

## LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 8

**SUBJECT:** Literature-in-English

**TOPIC:** African Poetry “Oumar Farouk Sesay (II)

**CLASS:** SS1

**WEEK:** 8

### THEMES

#### 1. The oppression of women

The poem deals with how women were oppressed in the past, especially as farm hands. These women were made to work in the fields or plantations owned by big individuals or companies and paid paltry wages for their labour. Actually, some of them were forced to work on such farms without any pay, that is, as slaves. While a moment of dereliction (abandonment) of duty is capable of attracting being killed by the slave masters. The poem also addresses how the oppressed women try to cope with their condition by resorting to singing to psychologically make light of their burden, to foster a sense of companionship, to celebrate their achievements, to tell their stories and forget their sorrows.

#### 2. The value of songs

The poet describes the importance of African songs. In Africa, music plays an important role in the way people interact, celebrate and relate historical events. The entertainment from song helped to relieve the people from agony and suffering in the land.

#### 3. Endurance

The long-suffering capacity of women in the poem is clearly underscored. In their miserable plight, African women continue to endure, taking succour in singing and even celebrating their achievements. Despite being faced with daunting tasks and risk of death, the women still carry on as if all is well.

### POETIC DEVICES

#### 1. Simile

This is one of the dominant devices used in the poem. Simile is seen in lines 1-2, ‘Like a sculptor chipping away at bits of wood/Time chisels away bits of their memory.’ This comparison is used to illustrate how slowly but steadily time preys on the memory of the women of the land. As we know that a sculptor slowly and painstakingly chips off bits and piece of wood in order to generate the object of his craft, so does the

poetic persona try to highlight how time slowly destroys human memory. In lines 22-23, simile was also used to compare the death of the women's song to that of the woman who died long ago. Lines 24-25, lines 41-42.

## 2. Personification

Many inanimate entities in the poem were personified by engaging in human activities. 'Time' in line 2 is given the attribute of a sculptor who uses chisels to construct his art, 'servitude' in line 10 is personified, as if it was a law enforcement agent who uses cuffs to incapacitate a criminal from running away. Line 37, 'the stuttering of my pen' which means he has a speech impediment and line 38.

## 3. Repetition

Some words and phrases recurred in the poem a couple of times, and they are: "forlorn fields", "servitude", "ploughed", "women of my land", etc. each of these words and phrases were used to develop the poet's thematic preoccupation.

## 4. Alliteration

This is the repetition of initial consonant sounds in words closely placed together and they are: line 5, "forlorn fields" (f,f), line 8, "lyrics lost", (l,l), line 16, "tyranny of time", (t,t), etc.

## 5. Paradox

The last line of the poem, "The dirge of their lives" is paradoxically used. Dirge is a song of mourning the dead. The term is not only paradoxical in terms of contradiction, but also because it is said to be the song of their lives. Certainly a dirge cannot be sung to celebrate life.

## 6. Imagery

This is the creation of mental and audio vision in the mind of the reader. These images are used to help the reader connect with the message of the poet. We have visual, auditory and olfactory images. Visual images evoked of a sculptor trying to create a physical object, of women ploughing fields, of women singing and also the slavery that existed throughout African history is created.

## 7. Diction

The poet's choice of words is simple. The words are rooted in the culture of its setting. Words like "decapitate", "wriggle", "holler", are used to convey story of oppression and lamentation.

## 8. Mood

This is an act of expressing one's feelings. The poet was in a sorrowful mood. It is this mood that gives vent to his lamentation about unwanted and unacceptable marginalization of Sierra Leone women that led to slavery and oppression.

## 9. Tone

The tone of the poem is that of lament. The poet laments the plight of the women.

## **STRUCTURE**

The poem consists of forty-six lines and eight unequal stanzas, with a one-line stanza being the shortest and a nine-line stanza being the longest. Each stanza focuses on slightly different parts of the overall message. The first two concentrate on the power of time, the third once concentrates on the life of the women in the fields. The fourth stanza explores how the women try to cope with their condition, while the fifth one returns to the influence of time on the memory of the song. The next three stanzas give attention to the present, exploring the use to which the survived tune is now put 'to tell the tale of servitude', as well as highlight the challenges that come with it. The last stanza summarizes and strongly emphasizes the women's story as a dirge.