GROUP SEVEN.

COURSE TITLE: INTRODUCTION TO POETRY.

COURSE CODE: ELS 122.

LECTURER: DR. SOLOMON .A. EDEBOR.

QUESTION: ATTEMPT AN INCISIVE LITERARY APPRECIATION OF TONY MARINHO’S ‘ ODE TO AN ADOLESCENT NATION’, FOCUSING ON, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THE POET’S BACKGROUND/ BACKGROUND OF THE POEM, THEMES OF THE POEM, THE POET’S USE OF LANGUAGE AND STYLE, OTHER POETIC DEVICES EMPLOYED BY THE POET, ETC.

ODE TO AN ADOLESCENT NATION by TONY MARINHO.

Call the prisoner

JUDGE: Nigeria; age 28 last birthday.

Sex; male, too frequent

Complexion; light dark to dark dark

Religion persuasion; all roads lead to heaven

alias; Giant of Africa

alias; Big brother

alias; Bufo Africanus.

You stand accused

of embezzling God’s gracious gift

abusing your human resources

squandering your inheritance

borrowing on no assets for no need

chaining your grandchildren to the cent

living a life of absolute decadence

causing affray and grievous bodily harm

bribability and corruptibility

moral insufficiency and real inefficiency

lack of all the sights

-foresight, hindsight, insight

except incite which you use to wicked end

and worst of all

you stand accused of

pride in your nothingness

and grandeur in your delusions

\_a well-known psychiatric malady

how do you plead?

NIGERIA: innocent guilty

Your worshipful holiness.

JUDGE: innocent guilty?

what’s that?

NIGERIA: guilt out of innocence

I’m only 28, my lord

a minor in the league of nations

a juvenile, a child, a sapling.

I’m innocent in my guilt

childish pranks,

teething problems,

youthful exuberance

JUDGE: silence in court

NIGERIA: objection

a traditional court,

a London court

or sharia court?

JUDGE: overruled

You have started again

Add ‘confusability’ to the charge

NIGERIA: confusability?

JUDGE: yes

Simple things made complex.

Complex things made impossible

innocently guilty or guilty innocent.

Both are guilty guilty

NIGERIA: objection!

JUDGE: ‘objection!’ ‘objection!’

Did you ‘objection!’

When 2/3 of 19 became 12 2/3?

Every Einstein expressed envy.

The computer could no longer compute

did you ‘objection!’

when 53 suitcase passed

through the eye of the needle

and 317 ‘ Olympians’ brought

17 tones of excess baggage

but no medallion?

when 2.8 billion in oil money missed monitoring?

when health care eluded the common man?

And education became a political weapon?

when cutoff points left goats in school

and the gifted at home?

when railways rotted and rusted?

when your people dinned from dustbins

and kwashiorkor came calling on the kids?

NIGERIA: Stop! Stop!

JUDGE: The case is cast-iron

NIGERIA: Ajaokuta -- a success

JUDGE: Stronger than steel

NIGERIA: rolling mill -- a success

JUDGE: a capital crime

NIGERIA: Abuja—a success

JUDGE: Newsworthy

NIGERIA: Iwopin paper mill – a success

JUDGE: I’m very young, only 28

In my infancy, the 60,s

I was boisterous not riotous

light- fingered not a thief

generous not corrupt

in my juvenile days, the 70,s

I was better, not incorrigible

a spendthrift, not a squanderer

in my young days, the 80,s

I was more professional, not profligate

politically naïve not insanely selfish

not bent on bankrupting, just banking the budget

JUDGE: who built 22 toll plazas with 78 million?

NIGERIA: I did, but…...

JUDGE: who bought a fifth presidential plane for 180 million?

NIGERIA: I did, but……

JUDGE: who provided education without learning?

JUDGE: who provided super protection only for the uppercrust?

NIGERIA: I did, but……

JUDGE: who allowed harming robbery for the rest?

NIGERIA: I did, but……

JUDGE: who provided health without healing?

NIGERIA: I did but……

JUDGE: where is a boarding pass reserved for the highest bidder?

NIGERIA: Here but……

JUDGE: and koboko crazy?

NIGERIA: here but…………..

JUDGE: where are values valueless?

NIGEEIA: here but……

JUDGE: but what?

NIGERIA: But….but…….but…..

JUDGE: You see

no defence

the case is closed

the finding is guilty

The sentence is………

NIGERIA: Judge and jury?

JUDGE: You do it daily

So why complain?

Okay, Speak before sentence is passed

NIGERIA: I’m young, young, young.

JUDGE: Youth is no protection

if you were human

at 28 you’d have graduated

from the cane to remand home

to police cell to prison

probably for life

NIGERIA: Have mercy, mercy

JUDGE: Did you have mercy?

Run over a goat, get jailed donkey years

2,000 naira’s scant compensation

For 7 years pre-trial incarceration

Steal a million, get a medal, become a minister

No, Mercy is not one of your virtues

You are sentence to eliminate

poverty, pestilence, penury

your sentence is to

resist corruption, avarice, greed

resist bribery, robbery and indolence

resist rigging, raiding, rancour

resist stealing and spraying

Forty-four billion dollars gone in four eyes

only a foolish child does not learn to save

your sentence is to

serve yourself as a nation

spend the country’s money on the people, and

save the children

NIGERIA: No! No!

That’s too much, masochistic

For how long must I chastise myself?

JUDGE: For one year,

you are so great in potential

that one year

of total goodness

total commitment

and total honesty

will bring water, electricity,

health, roads and education

NIGERIA: Just one year???

JUDGE: NIGERIA, you are sentenced to one year of total goodness

Failure to do this is fatal to your nationhood

Will you fail?

NIGERIA: I’m still young, inexperienced

I’ll only be 29 next year

JUDGE: Excuses, excuses

A fool at 28….

BACKRGROUND OF THE POET.

Dr. Tony Morinho is a practicing obstetrician and gynaecologist in Ibadan, Nigeria where he presently lives with his wife and children. Despite his profession, he maintains a lively interest in literature. He went to St Gregory’s College Ikoyi, Lagos where he became Head boy in 1967.

He is a medal winning medical graduate of the University of Ibadan where he was popularly known for his love for literature as he was usually found on the stage in the Arts Theatre. He served Youth Corps in Plateau State and it was there he wrote his first book titled ‘The Victim’.

He did his post graduate training at the University College Hospital, Ibadan. Right from there, he spent all his working life in and around Ibadan, as Associate lecturer and Consultant gynaecologist. He has played an active role in the Association of Nigerian Authors and is the author of several books for children, novels and two collections of poetry. Some of the novels are ‘The Victim’ and ‘The Epidemic’, while an example of Tony’s poem is ‘Ode to an Adolescent Nation’. He is also responsible for writing a play, ‘Why UI?’ which was performed successfully at the Arts Theatre of University of Ibadan in 1999. He is a social critic, writing regularly in the press on matters and also addressing public fora around the country and abroad. His social commentaries often appear on the pages of Sketch and Guardian. He runs and NGO called Educare Trust with other like minds.

BACKGROUND OF THE POEM.

The background of a poem refers to the root of a poem, what the poem can be linked to in real life. It can also be what prompts a poet to write a poem. There is a lot of reference to the age ‘28’ by Nigeria in the poem and this has a lot of significance as it builds the background of the poem. Nigeria turned 28 in 1988 under the regime of a military governor called Gen. Ibrahim Babaginda who ruled from 1985-1993. Military governments are usually chaotic in Nigeria and other parts of the continent. Military governors dislodged all forms and principles of democracy. They put in place draconian rules which were unconstitutional and inhumane. Due to the corruption all round, killing, bribery and more wicked practices as well, the growth of Nigeria became retarded both economically, socially and politically. Civilians however have their flaws as there can be existing cases of bribery and corruption but as we know ‘the best military government is worse than the worst democratic government’. Tony Marinho writes this poem to bring to light the terrible practices carried out by the military government such as embezzlement of funds, greed and avarice, rigging, indolence, raiding and others.

Furthermore, the fact that Nigerian leaders who are supposed to maintain law and order are the ones that are actually deterring peace is appalling, they never take responsibility for their actions and end up blaming the state of the country on late attainment of independence, colonialism and the likes of it. This is quite ironical because leaders anywhere anytime ought to set things right but it isn’t the case in Nigeria. Thus all these constitute the background of Tony Morinho’s ‘Ode to an Adolescent Nation’ as he gives Nigeria a year to stop embezzling funds, other corrupt practices and just be better as a whole.

SETTING OF THE POEM.

Temporal setting: This type of setting deals with the time or period a poem is based on or placed in. This poem has its temporal setting to be post-colonial era. This is exactly 28 years after Nigeria gains independence in 1960.

Spatial setting: This type of setting deals with the environment or the physical setting of a poem and we see that this poem has it spatial setting to be a court room.

SUBJECT MATTER OF THE POEM.

The poem ‘Ode to an Adolescent Nation’ highlights Nigeria as a country with a lot of problems. The subject matter of the poem is Nigeria. The poem is in a form of court trial between Nigeria and a judge. It begins with ‘call the prisoner’ (line 1), this gives us the idea of Nigeria as a place were suffering, lack of expression and havoc resides for as we know prisoners suffer all these. The judge uses the word 'alias' to describes Nigeria as ‘giant of Africa’ (line6) and ‘big brother’ (line 7) to show that Nigeria has falsely identified herself as all these. The judge makes a lot of accusations against Nigeria which are all true, some accusations made are ‘embezzling God’s gracious gift’, ‘abusing your human resources’, squandering your inheritance’(Lines 10-12), ‘chaining your grandchildren to the cent’(Line 14), ’living a life of absolute decadence’(Line 15), ‘pride in your nothingness’(Line 24), all these Nigeria does without putting into proper consideration the negative effects these will have on the present and upcoming generation. After which the judge asks Nigeria her plea which she says ‘innocent guilty’ (Line 28), she begins to defend herself by saying ‘I’m only 28, my lord’.

Furthermore, Nigeria tries to swerve away from the central topic by making matters more complex and complicated, we can see this in line 50 ‘simple things made complex’. The judge tries to set a picture of the poor living conditions in Nigeria,’ when health care eluded the common man?’(Line67), ‘when railways rotted and rusted?’(Line71), ‘when your people dinned from dustbins?’ (Line 82), ‘and kwashiorkor came calling on the kids?’ (Line 73). Amongst all these, Nigeria still fails to take responsibility, she tried to defend herself with four meagre successes including ‘Ajaokuta…’ (Line 76), ‘rolling mill…’ (Line 78), ‘Abuja…’ (Line 80), ’Iwopin paper mill…’ (Line 82)

However, the judge is quick to dismiss this as it is not a plausible means of Defense against the accusations. Nigeria’s belief that her four successes are enough to justify all of her previous misconduct is highly wrong. In the bid to elude responsibility, Nigeria makes use of some expressions to minimize the accusations made by the judge and also as a way to defend herself. These include, ‘…boisterous, not riotous’ (Line86) ‘a spendthrift not an embezzler’ (Line 91), ‘a sprayer not a squanderer’ (Line 92). This shows how low Nigeria stoops just to evade responsibility alongside showing her desperation in grasping whatever dignity is left of her.

It finally comes to a point where Nigeria runs out of words and cannot continue to speak the irrelevant words that kept flowing before. She is now cornered and has no means of justification or defence but ignorantly uses the ‘I’m young…’ (Line 131) excuse again, it is at this point the judge highlights that ‘youth is no protection’ (Line 132) and that if she were human at 28 she would have gone to prison after several punishments. Nigeria knowing fully well that she has been defeated finally begins to plead for mercy the judge however sentence her to eliminate poverty, resist corruption, resist bribery, robbery and indolence, spend her money on the people and save the children. The fact that Nigeria is so great in potential and that just one year of total goodness can revive the country is brought to the notice of Nigeria by the judge and she complains, not surprisingly, that she’ll only be 29 next year. This shows that she isn’t ready to carry out the sentences as she is already giving excuses for failure and eluding responsibility of the aforementioned failure even without starting yet.

In conclusion, the judge calls Nigeria’ a fool at 28’ which suits Nigeria quite nicely because despite everything she still complains about her age, this can only be done by a fool.

THEMES OF THE POET.

There are quite a lot of themes in the poem. Some include:

1) BAD GOVERNANCE: This is the cankerworm that eats deep into the carcass. It is a major problem in our country as those who come into power be it through election or through military coup leave the country in an even worse state than how they meet it. The functions of a good government is: maintenance of law and order, provision of social amenities, maintenance of security, provision of good health facilities and education. These are obviously lacking in Nigeria which proves that it is only a bad government that exists. We can see in line 15,’living a life of complete decadence’ which means Nigeria is living a life of luxurious self-indulgence as she neglects the citizens and fails to carry out her responsibilities and it is only a bad government that neglects the need of citizens after all the mouth-watery manifestos presented to them.

2) Reluctance to accept responsibility: When one does wrong, it is only right to take responsibility and aim to be better but this is not the case of Nigeria in the poem. The judge makes a lot of accusations about Nigeria but she chickens out and fails to take responsibility as she blames it on her young age ‘I’m only 28, my lord’ (Lines 33). This theme runs through the poem as that is her means of defending herself, Nigeria feels she’s just 28 and that is why she is unable to manage resources, provide a better living condition for the citizens, provide social amenities and many more. However, the judge cautions her by saying ‘excuses, excuses /a fool at 28’ (Lines 176 and 177).

3) Lack of Repentance: To repent is to feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one’s wrongdoing or sin. Nigeria, in the poem expresses lack of repentance. When the sentence is passed by the judge to Nigeria, she begins to complain ‘No! No! /that’s too much, masochistic, /how long must I chastise myself?’ (Lines 158-160).

She sees this as a punishment and asks how longs she’ll chastise herself, this mean she has no sense of remorse and she isn’t ready to repent or give change a try.

4) Abuse of Resources and Power: The government has abused her power and available resources. In lines 9-12, the judge says ‘You can stand accused/ of embezzling God’s gracious gift/abusing your human resources/squandering your inheritance’

We Nigerians are blessed with so many things such as fertile land, crude oil, granites and many more but they are abused by our leaders and are only used for their personal benefit. The human resources are abused as well as the government in power fails to reach out and take proper care of the common man as it is mentioned in the poem that ‘health care eluded the common man’ (lines 67). By doing all these, they are abusing the power vested in them and are contributing to the falling Nigerian economy.

POETIC DEVICES.

USE OF LANGUAGE.

DICTION.

Diction refers to choice of words. The choice of words used by the poet is simple and it is easy to understand. The language isn’t archaic as Tony ensures he passes across to readers what exactly is on his mind. The judge uses words to rebuke and insult Nigeria while Nigeria uses defensive words. In lines 6 and 7 ‘alias; Giant of Africa/ alias; Big Brother’ The word alias means false or assumed identity and Tony chooses this word to create more understanding to the readers that Nigeria isn’t actually all she claims she is.

USE OF SATIRE.

A satire lampoons the folly and vice of a society through the use of sarcasm, irony, and others to create humour. The poem is highly satirical as it address the follies and vices of Nigeria through the use of irony. The poem creates humour through its highlighting of these vices.

STYLE.

The style refers to how a poet expresses his thoughts and ideas in a poem. Tony presents this poem in a creative manner as he presents it in a court room, a case where Nigeria is the plaintiff and the judge is the judge who makes accusations against Nigeria. It is a dramatic poem which is lyrical in nature.

USE OF IMAGERY.

Imagery is the use of words to create picture in the mind of readers. The type of imagery the poet uses in the poem is that of visual imagery as the poet creates a mental picture of a court room in the readers mind. From the style the poet uses, we can picture a dramatic movement. Furthermore, the poet also uses lines 71-73 ‘ when railways rotted and rusted? / when your people dinned from dustbins?/ when kwashiorkor came calling on the kids?’ to set a mental picture of poverty and suffering as people eat from dustbins due to poverty and children are seen with big bellies, big heads and small bodies due to malnourishment.

Mood and Tone: The mood of a poem refers to the feeling a poet creates for his readers while tone is the attitude of a poet. The poem being a lyric deals with expression of feelings. The poet pours out his mind by assuming the character of a judge. The tone is harsh as it is filled with disgust, it is also satirical while the mood is anger and pity.

STRUCTURE OF THE POEM.

The poem is made up of 177 lines with most lines flowing with the use of enjambment. Enjambment is a run-on-lines, continuation of a thought from one sentence to another. The poet uses enjambment frequently in the poem as there is no break of feelings or emotion. Lines 9-19 ‘You stand accused/ of embezzling God’s gracious gift/ abusing your human resources/ squandering your inheritance/ borrowing on no assets for no need…’ show how Nigeria is accused of so many crimes that the judge keeps listing and listing without a break, no comma nor full stop. This can be seen as a means of showing the judge’s emotion and how pitiful Nigeria is made to seem. Nigeria is just portrayed as a fool. There are other places in the poem where enjambment is used like from lines 59- 72 ‘ The computer could no longer compute/ did you ‘’objection’’/when 53 suitcase passed/ through the eye of the needle/ and 317…’

OTHER POETIC DEVICES.

1) Metaphor: Metaphor is a figure of speech that is used for comparison. Here, direct relationship is establishes between two to similar things. The poet’s use of Nigeria is metaphorical. The poet uses Nigeria to directly compare the bad leaders. This is present throughout the poem as the poet isn’t referring to Nigeria itself but to the terrible people that rule this nation.

2) Alliteration: Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of two or more words on the same line.. The alliterations present in the poem can be found in ( line 7) ‘big brother’, (line 10) ‘God’s gracious gift’, (line 71) ‘…railways rotted and rusted’, (line 72) ‘dinned from dustbin’,( line 77) ‘stronger than steel’,( line 79) ‘capital crime’, (line 96) ‘not bent on bankruptcy, just banking the budget’

3) Use of irony: Irony is a figure of speech that refers to the expression of one’s meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect. Lines 24 and 25 ‘pride in your nothingness/ grandeur in your delusions’ are ironical because why would you be proud of your nothingness? The judge tries bringing to face the fact that Nigeria is proud in her nothingness and gains grandeur in her delusions, all these are ironical and funny at the same time.

4) Anaphora: Anaphora is a figure of speech which refers to the repetition of same word at the beginning of two or more lines in a poem. The poet makes use of Anaphora in poem in lines 6-8 ‘alias…/ alias…/ alias’. This repetition and use of alias is significant as the word itself means assumed identity. The poet uses it to portray that Nigeria’s assumptions as the Big Brother of Africa is all a lie. Also, her assumptions of being the’ Giant of Africa’ is also a lie. The anaphora present is for musicality. Anaphora is also present in lines 65, 66, 70 and 71 with the use of the word ‘when’.

5) Oxymoron: This is a figure of speech which mean placing two unlike words side by side to create meaning. The poet places two unlike things side by side in lines 28 and 30 ‘innocent guilty’ and in lines 4 ‘ …light dark’.

6) Repetition: Repetition refers to the occurrence of the same line in two or more places, or is used as a refrain. Some lines in the poem are seen occurring in more than one place in the poem examples; (Line 4)’…dark dark’, (line 28 and 30) ‘innocent guilty’, (line 74)’ Stop! Stop!’ [Line 132) ‘…young,young,young’. The use of repetition is for emphasis and to create musicality.

7) Hyperbole: This is a figure of speech which makes use of exaggerated statements or claims which aren’t meant to be taken literally. It is found in’ when 52 suitcases passed the eye of the needle’ (line 61 and 62).

8) Caesura: This is a pause in a line of poetry and it is found almost everywhere in the poem. Example’ Nigeria; age 28 last birthday, / Sex; male, too frequent’ (line 2 and 3) ‘I’m only 28, my lord’ (line 33), ‘I’m still young, inexperienced’.

9) Rhetorical Question: The poet uses this in Lines 66, 67,68,71,70. ‘when 2,8 billion in oil money missed monitoring?’/when health care eluded the common man? /and education became a political weapon?’ ‘when railways rotted and rusted?/ when your people dines from dustbins’.

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Reference.

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