|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| NAME | MATRIC NO. | ROLE | ATTENDANCE |
| Dania Nurat Peace | 19/law01/059 | Coordinator | 10 |
| Ewhrudjakpor Ogagaoghene | 19/law01/097 | Asst. coordinator | 10 |
| Cyril-ukpaka kidochuwu Joseph | 19/law01/056 | Lead Researcher | 10 |
| Ugwo Jessica Kenechuwu | 19/law01/258 | Researcher | 8 |
| Aladenola oluwademilade | 19/law01/028 | Typist | 10 |
| Christian Nancy Precious | 19/law01/054 | Member | 9 |
| Martin Somtochukwu Christabel | 19/law01/141 | Member | 8 |
| Dogo Joseph Danladi | 19/law01/065 | Member | 9 |
| Dunu Daniella Adanna | 19/law01/067 | Member | 8 |
| Emasealu Martha Odenose | 19/law01/085 | Researcher | 10 |
| Ukekpe Edidiong Uduak | 19/law01/260 | Member | 8 |
| Nnebe Chinemerem | 19/law01/151 | Member | 8 |
| Okokwu Ifeoma Frances | 19/law01/194 | Member | 8 |
| Odibo Blessing Oghenemarho | 19/law01/169 | Member |  |
| Uganto Mary Ande | 19/law01/264 | Member | 10 |
| Adewoyin Precious Adesola | 19/law01/012 | Member | 10 |

ANALYSIS OF THE POEM “OUR STORY” BY SOPHIA OBI-APOKO

Background of the Poet

Sophia Obi Apoko hails from Oloibiri, the forgotten oil haven of Bayelsa State (where oil was first discovered in commercial quantity and exported in 1956). She is currently press secretary for the SSG, Balyesa State. She has presented and published most of her works on stage, print and electronic media. She is currently working on a handful of poems and short stories. She is one of the product of the Creative Arts Department, University of Port-Harcourt.

She also holds a Diploma in Journalism and a PGD in Advertising and Public Relations. “**Tears in a Basket**” Sophia Obi’s first collection of poems clearly marks her out as a sensitive young poet with a great deal of promise. “**Floating Songs”** Sophia Obi’s second collection of poems clearly recognizes the degeneration of the Niger Delta as a result of oil exploration efforts of government and multi-national companies which has had an adverse effect on the quality of life in the region

Background of the Poem

­­On the surface the poem is an elegy which expresses the grief occasioned by a general calamity that touches not just the poet as an individual but a wider spectrum of persons in her community. The persona talks on how their pride and happiness was taken away by the people who they accepted with smile on their faces. The community being talked about in the poem is the poet’s hometown, Oloibiri.

Oloibiri is a community in Bayelsa State that was said to be where oil was first discovered in commercial quantity. Oloibiri could produce 5,000 barrels of oil per day. They were very strong, they were able to feed well and provide for their family through their means of earning a living which was either from fishing, planting or from the natural gift (oil) they were blessed with. The people of this community were mainly fishermen and farmers. This small community stood tall among other communities in Bayelsa. 18 years after petroleum was discovered in the small community was when Shell D’ Arcy came to the community (Oloibiri). It was in this small community oil prospectors from Shell first found petroleum in West Africa. The people of Oloibiri accepted them with open hands but they took advantage of them and took away their pride which was their oil. The way Shell D’ Arcy took their oil affected their soil and water, their soil was damaged due to oil spill and then their water was contaminated.

It was difficult to earn a living in the community and it became hard for the people of Oloibiri to have basic necessities. Oloibiri which was one of the oil havens of Bayelsa State was described as “an abandoned fishing port after the anglers had left with their catch”. Shell is one of the anglers that milked Oloibiri of its resources, leaving the community poorer than when they first arrived.

Summary of the Poem

The poem “Our Story” by Sophia Obi-Apoko is about a particular community that stood tall among other communities around. It was gifted with abundant oil which attracted visitors from around the world, farming and fishing was their major means of earning a living. After a period of time, a company named Shell came to their community. The natives received the Shell group with open arms and never bothered about what they were doing on their land until Shell came to seek their assistance when they encountered mystic powers at the oil well site. The natives told them they had to appeal to the gods of the land and requested they dropped a carton of JJW Peter (a kind of whisky in those days), a goat and other things for sacrifice. They appealed to the gods and things were going smoothly on the site.

After they were done with exploiting oil from Oloibiri and the oil well was dried they left, leaving the community polluted. Pollution of the resources of life for the ordinary people manifests in everything, from their fishing equipment, to the water they drink and soil erosion was widespread, their standard of living became really low and there was poverty in the land. The youths and the next generation to come were also affected, in terms of development or infrastructure Oloibiri had nothing, young men were suffering and roaming about jobless, no electricity, no water, no good roads. Oil exploration has devastated the environment and means of livelihood in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State.

Setting of the Poem

* Temporal setting: Colonial administration and post-colonial administration. All this happened before independence and after independence was gained
* Spatial setting ­­: Oloibiri, Bayelsa State which is where the poet focuses on in almost all her poems ( **Tears in a Basket and Floating Songs**)­­­­­­­

Poetic Devices

* Diction: This refers to the choice of words utilized by the poet in his/her work. The pet’s choice of word in this poem is very unique
* Auditory Imagery: This is the type of imagery that evokes the sense of hearing of a specific sound.

­­Line 4 of the poem… “creaky bamboo bed”

* ­­Simile: Involves a physical or emotional similarity made between a given image and what is intended. It is also known as comparison between unlike things in which ‘like’ or ‘as’ or any other similar expression is used.

­­Line 8 of the poem… “He lay stiff like a willing phallus”

Line 14 of the poem... “I coil into myself like a scared millipede taking mama’s space”

* ­­Personification: A figure of speech in which life or feelings of human beings are given to abstractions, inanimate objects or non-human beings.

­­Line 2…“lingering sorrows”

Line 5… “scared to upset the already angry bowels­­­­­­­­­”

* ­­Synecdoche : A person, place or thing or object is made to stand for a whole or the whole is made to stand for a part

­­­Line 13… “Mocking a man who once stood tall daring the height of the palm tree”

The man represents the community (Oloibiri)

* ­­Symbolism: This means something other than what it states or shows.

­­­­­Line 18-20

“The land cracks from loneliness

The farms swallowed by bitter spills

The rivers stagnated by oily curses”

These lines symbolize pollution in the community. The lines symbolize air, land and water pollution

* Anaphora: This is the repetition of the same word at the beginning of two or more lines of a poem

­­­Line 18 – 20 starts with the word ‘The’

* ­­Alliteration: Repetition of consonant sounds in a sequence of words in the line of a poem

­­Line 11… “stopped sipping”

Sound /s/ alliterates

­­Line 30… “stepping stones”

Sound /s/ alliterates

* ­­­Onomatopoeia: Word in English which suggest their meaning from their sound.

­­Line 6... “Grumbling in hunger”

* ­­Rhetorical Question: A question that doesn’t require an answer. It is usually used as emphasis.

­­­­­­­­­­­Line 7... “ Should he be grateful for this day”

Themes

* ­­Exploitation and Exploration: ­ Exploration is the act of exploring, penetrating or ranging over for the purposes of discovery, especially of geographical discovery. Exploitation is the act of forcibly depriving someone of something to which he or she has a natural right to. This is a major theme in the poem. The Shell D’Arcy came to explore the community (Oloibiri) and they discovered that the community was blessed with oil. They exploited the community to the extent of destroying the environment and means of livelihood in the community. This can be found in line 31 and 32 of the poem.

“They looted our peace, freedom, our innocence

Called us fools as they sail away with our pride”

The background of the poet shows that she is an indigene of the Oloibiri town in Bayelsa state where oil was first found in Nigeria. The poet uses the poem to show the suffering that their people and their land faced during the period the oil explorers especially those from Shell D’Arcy. These oil explorers cared less for the people and the land they were destroying in the process. They made the people labor for them in order to get their satisfaction and in return, the people and their land were left in a state of destitution. This can also be seen in lines 3-5 which says, ‘the dawn of uncertainty captures his gaze/ But scared he is to move his creaky bamboo bed/ Scared to upset the already angry bowels’.

* Ignorance/ Negligence: ­The tort whereby a duty of reasonable care is breached, causing damage (reckless action). The people of Oloibiri were carefree, because they allowed Shell into their community without wondering what they were up to.
* ­­Line 29 … “We embraced with open hearts”

­They were also ignorant to the signs given to them by their gods.

* Neglect­: The poem shows how the Shell D’Arcy Company and the government neglected Oloibiri community after exploiting them. After being exploited and neglected by the colonial masters, the Nigerian government came to them promising to help them, but at the end they were not given the care they needed, Nobody would believe that Oloibiri was the second highest oil supplying community in West Africa with the situation it is in now
* The theme of deceit: This is a very important theme displayed by the poet by her use of certain words in the poem. The background of the poem shows that the people willingly allowed the people into their land and this can only be through the use of the right words and empty promises said to them as a community or to their leader. This is highly expected of the white men in the colonialist days as they always want to have their way and not care of those suffering the consequences. The background also shows that the Nigerian government also did little or nothing to help the state of the Oloibiri community because there is nothing to boast about the condition of the place. This can be seen in lines 28-32 which says, ‘They came/ We embraced with open hearts/ But our laughter became stepping stones to their desires/ They looted our peace, freedom, our innocence/ Called us fools as they sail away with our pride’.
* Theme of damage of land and property: The theme is importantly portrayed as it is the after effect of the colonialist exploration of oil. In the background of the poem, it is seen that the people of Oloibiri suffered great losses as their lands and rivers ended up being polluted due to the oil spillage. Some houses that were broken down due to the fact that they were above oil extraction points were never rebuilt and the families were not compensated for their losses. This made life unnecessarily hard for the people because most of them were farmers and fishermen but seeing their condition they couldn’t farm or fish either. This can be seen in lines 18-22 which says, ‘The land cracks from loneliness/ The farms swallowed by bitter spills/ The rivers stagnated by oily curses/ Hearts shut against this monstrous reality/ Manning every home.’ These above lines explain how the people lived in hardship instead of enjoying as they are the inhabitants of the state that helped in the Nation’s economy.
* Theme of unemployment: This is yet another important theme shown in the poem by the poet. Still referring to the background of the poem, it shows that after the lands and rivers were polluted men and woman were left jobless and hopeless. They had no means of getting food to eat and caring for their families. They were suffering for their bad decisions and neglect from the Nigerian government. This can be seen in lines 5-9 which says, ‘Scared to upset the already angry bowels/ Grumbling in hunger/ should he be grateful for this day/ He lay stiff like a willing phallus/ Accused of the denial of strength’.
* Theme of fear: This theme is expressed in the lives of the people of Oloibiri as seen in the background of the poem. The people were too scared to question the colonialists during their actions of exploring oil. This their timidity to confront their leaders led to their present state. They also believed that some things were meant to be as in accordance with what the gods said concerning the issue at hand. This fear led them into praying for brighter days but unwillingly to take steps towards it. They can be seen in lines 14-17 which say, ‘I coil into myself like a scared millipede taking mama’s space/ Scared to wake into emptiness/ Scared to interrupt papa’s questioning gaze at the gods/ Who are silenced by the lack of sacrifice’.

What type of poem is this?

The poem is an elegy which expresses grief occasioned by a general calamity that touches not just the poet as an individual but a wider spectrum of persons in her community and the community itself

The members of the group would re-enact the story embedded in this poem in form of a drama.

Tone of the poem

It was earlier stated that the poem our story written by Sophia Obi- Akopois an elegy. An elegy is a poem that is primarily defined by its tone and thematic content. More specifically, its tone is serious, and its thematic content is dark, usually addressing the subject of death or the dead. More technically, an elegy could be defined by its specific poetic meter. However, this technical meaning is no longer really in use today. An elegy essentially just refers to a sad and serious poem. The poet cleary made use of certain emotions in her writing such as sorrow, anguish and disappointmentto further capturethe attention of her readers on the degrading state of oloibiri.

Mood of the poem

In literature, mood is a literary element that evokes certain feelings or vibes in readers through words and descriptions. Usually mood is referred to as the atmosphere as it creates an emotional setting for the readers. The mood of a poem is developed from the writers theme, tone and occasionally the poems diction even the setting Is a great means of developing a mood.

Creating Mood through Setting

Setting is the physical location in a piece of literature that provides background in which the events of the narrative take place. A particular setting not only provides support to the contents of the story, but also sets the mood of the readers. Let us analyze a few examples of mood developed using a setting:

## **Creating Mood through Tone**

The manner in which a writer approaches this theme and subject is called the tone. The readers always rely on the writer’s point of view of the events taking place in a story. They observe the story through his eyes. They feel the way the writer feels about the events taking place and the description provided. Therefore, the attitude of the writer evokes feelings and emotions in the readers.

## **Creating Mood through Diction**

Diction is the choice of words a writer uses. Diction or choice of words conveys deep feelings, and depicts the events, places, and characters in a literary work in specific colors, having an effect on the way the readers feel about them.

**Function of Mood**

Mood helps in creating an atmosphere in a literary work by means of setting, theme, diction, and tone. It evokes various emotional responses in readers, and thus ensures their emotional attachment to the literary piece they read. Once the readers are emotionally stirred, they fully comprehend the message that the writer tries to convey to them.

All these derivatives stated above are ways through which the mood of any poem can be gotten. In respect to the poem our story, the setting, tone and diction all hinted to a form of oppression on the people of oloibiriand how dilapidated their conditions where. The writers mood is obviously one of pain towards the people but also one of bravery as she speaks out through her poem on the peoples behalf

The Subject Matter

Subject matter is not what the work contains, but what the work refers to. Subject matter is the main idea of the story which consists of one or two phrases. Theme is the central idea or meaning of a story.

From this explanation it can be concluded that theme and subject matter are different. Theme is an idea which the author presents and is usually written in a full sentence. However, subject matter is a specific topic that is written in a phrase.

This basically means that the theme and subject matter are some what connected as they both emphasize on the ideas of the poem. The subject matter of this poem is actually complicated as the writer made major aspects of the poem based on various ideas making it difficult to pinpoint the central idea. However it can be concluded that the central idea is setup from the fact that the people of oloibiri were robbed of a precious natural resource by outsiders leaving their community in a state far worse than it originally was. The writer pleas on behalf of people and seeks assistance for them to lessen the hardship of the people. It is however disappointing that the people of oloibiri still have not gotten the necessary alms and aids they require reviving their community.

Background of the Story

­­­­­­­­­There is a story embedded in this poem, the poem would be dramatized by members of the group and the drama is going to portray the story embedded in this poem. We see the story of a grandfather telling a story to his grandkids; a flashback to what the Oloibiri village was before the coming of the whites while someone from the group says the poem in a faint but audible voice as the poem would be the grandfather’s words for the story.

Background of the drama / Importance of the drama

The drama aims to be a visual representation to the poem; which is a sad narrative of what happened in the town of Oloibiri which the poet is a native of. This dramatization, shows how the village of Oloibiri was peaceful and seemingly normal. The poet even explains how “brilliant” the community was before the arrival of the white man”… a man who once stood tall daring the height of the palm tree”. Using the poem, we are able to dramatize the after effects, emotions and events which disorganized a once small, peaceful community in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

The plot of the drama

So the way the drama goes, it’s a peaceful village where people go about their life routines; fishing, farming etc. Then a group of white men come and the villagers welcome them but they do not know why the white people have come to their village. The white people find oil and tell the villagers. They ask for permission and make sacrifices to the native gods (this is extracted from the cultural myth of the Oloibiri people of the oil field story).

The people give permission, sales start to boom and the people have hope that things would get better for them but unfortunately for them things begin to degenerate and become worse; the government abandons them and the oil field is abandoned. All these is what the drama is about, this is what the grandfather would tell the grandkids in the flashback while a member of the group would say the poem in the background. Members of the group would re-enact the story.