

LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 8

SUBJECT: LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH
TOPIC: AFRICAN POETRY; "Black Woman" by Leopold Sedar Senghor Cont'd
CLASS: SS1
WEEK: 8

THEMES

1) African beauty

The entire poem is devoted to the beauty of the black female. To be able to do this, the woman had to be "totally naked" that is, metaphorically undressed by the poetic persona's eyes. The poet does not seem to be addressing the poem to a particular woman; with respect to "Black Woman" the reference to woman is in the generic sense of the word from the perspective of the African. As already mentioned, these elements of beauty (firm-fleshed ripe fruit, glinting of the red gold etc) could be referring to the African land as well

2) A successful anti-racist racism

A negritude poem is one in which everything African is praised so that Africa can attract respect. The reason for it is that before negritude, everything Africa was cajoled and criticized an unwholesome. In order to reverse what was then in Vogue, there was a need to reverse the negative image of Africa.

This African woman rather than being clothed with apparel, this one is "clothed with your colour black) which is life, with your firm which is beauty. "Form" means the figure, the shape of the African woman. The poet invokes her "shadow" which is also black. It was out of this shadow that "I have grown up" this means that the poet was catered for by this shadow, probably his mother.

3) African land as a woman

In the poem, the black woman could pass for the African land. It is naked and lay bare by many ears of exploitation by colonization. It is a beautiful land which its soil is black as well. The land bears "firm-fleshed ripe fruits from which black wine is brewed; some quantity of this black wine would make my mouth lyrical with song or even speech." The protagonist grew up "in your shadow".

POETIC DEVICES

1) Sensual imagery

The poem has images that evoke pleasurable or erotic sensations. The reference to the "naked woman" already recalls sensuality. Other sensual images include "firm-fleshed ripe fruit" the glinting of red gold against your watered skin', "East Wind's eager caresses" etc.

2) Ambiguity and abstraction

Ambiguity is a word or sentence that is open to more than one interpretation, explanation or meaning. An abstraction is the act of generalizing features, an idea of an unrealistic or visionary nature. Abstractions in a piece of poetry would be imprecise, occasionally making what is said to be ambiguous. For instance, may one who is naked "clothed with your colour which is life"? Has life a colour? The expression, "in your shadow I have grown up" either means "I grew up while sitting or learning under your shadow" or "Your shadow has enabled me to grow up. The poet describes the naked woman as "my Promised Land". This is metaphorical but a human being is not meant to be a piece of land!

3) An exemplar of Litany

Litany is a Catholic church's pattern of prayer, the most popular of which is the one devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The poet was a Catholic and must have been influenced by this prayer mode.

4) Metaphor: The poem is metaphor filled. Lines 2, 12, 21, 23 and 24.

5) Simile is seen in lines 9-10, 11

6) Repetition: naked woman, black woman was repeated.

7) Apostrophe is seen in lines 1, 11, 20 and 29.

STRUCTURE

"Black Woman" is a poem of thirty-three lines including the additional projected lines to the lines following. The poem was originally written in French. As a translation, there are no rhymes. The poem is in blank verse, some of the lines running into another as run-on lines.