

LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 9

SUBJECT: Literature-in-English
TOPIC: Non-African Poetry; "Do Not Gentle Into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas
CLASS: SS2
WEEK: 9

THEMES

1. The pervasive (general) nature of death

One very important theme that flows through the poem is the issue of death. In this poem, the expressions 'good night' and 'close of day' are symbolic representations of death. The early part of the 20th century had witnessed a lot of tumultuous events that had resulted into millions of deaths of people from different spheres of activity. This is obvious in the poetic persona's reference to different categories of people despite their obvious differences, the end of life is common to all. However, the poetic persona tries to capture an important aspect of each human being's personality; the will to live, was something that was missing when the poem was written in 1947. People had lost hope and this is what this poem tries to revive; the human desire to live even in the face of death. Thus, the poet insists that mankind should fight and struggle with death when they get to the end of their life. He also acknowledges that death is an inevitable part of human life, mankind was not created to live forever; life only lasts for a while after which a person must die. He accepts this when he says that 'dark is right' but he still insists that man should meet death with a resistance even though he agrees with the fact that every man will eventually die someday, he strongly suggests that nobody should meekly succumb to the cold hands of death.

2. The poet's love for his father

Dylan Thomas loves his father, who had been his mentor, very much. So, this poem is a presentation of his love for his father. He does not want his father to die and apparently he was not happy with the fact that the old man was undergoing physical degeneration as he succumbed to the debilitating influence of disease and death. Dylan's father had played a major role in his mentoring him and his siblings. The fact that his lively and energetic father had become an invalid, suffering from multiple diseases was unsettling. These physical changes in David Thomas' body are what drove the poet to write a poem urging him to hang on to life. This also explains the reasons why 'Do Not Gentle Into That Good Night' is such an emotive poem.

3. Nonconformity to the status quo by resisting death

The poet is not happy about how people resign themselves to fate, by accepting negative occurrences including death, as a ***fait accompli***. In the poem, the poetic persona promotes to his reader, a nonconformist stance. This stance revolves around telling others not to just accept everything negative that comes their way as norm. In this poem, the poetic persona is concerned with death, defeat, loss, etc. He is advocating for a paradigm in the mindset of the people which makes them quickly adapt to tragic events.

The poetic person's position is that humans should consciously decide not to become puppets to the undesirable realities around them; instead, they should create their own positivist oriented realities.

POETIC DEVICES

1. Diction

The words used by the poet are everyday words that can be understood easily by anyone who has an average understanding of the English Language.

2. Euphemism

In the poem, death is not called death but by all manner of milder phrases and words like 'good night' (line 1), 'close of death' (line 2), 'dark' (line 4), etc.

3. Repetitions

A lot of words were repeated in the poem. Words/phrases repeated are: 'rage, rage against the dying light, do not gentle into that good night', etc.

4. Simile

A comparison was made in line 14, 'blind eyes could blaze like meteors'.

5. Personification

There is the use of personification in line 5, line 8, 'frail needs might have danced in a green bay', line 11 'they grieved it on the way', etc. here, sun and frail are given human attributes of grieve and dance.

6. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of speech that uses a significant aspect of a thing to refer to that thing. This figure of speech can be found in line 2 of the poem. 'Old age'; is an aspect of the life of every human being and is used here to refer to those who are age. At the same time, it is also a symbolic reference to the elderly.

7. Pun

The phrase 'good night' is a play on two meanings associated with it; farewell and death. The author plays on these meanings to convey the message that people should not be willing to bid goodbye to life. Similarly, in 'grave men', grave could either mean that the men are very serious individuals or that they are near the point of death.

8. Oxymoron

The expression 'blinding sight' in line 13, contains two words with contradictory meanings placed side by side. Here, the poet refers to the overwhelming clarity of hindsight (hindsight is the understanding that you have about an event only after it has happened), especially when death is fast approaching. 'fierce tears' in line 17 is also oxymoronic.

9. Alliteration

Line 3, 'rage, rage

Line 10, sang....smile

Line 11, Learn...late, etc.

10. Symbolism

Many of the words used in this poem are used to refer to a host of other things. The words serve a purpose on a denotative level and help create imagery in the minds of the readers.

11. Tone/mood

The tone of the poem is desperate. The mood is filled with anger and defiance.