

## LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 10

**SUBJECT:** Literature-in-English  
**TOPIC:** Non-African Poetry: "The Good Morrow" by John Donne  
**CLASS:** SS2  
**WEEK:** 10

### THEMES

#### **1. The emptiness of life without true love**

In the poem, the poetic persona reflects on the bareness of his life before he met his lover. He presents this idea in the first stanza, where he wonders aloud; "I wonder by my troth, what thou and I did till we loved (met)? Were we not weaned till then? But sucked on country's pleasures, childishly?". In these lines, the poetic persona considers all the pleasures that both he and his lover enjoyed before they met as insignificant indulgences that do not compare to the thrill they now experience as a result of their affection for each other. Besides, the poetic persona makes reference to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, a group of youths who took refuge in a cave to escape religious persecution and emerged two hundred years later. Just as these sleepers spent the better part of their lives fast asleep, totally clueless to the occurrences and changes around them, it was the same way the poetic person and his lover led lives that were dull and uninteresting before they met each other. Even though they were alive, they were not living; they merely existed, going through the motions like robots.

#### **2. The beauty and strength of true love**

Love as a concept, means different things to different people as it has undergone several comparisons and definitions over time. For some people, love is wicked while for others, it is beautiful. To some other people, it is like a drug; a drop of fantasy, to others, love is real and fierce in its reality. In the case of 'The Good Morrow', true love, which is embedded in the poetic persona's greeting 'good morning', is eternal and pure. It is blissful and fantastic. In this poem, the poet uses strong metaphysical (things that are thought to exist but cannot be seen) conceits to show the deep power of love. When love is true or sincere, the entire world ceases to exist for the person that is in love, except the romantic world where he or she lives with his loved one. The poet's description of the beauty and strength of true love can only be understood by those who have truly loved a person in this real sense. In such instances, the depth of the love changes an entire person such that when their partner dies, they lose their sense of being and reasoning because they have become a reflection of the one whom their hearts loved.

#### **3. The futility and vanity of love**

The poetic persona's emphasis on the joy and happiness that are an integral part of his relationship with his loved one when compared with every other thing before then, in a subtle way emphasizes the futility and vanity of life. He is of the view that any other moment a person spends out of love is a waste of time and

resources. Within the context of the poet's belief that habiting a realm of true love is the best state of human existence.

#### OTHER THEMES INCLUDE:

4. Growth and maturity
5. Sensuality

#### STRUCTURE

'The Good Morrow' is a poem of twenty-one lines. It has three stanzas of seven lines each. Each stanza has the following rhyme scheme – ABABCCC. This type of rhyme scheme is called the septet or the rhyme royal. It is usually in iambic pentameter. A rhyme royal can consist of a tercet and two couplets or a quatrain and a tercet.

#### POETIC DEVICES

1. Language/style

The style of Donne's 'The Good Morrow' is a conversational style and it is a dramatic monologue. A dramatic monologue is a one-sided conversation delivered by the poetic persona. Although, there is a listener but the individual being addressed does not usually reply the poetic persona.

2. Diction

The words used in the poem align with the time setting of the poem, which is the seventeenth century. The words are simple but with complex grammatical construction.

3. Hyperbole

In the poem, love is exaggerated by the poetic persona. In line 4, the comparison of their love to the seven sleepers is pure exaggeration. Also, in lines 10-11, he exaggerates their kind of love which is physically impossible to take up space in a bedroom and compare it to the entire space. Furthermore, in line 20, he declares that their love has attained immortality "love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die".

4. Metaphor

Metaphor is used in in this poem to compare the lover's realization of their love for each other to the weaning of a child. This is seen in lines 2-3.

5. Rhetorical question

Line 2-4, "Did, till my loved? Were we not weaned till then / but sucked on country pleasures childishly? / Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den? These questions do not require answers. The poetic persona uses the same device in line 17-18, "Where can we find two better hemispheres,/without sharp North, without declining west?".

6. Allusion

Allusion is a literary device that makes reference to a person, place, thing, event from history or another

piece of literature. There is reference to the persecuted youths sealed up in a cave who woke after nearly two centuries to find Christianity had spread. This story is believed to have taken place around 250AD when Emperor Decius sealed seven Christian girls in a cave.

#### 7. Imagery

The poetic persona creates visual images in the mind of the readers. In the first stanza, "were we not weaned till then? But sucked at country pleasures, childish?" this sentence creates images of babies at the breast and being weaned which reveals immaturity of the previous emotional life of the persona and his lover.

#### 8. Alliteration

Alliteration is used in line 2 "**w**ere **w**e not **w**eaned /w/ sound repeated. Line 4, or **s**no**r**ted we in the **s**leepers. Sound /s/. Line 9, **w**hich **w**atch /w/ sound.

#### 9. Assonance

Assonance is used in line 3, but **u**cked on **c**oun**u**try pleasures childish? /ʌ/ sound repeated. Line 15, **m**y face in thine **e**ye, thine in mine appears. Sound /ai/.

#### 10. Anaphora

This is the repetition of a word or expression at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, sentences or verses especially for poetic effect.

The poet used anaphora in lines 12-14:

**Let** sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
**Let** maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,  
**Let** us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

#### 11. Tone

The tone of the poem is highly intimate. The speaker is happy to discover that he and his beloved are in love. In the second stanza, the tone is confident. In the last stanza, the tone again is happy about the ephemeral nature of their love.

### HOMWORK

1. Identify five poetic devices used in the poem and explain their overall effects in the aesthetics of the poem.
2. Discuss the attitude of the poetic person to life before he met his beloved.