand. This is emphasised through the use of a major poetic device, repetition. With this device, it is easy for the poem to be easily remembered.

Poetic Devices

Repetition: This is the major literary device used in this poem. Apart from its main purpose of emphasis, it serves as a memory (mnemonic) device, which aids the remembrance of the lines. There is consistent repetition of words like "and", "create", "then", and "Doondari".

Personification: In the second and fourth stanzas of the poem, human attributes are given to non-living things.

Then the stone created iron;

And iron created fire;

And fire created water;

And water created air.

and

... and blindness defeated Man.

But when blindness became too proud,

*... and sleep defeated Blindness;
But when sleep became too proud,
... and worry defeated Sleep;
But when worry became too proud,
Doondari created Death, and death defeated Worry.*

Imagery: There are some words that provoke the reader's imagination such as 'milk', 'blindness', 'defeat', 'worry' and so on.

Poem for Study 2: "The Fence"

THE FENCE – LENRIE PETERS

There where the dim past and future mingle
their nebulous hopes and aspirations
there I lie.

There where truth and untruth struggle
In endless and bloody combat,
there I lie.

There where time moves forwards and backwards
with not one moment's pause for sighing,
there I lie.

There where the body ages relentlessly
and only the feeble mind can wander back
there I lie

in open-souled amazement.

There where all the opposites arrive
to plague the inner senses, but do not fuse,
I hold my head; and then contrive
to stop the constant motion.

My head goes round and round,
But I have not been drinking,
I feel buoyant waves; I stagger.

It seems the world has changed her garment.
But it is I who have crossed the fence,
So there I lie.

There where the need for good
And "the doing good" conflict,
there I lie.

Background

Lenrie Peters was born in Banjul, the Gambia in 1932. He had his education in the Gambia Sierra Leone and England. He graduated as a medical doctor. Peters has written short stories, poems and a novel entitled *The Second Round*. He was the first Chairman of WAEC in the Gambia. He died in Dakar, in 2009.

Lenrie Peters wrote "The Fence" during the post-Gambian independence. This was a period during which there was a wide gap between the rich and the poor. The poem challenges the socio-economic and moral justification for this situation.

Subject Matter

This poem is about the inability of the poet in making a decision (or decisions) concerning important issues which affect his society. The “fence” is a metaphor and symbol which refers to those who simply “watch” but “do nothing”, while the society is in a state of crisis. The poem is presented as a confession because the poet himself is sitting on the fence.

Analysis of Stanzas

Stanzas one, two and three present the mind of someone in a confused state. The poet confesses to his inability to decide whether to stand by deceit or follow the truth. At the moment, he is neither here nor there. He is sitting on the fence.

The fourth stanza dwells on the helpless nature of man as a result of aging. The fifth stanza is the climax of the poet’s struggle. Here, he tries to take a decision. He struggles to gain control, all to no avail. The intensity of this effort makes him feel dizzy like a drunkard.

The sixth stanza could be said to be the resolution in the poem because the poet recognises and acknowledges that the fault lies with him and not with the world, as he initially believes. The last stanza brings back the old memory of uncertainty, as the poet is left with the choice to either act or remain sitting on the fence.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem:

(a) The theme of indecision

This is the central theme of the poem. Throughout the poem, the poet reflects on the problem of indecision in life. At a metaphorical level of interpretation, the poet, using himself as example, challenges those who do nothing about the socio-economic problems of their societies. In the end, he goes through a lot of aches, as clearly depicted in the poem, for not being alive to his responsibility.

(b) The theme of the inevitability of pressure

The first two lines of every stanza in the poem highlight different aspects of life where man is constantly in confusion. In other words, man is usually faced with problems in life and these cause pressure, anxiety and indecision.

(c) The theme of the importance of decision-making

In stanza seven, the poet is left to imagine the difference between knowing what is good and actually doing what is good. Although we are not told what the poet does in the end, the lesson learnt here is that one way or the other, man is destined to make a decision, whether right or wrong, good or bad. Irrespective of the choices available, it is not good to sit on the fence.

(d) The theme of man’s control over the world

In stanza six, the poet emphasises the fact that man should be responsible for his actions, and not transfer the responsibility to others. The world cannot change man. However, it is man that determines how the world would be through his actions and inaction.

Language and Style

The poem takes the form of a confession. The poet uses the first person personal pronoun ‘I’ repeatedly. The tone of the poet is that of confusion and helplessness.

Poetic Devices

Personification: This can be seen in the first two lines of stanzas one, two and three.

There where the dim past and future mingle
their nebulous hopes and aspirations.

Also in line 20 – ‘...the world has changed her garment.’

Refrain: The use of the refrain 'there I lie' further helps to emphasise the poet's helpless situation.

Synecdoche: In line 11, '...Only the feeble mind can wander back,' the word 'mind' is used to represent a human presence.

Irony: This is also found in line 11. It is only a mentally alert mind that can achieve the goal of sound remembrance, not a feeble (weak) one.

Imagery: Here, the diction provokes mental image of confusion in the poem. In other words, the poem comes alive, with thought-provoking mental pictures. Stanza five is a good example.

My head goes *round and round*,
But I have not been *drinking*,
I feel *buoyant waves*; I *stagger*

Assonance: There are repetitions of vowel sounds in the poem. An example can be found in lines 15 and 16:

I hold my head; and then contrive
to stop the constant motion.

Poem for Study 3: "Expelled"

EXPELLED – JARED ANGIRA

We had traded in the market competitively perfect
till you came in the boat, and polished goodwill approval from high order
all pepper differentials, denied flag-bearers.
and cut our ribs, dried our cows
the vaccine from the lake
burst the cowshed, the drought you brought
planted on the market place, the tree of memory

I had no safe lock to keep my records
when Sodom burnt, Gomorrah fell
the debtors' records blared
the creditors tapped my rusty door

My tears flowed to flooded streams
and sources the rivulets from my human lake
from my veins, my heart, my whole
disposition of the last penny
the last sight, of my fishing-net

Everyone avoids my path; I avoid death's too
Pursuit in a dark circus
the floating garden in a gale
plants reject sea water, the sea water rejects me

I have nothing to reject
The broken lines run across my face
The auctioneer will gong his hammer
For the goods left behind.

Background

Jared Angira was born in 1947 in Kenya. He studied Commerce in the University of Nairobi. He is a popular poet who wrote about the problems which affected the country especially as a result of colonial invasions. Therefore, the socio-economic problems of the Kenyan society, which are part of the colonial experience, form the basis for this poem.

Subject Matter

The poem “Expelled” describes the problems of the young state of Kenya in the colonial era. Here, the poet, portraying himself as a victim, narrates his ordeals in the hands of powerful strangers, who came without warning to take everything he has, leaving him naked and hungry.

Analysis of Stanzas

The first stanza shows a society in a perfect order until the arrival of foreigners without invitation, but who were well received. Within the same stanza, the foreigners overpowered the indigenes and exploited their profitable resources. The second stanza reveals bad treatment from the strangers. The third stanza reveals the pain and anguish of the poet dispossessed of both his money and his working tools. The fourth stanza further presents the hopelessness and helplessness of the victim. There is no solace in nature, as the poet is completely avoided and has no one to console him. The fifth stanza finally expresses the defeat of the people by the oppressive foreigners.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem:

(a) The theme of colonisation

The poet captures the history of his land as a colonised and oppressed country. In his view was a peaceful environment before the arrival of the colonial masters.

(b) The theme of oppression

The history of Kenya is a history of oppression. The poet reveals the pattern of pain and torture which took place during the colonial days.

(c) The theme of total destruction of African culture and values

A significant part of the oppressive attitude of the colonial masters is the destruction of almost every indigenous African cultural values and general way of life. This is evident in the second stanza of the poem.

I had no safe lock to keep my records
when Sodom burnt, Gomorrah fell
the debtors' records blared
the creditors tapped my rusty door

(d) The theme of disillusionment

With the oppressive power of the West, the people stood little chance to defend themselves. Perhaps, this is the reason the poem ends on a sad and depressive note.

I have nothing to reject
The broken lines run across my face
The auctioneer will gong his hammer
For the goods left behind.

Here, the anguish and total resignation to fate is emphasised.

(e) The theme of change

At a different level, the poem also presents change as a constant experience in life. The poem generates this philosophy in the first stanza, whereby the poet was seen as comfortable with life as he traded with his peers at the marketplace. But suddenly, things became different. In this poem, there is change from peace to chaos and then to struggle.

Language and Style

The diction of the poem is very imaginative. It appeals to the reader's emotions and captures the attention of the reader through the use of imagery. Also, the poet uses himself as a victim, a direct representative of his people.

The mood of the poem reflects a depressed feeling caused by oppression. The tone is harsh and accusing, and it later changes to anger and pity.

Poetic Devices

Imagery: The use of the imagery of commerce is prominent in the poem. The significant images include “traded”, “market”, “penny”, “fishing-net” and “goods”. The poet also makes use of other mental expressions like “cut”, “dried”, “vaccine”, and “drought”.

Assonance: There is a consistent repetition of similar vowel sounds. For example, ‘...the cowshed, the drought you brought’ – line 6.

Biblical Allusion: There is a reference to a particular event in the Bible in the second stanza, which portrays the destructive tendencies of the West.

Personification: Inanimate objects are given the attributes of living things. For example, “plants reject sea water, the sea water rejects me.”

Poem for Study 4: “Boy on a Swing”

BOY ON A SWING – OSWALD MTSHALI

Slowly he moves
To and fro, to and fro,
Then faster and faster
He swishes up and down.

His blue shirt
Billows in the breeze
Like a tattered kite.

The world whirls by:
East becomes west
North turns to south
The four cardinal points
Meet in his head.

Mother!
Where did I come from?
When will I wear long trousers?
Why was my father jailed?

Background

Oswald Mtshali was born in Vryheid, Natal, South Africa in 1940. His first collection of poetry, *Sounds of the Cowhide Drum*, was published in 1971. He is a renowned poet highly regarded for his radical poems against the apartheid system in South Africa.

Apartheid is a policy of harsh oppression whereby the white government discriminates against the black and coloured people. This apartheid system is called minority rule. “Boy on a Swing” is a reaction to that racial policy in South Africa.

Subject Matter

The poem represents the experience of black South Africans under the apartheid regime. Two stages in the life of a boy are presented. The first stage represents the age of innocence: the boy plays on the swing. The second part represents the age of discovery where he becomes conscious of his environment and discovers the missing part of his life – his father.

At the metaphorical level of interpretation, South African people, at first, lived a life of innocence, not aware of the dangers of oppressive rule.

Analysis of Stanzas

“Boy on a Swing” has four stanzas.

The first stanza describes the movement of the boy on the swing from a slow pace to a faster one. The second stanza presents the boy in a dizzy state. In the third stanza, the tempo of the movement becomes so rapid that the boy is very confused. In the last stanza, the boy seems to have come to his senses. He asks his mother a series of questions.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem:

(a) The theme of innocence

At the beginning of the poem, the reader identifies with the innocent state of the boy, who simply lives in a carefree world. He swings to and fro, totally ignorant of his environment. This theme shows the lack of awareness on the part of South Africans about their society and its oppressive nature.

(b) The theme of socio-political consciousness

The theme of socio-political consciousness is depicted in the third stanza. The boy becomes aware of his place in his environment after he overcomes the experience of confusion and shock. He reaches the state of discovery.

(c) The theme of discrimination and oppression

The poem highlights the injustices meted out to the people of South Africa. Through the questions of the boy, the experiences of torture, rape and imprisonment are presented.

Language and Style

The poem is a lyric. It has a simple diction, easy to understand, and it is very descriptive. The poetic devices are used to add colour to the meaning of the poem.

Poetic Devices

Metaphor: The “boy” on the swing is a metaphor. He directly represents the people of South Africa. His experiences, from the state of ignorance to discovery, also represent the history of South African people.

Rhetorical Question: The use of this poetic device is central to the meaning of the poem.

Where did I come from?

When will I wear long trousers?

Why was my father jailed?

Onomatopoeia: This describes the movement of the action of the boy on the swing in line 4.

He *swishes* up and down

Imagery: The choice of expression provokes mental pictures in the mind of the reader. A good example is the imagery of motion as depicted in lines 2 and 3:

To and fro, to and fro

Then faster and faster

Simile: There is the use of indirect comparison between two unlikely objects.

His blue shirt

Billows in the breeze

Like a tattered kite

The world whirls by:

Alliteration: There is the repetition of similar consonant sounds in the poem. For example;
Billows in the breeze
The world whirls by:

Assonance: Here, we recall the repetition of similar vowel sounds also in the poem.
Where did I come from? – line 14
Long trousers – line 15

Repetition: This is to create an imaginary effect. This is noted in line 3.
Then faster and faster

Personification: Here, the world is portrayed as an animate object in line 8.
The world whirls by:

Hyperbole: There is the use of exaggeration in lines 11 and 12.

Poem for Study 5: “The Negro Speaks of Rivers”

THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS – LANGSTON HUGHES

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world
and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Background

Langston Hughes is an African American poet who is famous for his ideology towards the emancipation of black people. The history of the African American race is that of slavery and dehumanisation and dispossession as it happened to South Africans. For centuries, American slave drivers prospered on the bent backs of African slaves. After a long time in the journey towards freedom, including the Emancipation Act (1863), many African Americans still continued to experience discrimination.

Subject Matter

This poem is about a strong sense of self-assertion. The use of the first person personal pronoun calls attention to this feeling of pride expressed by the poet. The poet makes reference to ancient rivers to show his connection to African people and culture.

Analysis of Stanzas

Stanzas one and two emphasise the natural glory of rivers and their connections to the human world. He compares his soul to the depth of rivers. Stanza three goes further to show the attachment of the poet to the land of his ancestors, Africa, and the New World, America. The last two stanzas, which are repetitive expressions, show the poet’s frustration and deep connection with the rivers.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem:

(a) The theme of celebration

The poet shows a deep sense of longing for Africa and connection to America. Therefore, he celebrates the black race and glorifies the continent of his ancestors – Africa.

(b) The theme of Africa as cradle of humanity

By referring to the Congo and the Nile, the poet stresses the importance of Africa's ancient landscape. The use of "rivers" is very symbolic because a river is a source of life. In his view, Africa is the cradle of civilisation.

(c) The theme of struggle against slavery and oppression

The entire poem dwells on the evil of slavery and the quest to overcome oppression of the African American people. Lines 8 and 9 of this poem further reveal the mindset of the poet about slavery:

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
Went down to New Orleans...

Here, the poet takes the reader back to a historical moment when Abraham Lincoln (US President) is thought to have first expressed his dissatisfaction with slavery.

(d) The theme of strength and courage

The poem radiates the strength and confidence on the part of the poet, who represents millions of African Americans who have gone through one of the worst experiences to have happened to a race of people.

Language and Style

The poem is short, with 13 lines. It can be classified as a lyric because of the simplicity of diction. It is also philosophical. The tone of the poet is both of confidence and of longing.

Poetic Devices

Symbol: This is the use of a person or an object to illustrate a greater dimension of a group of people or objects. The poet employs the first person pronoun which makes him a representative of other African American people. Also, the use of rivers in the poem is symbolic. The rivers include the Euphrates, the Congo and the Nile. These references emphasise the subject of creation and civilisation.

Allusion: There are references to historical places, people and events. These include the rivers, Abe Lincoln, New Orleans and the abolition of slave trade in America.

Irony: The title of the poem is ironic. The word "Negro" is used mainly as an abuse for black people in America. In this poem, it is used with a sense of pride. The poet speaks proudly about his history. This goes to show his intelligence and sense of dignity.

Personification: The Mississippi River is portrayed as a living object in line 8: "I heard the singing of the Mississippi". The river is personified as human, with the ability to sing.

Repetition: The repetition used in this poem helps to foreground the feelings or emotions of the poet. There are two examples in this poem.

I've known rivers - lines 1, 2, 11

My soul has grown deep like the rivers - lines 4, 13

Simile: Examples of simile can be found in lines 4 and 13.

Imagery: The mental picture of rivers is constant throughout the poem. The poet draws a parallel between rivers and living.

I've known rivers ancient as the world
and older than the *flow of human blood in human veins*.

Poem for Study 6: "Ambassadors of Poverty"

AMBASSADORS OF POVERTY – PHILIP UMEH

Ambassadors of poverty are
The corrupt masters of the economy
With their head abroad
And anus at home
Patriots in reverse order
Determined merchants of loot
Who boost the economy of the colonial order
To impoverish brothers and sisters at home

Ambassadors of poverty are
The 'saviours' of the people
Office loafers in the guise of workers
Barons of incompetence
With kleptomaniac fingers
And suckling filaments
Position occupants and enemies of service
Locked in corrosive war of corruption
With their people's treasury
And killing their future

Ambassadors of poverty are
The dubious sit-tight 'patriots'
Frustrating the corporate will of their followers
The beleaguered, hungry and famished
owners of the land
People, priced out of their conscience and power
Incapacitated by their destitution
Unable to withstand the temptation

Of crisp mind and food aroma
Ambassadors of poverty are
The political elite
In air conditioned chambers
And exotic cars
With tearful stories of rip-off
Tucked away from
their impoverished constituencies
Lying prostrate
With death traps for roads
Mud for water, candle for light
Underneath trees for schools

Rats for protein
Fasting as food
And alibi as governance

Ambassadors of poverty are
The rancorous elit

In battle for supremacy
For the control of power
And their people's wealth
Moving down their own
With white man's machine
Oiled by the prosperity of black patronage
Counterpoised by deprivations
As the corpses of their able bodied men
Women and children lie unmourned
In shallow graves
In their fallow farmlands
Long abandoned

Ambassadors of poverty are
The round of trippers,
The elusive importers
Of unseen goods and services
Sand inclusive
Who trip the economy down
By tricking from M
For harvest of dollars as import
When their people see neither money nor food

Ambassadors of poverty are
The able-bodied men on the streets
Without motive, without vision, without mission
Men fit for the farms
But glued to the city
Hungry and desperate
Constituting willing tools in the hands
Of political overlords
For mission of vendetta
Against political foes
In their fight for power
Ambassadors of poverty are
Those whose actions and in-action
Reduce their people's expectations to nothingness
Those whose antecedents
Have lost the spark to inspire
While their people lie in surrender
Having been defeated by poverty

Ambassadors of poverty are
All of us whose in-actions
Steal our collective job
Because of what we should do
Which we never do
As we bargain away
Our conscience in the marketplace

Under the weight of poverty
To assuage our hunger
And our Master's will

Background

Philip Umeh is a Nigerian writer. He was educated at Government College, Umuahia and at the University of Lagos.

Although the poem “Ambassadors of Poverty” originally centres on Nigeria, a country which is known for its rich mineral and human resources, it is a general reference to other African countries. The irony is that the country is rich but it is known to the outside world as a poor nation. One of the main reasons for this situation is the lack of good leadership. Some of the results of bad leadership are poverty and disillusionment. This is what “Ambassadors of Poverty” is all about.

Subject Matter

Right from the beginning of the poem, the reader is introduced to the few who control the lives of others and cause them poverty and misery. They are presented also as merchants of sorrow and corruption in the country.

Analysis of Stanzas

The poem is made up of nine stanzas. Stanza one is a description of the “ambassadors of poverty”, whose activities cause the impoverishment of the people. They are presented as supporters of the colonial masters, enemies of the people.

Other stanzas that follow extend upon this description. For instance, stanza two describes them ironically as “saviours” of the people whereas they are destroyers of hope. The third stanza exposes their corrupt and self-centred tendencies even when they are described as “patriots”. Their various corrupt practices are presented in the fourth and fifth stanzas of the poem.

In the sixth stanza, the poet portrays the “ambassadors of poverty” as messengers of destruction whose sole purpose is to run down the economy. But in the following stanza, the poet shifts focus on some youths in the society who, instead of using their strength against the corrupt leaders, only to submit their will and are also used as tools of oppression.

However, the last two stanzas focus on other people whose actions and inactions also add to the problems of the society. Finally, it addresses those who also choose to sit on the fence, unconcerned, as the society is destroyed by the corrupt ways of the leaders.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem:

(a) The theme of bad leadership

This is the major theme of the poem. The poet highlights the various acts of bad leadership which cause corruption and poverty. The title of the poem is a clear reference to the general view about political and economic leaders in Africa.

(b) The theme of poverty

Poverty is indeed the consequence of bad leadership and corruption. The poem is filled with the imagery of poverty.

(c) The theme of colonialism

The poem also presents the negative effect of colonialism. It is the belief of the poet that the colonial masters support the corrupt life of the African leaders. Therefore, the West is being held partly responsible for the rot in the African society.

(d) The theme of disillusionment and Disenfranchisement

The poem also presents a people who are depressed. Depression leads to lack of patriotism. The poet describes a society where emphasis is placed on material things. This leads easily to corruption.

(e) The theme of class stratification and need for direction

The poet is saying that in the presence of corruption, the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. He also states that there is lack of direction due to the bad governance. The result of this is that the youth engage in criminal acts such as prostitution, armed robbery and other crimes to make ends meet.

Language and Style

The tone of the poet is that of anger at the rot in the society caused by bad leadership. The poem makes use of simple and accessible words, The imagery of disdain and decay is clear.

Poetic Devices

Metaphor: The title of the poem, “Ambassadors of Poverty”, is a metaphor for corrupt leaders in the society. In fact, there are several metaphoric expressions which describe the corrupt leaders.

Patriots in reverse order - line 5

Determined merchants of loot - line 6

Barons of incompetence - line 13

Irony: This is saying the direct opposite of what is meant. The words ‘saviours’ in line 10 and “patriots” in line 20 are examples of irony.

Refrain: The same expression, “Ambassador of Poverty”, is used as a refrain, which places emphasis on the message of the poem. The refrain is located at the beginning of every stanza.

Assonance: Repetition of similar vowel sounds.

Who boost the economy of the colonial order - line 7

Underneath trees... - line 38

Alliteration: Repetition of similar consonant sounds.

People, priced out of their conscience and power - line 24

Without motive, without vision, without mission - line 57

Enjambment: This is when the thought-flow of a sentence runs into the next line.

Unable to withstand the temptation

Of crispy mind and food aroma

Poem for Study 7: “A Slumber Did my Spirit Seal”

A SLUMBER DID MY SPIRIT SEAL – William Wordsworth

A slumber did my spirit seal;

I had no human fears:

She seem'd a thing could not feel

The touch of earthly years

No motion has she now, no force:

She neither hears nor sees;

Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course

With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Background

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is a renowned English poet, who wrote during the 18th century. This period is known as the Romantic Age in English literature. Romantic poets write about nature and their love for the

countryside. Therefore, there is usually reference to natural landscapes in their poems.

Subject Matter

“A Slumber did my Spirit Seal” is a poem about the death of a loved one, particularly a woman.

Analysis of Stanzas

The poem has two regular stanzas. In the first stanza, the poet expresses his sadness over the death of the woman. The death of the woman causes “slumber”, that is depression, in the mind of the poet. He is therefore dead to the world around him. The second stanza focuses on the dead state of the woman. It depicts not only the silence around the woman but also her oneness with nature.

Themes

The following are the main themes of the poem:

(a) The theme of death as inevitable

Death is an end to every man. It is inevitable. This poem expresses the point that death cannot be avoided.

(b) The theme of transition

The poem reflects on the end of man, the end of life and return to nature.

Language and Style

The poem is made of two quatrains. It has the tone of an elegy. The poet is shown in deep grief as he could not come to terms with the death of the woman in the first stanza. In the second stanza, the poet resigns to fate.

Poetic Devices

Alliteration: Repetition of similar consonant sounds. “A slumber did my spirit seal”.

Assonance: Repetition of similar vowel sounds. “No motion has she now, noforce.”

Imagery: The words ‘death’, ‘force’, ‘fears’, ‘slumber’ are provocative, reeling out mental pictures.

Euphemism: This statement below is suggestive of the loss (death) of the woman in a mild manner.

‘No motion has she now, no force:

She neither hears nor sees;

Rhyme Scheme: There is alternate rhyme scheme in the stanzas: abab, cdcd.