

COURSE MANUAL

Modern African Poetry

ENG328



University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
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Contents

About this course manual	1
How this course manual is structured.....	1
Getting around this course manual	4
Margin icons.....	4
Study Session 1	5
Modern African Poetry: Origin and Scope.....	5
Introduction	5
1.1 Pioneers of African Poetry.....	5
1.2 Thematic Concerns	6
Study Session Summary.....	11
Assessment.....	11
Bibliography.....	11
Study Session 2	12
Anglophone West African Poetry.....	13
Introduction	13
2.1 Colonialism in Anglophone West Africa.....	13
2.2 Colonialism in West African Modern Poetry	16
Study Session Summary.....	18
Assessment.....	18
Bibliography.....	18
Study Session 3	19
Christopher Okigbo: Idealism and Commitment.....	19
Introduction	19
3.1 Background and Early Poems	19
3.2 Analysis of Okigbo's Poetry.....	20
3.2.1 Heavensgate: the Poet at Childhood.....	20
3.2.2 Limits: a Prod into the Public.....	22
3.2.3 Silences: in the Eye of Turbulence.....	23
3.2.4 Distances: Apocalyptic Vision of Utopia	24
3.2.5 Path of Thunder: a Final Testament	25
Study Session Summary.....	27
Assessment.....	27
Bibliography.....	28
Study Session 4	29
John Pepper Clark: Social- Political Commitment.....	29
Introduction	29
4.1 Early Poems	29

4.2 Socio-Political Concerns in Clark's Poetry	32
4.2.1 Casualties	32
4.2.2 State of the Union	34
4.2.3 Mandela and other Poems	35
Study Session Summary	37
Assessment	37
Bibliography	37
Study Session 5	38
Wole Soyinka: Myth, Indictment and Liberation	39
Introduction	39
5.1 Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Poetry	39
5.1.1 Idanre and Selected Poems	39
5.1.2 A Shuttle in the Crypt	42
5.1.3 Ogun Abibiman	45
Study Session Summary	47
Assessment	48
Bibliography	48
Study Session 6	49
Négritude (Francophone West African) Poetry	49
Introduction	49
6.1 Origin and Bases for Négritude	49
6.2 The Nature of Négritude Poetry	52
Study Session Summary	58
Assessment	58
Bibliography	59
Study Session 7	59
Okara and Awoonor: Realistic Traditionalism	60
Introduction	60
7.1 Gabriel Okara	60
7.2 Kofi Awoonor	65
Study Session Summary	68
Assessment	68
Bibliography	69
Study Session 8	70
East African Poetry: Social Disparity	70
Introduction	70
8.1 Social Inequality and East African Poetry	70

Study Session Summary	77
Assessment	77
Bibliography	78
Study Session 9	79
Okot P'bitek: Alienation and Cultural Nationalism	79
Introduction	79
9.1 Biography of Okot P'Bitek.....	79
9.2 Analysis of Okot P'Bitek Poetry.....	80
9.2.1 Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol: Voices in the Wilderness of Alienation	80
9.2.2 Cultural Nationalism: Song of a Prisoner	85
Study Session Summary	87
Assessment	87
Bibliography	87
Study Session 10	88
South African Poetry: Dennis Brutus.....	89
Introduction	89
10.1 Short Biography of Dennis Brutus.....	89
10.2 Apartheid in South Africa.....	89
10.2 The Poetry of Dennis Brutus.....	91
Study Session Summary	96
Assessment	96
Bibliography	96
Study Session 11	97
Mazizi Kunene: Traditional Aesthetic Ideology	98
Introduction	98
11.1 Review of Kunene's Poetry	98
Study Session Summary	106
Assessment	106
Bibliography	106
Study Session 12	107
Aesthetic and Ideology in Zimbabwean Poetry	108
Introduction	108
12.1 Musaemura Zimunya	108
12.2 Chinjerai Hove	111
12.3 Freedom Nyamubaya.....	115
Study Session Summary	117
Assessment	117
Bibliography	117
Study Session 13	118
Jack Mapanje of Malawi.....	119
Introduction	119
13.1 Themes in Mapanje Poetry	119
13.2 Mapanje's Stylistics Features.....	123

Study Session Summary	125
Assessment	125
Bibliography	125
Study Session 14	126
Niyi Osundare: Social Commitment	126
Introduction	126
14.1 About Niyi Osundare	126
14.2 Review of Osundare's Poetry	126
Study Session Summary	131
Assessment	131
Bibliography	131
Study Session 15	132
Kofi Anyidoho: Traditional Aesthetics	132
Introduction	132
Analysis of Kofi Anadoho's Poetry	133
Study Session Summary	136
Assessment	136
Bibliography	136
Feedback to Self Assessment Questions	137

About this course manual

Modern African PoetryENG328 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre are structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this course manual is structured

The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography is provided while starting the course.

Your comments

After completing Modern African Poetry we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

Getting around this course manual

Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

			
Activity	Assessment	Assignment	Case study
			
Discussion	Group Activity	Help	Outcomes
			
Note	Reflection	Reading	Study skills
			
Summary	Terminology	Time	Tip

Study Session 1

Modern African Poetry: Origin and Scope

Introduction

In this study session you will learn about the necessary background to the origin, scope and classification of Modern African Poetry. Specifically, you will be exposed to some of the pioneers and their major themes.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 identify the pioneers of Modern African Poetry.
- 1.2 highlight major thematic concerns of the poems of the pioneers.

1.1 Pioneers of African Poetry

Historically, it is possible to trace the beginning of African Poetry in the European Languages, not in Africa itself but among African exiles in Europe and ex-slaves of the New World. As a result, African writing in European Languages betrays its deepest characteristics: first, alienation from African soil, both physically and psychologically, secondly, a consciousness even though sometimes agonizingly suppressed, of politics as the conditions of its operation, while those writers and poets who would carry out the task of defending African interests, and those who for whatever reason- of convenience or necessity- were content to hide behind a 'mask' of a newly assumed culture (1981:108). Notably, among the exiles, the various forms and degrees of this bondage had some consequences. After being taken into captivity, some slaves were taught to read and write, as a result, some of them ventured into the art of music, painting and literature. 'Works of African exiles and ex-slaves such as Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoana and others there were also reports that, individual Africans wrote verse in both classical and modern European languages which was of more than passing interest.

Importantly, some of these early poets, for example, thematically, dwell on Christianity and God, and Poets like H.I.E Dhlomo from South Africa dwells on the theme of protest, religion, Christianity, the Zulu Izibongo (Praise Poetry). The pioneer poets saw the function of poetry as one of public posturing; they see the role of a poet as that of a converter. Most of them were not poets with individual voice, but versifiers, and echoes of what the public approved. The tribal boarder widened to accommodate Christianity and elite.



Modern African Poetry began among African exiles in Europe and ex-slaves of the New World.

1.2 Thematic Concerns

Naturally, a tension is aroused in their works, a yearning towards the life of the soil (innocence) and Westernization (corruption). They wrote about race, politics or God or curiously “poetic” in an elite 19th century way-poems on death, love, sunrise, sunset. However, with the Second World War came poems pledging unstinted support to Britain. R.E.G Armatoe (European Man)

“Consuming love for Africa,” Armatoe and his contemporaries saw themselves as committed to express their views individually. Most were concerned with what they wrote, few with how they said it. In ‘The Lonely soul’, Armatoe, expresses ‘disgust’ and ‘disenchantment,’ which is characteristics of the pioneer poets:

I met an old woman
Talking by herself
Down a lonely road...
A man talks to himself
If showers of sorrows
Fall down like arrows
The love wayfarer...

Style

The way in which something

As earlier noted, most of the poets in this category, were not committed

is written that makes it typical of a particular author, movement or historical period

to **style**. They merely wrote to convey their messages. How they said what they needed to say, does not bother them. In “Between the Forest and the sea,” Armatoe claims that, African poet must be familiar with his past, and express that past in authentic and unmistakable accents, without a conscious appeal in any racial context. In his second volume: ‘Deep down the Black man’s mind’, “our God is Black”, “The Human race,” most of his poetry are dominated with the issue of race. Some of his personal poems are sad and sentimental.

Dennis Osadebey (Conflicting attitudes) Unlike Armatoe, Osadebey does not work through the medium of the individual to voice a public statement, as earlier noted, these group of poets set the stage for the others that came after them. They were mostly people who had received British education in England, who were attracted to western culture and civilization and became fervent adherents of the English poetic tradition. Most of the poems they composed were fashioned after the old English Christian hymnal style with many of their poems written in quatrains, or quasi sonnet form According to Babatunde Omobowale:

... this reliance on Western Literary traditions was not peculiar to Anglophone West African Poetry alone. It was everywhere on the continent (1997:130)

The pioneers blossomed between the early 20th century and 1960s. In their formative years, there was a conflict among the pioneers as a handful of them, regardless of their intellectual background that it was necessary for them to infuse aspects of their tradition and culture into their poetry to illustrate whatever’s they were saying.

According to Omobowale:

We find that despite the large number of poems and vastness in cultures and languages. Anglophone West African Poetry has always been indivisible spring of similar poetic expressions since the days of the pioneers (1997:130).

This indivisible cord becomes more conspicuous because of the general African belief in the existence of the world of the supernatural that wields

domineering influence on the lives of mortals. This is reflected in the poem of Michael Dei- Anang, “Let’s live in peace,”

In frailty upon the earth
Whereon, they rot
And we, in foul disintegration,
Will be identified-
With dust
(1977:13)

Another important aspect of the pioneer poetry is the belief in supernatural. This is well represented in the poetry of Dennis Osadebey

...O mortal man,
And know that since this world began
Men and stars have fallen low
(1977:14)

Osadebey aside his commitment to Africa and hymnal style for which he was known, he was well versed for his realistic rendering of Igbo Oral tradition and folktales in English. Thus most of his poems draw their inspiration from the cultural heritage of his people the Igbo.

However, with a poet like Gladys Casely Hayford of Ghana, the idea of the supreme-being or supernatural is symbolized by the Christian God. Her poem, “Rejoice,” is largely informed by her Western and religious background:

If God has been so gracious
As to make you black or brown
For you are great nation... (1977:14)

Almost all the pioneer poets have been influenced by Christian religion and we have some of the Biblical themes reflected in their works. At its early stage, the poetry of the pioneers was quite distinctive, due to the very simple style and language that the poets used. Their works was devoid of complex images and diction. As earlier posited, their themes

revolved round nature, love, beauty, philosophy, homeland, and of course, the supernatural. At the earlier stage of the Anglophone West African poetry, issues like emancipation and freedom of the black race from the Shackles of colonialism, notably, apartheid and civil war were not really the concern of the pioneers. Their poems were also devoid of humor', Omobowale, (1997:132).

According to Lewis Nkosi (1981), later on the attitude of the pioneer poets changed from moralization to public. Despite their acquired education from British colonialists felt the need to uplift their people through the art of Poetry According to Omobowale: 'This was a new commitment to ensure the development of the black race' (1997:132).

Most of the poetic output of Michael, Dei-Anang of Ghana became very revolutionary and nationalistic as exemplified in the thematic focus of the poetry, coupled with a sense of pride in their color. They saw that the advancement of the black race could only come, if the foreign civilization accommodated them (the blacks). This however, did not stop them from eulogizing Africa and re-echoing the right of the Africans, self-determination. Poems like Dei-Anangs "Dear Africa," and Dennis Osadebey's. "A young African Plea," are ardent examples, which show the pioneers' new thrust and concern about the fate of Africa and Africans. Below are few lines from Dei- Anag's poem:

Awake, thou sleeping heart!

Awake and kiss

The love-lorn brown

Of the ebon lass... (1977:23)

Lewis Nkosi also identifies an "ambiguity" text. *Tasks and Masks*, (1981). He believes that the ambiguity has resulted from the conflict of the poets' cultural background and their British education upbringing. He points out that:

...this ambiguity acquired its most authentic articulation
in the successful fusion of African and European images

contained in the poetry which came to be written by the writers of the next generation (1981:124)

Before we round up this study session, it is important to note the exclusion of North African Poetry; this raises a very fundamental question about criteria for inclusion and exclusion of what Modern African Poetry is. The reason might be adduced by teachers of African Poetry on grounds of race, language and religion. This is informed by the fact that most of the poetry written by poets of this region is in Arabic, and is about Islamic (and Arabic) themes and experiences. In other words North African poets are not black Africans but largely of mixed Caucasian. The truth, however, is that not much has been done by scholars to make the poetry of the region generally accessible to the other regions. According to Uche Mowah: 'If this region is part of Africa it will be impossible not to have poetry that deal with the sociological as well as of the Africanness of its people', (1997:116)

One might say the needed requisite is the translation of the works composed in Arabic into English and French. If this is so as suspected in some quarters, it follows, therefore that the problem of Language (indigenous) is the same for all the regions of Africa.



Many North Africans are Arabs. Most of their writers write in Arabic and on Arabic and Islamic issues. If those are included here, do you think the term, *African Poetry* would not turn a misnomer?

North African poetry, because of the regions multi-experience of Arabic, European, Islamic and Christianity colonialism, is characteristically defined by moral and political themes. We have poets like, Ahmad Shawqi al fajari, Mahmed al Banidi of Egypt, Al – Baji, al Masudi of Tunisia have clearly depicted moral and religious structures which serve as masks for more committed aesthetic and socio-political issues.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this study session, you learnt that pioneer poets saw the function the function of poetry as one of public posturing, they see the role of a poet as that of a converter: most of them were not poets with individual voice, but versifiers and echoes of what the public approved. Their themes revolved round nature, love, beauty, philosophy, and homeland and of course, the supernatural.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 1.1 (tests Learning Outcome 1.1)

- Modern African Poetry originated among African exiles in Europe and ex-slaves of the New World. Identify some of these earliest pioneers.
- Why did Modern African Poetry not originate in Africa?

SAQ 1.2 (tests Learning Outcome 1.2)

A yearning towards the life of the soil (innocence), is one of the themes in the poems of pioneers of Modern African Poetry. What are other themes?

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Study Session 2

Anglophone West African Poetry

Introduction

In this study session you will explore how Anglophone West African poetry came into being: its history, genealogy and how the various poets from West African descent responded to the realities in their domain.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 highlight dehumanizing features of colonialism in Anglophone West Africa.
- 2.2 establish colonialism as a major catalyst and inspiration for Anglophone West African poetry.

2.1 Colonialism in Anglophone West Africa

Abiola Irele noted in 'The Development of Contemporary African literature' that:

Writing by Africans in the European languages dates back to the very beginning of active contact between languages and the civilization which lay behind them have come to assume such a significance on this continent as to have created a new literary culture alongside the oral traditional within which literary expression has been largely confirmed in Africa from the immemorial, (1974:481).

As a result, poetry has always been in existence in the pre-literate African societies through the use of oral medium. The Writing of Africans in European languages began with Africans taken captive as slaves to Europe. Among these personages we have, Ottobah Cugoano, Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano. The resultant effect of the 1884-5

partitioning of Africa left Britain with West African Colonies which comprises four countries: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Gambia.

ITQ

- True or false: before the advent of Modern African Poetry there was no poetry in Africa?

Feedback

- False. Even the adjective, modern, presupposes the existence of another which was before it. In this case, that was oral poetry.

The predicament of Africans during colonialism was brought about by the 'material gods of the Whiteman, as embodied in the trinity of imperialism, capitalistic exploitation and militarism,(1920:9). Aside these forces, there were the cultural ones which were spiritually and psychologically exploitative in the sense that they tried to remold the Africans afresh. It is against the backdrop that J.H Oldham warned when he posited that:

No more fatal mistake could be made than to suppose that the West alone has something to give and the African has nothing to do but to receive. The African is not clay to be cast in to western moulds but a living type which must develop in accordance with its own laws and express its native genius (1955:174).

Disregarding this warning, however, colonial agents, especially the Christian religion with its education not only imposed a strange cultural self on the African. According to P.C. Lloyd correctly put it, 'the missionaries introduced to the rural areas of West Africa faith with a new cosmology, in which ancestors and native duties had no place... (1972:101). It has often been said that colonialism was not totally evil, it has been pointed out that colonialism put an end to inter-tribal wars and brought relative 'peace' to the warring tribes in Africa, more so, that it made nationalistic spirit possible: Without the work which the British did in opening up the towns, no national leader would have been able to gather an independence party: According to W.F Ward. Some of the defects of colonialism, the colonial masters did not do enough good work in the area of development and social services, judging from the fact that

they ‘made good profits from African Tin, Copper, Gold, Cocoa, Diamond and Ivory: The British especially defaulted in giving Africans a ‘total education because they were jittery of the fact that it might equip them for revolution and stiff opposition. As a matter of fact, those Africans who managed to obtain secondary education were not accepted by them: ‘it is a pity... that so few of the British were able to give real understanding and friendship to educated Africans and work with them as colleagues on equal terms: According to Ward:

The evil thing about color-bar was that it refused to distinguish between one African and another. Where it existed, no amount of education, or professional qualifications or culture, or home background made any difference. An African, no matter how thoroughly Europeanized, would not be allowed to live in the European area, join the European salary. The only thing that counted was his race. If the British had been able to abolish the color-Bar, to forget the color of a man’s skin and treat him on his merits as an individual, much bitterness would have been saved (1971:213-6).

As a matter of fact, ‘color bar’ was not limited to South Africa alone, but had its rooted tentacles in West and East African Countries.

ITQ

- Colonialists were credited with dousing inter-tribal wars and bringing peace to the colonies. Was there peace in Europe, from where they came, was Europe free of wars? If no, give examples of such wars.

Feedback

- The answer is no. World War I and II were triggered and raged in Europe, the land of the ‘civilized’ colonialists. The Holocaust, in which Jews were drastically depleted, about six million of them murdered, was initiated and instituted by Europeans. It is doubtful if anything near those ever happened in the ‘Darkest Africa’.



When European missionaries brought missions to Africa, was it for the love of Africans, for curing Africans from their perceived barbarism or for using the bible to explain away colonialism so as to raise converts who would see nothing evil in colonialism?

Another evil perpetrated by the British was the policy of indirect rule which the British said meant ‘the development of native resources for the natives, by the natives, under British supervision. (1971:216). This was indeed a verbal cover-up for what did actually obtain. In the words of R. Egede... whatever development there was, benefited the colonial master more than the natives. This was done with regard to the exportation of raw materials from Africa. And in the second place, the ‘ruling’ was not carried out by the natives, who were merely pawns on the chess-board of the British, the ‘ruling’ especially in Southern Nigeria, was actually done by the British themselves, whose activity could not even be merely described as ‘supervision.’ (1978:8). Whatever virtue that could be attributed to colonialism, it was nevertheless one kind of huge impersonal machine moving its callous way through the African world and subjecting the Africans to anything but truly human conditions. It is in this perspective that African poets have rightly perceived it.



The real benefits of colonialism for the colonialists and its perceived benefits for the colonies: which outweighed the other?

2.2 Colonialism in West African Modern Poetry

The art of poetry, like all others, is a plethora symbol of variegated reaction- mental, and emotional – arraigned by the zeal of ardent imaginative response to what had been, what is, and what will be. R. Egede puts it this way:

The African poets who have handled colonialism as their subject are to what extent concerned with what had been, with a past that was overwhelming in it and still remains overwhelming in its undesirable intrusion into the present.

(1978:8).

What we now have before us is not just life, but a transmutation of life and that is art. The kind of transmission or picture of the colonial forces as they operated in Anglophone West African Poetry, which has been transfused by the poets, depends largely on their individual imaginative dexterity and the influences of their cultural and intellectual backgrounds. To read their poetry therefore is to be treated emotional exhibitions held together to varying imaginative and by a central theme- colonialism- which has had a terrible impact on their life and culture. (1981:8). In the words of Wilfred Cartey, 'the theme of colonialism is one of the most persistent notes in African Literature and in fact in that of all newly emerging nations. It appears of historical necessity and will continue to be present in many literatures, for its effects on individuals and societies have been deeply wrenching, precipitating....' (1971:45).

The images of colonialism dominated the poetry of the Anglophone West African poets, among them we have: J.P. Clark, Kofi Awoonor, Wole Soyinka, Ottobah Cugoana, Raphael Armatoe and Dei- Anang the poetry of the three Anglophone writers, Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark, according to N.J Udoeyop:

The poetry of Soyinka, Okigbo and Clark- their subject matter and development of new forms- based as we have suggested on bending English and traditional African poetic traditions to new environment, is in the mainstream of the new poetry from African...

Criticism of their poetry must at all times relate the poems to their environment and the poets, growth in it (1990:157).

In the succeeding study sessions, we shall examine the works of some of these poets individually and bring to the fore, enough significant and vivid images to constitute a synopsis of the picture of colonialism which the Anglophone West African poets to be discussed later expanded and developed with imaginative vigour and vision.

Study Session Summary



Summary

We have note that the earliest group of the Anglophone West African poets were the pioneer poets which included, Gladys Casely-Hayfod, Raphael Armatoe and Michael Dei-Anang of Ghana, Dennis Osadebey of Nigeria. The groups were mostly people who were attracted to western culture and became disciples of the English poetic tradition. Later on their poetry, became revolutionary and nationalistic, thereby became overwhelmed with the theme of colonialism.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 2.1 (tests Learning Outcome 2.1)

Britain used the system of indirect rule in the administration of its West African colonies. What was this indirect rule in theory and what was it in praxis?

SAQ 2.2 (tests Learning Outcome 2.2)

Why and how does colonialism emerge as the main inspiration for the poetry of many Anglophone West African poets?

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Study Session 3

Christopher Okigbo: Idealism and Commitment

Introduction

Christopher Ifeanyi Chukwu Okigbo was born 16 August, 1932 in Ojoto, a Small Village some ten miles from Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. The fourth of five Children, Okigbo received his Primary education at Umolobia Catholic School. He developed an interest in music, mathematics, literature, and latin, and also became an outstanding athlete, excelling in soccer and cricket. He passed the Cambridge exams with distinctions: which guaranteed his admission in to the University College, Ibadan in 1950, then the only University in Nigeria (It is now the University of Ibadan.) To study Classic which had a great influence on his poetic works. In this study session you will learn about Christopher Okigbo, his life, the style of his poems and social realities informing them.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

After the Study Session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 point out realities in Okigbo's life which influenced his poetic sensibility as encoded in his early poems.
- 3.2 analyse Okigbo's poetry.

3.1 Background and Early Poems

The poetry of Christopher Okigbo is autobiographical, religious, political, imagistic and he began his poetic career by dissociating himself from idea of categorizing writers by race or region. He was determined to be a poet, not an African poet. Okigbo envisioned poetry as a means of self-expression, for projecting the many moods of the inner self, as a record of

inner conflict within the context of the dynamics of rituals and myths. He embraced the “Old Classic” as well as the “new greats.” He was influenced by Horace, Catullus, Ovid, Virgil, Tacitus, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristotle, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Browning, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Allen Ginsberg of the Beat Generation in the United States. This made him an eclectic poet, (borrowed from different traditions).

Okigbo’s earliest poems, all included in *collected poems*, are “On the New Year” (1958-1959), “Moon glow” (1960), “Love Apart” (1962), and “Four Canzones” (1962). (The Four Canzones- Lyric poems often set to music- are “song of the Forest,” “Debtor’s Lane,” “Lament of the Flutes,” and “Lament of the Lavender Mist.”) The motif of these apprentice poems is the poet’s Lament of his exile from his idyllic rural origins, and his unease with the “endless succession / of tempers and moods” of high society in urban centers like Lagos (“Debtor’s Lane”. (1958:9) Okigbo’s celebration of the fruitful fields” in *Songs of the Forest*,”. In addition to the theme of return to origin and tradition in his early poems, they also signify the nature of Okigbo’s poetics as an eclectic stylist.

Okigbo’s choice of the instruments to which the Canzones should be performed (drums, Oge, a hollow metal gong, and flutes) is evidence of his commitment to the African heritage even while he borrowed freely from other cultures. He sees himself as a music maker or sound composer. Hence, in “The Orpheus” the persona is regarded as a bird singing and the image is maintained with different types of birds.

3.2 Analysis of Okigbo’s Poetry

3.2.1 Heavensgate: the Poet at Childhood

Heavensgate is explicitly autobiographical. In this collection, Okigbo reveals the nature of his formal and informal education, recalls people from his childhood who had influenced his consciousness, and commits himself as poet- priest to the services of mother Idoto, the river goddess as well as the village stream from which he drank and in which he washed himself. In the Labyrinths, the persona in the poem, like Orpheus,

is about embarking on a journey of self- discovery and self- realization, and must submit himself to the cleansing powers of the water spirit.

Heavensgate begins as the personal return to source for purification, he is so contrite and repentant as he pleads to return:

BEFORE you, mother Idoto,
Naked I stand,
Before your watery presence,
A prodigal...
Under your power wait I
On barefoot,
Watchman for the watchword
At Heavens gate; (1958:19)

According to Okigbo, “I do not feel that in fact as a Christian I have ever been uprooted from my own village gods... I believe in fact all these gods are the same as the Christian God – that they are different aspects of the same power, the same force” (1965:30).

The rest of *Heavens gate* reveals the process by which Okigbo’s cosmopolitan and holistic intelligence was created. In “The passage” the same light is also presented as a hint of the future destruction of the world by fire:

Rays, violent and short, piercing the gloom,
Foreshadow the fire that is cleaned of.
(1958:20)

The above lines clearly intimate the biblical story of the creation, the Flood, and the promise of Armageddon; they also recall African myths, especially those linking the rainbow and the boa. The rainbow is linked to the boa in Igbo mythology as a premonition of some mysterious event, especially death. Among the Yoruba, the rainbow is the sign that the boa has excreted, whoever gets a piece of the excrement automatically becomes wealthy.

In “Initiations,” the second fragment of *Heavensgate*, Okigbo focuses attention on education, both formal and informal. The formal represented by Christianity, Captured in violent images (“SCAR OF the inflicted ... 1958:27) crucifix by blade and concretized in the person of Kap Kanly, the mythologized version of the drillmaster from Okigbo’s School days.

Essentially *Heavens gate* portrays poetry as a record of an intelligence engaged in a multilayered and cross-cultural spiritual quest. It is Okigbo’s offering to the divine essence of Idoto, his chosen-muse. The imagery here strikes a not different from that of the imagery of Christian forces: there is here genuine humility, a sense of security and hope, For Okigbo and other Anglophone West African poets, that which is African is rich and meaningful and that which is not African (white, European,) is disruptive and destructive.

3.2.2 Limits: a Prod into the Public

With limits we come to a new phase in the development of the quest. In his introduction to *Labyrinths* Okigbo declares that ‘siren Limits’ presents a protagonist in pursuit of the white elephant (1968:6).The protagonist’s search for Salvation that started in *Heavensgate* continue in *siren Limits*,” but in the second part, “Fragments out of the Deluge,” the focus has broadened to encapsulate a communal search for fulfillment.

“Siren Limits” opens with the image of a vociferous and confident protagonist (weaverbird, he-goat-on-heat) who waits, anticipating his acceptance by Idoto, the “Queen of the damp half light” (1986:39).

Following his dialogue with the self, the poet protagonist becomes invigorated to address his society. He can now advance with “eve-mist on shoulders: with “brand burning out at hand-end,” and Sing:

...tongue-tied,

Without name or audience,

Making harmony among the branches

(1986:41).

“Fragment out of the Deluge” brings to the fore, the conflict between Christianity and traditional Africa. According to Funso Aiyejina, “This fragment signals the sociological dimension of Okigbo’s poetic consciousness, (2002:589). Before now, his poetry had tended to focus on the individual and the search for self-realization. In “Fragments out of the Deluge,” Okigbo presents, in retrospect, some details about his protagonist and his milieu. He examines the collective rape of Africa and its “mysteries” by colonialism- as a major thematic preoccupation of Modern Anglophone West African Poetry.

According to R.Egudu:

The African poets who have handled
Colonialism as their subject are to that
Extent concerned with what had been,
With the past that was overwhelming in
Itself and still remains overwhelming (1978:8)

This chronology also relays the destruction of traditional African culture opens with the phases of Egyptian Pharaoh into a fennel branch- a metaphor of resurrection or reincarnation. From Egyptian Civilization Okigbo moves to the figure of Christ as Messiah, who, in spite of his miracles, was rejected and crucified. Hence, the spread of Christianity as represented in Irish Missionaries. Who “: sow the fireseed among grasses’ (1986:46). The protagonist, portrayed as a sunbird, sees this as the beginning of larger tragedy- the tragedy of the destruction of African culture predicated in ‘limits viii,’

A fleet of eagles,
Over the oil bean shadows,
Holds the Square
Under curse of their breath (1986:47)

3.2.3 Silences: in the Eye of Turbulence

In silences, Okigbo advances his preoccupation from the colonial era to the contemporary. In the introduction to *Lybyrinth*, Okigbo reveals that

silences was informed by the “events of the day” the first part, “Lament of the Silent Sisters” (1963), by the political turmoil of Western Nigeria in 1962 and the assassination of the anti-imperialist Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister in the Congo (now Zaire), by reactionary forces, the second part, “Lament of the Drums” (1965), by the imprisonment of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the Opposition in Nigeria, and the tragic death of his eldest son in an automobile accident. Silence is as a matter of fact, a dirge (Song of Lament) inspired by the tragedy of independent Africa. Okigbo presents his lament within the dirge tradition of Africa with its Call-and-response (audience / performance) structure.

Although, Okigbo’s focus is Awolowo, he sees him as an embodiment of the larger tragedy of Africa and the victims of that tragedy.

FOR THE FAR removed there is wailing:

For the far removed;

Far the Distant...

The Waiting is for the fields of crop

3.2.4 Distances: Apocalyptic Vision of Utopia

This fragment is considered by Okigbo, as a poem of homecoming, in both the Spiritual and the psychic Sense. The protagonist finds fulfillment in a form of psychic union with a supreme Spirit who is imbued with dual potency; Aiyejina: “in this poem, all of Okigbo’s conflicting emotions in a phantasmagoria during which the protagonist is accepted into the Cavernous bridal Chamber of mother Idoto, thus fulfilling his desire for a spiritual fusion with his goddess. (2002: 591). Distances, Okigbo’s most beautiful poem sequence, operates at the level of the transcendental and the Surreal. Inspired by part of the poet’s actual experience of Surgery under general anesthesia, Distances, presents a foraging protagonist in a state of possession, having been transmitted from flesh to phantom” on a horizontal plane (operating table or alter).

According to Emmanuel Ngara: “...Distances represent a major turning point, it comes at the end of a long quest for a poetic Vision. The quest results in a positive development both in Social Consciousness and in

artistic Excellence- it is more graceful and enchanting Rhythmic beat; it deals with issues that are of Public concern and it communicates better with the Reader , (1990:41)".



Can you interpret and relate Okigbo's poetry to the predicaments of Africa? How about his styles, indebtedness to tradition and colonialistic experiences at varying levels?

3.2.5 Path of Thunder: a Final Testament

In "Path of Thunder," Okigbo has accepted the social function of poetry. He has adopted Critical realism as an aesthetic ideology and eschewed the philosophy of art for art's sake. He has indeed come home, 1990:47.

This collection was published posthumously in 1968, "Path of Thunder," continues in its examination of Nigeria's political conflict, the theme of "Laments of Drums." It can be divided into poems dealing with the situation in Nigeria immediately before the January 1966 Coup detail and poems relating with the coup and its aftermath.

The pre-coup poems ("Elegy of the Wind") and "Come Thunder") encapsulates the general anarchy, tension- Laden situation in Nigeria, at the period; as a result of the constitutional fracas caused by the rigged federal election in 1964 and the rigged regional election in the West in 1965. "The poet Laments the arson, the deaths, and the arrogance displayed by those who have aborted the happiness of the electorate, and warns (prophetically) of an impending revolution," ("the thunder among the clouds"), (1968:92) Many had believed that the January 1966 Coup would be the medical leaf that would heal the nations "bleeding phallus."

In the other Segment, which deals with the post- coup poems, Okigbo brings to bear the techniques of a fabulist, celebrates the hunters (soldiers) who have deployed thunder (guns and tanks) against the elephants (politicians) who had been feeding fat on the forest (nation). Although, he is enchanted at the extinction of the elephant Clique, the poet is quick to warn of the probable consequences of an impending betrayal of the people by the emerging hunter class: "But

already the hunters are talking about pumpkins: / If they share the meat
let them remember thunder” (“Hurrah for Thunder,” 1968:94).

In the words of Aiyejina:

By May 1966, it had become obvious that
The generals who had sidelined the architects
Of the January coup and appropriated the reins
Of power were bent on creating an “iron
Dawn” (a military dictatorship) (2002:594)

The eagles, which had held Sway over the ritual oil began, had now
metamorphosed into robbers (soldiers and their political allies)
descending “to strip us of our laughter, of our thunder” (1968:98) Against
this background of continuing carnage, Okigbo affirms, in “Elegy for
Alto, humanity’s unending circle of hope and disillusionment:

THE GLIMPSE of a dream lies smoldering in a cave, together with the
mortally wounded birds.(1968:99)

On “path of Thunder,” Aiyejina opines:

“It represents a successful blend of theme and style, and of
the personal and the public. It is an artistic triumph and an
affirmation that Okigbo, the poet’s, has become the people’s
poets. Its lyrical intensity, its incantatory nature, and its
fabular construction are descended from traditional African
folk poetry, especially the dirge form, which Okigbo
gradually grown to favor, even while writing about a subject
as western as Yeats, (2002:594).



The thematic progression of Okigbo’s poetry runs as follows: Emerging from his journey of self-discovery in *Heavensgate*, Okigbo in *Limits* ventures into the social sphere, documenting the tortures colonialism has wreaked on his continent. In *Silences*, he deals principally with the political problems of independent Nigeria. In *Distances*, he operates at the level of the transcendental and the Surreal. In *Path of Thunder*, he climaxes the lamentation of the political problems by calling for a revolution; subsequently, after his coup prophecy had been fulfilled, he warns the post-coup rulers not to miss the purposes of the coup.

Note

Okigbo died during the 1967-70 Nigerian civil war fighting on the side of Biafra.

Study Session Summary



Summary

Okigbo has remained a source of inspiration and a challenge to other poets, especially African poets and those who value technical excellence and the possibility of articulating complex ideas and emotions. He is more than a poet of Nigeria as he is with Africa and humanity. Theo Vincent, described him as, “the best and most remarkable poet in African literature,” (2002:595).

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 3.1 (tests Learning Outcome 3.1)

- a) Studying Classics at the University of Ibadan, Okigbo was influenced by what classical and English literary figures?

BEFORE you, mother Idoto,
Naked I stand,
Before your watery presence,
A prodigal...
Under your power wait I
On barefoot,
Watchman for the watchword
At Heavens gate; (1958:19)

- b) As encoded in the poem above, whose figure and influence from his early life looms large in Okigbo’s early poetry?

SAQ 3.2 (tests Learning Outcome 3.2)

In ‘Limits’, Okigbo shifts focus from the individual and the search for self-realization to the public. How does he do this?

SAQ 3.3 (tests Learning Outcome 3.3)

What is the major thematic issue in 'Silence'?

SAQ 3.4 (tests Learning Outcome 3.4)

Operating at the level of the transcendental and the Surreal, 'Distances' was partly Inspired by what experience on the part of Okigbo?

SAQ 3.5 (tests Learning Outcome 3.5)

- a) In the pre-coup poems of "Path of Thunder," Okigbo laments the political crisis engulfing the nation and culminates it with a prophetic call for what?
- b) Apart from celebrating the coup in the post- coup poems, how does Okigbo further does his duty as a conscience of his society?

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Study Session 4

John Pepper Clark: Social- Political Commitment

Introduction

John Pepper Clark was born in 1935 in Kiagbodo in the Western Delta region of Nigeria. He was educated at Umuahia and Ibadan. Clark is one of the foremost poets in Africa and a contemporary of Wole Soyinka, and Christopher Okigbo, who published Clark's early poetry. Clark has written ten poems in which he laments Okigbo's tragic death. In this study session you will learn about his life, the style of his poems and social realities informing them.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 identify the major issues and the atmosphere of Clark's early poems.
- 4.2 discuss the themes of Clark's socio-political poetry collections.

4.1 Early Poems

J.P Clark is one of African's foremost poets whose poetic Career spanned from the pre-independence era. His poems could be categorized into philosophical, nature, sensuous, social and political poems. Clark's first four collections of poetry- poems (1962), *A Reed in the tide* (1965), *Casualties*, and *A Decade of Tongues* (1981)- not only reflect his developing poetic sensibility, but also point to emerging social vision and voice. *Poems*, contains most of his early poetry previously published in *The Horn*, a literary Magazine for creative writing. the second collection *A read in the tide*, contains most of the key pomes from the first collection and nearly all his poems about the United States . It is remarkable for its central image of people as both children and victims of

nature. We also have the images of post-colonial Nigerian. *A decade of tongue*, is a combination of poems from this earlier collections .

A decade of tongue are explications of individual childhood experience. The collection is loaded with personal images of a world through which the poet has forged from the childhood days in his native community. Clark conveys the innocent wonder of the child in the newness of everything, a novelty of experience inquisitively. In 'streamside exchange':

River bird, river bird

Sitting all day long,

On hook over grass,

River bird, river bird,

Sing to me a song,

Of all that pass and say,

Will mother come back today? (1962:20)

According to Osita Okagbue : “ An atmosphere of peace pervades the entire landscape of *Poems* with an occasional hint that nature can be capricious and the world an unkind place. In the second part of the poem, for instance, the bird reveals that the child's mother is never coming back (2002: 155). This theme is also present on 'ABIKU' Where the born –to – die child persist in tormenting the unfortunate mother, and 'Night Rain' where even though the child innocent fascination at the waterchriops “telling like orange or mango/fruit showered forth in the wind” (1962:6). One is awra that not only the poor family's sleep is threatened but also their home and lives are at risk of being washed away by the rain. “Clarks strength as a poet are his cyiceim and his remarked ceabilify to capture the fixture and rhythm of the delta camoscape girl in “Agbor dencer” or the sprawling nisty city of “Ibadan” (2002:155).

A reed in the tide contains the experience with *poems* “flight Across Africa” records the journey away from home forward this new experience of another culture brought about by the catalytic events of “Ivbie” *A read in the tide* reflects Clark's quest out of his native Ijaw environment

and begins to reflect on the larger Nigerian context in poems like “Emergency commission” , which trills on the political upheavals and state of emergency in the Western region of Nigeria, and “The leader” which is about Obafemi Awolowo:

Who unannounced home from abroad

Wrestled to a standstill his champion

Cousin the killer of cows (1965:36)

There is also “Cuba confrontation” (a reference to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis between the United States and the soviet union) “America, their America” (1964) this collection suggests that, his experience in the UnitedState was not a very pleasant one. Such incident as when he was told to bathe more often or when he was told he was an embarrassment to the entire group on a tour to the Parvin center show the extent of the severed relationship which he had with his hosts. Finally, the hasty manner of his departure from the country asked to leave. According to Akagbue he was on the whole, the American experience marks a turning point in Clark’s career: from then on he was no longer the private romantic concerned with expressing the personal experience in poetry that is sometimes very intimate and privately allusive, but always lyrical. As a result of his visit to the UnitedState, Clark began writing public poems.

According to Kolawole Ogungbesan, a foremost Nigerian critic: the writer is a member of a society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him (1972:5). Clark’s commitment to scio-political happening around him is a product of his rich intellectual background and the fact that he ranks among the first of African writers to emerge on the continent prior the exit of the colonialists. In the words of Egudu: African poetry is intimately concerned with the African people in the African society with their life in its various ramification – Cultural, Social, Economic, intellectual and Political (1978) It is in this regard that we shall consider Clark’s commitments as contained in *Casualties*, (1970) and *State of the union* (1985) and *Mandela and other poems* (1988).

4.2 Socio-Political Concerns in Clark's Poetry

4.2.1 Casualties

"Casualties" is J. P. Clark's contribution to the Nigerian civil war literature. In the collection, the remote and immediate causes of the war are highlighted. He goes ahead to bring out the futility of the war and its effects on the people whose community became theater of war. The political predicament of Nigeria since she became independent in 1960 is also highlighted.

History: Nigerian civil war: On January 15, 1966, a military coup by army officers toppled the government and led to the establishment of military rule under an Ibo general, Johnson T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, who surrounded himself with Ibo advisers. Northern resentment led to attacks on Ibos, and on July 29 the regime of General Ironsi was overthrown, and Lieutenant Colonel (later Major General) Yakubu Gowon, a Northern Hausa, became the chief of state of the Federal Military Government (FMG). In September some 20,000 to 30,000 Ibos were massacred, and many more were attacked and maimed. Having reason to believe themselves marked for extermination, Ibos from all over Nigeria returned in a mass migration to the Eastern Region, where, under their regional military governor, Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, many pressed for local autonomy and the more militant called for independence. The break came on May 30, 1967, three days after the federal government divided the four regions into 12 states in a move to decentralize and thereby reduce tribal antagonisms. Cut off by the division from coastal trade and oil resources which would have made them economically viable, the Ibos declared the independence of the Eastern Region under the name of the Republic of Biafra (taken from the name of an inlet on the Gulf of Guinea). Fighting broke out in June, and despite Biafran forays during the early months of the war, the federal forces had, by the end of this year, closed an ever-narrowing ring around Biafra, which continued to resist in guerrilla fashion.

--Microsoft Encarta, 2009.

In "vulture choice" Clark sees Nigeria as the vulture, a bird of bad omen that symbolizes cannibalism and death at various times. Nigeria, having been granted independence finds it difficult to stand on her feet just as the vulture whose wedlock for six years just like Nigeria's first civilian experience, epitomizes futility:

The vulture wanted a child six years was a long time to be married am no child ... what if another and child should die then I shall eat both for right(1970).

This particular poem can be given two interpretations. First, Clark sees the independence granted Nigeria in 1960 as a fragile arrangement which could collapse. The political set up which was fashioned on the British parliamentary model could not serve the best interest of the Anglophone West African Masses. Politician at that era were too self-centered to allow the model succeed. Consequently, the six years of independent, in Nigeria was characterized by political chaos, arson, killings, thuggery, unjustified detention and looting of the national treasury. Secondly, in Clark's explanatory note to the poem, he says the poem explains the dilemma or choice facing the 1966 coup plotters on the likely outcome of the coup. The atrocities perpetrated by the Nigerian political class at that time were many and great that it was not long before the five young majors seized power in order to "breast a festival of flood" and "stem a tide", that is, to prevent greed, avarice and corruption in high places, The atrocities which the five military officers considered sufficient for the military take over of government are contained in "seasons of Omens"

WHEN CALABASH HELD Petrol and men

Turned faggots in the streets

Then came the five hunters.

When claws were discovered that were not in the book

And cattle counted for heads of men (1970)

In this poem, justification for the coup is given as arson, falsification of the 1963 census figure, rigging. To Clark, these happenings facilitated the disaster and holocaust that was to overwhelm the Nigerian society. In "The Usurpation", Clark recounts the period of on uncertainty immediately after the coup. Some of the plotters had fled and there was no government in place. Surprise, awe, and pandemonium gripped the entire country as there was a kind of vacuum.

The evil of war and the loss of friends and relations are recounted in “skill and Cup” where Clark laments the death of the friends. In the “Death of a weaver bird”, he laments the death of Christopher Okigbo, a fellow poet and friend. According to R.N Egudu, Clark has “Succeeded” in creating for us, by means of a series of metaphors, and many other literary devices, unmistakable pictures of the futility and sorrows of our historic wars” (1978). To Egudu, Clark’s war poems are artistic success. The image of flood, dragon, hawk, fire, funeral pile and madness which describe the war are effective for their vigor and clarity, Causality, is a journey through madness and hell, but in spite of its bleak outlook, it ends in hope.

4.2.2 State of the Union

In the collection, *State of the Union* (1985), Clark reflects and refracts on a number of issues in the society. Reading through the poem, one finds nothing dignifying about the monstrous political “alchemy” called Nigeria (“The Sovereign”). Clark’s indirect and weary irony is appropriate for presenting the unwholesome picture of a country where nothing works; this is the subject and title of the first poem, “Here nothing works;”

Here nothing works services taken
For granted elsewhere either break down
Or do not get started at all
When introduced here...
(1985)

There is no doubt, that Clark in this poem is engaged in an appraisal of social services in Nigeria, water supply, electricity, telephone, road network and Aviation are strange to our land. In “The Cleaners” Clark criticizes political office holders who sees nothing good in whatever their predecessors had done. “Return of the Heroes” recounts the return of Baifran warlords from exile. It is typical of Nigerian government to grant state pardon to such people and even allow them to contest election on the platform of the ruling party. “Easter 1976” highlights the execution of the plotters of the February 1976 Coup in which General Murtala

Mohammed, the then Head of State, was assassinated. “Victoria Island”, highlights occupation of family land by the government and the allocation to themselves, cronies and foreigners. In “sacrifice” and “song of the Retired Public Servant”. Clark laments the plight of those who have served Nigeria meritoriously. Some who have even lost a limb properly or even life do not have anything to show for the love they have for their country. “One Country”, shows the plight of the people the Niger Delta who in spite of the fact that the nations wealth is derived from their soil, they suffer most in the Nigerian federation:

They draw waters up country from the rivers

The aborigines upon the bans are left

Dry in their tenements...(1985).

Amalgamation of Nigeria

The bringing together of the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form a single colony named Nigeria, effected in 1914.

“The sovereign”, is a poem in which Clark criticizes the **amalgamation of Nigeria** and the “so called” oneness of the country.

He says:

“It was never a union. It was at best

An amalgamation” (1985).

Clark sees the forceful unification of over four hundred tribes without a common link as fake and unworkable. However, the meager and controlled passion in this collection; the rich allusions, and complete metaphors that give *Casualties*, a depth of emotion and intensity of language seem markedly absent from *state of the union*. In spite of the starkness, some of the poems achieve a brilliance and potency of image that one has come to associate with Clark’s poetry.

4.2.3 Mandela and other Poems

Mandela and other poems (1988), has three parts, “Ceremonies for Departure” and “Departed”, cast a “recessive light on the controlled image of “Mandela.” The first section, entitled “Mandela,” deals with the liberation struggle in south Africa, which the poet believes in taking too long to conclude. The title poem, “Mandela,” looks at the life of Nelson Mandela as he wastes away in the RobbenIsland prison and at the huge

sacrifices that the struggle entails for all its leaders. This section also celebrates great freedom fighters like Samora Machel of Mozambique and the heroic children of Soweto who,

Afraid to die

In the concentration camp

He has made of their land,

Stampede barb –wire and bullet

(1988:9)

According to Okagbue: “nothing in “Mandela” comes close to the haunting beauty of the poetry of “Ceremonies for Departure” and “Departure.” The two are made up of a series of elegies on the subject of death, a brooding sense of loss of close friends and relatives to the relatives to the “vagrant guest,” whom no one wants but everyone must entertain someday” (2002:160).

Mandela and other poems, are exceptionally moving. In them Clark achieves a unique fusion of emotion, imagery, and language to produce poetry that is part elegiac, part nostalgic, and part resigned rumination on the passing of time: “All under spell of day / moves on into night” (The coming of Age,” 1988:47).

The collection does not end quite so hopelessly, for its last poem, “The order of the dead,” promises a life after death: “The dead of this land, praising God / may come again into town as children, If at their first coming / They went away with a sign of great wrong.” (1988:36-37).

According to Okagbue, “The modification of Clark’s tragic vision provides the hope that rescues the volume from its pervasive sense of registration to the finality of death, a view that is not particularly

African... for his readers; this is not the end of the road, for there is life and poetry after middle age.

Study Session Summary



Summary

Going by our review of Clark's poetry, we can conclude Clark shows his concern for the plight of members of his society, and the instability which is characteristic of war situations; the end result of which is always sorrow, agony and death. Clark also quests outside Anglophone, West African, to explore the plight of South Africa.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 4.1 (tests Learning Outcome 4.1)

- a) Clark's early poems mostly have what thematic concerns?
- b) As observed in 'Streamside Exchange', what atmosphere pervades *Poems* and many of Clark's early poems?

SAQ 4.2 (tests Learning Outcome 4.2)

While *Casualties* is based on the Nigerian Civil War, *State of the Nation* and *Mandela and Other Poems* have what principal themes?

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Study Session 5

Wole Soyinka: Myth, Indictment and Liberation

Introduction

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was born to Yoruba Parents on 13th July 1934 in Ijebu – Isara, Western Nigeria; he received his education at Abeokuta, Ibadan and Leeds in Great Britain. He is the first black African to win international fame and the first black African to win Nobel Prize in Literature (1986). He is an innovative poet, a demanding critic and editor. His poetic works reflects African realities; at pre-colonial and post – colonial levels. This study session introduces you to his works.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 identify the myth in which *Idanre and other poems* is founded.
- 5.2 locate the phase of Nigeria's history around which *A Shuttle in the Crypt* is thematically woven
- 5.3 highlight the pan-African cause to which *Ogun Abibiman* is committed.

5.1 Analysis of Wole Soyinka's Poetry

5.1.1 Idanre and Selected Poems

Wole Soyinka's multifarious identities are, however, tributaries of a single stream, fed by distinctive currents of his Yoruba culture. "One must never try to rigidify the divisions between one experience and anotherall experiences to flow into one another", he has insisted (1973:42). Soyinka's poetry has been said to be notorious for its clotted syntax and knotty grammar, its tortured diction and other overloaded metaphors, most especially for its tendency to subsume human emotions

Mount Idanre

A rocky mountain in Idanre town in Ondo State, Nigeria

Ogun

One of the deities in the Yoruba pantheon; others are Sango, Obatala, Orunmila Orisa-Oko, Yemoja etc.

and experience into mythic archetypes. In *Idanre and other poems* (1967), the twenty-five-page epic title poem is a unique collective. Here, the reader needs to be equipped with the full Yoruba mythological belief prior to an assault upon the text, and Soyinka's preface and notes are more confusing than illuminating. "Idanre" which combines a mystical overnight experience on **Mount Idanre** with the mythology of **Ogun's** descent among men, is a magnificently jumbled, furiously inspirational piece, written in a kind of cosmic delirium, and full of intellectual loose ends as a result of its crossing of different legends Soyinka as a poet loves to celebrate the tribulations of experience rather than the joy of innocence. His tragic vision extends to the operations of natural phenomena; likewise his tragic imagination, as earlier posited is linked to the tragic experience of his personal muse, Ogun, often appraised by Soyinka as the origin of the tragic spirit in Yoruba mythology and as the first tragic actor since his successful invasion of the dark irrational forces that inhabit the gulf of transition. Soyinka seems to have had certain epiphany, calling him to fulfill a vocation, in the manner of Okigbo's response to Idoto, the river goddess. He dramatizes his experience thus:

Three years later and some two hundred miles away, a
rainstorm rived apart, the intervening years and space,
leaving, unresolved sensations of my first climb up
Idanre. I abandoned my work. It was middle of the night –
and walked. Idanre is the record of the walk through wet
woods on the out skirts of Molete, a pilgrimage to Idanre in
company of presences such as dilate the head and erase
known worlds (1967:3)

Hence, Soyinka has turned himself into the priest of Ogun. Idanre's thunderous phrases and flashing images convey a sense of tremendous scope and power, transcending its individual opacities, but the final effect is more high-sounding than meaningful, and the verses frequently collapse into incoherent esoteric verbiage:

As the First Boulder, as the errant wheel

Of the death chariot, as the creation snake

Spawned tail in mouth, wind chisels and rain
pastes.

Rust from steel and bones, wake dormant seeds

And suspended lives. I heard

The silence yield to substance

(1967:65)

Here, the various facets of experience collide at the very core of the initial stimulus. The favorite method in *Idanre* is to situate impacted images in a poise of action, as seen above.

Hint

The Yoruba religion, just as other forms of African Traditional Religion, has many deities and deified heroes through whom *Olodumare*, the Supreme, thought to be too unreachably great and aloof, is worshipped.

The archetypal, elemental struggles of mythic forces are not informed by any humanizing perspective, and today the poem's chief value is a mine of images and motifs. According to Obi Maduakor: "To an uninitiated reader, Soyinka's modernist technique is bound to be obstructionist ... Roderick Wilson claims that it leads to complexity and confusion and Chinweizu et al charge Soyinka with indulging in metaphysical obscurities for their own sake. Soyinka's poetry requires the same kind of mental alertness that we have been accustomed to focus on the poetry of Donne and that of the neometaphysicians. Pound and Eliot. He resembles these in the dynamism of his mind, the resourcefulness of his intellect, and in the habit of yoking together heterogeneous ideas and concepts", (1986: 7-8).

Against this backdrop, Soyinka's poetry, according to Emmanuel Ngara, "fails also to appeal to the emotions, the imagination or the intellect. It is much too abstract, all dry bones without any juice and no flesh. Such poetry, according to Ngara, does not speak to the reader or listener and cannot be classified as good poetry'. (1990:95). Hence, if art has no appeal, it is not art.

Nonetheless, one cannot totally condemn the work of Soyinka; as *Idanre*, marks a developmental stage of his poetics. His later poems collection

Ogun Abibiman (1976) is more developed in terms of socio – political consciousness and ideological thrust.

5.1.2A Shuttle in the Crypt

A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972), is a collection supposed written as a response to the Nigerian crises; civil war (1967 – 1970). According to Maduakor: “Soyinka was opposed to the war in principle; he condemned the massacre of the Ibos in the North, and welcomed the January 1966 military coup as an event motivated by a “genuine revolutionary zeal”. When the war broke out ... he tried without success to reconcile the two parties in the dispute, the federal government and the Ibo The attempt failed, and, for his activities in Biafra, Soyinka was imprisoned. The failure of the revolutionary objectives of the first coup and the Third Movement is lamented in two poems”, (1990:38) *A shuttle in the Crypt*, (“Conversation at Night with a cockroach” and “And what if thus He Died?”):

Saw teeth, dribbling a caress
Of spittle on the wound, you nibbled
trust
From the heart of our concerted bond
(1972).

The shuttle next recalls the victims of the massacres in Northern Nigeria:

Not human faces, hands, were those
That fell upon us nor was death withheld
Even from children from the unborn
And wombs were torn from living
women

And eyes of children taken out
Oh the points of knives and bayonets
(1973)

After the massacre, after the lament of the victims, the cockroach has the last word:

All was well. All was even

As it was in the beginning

(1972)

A Shuttle in the Crypt (1972) is the bitter distillation of Soyinka's imprisonment, the testament of a poet driven to the brink of madness by the "mind – butchers" of military power; it is the literature of survival more functional than meaningful. Importantly, the shuttle of the title is the poet's imprisoned mind that shunts back and forth in its solitary confinement, first finding relief in the vexed criticism leveled at the federal regime ("Background and Friezes"); then liberating itself imaginatively into world literatures, using sheer technical execution as a discipline to hold itself together ("Four Archetypes"); and finally, as the landmarks of being subside and material reality vanishes, relocating to the remote, mystic inner reaches of consciousness. Importantly, the archetypes are metaphors for the poet's destiny as a victim of injustice. Sometimes an event in the Nigerian Civil War drama is provided with an analogue from history or literature. According to Maduakor, the use of archetypes as a poetic device has enabled the poet to address his readers directly through the voice of a personal. Furthermore, he universalizes his experience through that strategy, thereby using "As" to signify the recurrent pattern of human stupidity'. (1986:44) Indeed, I was not Joseph, a cursing martyr I, No saint – are saints not moved beyond Event, their passive valor turned to times slow unfolding.? A time of evils cries Renunciation of the sanity vision summons instant hand of truth to tear all painted masks

The story of the first archetype is taken from the Bible. Joseph was a servant in the household of Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's security guards. His wife attempted to lure him to her bed, and when all her strategies failed she accused Joseph of attempting to violate her honor. Joseph was immediately clamped into prison without trial. Likewise Soyinka was locked up prior to trial like Joseph.

However, the Biblical Joseph resigned himself to fate, while Soyinka becomes a "cursing martyr" who renounces the saintly vision:

All whose dreams of fire resolve in light

Wait upon the old ancestor in pursuit

Of truth, and to interpret dreams.'

The biblical Joseph as we know was endowed with the gift of prophecy and the interpretation of dreams. The creative artist is also an interpreter of dreams. The second archetype is Hamlet who belong to the category of "fanted Prometheans" in Soyinka's aesthetic philosophy. Joseph sacrificed a sense of injustice to the saintly vision and Hamlet, to his penchant for metaphysical speculations. The situation in Hamlet could only be applicable to Victor Banjo, the Commander of the expeditionary forces of the Third force, which invaded the Midwest in the early days of the war. Victor Banjo's Third force failed to make a decisive sally into Lagos.

The Third archetype, Gulliver, portrays Soyinka's real alter-ego."Gulliver was humane, long-suffering, law-abiding and accommodating but would never compromise his principles of justice (1986:45). The particular episode that brings out these qualities in Gulliver is Soyinka's role in the war between the Lilliputians and the Blefuscudians:

I could not choose but serve

I took their measure in the depth

Of sea-beds, gallery-slave to claims

Of bread and call. I brought the enemy fleet

To port, and pressed a reasoned course

Of Temperate victory. It did not suffice

I pledged reversion of any strength

To arbitration, they pledged extinction of their kind.
(1972).

In "Chimes of Silence," which presents the climax of the shuttles personal purgatory in the abyss of the crypt. Its organization according to Maduakor or is ritualistic, and its basic metaphor is one of a journey, that

is a rite of passage. The poem's ritual structure is a deliberate conceit for Soyinka who views his incarcerations in the crypt as a re-enactment of Ogun's trial in the abyss:

When Man is stripped of excrescences, when disaster and conflict... have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretensions, he stands in present reality at the spiritual edge of this gulf; he has nothing left in physical existence which successfully impresses upon the spiritual or psychic perception. It is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of the will, (1972).

In "chimes of silence" Soyinka works out his own salvation through the metaphor of a ritual journey. These technical devices have helped Soyinka to discipline the emotions and tighten his verse while at the same time lending sophistication to the exploration of the emotions.

A shuttle in the Crypt, is the poetry of private mystic revelation in extremis, nonnegotiable and often impenetrable: its searing vision cannot easily be transported back into the dimness of ordinary reality

5.1.3 Ogun Abibiman

Ogun Abibiman (1976), Soyinka's next excursion into verse was the twenty-two-page epic in which he combines a direct call to frontline states to take action against South Africa with a mythologized Menifee for its liberation (in which Ogun, Yoruba god of war, forms forces in violent, mystical union with the legendary Zulu Chieftain Shaka). Section I is devoted to Ogun's military preparation prior to the actual launching of the great offensive. Here, he laid aside his responsibilities as a farmer and carver and becomes the technician of the forge. In section II Ogun's military intentions are approved by the great warlord of the velds himself, Shaka, portrayed by Soyinka as "Africa's most renowned nation builder" and as a "Military and socio-organizational genius".

Shaka readily associates himself with Ogun's military prowess and provide the reader with a most revealing attribute of the god:

Felt the rain of sand as nerve-ends
On my hairless head, and knew this tread
—
Of wooded rockhills, shredded musts of
Idanre,
The heart of furnaces, and pulsing ore,
Clang of anvils, fearsome rites of
passage
Harvest in and out of season, hermit
Feet perfumed in earth and dung of all
Abibiman – shape of dread whose
silence
Frames the awesome Act of origin – I
feel,
and know your tread.
As mine. (1972)

Ogun Abibiman, is a poetry of the public voice passionately committed, but curiously impersonal and unengaging, carrying no deep emotional conviction. Although refreshingly lucid after Soyinka's earlier two volumes of poetry, its forced doggerel rhetoric is sadly lacking in the inner tensions that give the earlier lyrics their personal intensity and human resonance.

As an African poet, well rooted in his Yoruba tradition, Soyinka infuses, music and rhythm to a heroic and sublime pitch in *Ogun Abibiman*:

Rogabodiyen Rogabodiyen Turmoil Turmoil
Ogun re lee Shaka Ogun treads the earth of Shaka
Rogabodiyen Turmoil on the loose

Ogun gbo woo Shaka Ogun Shakes the hand of Shaka

O di rogbodiyan all is in Turmoil

Ogun is commissioned by the most authoritative voice of revolution in the pre-colonial history of Southern Africa to carry the war of liberation to its logical end.

In part III, Soyinka returns to Shaka's war cry, *Sigidi!* Which She translates as 'The song of the spear blade as it bites: I have eaten!'. The acceptance of the necessity for violence in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. According to Ngara, "... The poet and griot rejects the claim of those who plead non – violence ... After all non – violence is returned with violence: (1990:100).

Will love survive the epitaph –

Another Kaffir gone saves us the sweat?

Can love outrace the random bullet

To possess the heart of black despair?

Soyinka ends the polemic on violence and non-violence with a reference to Yeats's 'The second coming; the second coming of Ogun and Shaka signals the end of hostilities and the extinction of white rule in Africa.

Study Session Summary



Summary

To an uninitiated, Soyinka is an obstructionist. But Soyinka's poetry requires the same kind of alertness that is associated with the poetry of Donne; whom he resembles in the dynamic of his mind, the resourcefulness of his intellect and in the habit of yoking together heterogonous ideas, particularly in *Idanre* and *shuttle*. In *Abibiman*, Soyinka has created a minor epic which is direct relevance to the African predicament.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 5.1 (tests Learning Outcome 5.1)

Idanre is steeped in Yoruba mythology. What particular myth is principally employed in the collection?

SAQ 5.2 (tests Learning Outcome 5.2)

Around what phase of Nigeria's history is *A Shuttle in the Crypt* thematically woven?

SAQ 5.3 (tests Learning Outcome 5.3)

Ogun Abibiman is committed to what pan-African cause?

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Study Session 6

Negritude (Francophone West African) Poetry

Introduction

In this study session you will learn about the Idea of Negritude. The term was coined by Aime Césaire of Martinique in his poem, “Return to my Homeland”, in 1934, and was later associated with the movement inaugurated by some West Indian and African Students in Paris. The movement asserted African values; it later became an appropriate starting point in any analysis of the cultural and literary response of the African to European colonialism.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 establish the link between the policy of assimilation the rise of the Negritude movement.
- 6.2 Explain the nature of Negritude poetry

6.1 Origin and Bases for Negritude

Assimilation

A colonial policy in which Africans are promised French citizenship in exchange for stripping off of their African personality and adopting French culture

The term ‘Assimilation’, is used to describe the French colonial policy in Africa. It encouraged the educated African to sever his natural ties to his land, culture and then adopt the French culture in order to be reckoned with as a French citizen. As W.E.F. Ward clearly puts it, the price paid by the African was high: he must cut himself off completely to the French ways of life” (1952:58).

This was precisely what French wanted and designed. As a result, a large number of African students were sent to France in order to accelerate their adjustment to the norms and values of a modern society, which of course translate to their being separated from the ‘norms and values’ of their own indigenous society. Notably, these Africans were incorporated (assimilated) into the French culture but whether they gained equal social

status and recognition with Frenchmen is a different matter. According to R.N. Egudu “Assimilation was not aimed at elevating the African but at devaluing his culture, and that was why it was thought necessary to strip him of his true cultural self and put on him a foreign one which he was later to revolt against. The contemptuous attitude of the French toward the African and his world was vindicated by their discrimination between ‘metropolitan France’ – the original, undefiled France – and ‘France overseas’ which was there only for economic purposes. (1978:30-31).



The alienation of the African from his cultural roots triggered negritude.

Conscious of their cultural heritage and seeing the urgency of assessing Western Cultural values and their corrupting influence, the founding fathers of Negritude quests to rediscover their own cultural roots. Incidentally, some of them had enjoyed a measure of acceptance within the French cultural arrangement owing to the provisions of the French colonial policy of Assimilation. According to Okunoye O, “The policy succeeded in alienating the average educated man from his own culture, people and cultural environment, offering him instead, a false sense of acceptance into the French society” (1997:144).

ITQ

- True or false: the African under the policy of assimilation, upon stripping off Africanism, is fully welcomed into French society?

Feedback

- False. The African he is merely given a false acceptance into French society. He becomes neither French nor African.

It is against this background of cultural and other forms of domination that negritude poetry has been written. The Negritude movement is essentially a cultural one, though some of its objective are political. About negritude Aime Cesaire said:

To set our own effective revolution, we had first to put off our borrowed dress, those of assimilation, and affirm our being, that is our negritude...to be truly ourselves, we ought to embody the negro – African culture in the realities of the twentieth century. For our negritude to be an effective instrument of liberation... we had to shake – off the dust and assert it in the international movement of the contemporary world. (1967:45).

ITQ

- While the French used Assimilation to govern their African colonies, the British used what policy?

Feedback

- Indirect rule

Leopold Seder Senghor, says that, “negritude is the sum total of the values of the civilization of the African world”. It is not racialism, it is culture? The tenets of the negritude movement naturally derive from the definitions, especially Senghor’s extended definitions especially Senghor extended definitions of the concept, negritude. Some of the tenets according to Egudu are: “the doctrine of identity, which states that the black people have an integrated separate identity marking them out from other peoples in the world; the doctrine of innate purity, the doctrine of originality or naturalness as against the artificiality of the Europeans, the doctrine of beauty as incarnate in the black woman; the doctrine of universal role which presents the black man as the reservoir of world’s humanity and assigns to him the role of rejuvenating mankind that has been impoverished by the abstractness and impersonality of the white world. This perhaps is the essence of that communal warmth, the image symbol and the cosmic rhythm which instead of dividing and sterilizing, unified and made fertile,’ (1978:32)



The French promised the African assimilation into French society, the British maintained the distance, aloof; which to you, is more dehumanizing?

6.2 The Nature of Negritude Poetry

The whole focus of 'negritude poetry will become clear once we rightly place emphasis on the 'being' of the Blackman as the heart essence of the concept of negritude. More so, for instance, that not all the poems written by the francophone African poets can justifiably be tagged as 'negritude' poetry: Many of them are protest poetry like that of their south African counterparts: and Many wrote against neo-colonialism and oppression like Anglo phone African poetry.

On negritude poetry, Egudu has this to say: 'negritude poetry must be seen to consist of those poems which show that the blackman has something rich and valuable in his nature and culture .And it is natural that francophone African should be concerned with showing thus richness and value in some of their poetry, because they were the direct victims of 'assimilation which deride the existence of black humanity and culture (1978:35).

As a reaction to this attitude, the Francophone African poets have shown through negritude poetry that black humanity and culture have always existed. As a result, negritude poetry is therefore a kind of 'epiphany', a demonstration of what black 'beings' is. The idealist school of negritude Leopold senghor has written more than any other negritude writer and he is easily the most renowned

Negritude poet. Negritude will always remain one of the most significant literary movements to have arisen in Africa .AS a protest movement, Negritude was a product of concrete historical factors. According to kinfe Abraham:

The black protest writer these dwells on his past partly because of an attempt to escape contempt due to the long history which has demeaned his person and belittled his culture. But it is also partly because of a strong desire to negate the pernicious propaganda and non-truths which have haunted him over the years ... the black writer has the

twin tasks of responding as the insulted party and of explaining as the spokesman of his own past and present (1982:1)

Negritude, was a product of bourgeois intellectual elite, the intelligentsia, as earlier posited, it makes an important development in the political consciousness after years of colonization and self- abnegation, the African elite was pleasantly surprised to realize, that African had something to be proud of after all –they need not be ashamed of their race and colour as Europeans had led them to believe. That is, African intelligentsia was beginning to question the dominant ideology and to use literature to attack it (1990:24)

ITQ

- The Negitude movement extended to West Africa?

Feedback

- False. It dominated principally the Francophone West Africa poetic landscape

Negritude later became a rallying outcry of the black intelligentsia of the African Diasporas especially in the Caribbean. Must of the problem of colour: the beauty of the Negro race, the courage of black people, the warmth and humanity of the black race and so on and so forth. According to Franz fanon:

The Negro, never so much a negroas since he has been dominated by the whites, when he decides to prove that he has a culture and to behave like a cultured person, comes to realize that history points out a well-defined path to him: he must demonstrate that a Negro culture exists (1987:170).

As an extremist, response to an extremist situation, a nationalist reaction to the distortion of European cultural imperialism Negritude was in danger of demeaning into fantasy and romantic idealism. This is true of Leopold Sedar Senghor, he exalts the virtue of the African race in the most exuberant manner, just as he levels criticism at Europeans for their

inhuman treatment of Africans and their lack of those qualities which make black people fully human and natural.

In writing about the Africans' belief in the guardianship of the dead, Senghor is demonstrating that, as against Christianity, the African has his own indigenous religion:

Let me listen in the smoke but where there comes

A glimpse of the friendly spirits

Let me breathe the smell of our Dead, gather

And speak out again their living voice ...

In 'Murders' he extols the praises of Senegalese gods who have been 'captured' and made prisoners in France. To him the statue, symbolizes the black race, are 'the flower of the foremost beauty' in a world devoid of beauty and elegance. To him:

... You are the flower of the foremost beauty

In stark absence of flowers

Black flower and solemn smile diamond time out

Of mind, you are the day and the plasma of the words

Virio spring, Flesh you are of the first couple,

The fertile belly milk and sperm....

(1875:96)

Senghor in 'prayer to masks', he posits that without the black race, the whites can not survive, he sees, the black race, the African as 'the leaven that the white flour needs', the black race, is seen as bringing light and life to a world that has fallen victim to the perils of negative technological influence. To him, it is the Negro who is to infuse liveliness, spontaneity and Joy into their world:

For who else would teach rhythm to the world

That has died of machines and cannons?

For who else would ejaculate the cry of joy, that

Arouses the dead and the wise in a new dawn?

We are the men of the dance whose feet only gain

Power when they beat the hard soil

(1975:97).

In the above according to Ngara, “we see not only a conservatism which leads the author to a romantic ... Rejection of modernity and escape to an idyllic pre-rational past, but also a suggestion that the African as a race is endowed with certain psycho-physiological qualities lacking in other races”, (1990:25). Those ideals include, body flexibility, associated with the Negro, which signals, harmony and togetherness and communalistic spirit. In “New York”, his belief in a symbiotic relationship between European and African values, which may have been informed by his deep involvement with, and knowledge of the two cultures. He is aware of his own indebtedness to Europe and Africa:

New York! I say to New York, let the black blood flow into
your blood, cleaning the rust from your steel articulations.
Like an oil of life giving your bridges the curve of the hills,
the Liana’s suppleness. See, the ancient times come again,
unity is rediscovered, the reconciliation of the lion the bull
and the tree (1975:98)

In like manner, the whites of New York are pictured as cold, lifeless, heartless stripped of human feelings. This is also matched by their physiological inflexibility thus, they have hips that are as rigid as bridges” this inflexibility is contrasted with the liveliness of black people who dwell in the other side of New York Harlem. In the words of Ngara: “this is a philosophy based on race, which claims that a certain race will for ever possess qualities which will make it superior, a philosophy that is both subjective and idealistic” Ngara states further: it is the same philosophy that inform the theme of Bernard Dadie’s poem ‘I thank you God’ a simple but rich poem, full of subtle irony, but nevertheless declares in subjective terms:

I thank you God for creating me black white is a color for
special occasion black is a color for everyday and I have

carried the world since the dawn of time and my laugh over
the world, through the night, creates the day, I thank you
God for creating me black (1978:99).

Kinfe Abraham proportionally defends Negritude on ideological grounds, but failed to realize is that, in the Senghorian or subjective school, projected Negritude as an ideology of the intellectual's elite. While it portrays the general political consciousness of the African people at a given historical moment... of a class that had fallen victim to acculturation and was only beginning to accept what the African masses had never rejected. To Ngara, the poetry consists of romantic and abstract philosophizing which bears in direct relation to economics realities. The Senghorian school is preoccupied with the cultural, psychic and physiological aspects of the African and does not take into account the level of economic development which shape human behaviour. To this extent, the Senghorian school of Negritude does not accurately reflect, the real conditions of existence of black people, it exaggerates and falsifies particular qualities of the Negro race to present distorted picture.

The realistic school of Negritude-David Diop his poetry, according to Okunoye, "do not rival Senghor's in quantity but offers us a radically different rendering of a similar experience and vision. The anger and nostalgia that serve as the informing spirit, for Diop's poetry stemmed from the prolonged, alienation from Africa and his impatience with, and reflection of Europe and all that it offers (1997:147). The theory that black race possesses certain genetic qualities which make it superior to other races is no longer a central theme in their work. they are now concerned with the fact that, black people have suffered at the hands of white people, that the African has been made the object of history by resisting white domination and asserting his humanity. The work of these poets (David Diop, Agostinho Neto and Variato da Cruz) Africans are presented in terms of the harrowing experiences they have had, the suffering they have endured and the new form of social consciousness they have acquired. They are concerned about depicting in concrete terms, the struggles of black as opposed to abstract theorizing about their

race. In Diop's "Africa," he decries the colonial encounter and laments the loss of the serenity of the past.

Africa my Africa

Africa of proud warriors in ancestral Savannahs

Despite her faraway river...



Though all Negritude poets are unanimous in reversing European's forged history of Africa, David Diop, Agostinho Neto and Variato da Cruz have a vision characterized by revolutionary nationalism and realism while Senghor and his school of thought have a vision characterized by subjectivism, fantasy and romantic idealism.

Diop according to Okunoye, is concerned about the injustice, the oppression and the dehumanization that Africans suffered in the hands of the colonizing powers. This is why he depicts in concrete terms, the colonizer as inhuman, heartless and greedy. He blames the woes of the African continent on the rather tragic advent of European, the enduring complicity of the Christian mission (1997:150). In the "Vultures"

In those days

When civilization kicked us in the face

When holy water slapped our cringing brows

The vultures built in the shadow of their talons

The bloodstained moment of tutelage

In those days...

In Viriato da Cruz's poem, 'Black Mother'

Your presence, mother, is the living drama of a race

Drama of flesh and blood

Which life has written with the pen of centuries unlike the Senghorian School, concrete representations are portrayed in the Realist School.

In Agostinho Neto's "The Blood and the seed," "the harrowing experience, the future and pain are symbolized by images of bleeding,

grief and cries become a source of hope symbolized by the seed and various.

Image if growth:

Our cries

Are drums heralding desire?

In the tumultuous voices, music of nations...

Ngara a Opines, “this is the school to which David Diop belongs. He is indeed a Negritude poet but one whose vision is characterized by revolutionary nationalism and realism as against the subjective idealism, the poetry, throbs with the rhythms of Africa characteristics if Negritude poetry, them black colour is celebrated.

Study Session Summary



Summary

The picture of the black man given by the negritude posts is one drawn on the black man’s experience in history. For it shows what it is to be a negro in the world of men. Furthermore, the picture is based on the culture and intrinsic nature of the Blackman, and it is these two factors which give man his essential human traits.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 6.1 (tests Learning Outcome 6.1)

Discuss the distasteful human conditions that triggered the negritude movement.

SAQ 6.2 (tests Learning Outcome 6.2)

What made many negritude writers to dwell much in the past of Africa?

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Study Session 7

Okara and Awoonor: Realistic Traditionalism

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explore the works of Gabriel Okara and Kofi Awoonor. Awoonor is Ghana's most famous poet and major African Literary figure who has worked in many genres. Gabriel Imometime Gbaingbain Okara was from Bayelsta State, an Ijaw nation in Nigeria.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 establish the centrality of the images, the back and the front, to Okara's poetry.
- 7.2 discuss the traditional models employed in and the message of some of Awoonor's poetry collections.

7.1 Gabriel Okara

Gabriel Imometime Gbaingbain Okara was born 24 April 1921 at Bumoundi in Yenagoa, of Bayelsta State the Ijaw nation of the Niger Delta in Nigeria, he was educated at Umualia and Yaba College of Technology.

Okara started writing poetry in the early 1950s, he is one of the oldest contemporary writers from English speaking Africa. Although they are extensively anthologized, Okara's extant poems were collected in a slim volume, *The fisherman's invocation* (1978), a quarter of a century after he received his first poetry prize for "the call of the river nun" in 1953. Okara shares the same landscape, with Clark, traversed by the many inlets and rivulets of the west African seacoast and, more particularly, by the mass of creeks around the mouth of the Niger Delta. Yet, both were also

influenced by European modernist school of T.S Eliot, W.B Yeats, and the Irish priest-poet G.M Hopkins.

The tone that predominate in *The Fisherman's Invocation* is one of gentleness, as a when one meets Okara in person, combined with an overwhelming sadness as he moves effortlessly and economically among private public and cosmic levels. His use of nature may come in part from his reading in the English Romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth. (His poems" spring" is rereputed to have spurred Okara to write poetry.) However, such familiar bearings are quickly shaken by mutual and at times violent imagery and a beat reminiscent of oral traditional songs. Although Okara's prosody is yet to be analysed his sonorous verse undeniably has some of the "spring rhythm" quality of Hopkins verse, which went so far as to foreground the "speech framed to be heard" at the expense of meaning.

'*The Fisherman's Invocation*', abounds in nature imagery. According to Ngara', there are constant references to water, the sun, the moon, the earth and so on. Also running thoughts are images referring to fishing – canoes, paddles, nets and water', another aspect is the use fertility imagery which has sexual connotations. There are, however, two dominant images – the Back and the front symbolizes the past and the future, or tradition and modernity respectively'. The two are depicted in dialectical interaction with each other. As a result, the theme of the poem can be summarized as the reconciliation of these two apparently contradictory forces.



- the back—the past / tradition
- the front—the future / modernity

Okara's poetry often depicts them in dialectical interaction with each other.

In the view of Okara, the only way for the African intelligentsia, placed on the horn of a dilemma by the contradictory demands and pressures of tradition and modernity. That is, the combination of the ideals from both sides.

It's only the back caught

In the meshes of Today
And I see moons past suns
Past nights and past gods reflected
By the back trying to slip
Through the meshes like a fish

In *The Fisherman's Invocation*, the major motif used by Okara is that of fishing, which he skillfully weilds into artistic icons. The fisherman and his cohorts are fishing from a canoe. The canoe symbolically is that which ferries it is the modulating principle of life, without which one cannot survive the pressures of history; it is that which provides one with moral principles and social values. The net, is the means, the apron strings by which the necessary network between the past, the present and the future can be affected. The Canoe must advance, but to do that, it must draw substance from a source with the help of the net. Now the net brings nothing from the right side, nothing from the left side, but something from the back. However, the back is not easy to catch and bring up into the canoe. It comes after an enduring, meticulous and preserving quest. It is heavy and can see easily slip through the net:

Draw gently
Draw carefully
Don't let it slip
Draw it up into
The Canoe and lets hold
It in our palms
The Back, the gods,
Even for only
One still moment...
One teaching moment

"The Fisherman's Invocation", is Okara's most ambitions poetic work because, while adopting a deliberately non-political slant, it reflects

through indigenous imagery the tribulations of nation-building as well as the traumas that befall the self.

Interestingly, what Okara calls “the Front” (as opposed to “the Back”) signifies both the present and the future, as if it were a translation of the imperfect tense in the sub-Saharan African Languages, thereby setting the poem against a nonwestern conception of time. To his fearful companions nightmarish vision of the past as a desert or a dried up well, the fisherman insist that the past may turn out to be a fertile, feminine body, an archetypal mother not to be defiled:

There’s water from a river
Flowing from the bottom of the Back
Of the womb.

1978:5

The fisherman briefly becomes a cosmic hunter, for the teacher’s “invocation” is to

Stalk the Back in the forest
Stalk the Back in the heavens
Stalk it in the earth.
Stalk it in your umbilical cord

(1978:5)

Which entails looking for the past in one’s origin and development as human being. The mention of the “umbilical cord” is not fortuitous, for, in Ijaw belief, it is buried at birth in the native soil and thereby forces its owner to return to it at the moment of death.

ITQ

- How does Okara’s poetry expose his landscape?

Feedback

- In *The Fisherman’s Invocation*, the major motif he used is that of fishing, consequently there are recurrent references to canoes, paddles, nets and water, common sights in his native Niger Delta.

In 'Piano and Drum', the drum is a symbol of tradition and it is associated with natural images – 'the mystic rhythm' 'the panther ready to pounce', 'the leopard snarling' and the 'the naked warmth of hurrying feet'. The drum also associated with naturalness and life. Everything is galvanized into action by its sound. The protagonist himself is turned into a frenzy of activity:

And my blood ripples, turns torrent,

In my mother's lap a suckling;

At once I'm walking simple

Paths with no innovations,

The piano, on the other hand, only manages to produce discordant and futile tunes. It speaks of complex ways', in tear – furrowed concerto'. Instead of making him feel at home with his environment, it takes him to 'far-away lands' and 'new horizons' speaking in such strange sounds as 'diminuendo', counter-point and 'crescendo'. The piano is so much in disarray with its own complex system: 'it ends in the middle of a phrase at a dagger point'. The poet is 'lost', he keeps 'wandering' not knowing rhythm to follow the tension between the past and the present in relation to the future, between tradition and modernity, is at its worst in this poem.

According to Ngara: 'There is a strong element of romanticism in Okra's traditionalism. This romanticism comes out in the ubiquitous images of nature that occur in 'You Laughed' and other poems. 'Through this collection of poems there are references to the earth, the sky, fire, the sea, rivers, waves, fish and other natural objects'. In this set of images we can see a combination of romanticism and traditionalism – a refusal to come to terms with world of modern technology. The drum is also a key symbol". (1990:51). Okara is anxious to be guided by the rhythm of the drum, and following the rhythm of the drum symbolizes obedience to nature, being guided by tradition. He or She who refuses to obey the drum is heading for destruction.

7.2 Kofi Awoonor

Kofi Awoonor is Ghana's most famous poet and major African Literary figure who has worked in many genres. In *'Rediscovery night of my Blood'* (1971), this is one of the lyric lament, expressing the western – educated Africans drifting sense of loss and anguish at his or her severance from indigenous cultural traditions that have been cut away by a perverting modernization. *Night of my Blood* permeated by the returning exile's complex mixture of feelings: a wary fatalism alongside nostalgia for childhood joys and lost harmonies, longings as well as forebodings about what he will find. Awoonor's model is the Ewe dirge.

Hence, a recurrent motif in Ewe dirge poetry is the thwarted or painful return: the ancestral pilgrimage after sojourns in alien and hostile worlds, leads back to desolate land of neglected and ruined shrines, eaten by termites:

It came one day at the dead of night,
Destroying the cement walls,
And carried away the fowls,
The cooking pots and the ladles,
The sea eats the land at home...

In Awoonor's much anthologized poem in "The Weaver, the Bird", which originally appeared in *Rediscovery*, the rediscovered shrines are defiled by the metaphoric droppings of foreign religions and false political messiahs. The image of the weaverbird, notorious for its colonizing habits and its destructive effects on the host tree, allows Awoonor to open out into the larger theme of Europe's colonial assault on Africa's material and cultural wealth, envisaged in the poem as a process of desecration that leaves contemporary Africa with the task of rebuilding everything anew. Once invited in, the weaverbird returns "in the guise of the owner" the tenant turns landlord, and the invader is indulged by the misplaced gratitude of indigenous hosts: "we did not want to send it away" (until the morning after)



Awoonor models his *Rediscovery night of my Blood* after the Ewe dirge, as such he carries over into it the dirge's recurrent motif of a thwarted or painful return.

The Brooding, sorrowful tone of those poems is offset by pointed satire denouncing corrupt, neocolonial traitors who have “abjured the magic of being themselves” (“we have found a New land”,). To the lament for neglected gods and decayed shrines of African independence movements. According to Derek Wright: “The dirge’s format of worldly disappointment and frustration is a ready –made vehicle for the expression of the dwindling millenarian hopes of African nationalism and the subsequent post independence disillusionment”, (2002:65).

The persona in these poems undertakes a journey that is both realistic and mythical, leading both outward into society and introspectively into the self. The speaking “I” of an Akpalu dirge is simultaneously the grieving individual singer and the voice of the whole community, plunged into mourning by a death. Thus it is through him that the community – and in Awoonor’s imitative elegiac songs are not isolated outbursts of private melancholy and statements of personal alienation, rather, they function as expressions of a collective desolation and as an elegy for the spiritual death of an entire culture and the passing of an era. (This is the “night” of the poet’s “blood” in “Night of my blood”.) Super-imposed, in turn, upon this pilgrimage is the modern poet – exile’s circular passage of departure and return, rediscovering at last the wisdom of ancestors and ritual poetic traditions and submerging himself in their sustaining communal ethos.

Ride me, memory (1973), this volume is based on the first years of his experience in the United States between 1968 and 1975. African memories crowd in alongside its anecdotes and larger political statements as Awoonor moves away from the dirge –lament into other oral styles and into literary traditions outside his ancestral heritage. The range of Ewe forms is extended to include the halo, the earthy vitriolic song of abuse, and the praise song. Under the first category come jocularly caustic portraits of meddling first – world scholars, under the second earnestly adulatory of black American writer, singers, and jazz musicians.

A violent energy coincides with a tightening of the bonds of political commitment in these poems. Awoonor testifies to the sufferings and struggles of victims of the black Diaspora, especially under the brutalities and hypocrisies of the modern United States, which keeps breaking into his enjoyment of the company of the American hosts. Kofi Anyidoho, have commended Awoonor's continued more sparing use of the dirge (in 'African memories') and his richly comic deployment of the halo (in 'songs of Abuse').



Model for *Ride me, memory*: the halo, the earthy vitriolic song of abuse, and the praise song

The house by the sea (1978), recounts the prison experiences of Awoonor, having been enmeshed in political trouble after his return to Ghana in 1975. The prison poem at the centre of this volume, in their remorseless examination of the nature of political involvement and responsibility, reveal a harsh, distilled intensity, a gritty sharpness and brittle clarity that are new in Awoonor's work.

This is raw, survivalist poetry (some of it written on toilet paper and smuggled out of his cell), urgently confronting the realities of political repression, torture, and assassination of African and global contexts and posing ultimate questions about the nature of freedom—whether it is best served by the private pursuit of self—fulfillment or by the public service of unromantic revolutionary labours.

In his next collection, *the latin American and caribbean notebook* (1992) The harvest of his diplomatic employments and travels in Brazil, Cuba, and Nicaragua. In this volume the poet is by turn's self-defensive (of his Nkrumah period and after) and self-accusatory. He presents himself, in the historical present, as 'the braggart loudmouth boastful uncertain diplomat' ('Rio de Janeiro; fearful and lovely city') shunned off abroad to serve another country while his own is being wrecked by fools and criminals. The ambassador—poet then proceeds, from a position of comfort and privilege, to project his own sense of displacement upon victims of the black Diaspora in other lands

As we have noticed, Okara and Awoonor are guided by a consciously formulated aesthetic ideology –realistic traditionalism. Their poetry reveal certain patterns- the use of image of nature, and things associated with the African traditional mode of life, the use of simple words the creation of rhythm patterned after drumbeat, the use of Ijaw and Ewe modes of expression and so on. All these are clearly linked to their authorial ideology, and in those few poems where images referring to modern technology are employed it is quite clear that they are used to show the contrast in values that the poets are anxious to articulate.

Study Session Summary



Summary

A close examination of the two poets reveals that there is no emotion in the manner in which they give expression to the ideological imperatives, except for few of latter Awoonor's poems. There is no attempt to sentimentalize the problem, yet the genuineness with which the poets articulate it and the lyrical quality of the verse speak of deep feeling.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 7.1 (tests Learning Outcome 7.1)

The back and the front are two dominant images in Okara's poetry; how do they define the thematic concerns of Okara's poetry?

SAQ 7.2 (tests Learning Outcome 7.2)

- What does Awoonor's *Rediscovery night of my Blood* principally lament using the model of the Ewe dirge?
- While *Ride me, memory*, testifies to the sufferings and struggles of victims of the black Diaspora, especially under the brutalities and hypocrisies of the modern United States, The house by the sea is woven around what adversity in Awoonor's life?

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Study Session 8

East African Poetry: Social Disparity

Introduction

The social dislocation, which incidentally is a feature not just of the East African situation, but of the post – colonial African situation in general, is very well illustrated by the case of the privileged elite. An observer once remarked that ‘there are many indicators that the ruling class is rapidly becoming closed with self-perpetuating through the monopoly of European language. As a result, East African poets grapple with the current problems in their society; by domesticating their literary works in this study session, you will examine their literacy works.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

8.1 explain social inequality as the main theme of East African Poetry

8.1 Social Inequality and East African Poetry

One major reason for corruption in East Africa is the insatiable quest for wealth, particularly among the civil servants and politicians. According to a political analyst, Herbert Spiro, ‘the old tribal customs of exchanging presents’, and the insufficient administrative training of the civil servants’, hence, one cannot easily distinguish between an uncommitting and uncommitted present on one hand, and a bribe on the other, and it can also be noted that many people who have no formal administrative training at all are not corrupt.

The masses have also become poorer, not because they cannot compete with the existing oppressive structure in place, but they have lost the little

they have been able to gather looking for employment in the face of increasing unemployment. This is because independence has brought with it an increase in the status and wealth of politicians and government officials and a corresponding decrease in those of the masses

It is the presence of such vices as these and the absence of the so much 'preached virtues of socialism, according to R. Egedu, which constitute in the main the subject matter of much of East African poetry', (1978: 129), which inform it with a human consciousness that is inescapable for its tragic reality. As a result, various East African poets have reacted against these social ills in their various ways, notably, they have all condemned them. It is also noteworthy, that, these social ill that has eaten- deep into the fabrics of East Africa is also present in other parts of the continent. The only point of divergence is that, while the Anglophone West African poets are concerned more with colonialism and Negritude, the East African poets are more preoccupied with the current problems in their society. In the words of a Kenyan poet, Lennard Okola:

The East African poet seems in his relative aloofness from negritude enthusiasm, to be striving to come to grips with the present. Perhaps he feels, subconsciously, that much of the colonial situation has been explained away for him by the longer established West African poets and, therefore, considers negritude a dead subject which would dissipate his creative energy in vague nostalgia (1967. 13)



Tip

- Major theme in West African poetry: colonialism and Negritude.
- Major theme in East African poetry: social inequality, suffering of the masses

Hence, we shall focus more in this study session, on the contemporary lifestyle in East African poets. In Jared Angira's 'No Coffin, No Grave'. We saw the diary of a wealthy politician where he made known, where to be buried:

Well, his diary, submarine of the Third World war showed
he wished to be buried in a gold-laden coffin like a V. I. P
under the jacaranda tree beside his palace a shelter for his
grave and so much beer for the funeral.

Against this backdrop, the poor people frustrated the wish of this selfish politician.

He was buried without a coffin without a grave; the scavengers
performed the post-mortem in the open mortuary without
sterilized knives in front of the night club...

In the above poem, the Ugandan poet, the people justified their
annoyance, for while the rich man had surplus resources to be buried with
excess money for making 'beer for the funeral ceremony' and even the
fact that his grave would be sheltered, the masses:

Brood on books

Brood on hunger

And school girls

Grumble under the black pot

Sleep under torn mosquito net...

We only cover the stinking darkness

Of the cave of our mouths

And ask our father who is hell to judge him

And quick and the good...

Capitalism

An economic system in which private businesses, not the government, control the means of production and distribution, doing so primarily for profit making

The poem depicts the evils of **capitalism**, neo-colonialism and greed. The land that would have been need to produce food, was even slotted to be the burial arena of the rich politician; thereby debarring them from utilizing the land for productive use.

In another poem, 'The street' by the same poet portrays a picture in which the agreement between the haves and the have –not is sharply placed in focus: as worms crawl, and Mercedes and zephyrs cars slide past, Wananchi the poor man who has his nostrils blocked scratches his

body with his tiny nails; and as the 'vultures whirr' and 'the band splashes / up the night club 'Rolls-Royce /sleek and cool 'drives past. Significantly, the use of 'worms' and vultures' are symbolic. Worms are parasitic and vultures are birds of prey. Both therefore represents the oppressive owners of the Rolls Royce, zephyr and mercedez Benz cars, who like the parasitic worms drains the economic well-being of the social commonwealth, and similar to the activity of the vultures devour the lives of their squalid compatriots. According to Egudu, 'The effect of those images is to show the degree of contempt with which the poet holds those capitalists who have taken more than their proper share of the national wealth,(1978;13). He also appeals to the moral consciousness of the populace in order to facilitate social regeneration and alertness.

In 'The song of the common man' by Crispin Hauli (from Tanzania), we could situate the issue at stake, social inequality. Here, it is portrayed in the form of physical and psychological suppression.

These my brothers no longer brothers
Their hands are whips, along they drive me,
These my sisters no longer sister
Their mouths are cannons, spittle of fire,
These my playmates no longer play mates.
Their actions are fates, my life they decode,
Fellow humans load me a poor ass,
To be driven pushed, kicked and abused.

This is indeed the anthem of sung by 'common man', a dirge, regarding his plights, in the society where, few, privileged individuals devour the nations wealth, and leaves a wide gap, between themselves and the poverty-stricken populace.

These people, in the words of Okot p' Bitek, from Uganda, have their grabbing tendencies upset The social balance of the nation so much that, the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots, appears unbridgeable;

And you eat green vegetables

Without the simsim paste
And your thin children
Collect the odir and odenne insects
And they roast the odir and odenne
And eat them
And the children of others
Are fat,
And their wives grow large buttocks,
They eat meat from the chest of bulls
And the skin of their legs
Shines with health

This is another aching scenario, in which there is no balance in the distribution of the societal resources, while some feed-fat, others have nothing to eat some children of the privileged politicians and their capitalist cohorts feed on expensive, imported food items.

In another poem, 'The Death of an Eland' by Henry Barlow (from Uganda), here, an invalid woman, portrayed with terror and pathos, is 'emaciated with hunger and pain and on whose body some, 'Fat... blush green,' and 'numerous small brown' ticks are swarming and feeding, is pleading for mercy and help from the passers-by.

However, one of these passers-by sees her and offers no help; It is however, a hunter who had pity on her. As the hunter says, 'It is kinder to shoot her' as a result, he raises the gun and shoots her neatly. The hunter's action here may be seen as sinister, but when we realize that both the hunter and the invalid woman, belongs to the same social class, we appreciate the step he has taken. He might think that, due to her condition, and that if the poor are not taken care of, it is better to kill them, rather than constituting visual disharmony in the society. Indeed, it is better for them to be dead than continuing in suffering.

In another poem by Laban Erapu (from Uganda) ‘the guilt of giving’, here an attempt to help the needy is rebuffed by the society. Infact, according to Laban, givers are chastised and ridiculed, to such a society, the beggars waylaying his to such a ‘betters’ for help is a mere:

Heap of rags
That pollutes air-conditioned
City centre
Whose silent presence
Intrudes into your preoccupation.

The sympathetic man who once found occasion to give a coin was found guilty by the scandalized crowd.

Of recalling attention
To the impenetrable patience
They had learnt not to see

The ironical situation here is striking: first the helper is rebuffed rather than commended, and secondly, the crowd that condemned the helper is said to be scandalized.

For Everett Standa (from Kenya), the poet portrays the callousness of urban dwellers for pretending not to notice the beggars in the cities:

But, my friend, do men
With cripple legs, lifeless eyes,
Wooden legs, empty stomachs
Wander about the streets
Of the civilized world?
To teach me my friend, the trick,
So that my eyes may not
See those whose houses have on walls
But emptiness all around;

Show me the wax you use

To seal your ears

To stop hearing the cry of the hungry.

In this poem, the hypocritical attitudes of the civilized people are portrayed in the poem 'I speak for the bush' their insensitivity towards the plight of poor people, particularly in the rural areas. According to Egudu... Of more significance to the subject of the study session is the fact that those who are blessed with wealth have no eyes for seeing the poor and have sealed their ears against the cry of the hungry, (1978:138).

Another poet's perspective, Henry Barlow, 'building the nation', non-challance to the suffering of the masses is compounded with dishonesty and hypocrisy in high places. The poem is presented in the form of a dramatic monologue spoken by a high government official- of his occupation with nothing ... What he calls 'highly delicate diplomatic duties was actually, 'beer'.

Cold 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.

To the poet, these were the 'dedicate diplomatic duties'. Mostly those are the preoccupation of most African government officials. Lavishing and wasting resources on things that are not benefiting to the common people; what concerns them according to Barlow, is what they could grab within a short period in government.

So the PS had ulcers too!

My ulcers think are equally painful

Only they are caused by hunger,

Not sumptuous lunches!

So two nation builders

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

The chauffeur, who knew that the PS was trying to deceive him made known the above lines. What he is trying to say is that, there is the chauffeur, who is representative of the poor people. Whose job is to drive the PS around in the car, for he has performed his proper function. The PS is not a nation-builder but a nation-looter motivated by avarice and greed.

In the words of Plato, the essence of founding a state is not to promote the happiness of a single class, but, so far as possible, of the whole community' (1955:157). As a result, the principle has been greatly violated in the community which the East African poets have dealt with. In that community, the guardians, unlike the biblical parent (father), would give their children (subject) a stone for bread or a serpent for fish :(1978:141). As seen in the above example, unlike their Anglophone and Francophone poets, deals with in practical terms the reality dawning on justice, equal distribution of social amenities and opportunities and fellow-feeling have been most fervently dispelled.

Study Session Summary



Summary

The East African poets seemed to be preoccupied with the suffering of their fellow citizenry in the face of abundance and plenty, been squandered by the privileged political class. This has been their major thematic concern in this study session.

Assessment



SAQ 8.1 (tests Learning Outcome 8.1)

Establish social inequality as the main theme of East African Poetry

Assessment

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Study Session 9

Okot P'bitek: Alienation and Cultural Nationalism

Introduction

In this study session you will learn about colonialism, alienation and cultural nationalism as the main themes around which Okot P'Bitek works revolve.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

After the Study Session, you should be able to:

9.1 Establish *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* as allegorical.

9.2 Identify the main issue in *Song of a Prisoner*.

9.1 Biography of Okot P'Bitek

Okot P'Bitek was born in 1931 in Guhi, Acholiland in northern Uganda. His writings are influenced by oral literature, his mother's songs, and the stories his father performed around the evening fire. He has been lauded for his successful use of oral forms in his English language poems. Okot P'Bitek (1931-82) the singer of satiric songs was throughout his sojourn on earth, and in his consciousness, a rustic bard anxious to weave the ironies and contradictions of contemporary post-colonial Africa into symphonies that would caress and at the same time prick the ear lobes of his audience. P'bitek's Brief stay at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria, must have irked most of his intellectual colleagues who saw in him a "renegade", lectures for P'Bitek were village squares for entertaining his stunned but thrilled student: he would perform some Acholi songs in his high pitched voice and the students would respond with ovation! After the performance, P'Bitek would scuttle to Oduduwa Hall with a few 'brave' students at his heels for some pints of beer! P'Bitek argued that his salary was 'loot' which the government paid for his 'antics' as a professor. Few however knew that these bouts of beer at Oduduwa were masks worn by an anguished soul vegetating in exile as his fatherland Uganda was under the maiming grasps of Idi Amin. Among his works are: *Song of Lawino* (1966), *Song of Ocol* (1970), *Song of a Prisoner* (1971), and *Song of Malaya* (1971), *The Horn of my Love* (1974).

9.2 Analysis of Okot P'Bitek Poetry

9.2.1 Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol: Voices in the Wilderness of Alienation

Song of Lawino is frequently seen as the publication that brought p'Bitek to literary prominence because it openly stood for Africanness at a time when the forces of progress, development and new religions scared most people away from asserting their African identities. Lawino the main character in the poem not only makes social and cultural comments but also speaks for the voiceless majority who helplessly stand between modern and traditional cultures. Lawino, the protagonist in Song of Lawino, can be seen as the embodiment of most of the aspirations and contradictions of the Ugandan wretched of the earth-the peasantry and the peasant laborers who have all been violated by colonialism has shaken their economy, world view, and cherished spiritual institutions, thus, the world in which they are now thrown into is one in which things are no longer at ease since the colonizer put a knife on all the things that hold them together. Consequently, they are stunned, confused, dispirited and utterly alienated in various shades from the institutions erected by colonialism. Lawino can be seen as personifying this spirit of despair waiting in the night of the conquerors and their African heirs.

Hint

Idi Amin became the dictator of Uganda in 1971 after he overthrew President Milton Obote in a coup. Clearly the most barbaric dictator Uganda ever knew, he ordered the deaths of approximately 300,000 persons considered to be intellectuals or political opponents. Few intellectuals were fortunately able to escape, among them Okot p'Bitek. Amin expelled about 70,000 Asians, who owned most of the country's businesses and nationalized their companies. In 1979, he was overthrown by the Tanzanian army with help from Ugandan rebels operating out of Tanzania. He was rescued by Libyan troops from capture and lived in exile in Saudi Arabia until his death in 2003.

It is crucial that we stress the class dimension of Lawino if her cries are to be interpreted meaningfully within the context of Africa's neo-colonial existence. Though Lawino is individualized as a disgruntled wife engaged in a domestic brawl with her husband Ocol who has literally abandoned the countrified Lawino for a citied and sophisticated mistress. Tina, yet, Lawino's trenchant criticism of Ocol is a collision of two

antagonistic classes and their values. Lawino's reaction to Clementina, her husband's westernized lover, creates the impression that Lawino is a newly married woman, for a woman seasoned in marriage would not be bothered by the likes of Clementina. To p'Bitek, Lawino is a spokeswoman for her people (i.e. people who never went to university). Lawino's estrangement from her husband is the basis of Ocol's public ridicule since he considered her out dated "like the things left behind/ in the desert homestead/like a wild goat' campaigning for power thus neglecting his meals "as if I do not cook!" it is this estrangement of wife from husband that facilitates the verbal tussle between Lawino and Cool. Lawino can be regarded as the encapsulation of Alcholi peasant culture. In the words of Cabral:

... Culture is the result, with more or less awakened consciousness of economic and political activities, the more or less dynamic expression of the types of relations prevailing within that society on the one hand between man (considered individually or collectively) and nature, and on the other hand, among individuals social strata or classes (1980 : 141).

Lawino therefore personifies the resilience of Alcholi peasant culture in the wake of the corrosive effects of colonial and neo-colonial domination. Thus she celebrates with glee Alcholi moves: she had been 'chief of girls' as a Youth, is a good dancer at traditional festivals; is well grounded in the Alcholi names for surrounding phenomena and had even the enslaving religion of the colonizer: " I refused to join/ The protestant catechism class/ because I did not want to become a home-girl.

Lawino can be fierce in her defense of Alcholi culture, but she never degenerates to being a cultural chauvinist. She thus prefers her peasant songs to the colonizer's, is contented with her traditional meals utensils, ways of life beliefs, superstitions philosophy and even accepts polygamy ' I have need of it'. All she asks for in the new society is an affirmation of the authenticity and validity of her peasant culture:

I do not understand

The ways of foreigners

But I do not despise their customs

Why should you (Ocol) despise yours?

Lawino's belief in her peasant culture can be said to affirm Ngugi's observation that despite the corrosive and alienating nature of colonialism only a figment of the conquered people imbibe the conqueror's credos and mannerism thus leaving mass of the people still close to the soil without completely losing contact with their traditions. Hence, Lawino extols the magnitude of this mass culture:

Listen Ocol, my old friend

The ways of your ancestors

Are good,

Their customs are solid

And not hollow

They are not thin, not easily breakable

They cannot be blown away

By the winds

Because their roots reach deep into the soil But the 'adulterated' Ocol, representative of the educated native is utterly alienated from his cultural heritage and declares that he could uproot and demolish the entire homestead:

To hell

With your Pumpkins

And your old Homestead

To hell

With the husks

Of old traditions

And meaningless customs,

We will smash

The taboo s

One by one

Explode the basis

Of every tradition

We will uproot

Every sacred tree

And demolish every ancestral shrine

Ocol's cultural alienation cuts him off from his people's dances, rites, ancestral worship, communal ethos, gerontocratic values, medicinal herbs and philosophical interpretations of surrounding phenomena. Thus disconnected from this cultural umbilical cord that could nourish him with spirit won energy, he looks with disdain at his people's technological level, their history.

The political parties are pierced by the searching intelligence of Lawimo, they are exposed for what they are; lies and deceit:

The woman Yodel

And make ululation!

Not because they understand

But, because they are tired

Tired of the insults and the lies of

The speakers

As a result, there is a wide gap between the politicians and the masses:

And while those inside

Eat thick honey

And ghee and butter;

Those in the Countryside

Die of the smell

They re-eat the bones

That were thrown away

For the dogs

Ocol personifies the class of educated Africans and even his creator, P'Bitek affirms this 'He's a voice of stupidity of people who went to the university ', thus imbued with this Eurocentric and dialectical outlook, Ocol inveighs against his people's cultural heritage and history and vows to uproot Lawimo's romanticized and symbolic pumpkin and hopes to replace it with the tree of capitalist individualism:

I see an homestead in the valley below

Huts, granaries....

All in ruins

I see a large pumpkin

Rooting a thousand beetles in it;

We will plough up all the valley,

Make compost of the pumpkins

And the other native vegetables,

The fence dividing family holdings

Will be torn down, i will uproot

The trees demarcating

The land of clan from clan....

124

African history is negatively perceived by our 'educated native'. Africa becomes in his consciousness, "the sleeping idle giant/Diseased with chronic illnesses. Africa's forms of social consciousness are superstitions; his technological inventions become mere toys:

Look at his toy weapons

This utensil, his hut....

Toy garden, toy chickens,

Toy cattle,

Toy children.

Songs of Lawino is entertaining and teaches a sense of self-worth that resists the effects of Western Cultural domination. *Song of Ocol*, is a typical male song because it is a response to the accusations in *Song of Lawino*. It is Okot's way of agreeing with Lawino and her resistance to Westernization, while also accepting the social and cultural changes taking place in Africa. In song of Ocol, Lawino meets her match. She is silenced because her song is viewed as "the confused noise made by the rain after the Butcher's knife has sunk past the wind pipe". (1996:10). Lawino actually upset those who thought leaving African traditional for a western way of life was fashionable and progressive. They thought they had come a long way and were upset when Lawino kept telling them that they were misguided.

On the other hand there were those who cheered and encouraged Lawino because she spoke for those who were intimidated into silence.

9.2.2 Cultural Nationalism: Song of a Prisoner

Song of a prisoner was written while Okot was in exile, it may have been influenced by the feeling of abandonment, and it depicts what he saw as Africa's struggle with the evils of Uhuru – confusion, unpleasant experiences, doubt and regret. *Song of A Prisoner*, joined a chorus of voices that said national leaders had been Uhuru for personal gain. While government leaders benefited from Uhuru the poor were beaten, jailed, and even killed without cause. The poem is generally understood to be Okot's examination of the unfulfilled expectations of Uhuru, but it may also reflect his community's struggle to understand the meaning of independence. Notable Acholi political leaders of the 1950s failed to communicate the essence of independence to their people.

The anger of those who have lost their freedom is expressed very effectively in the last lines of *Songs of a Prisoner*:

I want to drink

Human blood

To cool my heart
I want to eat
Human liver
To quench my boiling water thirst,
I want to smear
Human fat on my belly
And my forehead.

Song of Malaya could more readily be seen as a companion to *White Teeth*, if Okeca's story was viewed as the beginning of urban migration. While Okeca went to town to save up money to marry the girl he loved most Acoli young men in the 1960s went to town in search of education and white-collar jobs. And, unlike Okela, who returned to his rural home after he felt he had achieved his goal, most of those young men become acclimated to urban life and came to view the city as their home. *Song of Malaya* is primarily the story of urban dwellers. Importantly, there is something common to Okot's 'Songs' and that is the use of traditional modes of expression and African imagery. In Ngara's words "The imagery similar to that of Okara, but the binary opposition between nature imagery and metaphors derived from modern technology is not as strong in the Ugandan poet as it is the Nigerian (1900:62). Even while depicting modern life, P'Bitek makes use of images taken from a traditional set-up

Two bulls wrestle
With their horns
The horn of the ruling bull
Breaks
And he tumbles down
The smooth breast
Of the hill
And plunges

Into the River.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this study session, we learnt that In *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*, Okot spoke out on the cultural changes taking place in Acholiland and beyond. *Song of Malaya* is primarily the story of Urban dwellers and the myriads of challenges encountered by young people. We can also say that Okot P'Biket's achievement in *Song of Lawino* is unparalleled in African poetry to date. 'Using traditional modes of expression and tropes he created a memorable poem in the medium of English.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 9.1 (tests Learning Outcome 9.1)

Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol allegorize what lamentable African situation?

SAQ 9.2 (tests Learning Outcome 9.2)

What is the main issue in *Song of a Prisoner*?

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Study Session 10

South African Poetry: Dennis Brutus

Introduction

In this study session, we will examine the contributions of Dennis Brutus, who was born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe), of South African parents in November, 1924.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

10.1 outline the condition of black people in South Africa during the Apartheid regime.

10.2 examine the response of Dennis Brutus to the Apartheid regime through his works?

10.1 Short Biography of Dennis Brutus

Dennis Brutus was born in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe), of South African parents on 28 November, 1924. Educated South Africa at Fort Hare University College in Alice and the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, he taught English for fourteen years in South African high schools. A coloured person, Brutus participated in many anti-apartheid campaigns, particularly, those concerned with sports. Eventually, The South African government banned him from attending political and social meetings and made it illegal for any of his writings to be published in South Africa. In this study session you will learn about his works.

10.2 Apartheid in South Africa

All our land is scarred with terror

rewarded unlovely and unlovable;
 sundered are we and all our passionate surrender
 but somehow tenderness survives

(Dennis Brutus. "Somehow we survive".)

Apartheid

The former political system in South Africa that effected a rigid racial division between the governing white minority and the non-white majority and gave all political benefits to the former.

The apartheid laws classified people according to three major racial groups—white; Bantu, or black Africans; and Coloured, or people of mixed descent. Later Asians, or Indians and Pakistanis, were added as a fourth category. The laws determined where members of each group could live, what jobs they could hold, and what type of education they could receive. Laws prohibited most social contact between races, authorized segregated public facilities, and denied any representation of non-whites in the national government. People who openly opposed apartheid were considered communists and the government passed strict security legislation which in effect turned South Africa into a police state.

The apartheid reign spanned over four decades, from 1948 to the early 1990s.

—Microsoft Encarta.

The modern African poets who wrote about colonialism were preoccupied with a past problem. Their work, like yam shoots, flowered out of the corpse of colonialism (though its ghost is still living among Africans). Contrary to this, the South African poets have painted and are painting from life: their model, **Apartheid**, is before them and very much alive in all its ugly aspects, brutalizing the poets as they write and demonstrate various antics towards that enemy.

hydra-headed beast, **Apartheid**, which more than its mentor, colonialism, has terrorized and dehumanized the black South Africans. Mbuleto Vizikhungo Mzamane graphically captures the nature of racial discrimination in Brutus Apartheid South Africa in the following words:

You are born to parents who have had to beat the influx control regulations in order to live together and mate: your "locations" which have been divided along racial lines in accordance with the Group Area Act. You are taught ... Based very often by teachers who really know no better, under the Bantu Education System – at University you are taught by third rate lecturers' who have failed to make the grade at Stellabosch or Pretoria and have therefore been relegated to teachings blacks: when you complete, you may not do certain category of job, even if you are qualified for it because of the Job Reservation Act...

Here is the same type of contradiction that in history has tended to present despotism as benevolence; the same type of hypocrisy that presented colonial oppression and exploitation in the guise of civilization and salvation. According to R.E. Simons:

Three centuries of white settlement (is) phased by colonial wars, expropriations of tribal lands, slavery, forced labor and industrialism... color prejudice was endemic and deeply ingrained among whites; but their policy of racial discrimination, through vicious and degrading, differed in degree rather than in kind from the discrimination practiced elsewhere under colonial rule, (1967:7).

Apartheid (or apart-hood) is therefore the high-water mark of the colonial movement, comprehending in one breath oppression, discrimination, exploitation, enslavement and estrangement'. In South Africa, strangers have become landlords as it were, and forced the owners of the land into cultural and physical exile. According to Egudu: "It is this hostile situation that constitutes the background of modern South African poetry. This poetry is prefaced with the struggles and agitations of earlier freedom fighters, such as the League of African Rights formed in August 1929", (1976:46). Their freedom song, like Modern South African poetry, is both an expose and a reaction:

We the Black Race, cry for freedom!

Africa Our MotherLand,

Was taken from our fathers

When the darkness hemmed them around.

As a result of the inspirations from the above song, the South Africa poets have responded to the Apartheid situation in various ways. According to Egudu, 'a number of the poets have merely sung their sorrows, and their poetry reads like a weak – limbered dirge. Arthur Norje (1970), for example, is mainly concerned with self-pity resulting from loneliness in exile and general racial discrimination. His poetry is therefore sentimental and tends to sap the energy for action.

10.2 The Poetry of Dennis Brutus

In examining the work of Dennis Brutus; there has been five distinct phases in his development as a poet, each marked by formal and thematic shifts that not only reflect his changing preoccupations and professional

concerns but also document profound transformations in his conception of the nature and function of poetry. Each new phase has grown out of a personal experience that made him question his previous attitudes towards verbal art and seek a more satisfying outlet for his energies of articulation. His collections include: *A Simple Lust* (1973); *Sirens, Knuckles and Boots* (1963), was published in Nigeria through the assistance of his friends while he was in a South Africans Prison from Prison, he used to smuggles out series of poems to his wife writing about his Prison experiences. Those were later published as *Letters to Martha* (1968). His later collections include, *China poems* (1975), *Stubborn Hope* (1978), *Salutes and Censures* (1982) and *Airs and Tributes* (1989).

Brutus reacts with vigor, integrity and defiant hopefulness to the Apartheid police regime in South Africa. It is Brutus's temper, intellect and imagination that save the protest from sounding merely strident from degenerating into blubbering emotionalism or mawkish self-pity or naïve malice. Brutus have demonstrated through his poetry that he is fully aware of and responsive to the Brutal world of South Africa. 'In the words of Egudu, 'Brutus is fully alive to his social responsibility as a south African poet. He once said: 'I think it is simply true that an artist, a writer, is a man who lives in a particular society and takes his images and ideas from that society,' This is tantamount to saying that the nature and magnitude of a person's behavioral response, ie what he says, thinks or does, is some function of ... the stimulus situation in which he is placed and of ... the nature of his personality.

Dennis Brutus poetry is the reaction of one who is mental agony whether he is at home or abroad. This agony is partly caused by harassments, arrests and imprisonment, and mainly by Brutus's concern for other suffering people. This Brutus feels psychically injured in some of his poems. When he traverses all his land as a 'troubadour,' finding wandering 'motion sweeter far than rest', he is feeling the pinch of restiveness resulting from dislodgement. All the factors that make life uncomfortable are assembled in the poem: banning of inquiry and movement', 'Saracened arrest', and 'the captor's hand: and against them Brutus takes to roaming in freedom, 'disdaining', 'quixoting' (i.e.

pursuing an ideal honor and devotion), singing all the time. His fight is purely psychological, not physical, for he puts up an attitude which the oppressors would least expect and which would disconcert them.

Brutus is combating the forces of oppression with the 'tenderness' which, though it is 'frustrated, does not wither'. (S.L.P.4). as in the previous poem, the agents of pain here touch the mainstay of the mind. Perhaps a good place to begin would be with one of the first London poems in *A Simple Lust*:

I walk in the English quicksilver dusk and spread my hands
to the soft spring rain and see the streetlights gild the
flowering trees and the late light breaking through patches of
broken cloud and I think of the island's desolate dusks and
the swish of the island's haunting rain and the desperate
frenzy straining our prisoned breast: and the men who
are still there crouching now in the grey cells, on the grey
floors, stubborn and bowed. (1973:102).

The painful recollection of his imprisonment on Robben Island, the contrast between freedom and confinement, the manifold sensory perceptions – all these are typical of Brutus' poetry in exile, but even more noteworthy is the full-bodied texture of the poem. Brutus is no longer writing unornamented verse. The diction is simple, the form irregular, the line length flexible instead of fixed but there are also traces of alliteration, slanted end rhymes (dusk/dusks/breast; rain/rains cloud/now/bored). In the same poem, there are the investigating searchlights'; there is the monolithic Decalogue/of fascist prohibition, and above all there are 'patrols' which, like snakes, 'uncoil along the asphalt dark/hissing their menace of our lives. These forces have organized that 'terror with which all our land is scarred' and which 'rendered (it) unlovely and unlovable'. The fact that Brutus emphasizes his use of 'tenderness', and not malice or even physical action, as a fighting weapon does not mean that he is not appreciative of the ugliness of his situation. He clearly states in 'I am the exile' (S.L.,P. 137), that although he is 'gentle' and 'calm' and courteous to servility', yet ...

Wailings fill the chambers of my heart and in my head behind my quiet eyes I hear the cries and sirens.

And this goes on to emphasize the point that his pain is mental rather than physical. For this kind of pain, Brutus devises a mental weapon, as he indicates in ‘off the campus’:

So here I crouch and nock my venomous arrows to pierce deaf eardrums waxed by fear, and from the corner of my eye catch glimpses of a glinting spear.

In warfare it is the nature of attack that determines the type of weapons to be employed by the attacked for defence. In South Africa, it is not so much the physical destruction of the blacks and coloured by the whites, as the dehumanization, that is painful to Brutus. At adulthood, his experience which included deprivation of fundamental human rights through coercion and other pedagogues of apartheid system, incessant brutalization and harassment, was largely responsible for his ‘perception of South African reality, and the sharpening and sharpening of his critical sensibility’, (1997:180). It also informed his subsequent reactions which are readily predictable’. One can notice this in “Mirror Sermon”:

This cold reflection
Of our interlocking nudity
Moralizes ascetically
On sensual intellection or morality
(A simple Lust 21).

According to Dassylva, ‘The ‘cold’ raw, enshrouded or unflavoured presentation of reality of man’s inhumanity to man in apartheid South Africa is suggestive of sheer ignorance of the fact that man, regardless of colour or race, is born equal....our interlocking nudity” the poet means as in love (-making) or in death, one thing that man cannot help is being voluntarily naked”, (1997:180).

The poet goes further to portray the macabre dance that is apartheid system while still using (love-making) images in the following lines:

... Our images cavort

In silent dissonance

Or graceless dance

Slow sarabands of passionless lasciviousness and lace through a
cacophonous gavotte Marionettes Devoid of graceful antecedents we
pirouette in senseless choreography or jerk on twitching strings of lust...
(A Simple Lust, 21)

Brutus' artistic and critical vision transcends the question of apartheid or racial problems. As expressed by him in "Their Behaviour".

Their guilt

Is not so very different from ours exercises

Who does not joyed in the arbitrary of power

Or grasped for himself what might have been another's

And who has not used superior force in the moment
when he could.

(and who of us has not been tempted to these things?) –

According to Dasyva:

"The point the poet seems to be making is the need for
victims of apartheid not to see the issue of wickedness as a
monopoly of the white, it is inherent in man regardless of
color or race", (1997:181).

It could therefore be said that, Brutus made a success of his poetic response to the apartheid situation in South Africa. His concern for the suffering of others, his intellectual protest without malice, and the hope which has defied cell despair – all of which he has portrayed through images and diction that are imbued with freshness and vision – show him to be a capable poet fully committed to his social responsibility.

Study Session Summary



Summary

Throughout much of his career the hallmark of Brutus' most mature poetry has been a consistently resonant lucidity conched in a variety of expressive forms. He has also remained a steadfast opponent of social injustice and political oppression, speaking out against the evils of apartheid and other institutionalized forms of racial discrimination.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 10.1 (tests Learning Outcome 10.1)

Outline the condition of black people in South Africa during the Apartheid regime

SAQ 10.2 (tests Learning Outcome 10.2)

Examine the response of Dennis Brutus to the Apartheid regime through his works?

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Study Session 11

Mazizi Kunene: Traditional Aesthetic Ideology

Introduction

Kunene's poetry is based on a profound understanding of the mores, culture and cosmology of an African nation –the Zulu, for Kunene, the utilization of traditional material involved a careful study of the Zulu literary tradition, Zulu literary forms and the effects of colonialism and the Christian religion on Zulu literary forms. In focusing on Zulu traditions, Kunene does not degenerate into narrow – mindedness and ethnicity. He does not write as a Zulu who is unaware of Africa. In this study session you will learn about his works.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 11.1 situate Kunene's attempt to reconcile the world view and linguistic repertoire of a traditional society with the resistant struggles against oppression.
- 11.2 describe the effectiveness of traditional materials in Kunene's poetry

11.1 Review of Kunene's Poetry

A poet or for that matter any creative writer, cannot contrive his **subject matter** or **themes**. He must know what he is writing about. If he does not, he will come up with something unnatural, unrealistic and downright phony. Only a Jewish poet can write about barmitzvah. Only an Afrikaners poet can describe Nagmael. A typical black man can tell how he slaughters a black goat for his ancestors.

Poetry is the language of emotions. Only words can convey the meaning of this language to the heart, where emotions are said to be situated. These emotions are only existent in human beings with the result that creatures other than Homo sapiens are said to be devoid of love, hate, fear, despair and hope. Consequently, every person should, because he has emotions, understand and appreciate poetry; otherwise he is no different from a brute or a stone.

Like people all over the world, black people of South Africa have emotions. They love, they hate, and they fear, they despair, they aspire. For too long, they have been muffled by unfounded fears which cannot be suppressed any more. Though, there have been real fears of being lynched, murdered and imprisoned if they dared raise their voices to what they know for a long time to be wrong and expected to be righted. Their fears have been compounded by the teachings of missionaries about heaven and hell. Acceptance of the injustices perpetrated in their lives would be rewarded with heavenly bliss, and the opposition of this oppression would lead to perditions they were taught to believe.

Of course now they have been through this in the light of these realities as inherent in South Africa, that we shall examine the poetry of Kunene Mazizi; who is committed to the use of oral tradition in proffering remedies through artistic means, to the harsh realities in South Africa. According to Kunene:

Oral literature constantly projects the examples of socially desirable actions making series of those who uphold the highest communal values and villains of those who violate them. Its strategy is therefore to be effective immediately and to be of immediate application ... to maintain its interest oral literature of necessity links itself with various social, political and religious events Any gathering becomes a fit place its expression be it a work party, a circumcision school, a diviner's get together, a family reunion, a dance, a feast, a festival, an evening gathering by the fireside, or a shepherds' gathering. The participation of the community is

an essential part of a literature that is not only 'live' but also communal in its intent (1976-32).

The communal quality secularizes the literature and makes accessible what would otherwise be a highly moralistic or didactic literature. The fact that is based on concrete social and historical events brings closer to everyday morality and action. It deals with the ethical challenges of things that can be achieved and therefore becomes more than a litany of super human ideals.

To Kunene, the Zulu thought is seen as representative of African thought. In Zulu poems he uses traditional modes of thinking and expression without advocating a return to the past, nor does he necessarily glorify the past like the Senghorian school of Negritude. On the contrary, Kunene's writing is preoccupied by dialectical thinking, this poetry portrays a world which is constantly advancing to a higher state, and this partly accounts for the strong element of optimism that runs through the poem on resistance to apartheid. Among Kunene's collections are: *Anthem of the Decades: A Zulu Epic* (1979) and a second collection of short poems, *the Ancestors and the sacred mountains. Emperor Shaka the great : A Zulu Epic* (1979)

Kunene's as a poet that prides himself in Zulu philosophy and culture. This is well exemplified in few of this poems randomly selected from some of the earlier mentioned collections. These include "In praise of the Earth's: 'stages of Existence' , 'The Bound' and 'Three worlds' In these poems Kunene's explores the cosmology of the Zulu people, their attitude to moral issues, social relations, death and other related issues. Kunene's uses Zulu beliefs and cosmology to articulate and propagate his own personal philosophy of life. Zulu traditional literature and thought are therefore used to illuminate the present and the future. In Zulu poems, there is no advocacy of a return to the past, no sentimentalization or idealization of the past. An interesting example of how Kunene uses traditional material to project his own ideals in Zulu poems is 'Anthem of Decades, which dramatizes the Zulu creation myth:

The belly of the earth split open

Releasing animals that crawls on the earth
And others that drum their hoots on the ground.
The lion roared thundering the fruit fear
Other beast less ferocious stared
Until, aware of the satisfying taste of blood,
Joined in the general carriage.
So the lesson was learnt. Life must continue
And good things must feed the ruthlessness of appetites.

ITQ

- Negritude poets portray the greatness of African traditions, as does Kunene; why is Kunene not classified as a Negritude poet?

Feedback

- Kunene does not romanticize the past, as do Negritude poets, but maintains a realistic view of the society as changing

Kunene admits in the introduction to the collection that not everything in ‘Anthem of Decades’ is taken from the Zulu creation myth, according to him, I have used the story of the origin of life, he says and added my own detailed description according to the dictates of Zulu culture, (1970:41). It is important to note that, while Kunene may have been influenced by the Christian story, Kunene has been careful not to introduce into his poem, elements that are deviously alien to Zulu culture, the idea of good and evil does not appear as such, I have not however presented Sanwaz as the devil since such a concept does not exist in traditional Zulu thought, what matters most there is that Kunene’s myth fits into modern thinking. Kunene sees the world as a being in a constant state of motion, progressing from lower to higher levels of existence. His world is not a static one, it is characterized by dialectical materialism, this philosophy permeates Kunene’s thinking at this stage of his career, we can summarize Kunene’s authorial ideology in *Zulu poems* as that of an Afrocentric, Optimistic and dialectical thinker who utilizes Zulu culture and traditional thought to give expression to his own vision. This is well

delineated by those poems that deal with what may be called themes of resistance”. In the screams:

I offer you screams of a thousand mad men

Who scream to those without mercy

Who scream over the graveyards

Of skeletons piled on pole,

Bones dislocated from their joints

...

I offer you the cloth that is torn in the middle, left in the field

By those who departed before the children were weaned from the breast

Tell me, tell me

Who wore it before the fall of winter?

The themes of resistance fall into three categories.

First, Kunene’s response to European culture and ideology; secondly resistance to oppression in south Africa in an indirect, almost allegorical ways, using the traditional idiom and those that portray the theme of resistance more directly, in the modern idiom; the first category, consist of very few poems, the best ones being Europe’ and the civilization of Iron. The one titled ‘Europe, begins with a celebration:

Europe, your foundations

Are laid on a rough stone

Your heart is like cobweb

That are dry in the desert.

The basic idea in the poem is clear:

The hard-heartedness and complete lack of warmth of Europe. It is this hard –heartedness which led Europe to choose the bride groom of steel, in the other poem ‘steel’ as associated with bold and violent diabolism:

I saw them

In their long procession
Rushing to worship images of steel
They crushed the intestines of children
Until their tongues fell out
I saw iron with sharp hands
Embracing infants into the flames
They wandered on the roads
Preaching the religion of iron,
Pregnant with those of bloods and milk.

In the poem 'Europe' the poet like other African intelligentsia, who had went through a period in which European ideals were accepted without questions, but now :

Once I believed the tales.
Once I believed you had breast
Over flowing with milk

Like other African poets, Kunene expresses his romance with African cultural values against the estranged European ones.



Kunene also uses his poetry to portray the heartlessness of European settlers.

The other category, where Kunene's employs the traditional ideal to convey deeper meaning which has relevance to the contemporary situation in south Africa: 'Peace' 'stages of Existence'; 'The spectacle of youth' 'A Great Generation: thoughts at the gathering of the storm', in the spectacle of youth' Youthful embrace is compared with the kingly boldness of a lion, which can confront any kind of opposition and oppression . The youthful skill is compared with those of the transitional ancient heroes ,(shaka) who fought with gallantry during their life time.:

I love the children of the lion,

When their manes were beginning to grow,
Simulating the ancient heroes,
I knew the greatness of their future
When they leapt on the tender rocks of antelopes
Which so long prided themselves on their fleetness.

I praised the skillfulness of their power, knowing how
soon they will be killing buffaloes.

The images of 'manes' which in itself stands for authority and unchallengeable prowess is used to exalt the youthful personalities against oppressive domination. The poem is more like an indictment, meant to spur the Zulu youths into ardent nationalism and anti-colonialist tendencies.

In another poem, 'stages of existence', the protagonist uses rainbow to tie the earth so that it gives birth. Two sets of images contend with each other on the rainbow. First he 'the faces of Old women', who 'raised their heavy eyes/like the shadows of magical figures'. These are symbols of the past. When he tries the earth another set of images comes out:

Beyond the red boundaries
Is the new lightening of children
Who will grow above
The shadows of old women
When they have conquered them
They may rest and create new forms
That inspire new life
Making knots for eternity
From which new generations will arise ...

The past will be conquered and a new generation will arise. This becomes a recurrent theme in 'A Great Generation', a dramatic poem in three voices, centres on two characters, Mathungo and Bhekani, who left home

promising to return the following day but have now taken too long to come back. The poem alludes to the South African liberation struggle. The two characters (Mathungo and Bhekani), represent the new generation of fighters who left the country and have taken long to come back. This is a way of expressing the idea of a protracted liberation struggle. But optimism is expressed in the minds of the majority of the people symbolized by the voice of 'ALL'

In 'Vengeance', Kunene employs an oral technique in which the speaker uses rhetorical questions to address an enemy. The poem is a monologue in which the protagonist gives vent to his indignation at the injustice of the enemy.

How would it be if I came in the night
And planted the spear in your side
Avenging the dead:
Those you have not known
Those whose scars are hidden
Those about whom there is no memorial,
Those you only remembered in your celebration?

According to E. Ngara: "The search for the link between humanity and the cosmos, a theme which is explored in a number of poems... All this serves to show that Kunene is a philosophical poet who is guided by a particular conception of the interrelatedness of tradition, humanity and the universe. It also indicates a new idealism in the second anthology which one does not feel in the first" (1990:87).

The salient point, however, is that Kunene has developed a distinctive style through which all these themes are explored. The style is a direct product of the author's committed interest in Zulu culture and cosmology. The poetry is replete with images of the planets and the constellations – sun, moon, earth, stars and sky. According to Kunene, "Again, according to the Zulu cultural tradition, the moon, the sun and the stars are physical phenomena which primarily express the nature of distance and the quality of light, while also being symbolic of (physical) power", (1981:12).

Study Session Summary



Summary

Kunene's contribution to African poetry is substantial, particularly if we take into account the two epics; the importance of his contribution lies in his attempt to reconcile the world view and linguistic repertoire of a traditional society with the structures and rhythms a foreign language, which he is using to convey the concerns and hopes of a modern and complex society. His method is faulted with certain loopholes of over generalization but his aesthetic ideology is encouraging.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 11.1 (tests Learning Outcome 11.1)

Situate Kunene's attempt to reconcile the world view and linguistic repertoire of a traditional society with the resistant struggles against oppression.

SAQ 11.2 (tests Learning Outcome 11.2)

Describe the effectiveness of traditional materials in Kunene's poetry

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Study Session 12

Aesthetic and Ideology in Zimbabwean Poetry

Introduction

The Zimbabwean war poetry differs from the poems emanating from that region because, the war experiences are relayed by the representative I mean, this class of poets were closer to the rustics than the Bourgeois poets. In this study session, three poets would be our focus. They are Musaemura Zimunya's, *Thought Tracks*, Chenjerai Hove's *Up in Arms* and his *Red Hills of Home* and Freedom Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again*. Among the three poets to be discussed below, two did not actually participate directly in the physical fighting, while the third was a guerrilla who composed some of her poems at the height of the combat. Of the two whom did not fight one was in the country throughout the armed conflict while the other was incarcerated by the Rhodesian regime. As a result, we would discern differences in ideological perception and styles of the poets in depicting reality.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 12.1 point out the nature and general atmosphere of Musaemura Zimunya's later poetry.
- 12.2 discern the main thematic concern of Chenjerai Hove's poetry.
- 12.3 situate irony and a sense of unresolved imbroglio in the fundamental essence of Freedom Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again*.

12.1 Musaemura Zimunya

In the introduction to his collection, Zimunya has this to say: ' At the height of the war of Liberation, Great Zimbabwe seemed to speak

eloquently timelessly to all who sought and fought for the freedom of this land. It was a living myth. At the same time the message which it seemed to communicate was proportionally impossible to capture ... I realized that while we were looking for freedom, we were also engaged in a quest, a quest for an individual accommodation with existence and for the meaning of Great Zimbabwe', (1982: 7).

A striking feature of Zimunya's collection is its patriotism. Whether Zimunya is describing the scenery, longing for home from across the seas or singing songs of Great Zimbabwe, he is ever conscious of his duty to the community. At the heart of Zimunya's vision as an artist is the concept of Zimbabwe as a nation, infusing into the whole collection, strong spirit of nationalism. This mirrors the overbearing spirit among patriotic Zimbabweans during the war of national liberation. The writing of poetry became for Zimunya part and parcel of the search for a Zimbabwean identity? (1990:112).

Thus, Great Zimbabwe 'is the main symbol in some of the best poems. Other related symbols include mountains and the Zimbabwe Bird. These images are linked so that the mountains and the Eastern districts merge into the Rock of Great Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Bird in turn symbolizes the nation.

Zimunya's later work is dominantly joyful in mood there he uses lively mood and countenance. The mood is that of jollity and celebration. In 'Children' Rain Song', the poet captures the mood of rural children particularly when it rains:

I see little Children
Fling their small clothes away
Like merry flying termites
After their rainy wedding flights
Skipping, hopping and screaming in the rain
Rain fall fall
We will eat berries

Rain fall fall

We will eat mealies

We will eat cucumbers

Rain fall fall

In another poem 'Kisimiso', Zimunya pictures the joyful mood of a family that has gathered for Christmas celebration:

Kisimiso means feasting

Dozens of bread loaves, drums of tea ...

Rock –size pieces of meat of the he-goat

In takes of thousand eyed –soup

And of course, large pots of fizzing frothy beer

Nothing about the book theme of good will and peace

Of course, good will was always here, and old man well –known to me lost his hair.

The humorous aspect of this book is best depicted by the poem 'Ifulaimachina' which gives a picaresque of an old African man wonder at the sight of an aeroplane :

Pulled a fine long whisle

To fill his heart with this wonder

And in half-empty voice

Said 'Infaimachina'.

Following the front of smoke

With his squinting eyes

And in innocent gumful smile...

The above poems differ in contradistinction to the prison poem, where the persona is compelled to think deeply and calmly about the trials and pillage of incarceration. In the poem entitled, 'to man':

Dear mai,
As long as I can still cough and spit
As long as I can still hold this poem
I am alive, man
I hope you are well also
Please do not let your mind fill...darkness
Do not grow your heart away with grief
I am alive mai
It will be over before long

Many of the poems in *Thought – Tracks* are very easy to comprehend, while some are difficult, but it is important to note that, all the poems appeal to the reader. Zimunya's power of communication in this collection is laudable. His sense of rhythm and appreciation of the music of poetry give some of the poems lyrical quality. More so, Zimunya's appeal to the imagination is almost unequalled. Zimunya as a poet is a philosopher as well as a poet of ideas. He seeks to explore the nature and significance of the monument – hence the importance attached to its silence, the exhortation to his son to approach time like the stone, which is not time-enslaved and the attempt to define and characterize the timelessness of the stone in 'the stone speaks':

I am old and age-less
Young and youth-less
Living and life-less
Dead without death

12.2 Chinjerai Hove

In *Up in Arms*, Hove commits himself to delineating the harrowing experiences, sufferings and heroic exploits of the common people during Zimbabwe's war of national liberation and at other times during the colonial era. Hove has not set out to eulogize anyone but to portray the effects of the war on the common people and on the fighters as victims of

war's cruelty. He therefore emphasizes its brutality and harshness of the perpetrators. In 'the Armed Man', whose gun 'mates with his hunchback', and those who, in the poem 'when I behold', dismember and disfigure his sister, learn:

Scattered fingers

Charred hair

Mangled teeth

Sprinkled with dust.

The persona here recalls the frustrations of a war –torn wife who is tired of a husband who never sleeps, 'guarding, the home or on call-up/ never sleeping! He recounts the story of a heroic grandmother who cooks for the fighting guerillas despite 'the coming dangers to herself, but who was forgotten by national anthem makers. In 'A Boy', Hove expresses the dehumanizing regime of white imperialism in Zimbabwe:

A 'boy' you are called

By milk plastered lips

And you undo your hat

To bare that musty dome

Yet a 'boy' you remain

In the above poem, the persona is referred to as a 'boy' with gray hair and after over thirty years in service. After all these years of 'spotless service all he gets is a pat' and a 'clock':

A pat from my tennis boss

(The first of its kind)

Plus some tinkling clock

For my withering wrist

And that's all with me

After all the exploitation, the only thing the worker could do is to go home, waste away redundantly and expects according to E. Ngara:

Hove is the voice of the people. He
Therefore sets out to use his pen
To fire against the civilization that
Brings such suffering and humility on
The common man and woman in the
City Street and the communal areas (1990: 117)

This is the theme in ‘; uprising ‘, which gives the volume its title:
I have been up in arms
With this rinsed civilization
Civilization that walks naked
And roast brother for sisters’ lunch

Hove is explicitly partisan in these poems; he speaks for the dispossessed peasant, the exploited worker, the butchered freedom fighter and all the downtrodden.

ITQ

- Though both are Zimbabwean poets, what is one area of departure between the works of Musaemura Zimunya and Chinjerai Hove as shown in this study session?

Feedback

- The joy, mirth and celebration we have in Musaemura Zimunya’s works are replaced with misery and plagues in Chinjerai Hove’s poetry

In *Red Hills of Home*, the focus here shifts from socio-political issues to personal and family tragedies. Here, Hove dwells on the tragic aspects of life. There is indeed the concern for the peasant whose way of life is being destroyed, but the social message is overshadowed by the misery of the protagonist, who laments his plight and the plight of his dead father:

I grew up here,
Father died underground seven rainless seasons ago

And the burial news
Was all we had to bury.
Now the fatherless eagle, like roast meat,
Recites the misery of the dusty sky

Some of the poems in this collection focus on the self rather than the society as it is the case with Hove's earlier poems. In 'once partners', the protagonist yearns for a lost marriage partner:

We swam and sank and swam again,
But tomorrow I sit alone
Alone on the doorstep
Of a home without a fireplace
Not fearing the storm
Nor the silent thunder in my heart
The distance left behind is gone
The clouds pass me
Without even a drop of dew on my head.

In these poems, Hove makes rather a distressing reading. He dwells much about the tragic side of life and little about the joys and happiness of living in the world. 'While misery and tragedy are fact of life, people do not want to be told that misery is all there is'. (1990: 119).

However, some of the poems in this collection indicate that Hove has acquired. A greater mastery of poetic technique than in the earlier volume. While one can justifiably say that, *Red Hills of Home*, is a sad poem, it is artistically a fine piece of work. Consider for instance, how in the third stanza the poet portrays the effects of technology and the new way of life on the peasants:

Red Hills have come
With wounds whose pus
Suffocates the peasant

The peasant's baby sleeps

Knowing only thin dreams of moonlight joy,

Dying too are the songs

Of the seasons that father once sang...

Hove, on the whole, preoccupied himself with the plights of the common man and woman. He expresses a general concern for the lot of the black workers who were exploited at their work places and died without the benefits which accrued to white workers on retirement. (1990: 121).

12.3 Freedom Nyamubaya

On the Road again, delineates the poet's view of the nature of the struggle for freedom, independence and social justice'. As noted in the introduction to this study session, Nyamubaya participated actively in the arm struggle for the independence of Zimbabwe. She carried a gun lost and buried friends and marched to victory with the rest of the fighters in 1980. 'now Zimbabwe is an independent country, but to Nyamubaya, the victory of the freedom fighter was not the end of the struggle'. She knows that the struggle goes on and on' as she declares in the title poem. She makes her intention clear in the 'introduction':

Now that I have put my gun down

For almost obvious reasons

The enemy still is here invisible

My barrel has no definite target now

Let my hands work-

My mouth sing-

My pencil write-

About the same thing my bullet aimed at.

This is perhaps the motif that runs out through this enchanting collection of poems. To the poet, the war against imperialism in Africa is endless, in

‘defeated victory’, she analyses Zimbabwe’s struggle for independence, assesses the victories won by Africa and declares:

We surely won all battles

But lost nearly all wars

We cured all symptoms

But not the diseases

A defeated victory

Africa past, present and future.

Nyamubaya was there in the struggle and what she says she says from the bottom of her heart, from direct experience and with an authority that no one can question. She is ideologically advanced; she has reached a very high level of consciousness and is capable of discerning social analysis and a clarity of vision unparalleled in Zimbabwean poetry.

Note

History

The first Zimbabwean nationalist parties had emerged in the 1950s, and the early political leader of stature was Joshua Nkomo. Nkomo led a number of political movements, most notably the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), which was formed in 1962 and supported largely by the Ndebele of the southwest. In 1963 the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was established by dissident Marxists who sought a more radical political stance. ZANU was led by Ndabaningi Sithole until he was replaced in 1976 by Robert Gabriel Mugabe. The colonial government banned both ZAPU and ZANU shortly after their creation, and the movements consequently developed as clandestine guerrilla groups seeking the overthrow of the white government.

In the mid-1970s guerrilla attacks became more formidable, with ZANU proving the more effective of the guerrilla movements. After 1976 the military wings of ZANU and ZAPU joined forces to create a more powerful liberation army, called the Patriotic Front (PF). Peace negotiations, at first brokered by South Africa, began in 1976, but no agreement was reached. In 1979 Rhodesia’s white regime attempted to compromise by introducing a new constitution that allowed limited black majority rule with political safeguards for whites. After elections the same year, a moderate black leader, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, formed a coalition government with the Rhodesian Front and took office as prime minister. However, ZANU and ZAPU did not accept this arrangement, viewing Muzorewa as a puppet of the white government. In 1980 the Rhodesian government accepted British and American mediation and signed the Lancaster House agreement for majority rule. In elections held that year, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), as ZANU became known, decisively defeated ZAPU. Mugabe was installed as prime minister, and the nation was renamed Zimbabwe.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this study session, we have shown the appeal of Zimunya's *Thought – tracks* here he demonstrates a progressive attitude to the political scene in pre-independence Zimbabwe. Hove in, *Up in Arms*, takes a partisan position and aligns himself with the down-trodden and the struggling lots of Zimbabwe. While Nyamubaya's strength lies in the convincing manner in which she records the experiences of the freedom fighters.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 12.1 (tests Learning Outcome 12.1)

Point out the nature and general atmosphere of Musaemura Zimunya's later poetry

SAQ 12.2 (tests Learning Outcome 12.2)

Discern the thematic concerns of Chanjerai Hove's poetry

SAQ 12.3 (tests Learning Outcome 12.3)

How is irony deployed to synthesize the message in and inspiration for Freedom Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again*?

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Study Session 13

Jack Mapanje of Malawi

Introduction

Jack Mapanje is perhaps the most outstanding of the Malawian poets. A social critic with a strong feeling for art and artistic objects is evident from his poetic works. He has been detained a number of times as a result of his vitriolic punches of the Malawian leadership. In this study session you will learn about his works.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

13.1 discuss three thematic expressions from Mapanje's works.

13.2 identify the services of images and literary devices adopted by Mapanje to carry his message across.

13.1 Themes in Mapanje Poetry

From the first poem, 'Kabula Curio – Shop', it is evident that Jack Mapanje is a social critic with a determined feeling for art and artistic objects. The poet is angry, at the treatment meted out to art and artists by modern tourist industry, which commercializes everything. The annoyance of the protagonist emerges from the contrast between the first and second stanzas. The first stanza portrays the artist, the carver, hard at work, making it clear that much labor, skill and concentration have gone into the piece of carving:

Black wood between carefully bowed legs

The eyes red over bellows and smoke

The sharpening of axes, adzes, carvers

The chopping, the whittling and such

Carving such scooping and scooping

Then the sandpapering and smoothing

In the second stanza we see the some product broken and left in a tiny corner of the curio-shop:

Now a broken symbol thrown careless

In the nook of a curio-shop: a lioness

Broken legs, broken neck, broken udder?

There is also the issue of the artist not getting the worth of his tedious labor: 'Such energy release and the price / bargained away.'

In other words, the artists is exploited and paid a token for a great job well done. In 'Song of Chickens', we have the image of leader who was once sincere in his pursuit of freedom, who genuinely shielded his subjects, but who has now turned against them. To Mapanje, some African leaders have metamorphosed into despots, collaborating with the imperialist world, some have been collaborated with South Africa and with the former white – controlled Mozambique and Rhodesia to suppress the citizens of their own countries.

Master, you talked with bows,

Arrows and catapults once

Your hands steaming with hawk blood

To protect your chicken

Why do you talk with knives now

Your hands teaming with eggshell

And hot blood from your own chickens?

Is it to impress your visitors?

Note

History

Hastings Kamuzu Banda (1906?-1997), first prime minister (1964-1966) and president (1966-1994) of Malawi. Banda led the campaign against the white-dominated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. Following riots in 1959, he

was arrested; freed in 1960 to aid in the transition to independence, he later assumed leadership of the government. Banda made Malawi a republic in 1966, with himself as president. In 1971 he declared himself president for life. Banda ruled with an iron hand throughout the 1980s. In the early 1990s, however, opposition to his regime intensified, as did international pressure to improve Malawi's human rights record.

Murders and arrests marked the struggle over the eventual succession to Malawi's aged, authoritarian President Hastings Kamuzu Banda. In March one of Banda's exiled opponents, Attati Mpakati of the Socialist League of Malawi, was killed in Harare, Zimbabwe, shortly after arriving on a visit from Mozambique. In Malawi, former Justice Minister Orton Chirwa and Vera Chirwa, Malawi's first woman lawyer, were sentenced to death in May for treason. The Chirwas, members of the Malawi Freedom Movement, maintained they had been kidnapped from exile in Zambia by Malawi police in 1981. President Shehu Shagari of Nigeria, the Church of Scotland, the International Commission of Jurists, and others asked the Malawi government for clemency for the Chirwas, who appealed the verdict. Four key leaders of the ruling Malawi Congress Party, the country's only legal political organization, were killed in a car crash in May under suspicious circumstances. One, Dick Matenje, the party's secretary-general, was widely viewed as a possible successor to the president. Suspicion in the Matenje death focused on another candidate for the succession, Central Bank Governor John Tembo, an uncle of Banda's longtime companion, Cecilia Kadzimira.

--Microsoft Encarta

‘The New platform Dances depicts a contrast between traditional dances as acceptably performed in the past and what seems to be a caricature of them in modern Malawi. The protagonist would at first appear to be someone in the position of President Kamuzu Banda, Boasting about having ‘scattered nervous women’ and then enticed them back/ with fly whisk’s magic,, however it becomes clear that this is a voice from the past commenting satirically and butterfly , in a manner similar to that of Okot P’Bitek’s Lawino:

Now, when I see my daughters writhe

Under cheating abstract

Voices of slack drums, ululate

To babble-idea-men-masks

Without amulets or anklets,

Why don’t I stand up

To show them how we danced

Chopa, how IT was, born?

Why do I sit still
Why does my speech choke
Like I have not danced
Before? Aren't I
Danced the bigger dance
Haven't I?

Another point of interest here is how Mapanje gives advice to senior government officials in poems like 'on the Royal Blindness paramount chief Wangela, 'making our clowns Martyr and ;when This Carnival finally closes' The interesting thing about Mapanje's depiction is that, it is a reflection of the happenings in Africa. In when this carnival.....

When this trothful carnival finally closes, Brother
When your carnival finally veins dry, this very officers
Will burn the scripts of the praises we sang for you
And scatter the calabashes you drank from your Charm,
These drums and the effigies blazing will
Become the accomplices to your lie-achieved world!
Your bamboo hurt on the beach they'll make a bonfire
Under the cover of giving their hero a true traditional
Burial, though in truth to rid themselves of another
Deadly spirit that might otherwise have hunted them,
And at the wake new mask dancers will quickly leap
Into the arena dancing to tigher skins, boasting
Other clans of calabashes as the undertakers jest:
What did he think he would become, a God?
The devil!

Mapanje's poetry is that of a social crisis who is dismayed at the way things are going in his society, the loss of freedom and what he views as a

degeneration of culture and other values. His work is protest poetry, performing the same function as those of other prominent African writers. According to Ngara, “Mapanje”s preoccupation as a poet are essentially cause for satire. But how has he use satire?., the key to his artistic method is hinted at in the cryptic introduction to the volume”(1990:162):

The verse in this volume spans from some the turbulent years in which I have been attempting to find a voice or voice as away of preserving some sanity. Obviously where person voices are too easily muffled, this is a difficult task: one is tempted like the chameleon, who failed to deliver chiuta’s message of life, to back in one’s brilliant camouflage. But the exercise has been, if nothing else, therapeutic: and that’s no mean word in our circumstance! (1983:14)

From the above, it is crystal clear that Malawi has become a despot state; where oppression and censorship has become the order of the day. Mapanje’s voice is muffled, what he has to say is said carefully, indirectly and offer in a cryptic fashion. As a result, his poems turn out to be very difficult to interpret, especially for the reader who is not familiar with Malawi’ oral traditions and political phase. In line with this, Mapanje has gone ahead to evolve or consistent aesthetic ideology deriving from the historical and social situations under which he writes. His reveals certain stylistic features which we shall examine in the Nest sub-heading.

13.2 Mapanje’s Stylistics Features

The first obvious feature in Mapanje poetry is his extensive use of Malawian myth and oral traditions. This is evident in the poems on chiuta and on chingwe’s hole and many others. It is also evident in the tittles of his works. In these works, Mapanje relies on myths for the interpretation of his poems. According to Ngara, ‘in Mapanje and other Malawian writers myths are used primarily as away of communication rather than a means of recapturing the past (1990:163).

For Mapanje, the method gives rise to a dialectical process_ the use of oral traditions in poetry has led to an abiding interest in orature, as evidenced by the publication of *Oral poetry from Africa* (1983), which indeed helps to keep tradition alive. To Mapanje, this ‘mythical style,’ allows a poet to be a chameleon to convert *Ebony Beauty* from a human being to wood and vice versa. In Mapanje, This method brings in element of allegory with poet at two levels a superficial and a deeper level. This is evident in poems like, ‘songs of chicken’s ‘The Tussle’ in these poems animals are used as embodiments and representations meant to portray individuals. Similarly Banda Becomes chiuta and Malawi remains Chingwe’s Hole;



In the hostile dangerous terrain within which Mapanje found himself, allegory became necessary to divert the attention of despotic Banda.

Satire, according to Ngara, ‘is a very common feature of African orature and one of the forms takes is apostrophe, the device of speaking as if the poet or protagonist were directly addressing a particular person or audience,(1990:163).In Mapanje, Apostrophe has peculiar punch driving the point home in a hard and pinching manner.

The duality of apostrophe and the lampoon gives rise to a vivid chromatic element in the poetry. In the making our clowns martyrs’.

Hard luck my friend but we all know what currents have stroked your temper. You come from a breed of Toxic frogs croaking beside the smoking marshes of River shire, and the first words you breathed were snapped by the lethal mosquitos of this morass.

We know you would wade your way through the arena. Though we wondered how you had got chosen for the Benz. Like the above, to give the satire a bite he employs the combination of lampoon and apostrophe. Though he appears to be sympathising with the persona in reality he is shedding crocodile tears. These are creative styles that could have been invented by a skillful poet as evident in the work of Jack Mapanje.

Study Session Summary



Summary

Mapanje's preoccupations as a poet are essentially cause for satire. He also uses the myth and Malawian oral tradition to depict the realities (political and social) in his domain. No wonder he has been tagged as the chameleon artist.'

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 13.1 (tests Learning Outcome 13.1)

Identify at least three thematic expressions from Mapanje's works.

SAQ 13.2 (tests Learning Outcome 13.2)

Mapanje's works rely heavily on Malawian myth and oral traditions. Aside these, what other devices are used in his works?

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Study Session 14

Niyi Osundare: Social Commitment

Introduction

In this Study Session, you will explore the contributions of Niyi Osundare, a Nigerian, to the works of poetry.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

14.1 distinguish between the poetry of Niyi Osundare and the generation before him; particular at the level of comprehension and simplicity.

14.2 identify themes in Osundare's poetry

14.1 About Niyi Osundare

Niyi Osundare was born in a Yoruba family in Ikere-Ekiti state, Nigeria. He was educated at Ibadan, Leeds and Canada respectively. Among his works, we have: *songs of the Market _place* (1986), *the Eye of the Earth* (1986) *Moonsongs* (1988), *Waiting laughs* (1990), *Songs of the season*(1990) and *selected* (1992). He also published a critical commentary, *The Writer as Righter*1986 and *Village voices*, (1984).In this study session you will learn about his works.

14.2 Review of Osundare's Poetry

The purposes of Osundare's poetry are plain in his volume *Songs of Marketplace*. In which he devotes his poetic energies to the service of the exploited African peasantry. In the first poem, "poetry is" he assert his artistic vision in conjunction with his populist theme of social obligation. To Osundare, poetry is:

Not the esoteric whisper

Of an excluding tongue

Not a claptrap

For a wounding audience

Not a learned quiz
Entombed in GrecoRoman lore
Poetry is
A life spring
Which gathers timbre
The more throats it plucks
Harbinger of action
The more minds it stirs

The reference to “GrecoRoman lore” is crucial to Osundare’s poetic for through it he indicate the uses to which the pre-civil war generation of poets, such as Soyinka and Okigbo, put their post-colonial education inheritance, these poets according to Osundare, brought the whole mechanistic apparatuses of European poetry... The modernist pretension ...to African soil. That was why soyinka was difficult and Okigbo too...”(1985:4).

In “the poet”, from *A Nib in the pond*, Osundare extends his populist theories about the function of poetry to include the role of the poet, who:

Is not a prophet,
God hollow ventriloquists,
Auguring past futures
In dated tongues
The poets eyes are washed
In the common spring
Through seeding beyond
The lazy horizon
Of lowering skies
Who says the poet
Should leave the muck

Unraked?

In a land of choking mud

How can the poet

Strut

Clean

In feathered sandals

And

Pretend to the world

He never smells?

Though he excludes obscurity and arcane language of the pre-civil war poets, Osundare has in common with his peers (including most of those of the first generation) a political dimension to his writing that makes it potentially revolutionary and transformative. Osundare strives with the problem of the masses and dissociating it from the socioeconomic processes that make it elitist. He does this by drawing on the oral tradition of his agrarian roots. In the stories, songs, moods, and tones, he finds a model for making his poetry accessible to the oppressed people in Nigerian society, who are victims of self-serving political and economic leadership.

Note! compare:

I could not choose but serve
I took their measure in the depth
Of sea-beds, gallery-slave to claims
Of bread and call. I brought the enemy fleet

The politician's mouth has two edges
Like Esimuda's sword
It is murders both ways
When the man of power

To port, and pressed a reasoned course
Of Temperate victory. It did not suffice
I pledged reversion of any strength
To arbitration, they pledged extinction
of their kind
(Wole Soyinka, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*)

Tell you his tale
Ask him to wait till
You bring a sieve
(Osundare, *village voices*)

Osundare's poetry combines the meditative with the rhetorical and displays a wide range of topics : European cultural influence and poetry as well as the abstractions of love, pride, humility, honesty, cowardice, misery and corruption. His mood /lyrical, celebratory, ironical, satirical, humorous, bitter-are equally various as he exposes corruption in Nigeria society.

In *village voices* (1984), Osundare portrays the activities, concerns, and attitudes of peasants. For example in "Eating Tomorrow's Yam", he details the concerns of farmers ;in "The prisoner song," he convincingly portrays the bluster of a prisoner ;and in "Alarinka", he capture the listlessness of a vagabond. He also projects a clear revolutionary proletarian vision.

Here, Osundare portrays the hypocrisy of Nigeria politicians. To Osundare, they do not have anything good to offer the masses; what concerns them is grabbing with both hands.

In *A Nib in the pond* 1986, he continues with his thematic concern in *Song of the Marketplace*:

No need hiding
In the tabernacle of words
So the storm of anger
No need camouflaging
Behind a flimsy jungle
Of occult idioms ...
There is no petname for

Injustice

Poverty

Has no bank for nicknames.

In *The Eye of the Earth* 1986, Osundare affirms the origins of rural –oral societies of his poetic materials: Farmer –born, peasant –bred, It encountered dawn in the enchanted corridors of the forest, suckled on the delicate aroma of healing herbs, and the pearly drops of generous moons. Living in those days was rugged, but barns brimmed with yams fattened by merciful rains and the tempering fore of the upland sun ... Earth was ours, and we earth's"

The poem presents a vision of a dying earth. Proceeding from the acts of the "rich and ruthless who squander earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while million of people perish daily from avoidable hunger" (1986)

Waiting Laughters (1990), is, as Osundare says in the subtitle, "a long song in many voices". The song has four movements that all relate to the theme implied in the title- waiting and humor. Osundare draws his theme for the most part from Nigeria specifically from his Yoruba inheritance, but there are poems that relate to other parts of Africa and the black world- such as Thomas Sankara, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko and Walter Rodney. These poems contain an excitement, an exuberance that propels them forward, often as a string of images and suggest the impatience inherent in waiting. With a playfulness in the use of language.

What happens to the song which waits too long

In the labyrinths of the throat

What happens to the prayer which waits too long

Without an amen

What happens to the faces which wait too long

without the memory of a mask.

What happens to LAUGHTER which wait too long

In the compost of anguished seasons?

What...?

Osundare has produced a volumes of poetry with a sweetness and mellowness virtually unparalleled in African poetry to date, and a rhythmic beat which compares well with that of Kofi Anyidoho, whose work, we shall examine in the next session.

Study Session Summary



Summary

Osundare return to the tradition of African poetry that uses poetry as song, in order to chastise wrongdoers and create a fair and just society. His poetry is unique by its lyricism together with an insistent dramatic manner, derived from the African oral tradition. His poetry is best appreciated in performance and within the larger context of oral poetry.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 14 (tests Learning Outcomes 14.1 and 14.2)

- Like poets of the former generations, Osundare wrote to condemn socio-political plagues and the suffering of the masses. What stylistic trait however distinguishes his poetry from those of the generation before him?
- Highlight themes in Osundare's poetry

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Study Session 15

Kofi Anyidoho: Traditional Aesthetics

Introduction

In this study session you will explore the works of Kofi Anyidoho. Kofi Anyidoho, a Ghanaian, is one of the most distinguished poets of the new generation. He has authored among others, *A harvest of our dreams*. As seen in other African poets, Anyidoho is greatly indebted to tradition; which is evident in his works; especially the dirge form.

Learning Outcomes



After the Study Session, you should be able to:

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

15.1 explain how the thematic expression of *Dance of Death*

Outcomes

consummate that of *A harvest of our dreams*.

15.2 discuss literary devices employed by Anyidoho to convey his messages

15.1 Analysis of Kofi Anadoho's Poetry

Kofi Anyidoho speaks with the voice of a revolutionary who is preoccupied with the events in the history of post – independence Ghana, in microcosm and Africa in macrocosm. His poetry is a reaction to a revolution that was betrayed and it speaks with an assertive firmness and aggressiveness. In the poem, “Mythmaker”.

Our orphan laid an egg across the backyard of the skies.

The rain storm came and swept it all away. Again he laid an egg against the backyard of the skies. Again the rainstorm came and swept it all away today he sows a mystery seed in the bosom of whirl thoughts, our predator birds shall have to prey upon their own anger their own nightmares.

The above poem is a dedication to students who lost their lives in student risings against the panther's boasts. The poem asserts in a lyrical almost mournful voice, that these students will/be/home/some day', .In 'seedtime' hope for the nation is expressed through the use of varieties of images. The poem shows how attempts to advance the revolution have been foiled at various levels. However 'this hand survived the flood of birth water, we are told.

A harvest of our dreams, depicts the betrayal of the people's revolution in a more explicit way. There is the symbol of the honeybee who went across the world gathering fragrance for his mother –Queen but then some other gatherer came with his own planes: Our live went up in flames; so our “honeycomb” went floating through seedtime within the soul beyond memory of this honeycomb. But he is not alone in this because he is seeking kindred minds| for lost passwords into fiestas of the soul'. The poet is here re-awakening revolutionary tendencies in the minds of other people as a way of achieving the desired goal. The poem ends on an optimistic note; with hope for future victory and success.



Though calling for revolution and readiness to pay the ultimate price, Anyidoho is not a prophet of doom. He is calling for those things he has realistically seen as indispensable to change.

Another important poem in Anyidoho's collection is 'The panther's final dance'. Here, three key symbols are employed in this poem, the interpretation of which unknots the poet's intention. The symbols are thunder, panther and hippo. Thunder referred to simply as 'rumblings' or alluded to in word or phrases connected with lightening. 'Thunder' is a recurrent symbol in Anyidoho's poem. According to Ngara, 'The attitude of the protagonist to thunder is sometimes ambivalent, as in this poem where 'thunder' is criticized for picking a 'clique of trickster gods / for councilmen and ministers of state' but in the main thunder is portrayed in a very positive light. The attitude of the protagonist to panther. Is definitely ambivalent, panther is given a negative image except when he smote down the rule of 'demi-dogs' in the third stanza of the poem(1990:169).

In *Dance of Death*, Anyidoho advocates the promotion of revolutionary action even at the Cost of death. This is in order to put back on course 'a revolution gone astray into /arms of dreams merchants' to quote the closing lines of Elery for the revolution! Dance of death is indeed the one poem which encapsulates Anyidoho's vision most passionately and most eloquently. The poet irrevocably and openly declares his support for revolutionary change and calls upon his compatriot to be prepared to make the supreme sacrifice of death so that the nation may be born a new:

The birth of a new nation

Calls for sacrifice of souls

And our hearts are filled with

A passion for life by baptism of death.

To Anyidoho, peaceful means and dialogue which could have been the best means of achieving this goal does not seem to appeal to him as past means based on these virtues has failed; that is he has resorted to

revolutionary means: why our minds have labored in vain / preparing blue – prints for revolutions of peace’. This why he has advocated unity among the patriots to have a common front to combat a common enemy. He therefore warns that this daring adventure may result in death.



Dialogue, revolution: which, to you, is more effective?

In a powerful stanza that demonstrates the poet’s talent for lyrical and performative verse, various instruments are called upon to give rhythm to the dance of revolution.

Put the rhythm to the loom
Weave new tapestries for our gliding feet
This rhythm grows too urgent for our peace
Splitting our souls among a thousand desperate love
The dance of death is a dance of grace
Give us back these old drummers
Give them back those broken drums with Nasal Twang
Call them here call the owners of our town.
Brings them stools to sit in state and watch
Our feet in the final glide across our twilight zone.

The poet ends the poem with hope for victory and profound understanding of revolutionary change which involves a dialectical relationship between destruction and construction:

The god of creation rambles
Through the ruins of broken worlds
And
The process of reconstruction
Is also

A process of demolition.

From the foregoing it is clear that “Anyidoho is not a fanatic but a committed revolution any who has strong patriotic feelings and was bitterly disappointed by the betrayal of his country’s revolution in the 1970s.

Study Session Summary



Summary

Anyidoho uses animal imagery and words associated with thunder, storms and lighting in poems on revolution. He also uses idioms and symbol which are probably taken from the Ewe language and which certainly reflect a traditional pre-capitalist world view. His style involves a return to traditional symbols. In the whole, Anyidoho has achieved a density of texture which at first makes the poetry quite difficult to perpetrate, but he is in the main extremely successful in articulating a passionate revolutionary vision.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 15 (tests Learning Outcomes 15.1 and 15.2)

- Explain how the thematic expression of *Dance of Death* consummate that of *A harvest of our dreams*.
- Identify and discuss literary devices employed by Anyidoho to convey his messages

Bibliography



Reading

Anyoholo, K *A Harvest of our dreams*, London: Heinemann, 1984

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Feedback to Self Assessment Questions

SAQ 1.1

- a) Olaudah Equiano, Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoana
- b) Modern African Poetry is a written poetry tradition. The art of writing was non-existent in much of sub-Saharan Africa before the coming of Europeans. While there were vibrant oral literary traditions, consequently, written literary tradition was non-existent. During the trans-Atlantic slave trade, some of the African slaves who found themselves in Europe and the New World learned to write and thus were able to pioneer written literature.

SAQ 1.2

The issue of race was present. African tradition and culture as well as the belief in the existence of the world of the supernatural runs through most of the poems, especially as observed in the poems of Michael Dei-Anang and Dennis Osadebay. Many poems by Gladys Casely Hayford revolved around Christian themes. Some, such as Michael, Dei-Anang and Dennis Osadebay, also became very revolutionary and nationalistic, stressing a sense of pride in their colour.

SAQ 2.1

In theory it was a rule through existing traditional institutions with British supervision; but in praxis it was a rule directly by British officials with existing traditional figures as mere puppets.

SAQ 2.2

They became conscious of the evils of colonialism and realized its dehumanizing effects on the colonized. They thus channelled their poetic vigour towards rediscovery of African greatness and exposing the evils of colonialism with the purpose and expected eventuality of cessation of colonialism and achievement of independence. Their poetry thus became revolutionary and nationalistic. To read their poetry therefore is to be treated emotional exhibitions held together to varying imaginative and by a central theme- colonialism- which has had a terrible impact on their life

and culture. (1981:8). In the words of Wilfred Cartey, 'the theme of colonialism is one of the most persistent notes in African Literature and in fact in that of all newly emerging nations. It appears of historical necessity and will continue to be present in many literatures, for its effects on individuals and societies have been deeply wrenching, precipitating....' (1971:45).

SAQ 3.1

- a) He was influenced by Horace, Catullus, Ovid, Virgil, Tacitus, Aristophanes, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristotle, John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Browning, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Allen Ginsberg of the Beat Generation in the United States.
- b) Mother Idoto, the river goddess as well as the village stream from which he drank and in which he washed himself. He commits himself as poet-priest to the services of Mother Idoto.

SAQ 3.2

His focus shifts to social realities surrounding Africa, such as the collective rape of Africa and through colonialism and cultural cum religious imperialism. He thus taps into the major thematic preoccupation of Modern Anglophone West African Poetry.

SAQ 3.3

He moves a step further into social realities in independent Nigeria, as well as Africa, such as the election crisis of the Western region with its attendant woes, the incarceration of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, assassination of the anti-imperialist Patrice Lumumba, the first prime minister in the Congo, and so on.

SAQ 3.4

It was partly inspired by the poet's actual experience of Surgery under general anesthesia.

SAQ 3.5 (a) Coup (b) he warns those who assumed power not to squander the potentials of the revolution, not to share the meat and forget thunder.

SAQ 4.1

(a) Personal experience, children, nature are major concerns.

(b) According to Osita Okagbue, 'An atmosphere of peace pervades the entire landscape of *Poems* with an occasional hint that nature can be capricious and the world an unkind place.'

SAQ 4.2 *State of the Nation* is based principally on the socio-political decay of Nigeria while *Mandela and Other Poems* is based on the protracted freedom struggle in south Africa.

SAQ 5.1

According to Layiwola, (1997), the Yoruba phenomenon which informed this has been the story of Atunda, otherwise termed Atowoda. The story of Atowoda is a curious one, itself deriving from the Yoruba myth of origin. It was reported that the archdivinity, at the very beginning, had the name Orisa (i.e. one to be revered and worshipped). Along with the god of divination and wisdom, Orunmila, he descended into the primeval void to begin the processes of creation as directed by Olodumare, the Supreme. Orisa procured himself a slave from Emure market to be his helper. This slave was called Atunda. Three days after he was bought, he asked the permission of his master to cultivate a piece of virgin land not far from the house, on the summit of a cliff. Atunda worked hard on the land and impressed his master. Somehow Atunda became envious of his master and contrived to murder him. Now his master was wont to visit the farm once in a while. On one such occasion, when his master climbed the steep hill, he heaved a heavy boulder down the hill as his master was just in place. The result was devastating; the arch-divinity (Orisa-nla), once whole in his usually snow-white garment, was shattered into four hundred and one fragments.¹¹ The four hundred and one fragments today constitute the entire pantheon of the Yoruba as they were re-aligned and put together by Orunmila, the agency of divination and of wisdom.

On the role of Ogun in it all, Layiwola continues: Idanre represents the mysteries of Ogun in its seven phases as the archetypal model of heroic existence from its birth through the inevitable process of dissolution. Ogun, after all, created the path of awareness through which other gods began the journey into the cosmic realm, when our world was still inchoate and unformed. In the present dispensation, it correlates with the twilight of dawn, with all its formless shapes and presences, and the semi-conscious state of sleep.

The Yoruba myth of creation credits Ogun with metallurgy. He it was, they believe, who forged iron tools and with a cutlass cut the path for divinities on their journey when Olodumare commissioned Obatala to create the world of humans.

SAQ 5.2

Situations leading to and his own suffering during the Nigerian Civil War

SAQ 5.3

The liberation of South Africa from apartheid; a call to frontline states to take action against south Africa, symbolized in the mystical ally between Shaka and Ogun

SAQ 6.1

A discussion of the catalytic factors of Negritude would revolve round colonialism, the policy of assimilation, cultural imperialism and the alienation of the Africans from their roots.

SAQ 6.2

Europeans had for a long time derided the cultural essence of Africa, but now 'the African elite was pleasantly surprised to realize that Africa had something to be proud of after all –they need not be ashamed of their race and colour as Europeans had led them to believe.'

SAQ 7.1

The images are employed to encode a dilemma on the part of the African about whether to be immersed in the past, the traditions, or in the front, modernity. Thus the theme is mainly hinged on dialectics.

SAQ 7.2

- a) Severance of the African from indigenous cultural traditions that have been cut away by a perverting modernization
- b) His imprisonment

SAQ 8.1

In Jared Angira's , 'The street', the rich go about in Rolls Royce, zephyr and mercedez Benz cars, while the poorman who has his nostrils blocked scratches his body with his tiny nails. In one of Okot P' Bitek's poems, the children of the poor

...eat green vegetables

Without the simsim paste

...

Collect the odir and oenne insects

And they roast the odir and oenne

And eat them

And the children of others

Are fat,

And their wives grow large buttocks,

They eat meat from the chest of bulls

And the skin of their legs

Shines with health

In Henry Barlow's 'Building the Nation', politicians' highly delicate diplomatic duties is exposed to be

Cold 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.

while the poor, in 'The Death of an Eland', is exemplified as an invalid woman, portrayed with terror and pathos, emaciated with hunger and pain and on whose body some, 'Fat... blush green,' and 'numerous small brown' ticks are swarming and feeding. Her pleas for mercy and help from the passers-by is not favourably heard until a hunter, to put to an end her misery, shoots her.

In this way, all the poems examined in this study session is either exemplifying the social disparity or recounting the miseries of the poor or doing both.

SAQ 9.1

The tension between African traditions and Westernization and the alienation of the African elites to the former by the latter

SAQ 9.2

Disillusionment with the much-desired uhuru, or independence; bitterness at the interception of the benefits of independence by the political elite.

SAQ 10.1

We have to distinguish between the condition of colonialism experienced in West Africa and the apartheid institutionalized in South Africa. Under the former, the natives still own their own land, farm their own land, dwell in their own cities but are governed by a foreign power. Under the latter, white settlers take over the land and the natives could best be described as tenants. At some points, blacks were consigned to newly created and impoverished homelands, called Bantustans, which were designed to eventually become petty sovereign states. The white population retained control of more than **80 percent** of the land. Several people were killed who engaged in anti-apartheid activities. In the apartheid the most diabolical dimension of man's inhumanity to his fellow man was expressed.

SAQ 10.2

Brutus does not sink into the mire of self-pity as some other poets do, he reacts with vigor, integrity and defiant hopefulness to the Apartheid police regime in South Africa. It is Brutus's temper, intellect and imagination that save the protest from sounding merely strident from degenerating into blubbery emotionalism or mawkish self-pity or naïve malice.

SAQ 11.1

In 'The spectacle of youth' he used elements from the Zulu fauna to explicate freedom struggle, where the children of the lion stand for youths who must rise up against oppression. 'Europe' exposes the heartlessness of the oppressors, ostensibly to justify the counter brutality the freedom fighters would have to perpetrate on the course of their struggle. 'The Protest' resonates with protest of the oppressed. A great Generation is about the protraction of the freedom struggle while 'Vengeance' calls for radicalism in the struggle.

SAQ 11.2

Artistically, the freedom struggle themes are perfectly insinuated into the templates of Zulu traditional motifs. In this way, the traditionalism of

Kunene's poetry neither becomes romantic or idealized nor does the freedom struggle they advance become obtrusive or degenerate into message without aesthetics. Matter and manner blend perfectly with neither becoming obtrusive. Unlike Senghorian Negritude, the portrayal of traditionalism is not just for its own sake.

SAQ 12.1

Zimunya's later works are dominantly joyful, lively in mood, portraying jollity and celebration. We have this for example in 'Children' Rain Song' and 'Kisimiso'. They are also humorous, as we have especially in 'Ifulaimachina'. Many are easy to understand.

SAQ 12.2

The harrowing experiences, sufferings and heroic exploits of the common people during Zimbabwe's war of national liberation and at other times during the colonial era.

SAQ 12.3

We surely won all battles

But lost nearly all wars

We cured all symptoms

But not the diseases

A defeated victory

Africa past, present and future.

From the title 'Defeated Victory' one sees pungent irony deployed to indicate the unresolved status of the freedom struggle. Yes, armed struggles are over, but there are still works to be done as it is not yet uhuru. The victory has not yielded the expected dividends to the masses, so the struggle must continue, not through arms anymore but through intellectual exertions, which for Nyamubaya comes in poetry. The message comes out more clearly in

Now that I have put my gun down

For almost obvious reasons

The enemy still is here invisible

My barrel has no definite target now

Let my hands work-

My mouth sing-

My pencil write-

About the same thing my bullet aimed at.

SAQ 13.1

In 'Kabula Curio – Shop', Mapanje is angry, at the treatment meted out to art and artists by modern tourist industry, which commercializes everything. The artists work hard carving, but is exploited and paid a token for a great job well done. In 'Song of Chickens', we have a theme of disillusionment with the nationalists who had fought for freedom and had helped won independence but who have turned another sets of despots from whom the masses need again to be liberated. 'The New platform Dances depicts a contrast between traditional dances as acceptably performed in the past and what seems to be a caricature of them in modern Malawi.

SAQ 13.2 Allegory and apostrophe

SAQ 14

- a) Osundare clearly demonstrates that obscure diction is not a necessary ingredient for beautiful verses. His poetry is rich in images that are not obscure. Also, his poetry is best appreciated in performance and within the larger context of oral poetry.
- b) In *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare celebrates the bucolic splendour of rural existence; he celebrates the earth and its resources. Then he presents a vision of a dying earth. Proceeding from the acts of the "rich and ruthless who squander earth's wealth on the invention of increasingly accomplished weapons of death, while millions of people perish daily from avoidable hunger".

In *Songs of Marketplace* and *A Nib in the pond*, he discourages obscurantist poetry and prescribes that the poetry that would yield itself to the service of the masses should be understandable.

In *village voices*, he portrays the activities, concerns, and attitudes of peasants. He also unravelled the hypocrisy of the political class.

SAQ 15

- a) *A harvest of our dreams*, depicts the betrayal of the people's revolution; it depicts how the people's labours have been harvested by wicked, opportunistic leaders. In response to this injustice, *Dance of Death* advocates revolutionary actions in order to put back on course 'a revolution gone astray into /arms of dreams merchants'. He calls on his compatriots to take up arms and fight the evil forces even at the Cost of death.
- b) A discussion on literary devices employed by Anyidoho would revolve round symbols, powerful images, myths and other allegorical motifs.