

LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 10

SUBJECT: Literature-In-English

TOPIC: African Prose; "Second-Class Citizen" by Buchi Emecheta Cont'd

LASS: SS1

WEEK: 10

THEMES

1. Marriage without love

The marriage between Adah and Francis is not founded on genuine love. Both of them seem to have stuck to each other on the basis of convenience. Adah sticks to Francis as she has no relative kind enough to take her in.

To her, Francis is quiet a young man, who will soon be an accountant. The marriage itself starts on a wrong footing. Both of them, Francis and Adah are underage. Francis seems to have been more interested in the fact that Adah will bring more money into the house, although he fears for the marriage if she works for the Americans where her salary 'will be three times my own'.

The first sign of apartness to come is in Francis leaving for England without being bothered by his wife remaining behind. Secondly, Adah feels cheated being left in Nigeria: "so she was to stay in Nigeria, finance her husband, give his parents expensive gifts occasionally, help in paying the school fees for some of Francis' sisters, look after her young children and what then, rot?" Thirdly, for not having wept on the day of her husband's departure, Francis still on his way to England, writes her from Barcelona: "you did not cry for me.... You were happy to see me go, were you not? Fourthly, she is accused of not appearing "in my send-off photograph". All these accusations and observations show that love is scanty in the relationship.

2. Stubborn female

Adah is a stubborn woman. From the onset, Adah is presented to us as an insubordinate fellow who takes her fate into her own hands. From childhood, she refused to accept the place given to her; either by her parents or any other person. She rejects the idea of Boy continuing his education because he is male while she, a girl child, is denied secondary education. She is not opposed to marriage; she only did not accept elderly suitors, in spite of mother's (her mother) propaganda that "older men took better care of their wives than the young and overeducated ones". Being a willful girl, she has already made up her mind that she won't marry a man "she would have to serve his food on bended knee." Although Adah knows that many Igbo wives refer to their husbands as 'master' or 'Sir', "she wasn't going to!

Such is her head-strong nature that her smile is taken to be a challenge to the headmaster who canes her until she bites one of the boys who carries on his back. It is for this that she is nicknamed, (the Igbo tigress". Similarly, she withstands Cousin Vincent's stroke who canes her for supposedly losing two shillings she was given to buy a pound of steak from the market. So stubborn is Adah that after receiving 50 strokes of the cane, she refuses to cry. Her Cousin, Vincent, has to beg her "to cry a little". Another evidence to show that Adah is a stubborn female abounds in her marital life with Francis. She refuses to be Francis' type of woman and the narrator says: "Francis could beat her to death; she was not going to stoop to that level". It is not stated in the story how Adah knew her husband had been messing around with Trudy (the babysitter). Yet she tells Francis: "I am going to kill you and that prostitute. You sleep with her, do you not?" Similarly, at one of her climaxes of her hatred for her husband, we are told that Francis "thought at first that she was going to smash his skull into a pulp from the way she was looking at him with thick hatred.

From all that have been said about Adah here, she is certainly a stubborn woman.

3. An irresponsible husband

Francis marries early in his life. It is not clear if the manner he comports himself as a husband is because he takes on such a responsibility so early in life. As the day progresses, the way he says or does things shows that he is not ready, neither for fatherhood or husband. He sets to go to England for further studies without being bothered how his wife will fare at home. Instead he is more interested in noting whether or not Adah cries on the eve of his departure from Nigeria.

At the least provocation, Francis beats his wife. He is conservative to the point where he does not believe a woman should be a writer. Francis finds it difficult to accept change. He does not accept a woman claiming equality with a man or proving to be intelligent. He tells his wife, "you keep forgetting that you are a woman and that you are black". When Adah is about to start work with the American Consulate, he shudders to think that his wife will earn more than himself. He complains to his father: "her pay will be three times my own". "My colleagues at work will laugh at me." He asks his father what he should do. His father is angry with him and calls him "a fool of a man" and goes on to remind him that Adah's money is his, especially as she has no direct relative interested in her.

More or less an irresponsible husband, he loathes (detests) work. He is satisfied to be fed by his wife. Francis is not bothered that his wife whom he leaves behind in Nigeria is taking care of herself, their two children, is financing his education in England and also catering for his family. Although he does not work, he grumbles when he is asked to look after Titi and Vicky (his children) while Adah goes to work. "If she had not brought her children and saddled him with them...if she had not become pregnant so soon after her arrival, he would have passed". A claim like this is an indication that Francis is not the husband of a family as he is not prepared to shoulder any responsibility or admit outcomes which he clearly initiated. So unhelpful is he that the narrator informs us, "Adah seldom called her husband for anything"

4. The concept of second-class citizen

The concept of second-class citizen applies mainly to the female, especially in Nigeria. Adah's coming (her birth) is not marked nor her birthday noted because she arrives "when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy". She is thus "a disappointment to her parents, to her immediate family, to her tribe..." in the scheme of things, Boy is considered more important than Adah. Adah's schooling is stalled in order to give Boy a head start in education.

In England, the concept of second-class citizen goes beyond sex or gender and incorporates race or where one comes from: "you may be living like an elite but the day you land in England, you are a second-class citizen". This is what Francis reminds his wife of.

CHARACTERS AND THEIR ROLES

1. Adah Obi (nee Ofili)

Originally Adah Ofili, Adah Obi is her name in marriage. She is an Ibo woman married to an Ibo man, named Francis. She is not on the beautiful side; she is said to be "cranky and ugly" and "all skin and bone". She is a brilliant girl whose brother, Boy, is considered more important than she is. She is a self-willed fellow who does not "believe in that stuff of loving your enemy" she is unhappy with Cousin Vincent to the extent that when she hears he has failed his Cambridge School Certificate examinations, (Adah burst out laughing. God had heard her prayers". For practically having no home, early marriage is acceptable to her. Adah is a hardworking lady who wants the best for herself, her children and her husband. She constantly engages herself and fends for others- her children, her husband and her husband's family. She seems to lack tolerance for those who either do not do things the way she wants or those who fail her. "Adah did believe in anything good coming from something you did not pay for".

2. Francis Obi

Francis wants to be an accountant and decides to go to England in order to achieve his aim. He and Adah are ready to marry, each having his or her reason for wanting the other. Francis is a male born among many females, thus, he enjoys closeness with his parents in a culture where premium is placed on being a male.

He is a self-conscious African who enjoys throwing his maleness, in his relationship with his wife, "he was the male and he was right to tell her what she was going to do". Thus, he enjoys beating his wife and considers it normal to be doing so. On his wedding day, he forgets to bring along the marriage ring, although, the ring comes on the second day, it is evidence of irresponsibility. Francis is a traditional man living in a modern environment. He seldom smiles and does not make friends, in all the places they lived, they made no friends. His burning of his wife's manuscript is evidence of his wicked tendencies. As we learn later, he also burns his marriage certificate and his children's birth certificates. He is a bit on the violent side: on more than one occasion he engages his wife in fights, he nearly strangulates his wife Adah but for Mr. Devlin, her Irish co-tenant, who intervenes and separates them.