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Traditional Aquatic Symbols in Niyi Osundare's Tender Moments

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Abstract

Many scholars focus on Niyi Osundare's eco-poems as well as his socio-political views, that his love poems seem to have been neglected. Niyi Osundare uses various categories of images and symbols to explore a variety of themes in his poetry collections. A close look at the love poems of this renowned poet shows that he is a master at expressing the untold emotions between lovers. Love is a central theme in African poetry and gifted African poets like Osundare have found ways of expressing its intricacies in a symbolic perspective. This paper examines traditional aquatic symbols as vehicles through which Osundare expresses the emotion of love in his poetry collection entitled 'Tender Moments'. The paper uses the qualitative research modalities of analytic and direct observation methods. The study is done using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which allows the researcher to probe into the motives that drive writers to present their works in the manner they do. This study enquires into the poet's usage of these symbols in this special love collection and demonstrates how traditional aquatic symbols were used by the poet to buttress the theme of love. The paper concludes that these symbols were significant and effective in aiding the poet in his journey of expression.

Keywords: Traditional aquatic symbols, African poetry, African studies, Niyi Osundare, Tender Moments

Introduction

Jabbi (1985, 214) and Abrams (2005,12) believe that certain symbols might be created by poets as they embark on their journey of self-expression. They then make a distinction between private and traditional (or public) symbols. Both authors define private symbols as subjective, that their meanings depend on the writer's understanding of the work. Traditional symbols, in contrast, are objective as their meanings are conventional and known to people in society. Booth, Alison and Mays (2010, 209) also describe traditional symbols as symbols that have been used by many people over a long period of time and their significance is known across cultures as the same. Thus, traditional symbols are universally acceptable or culture-specific axioms, just like waving a white apron in the air or raising one's two hands above one's head during a crisis would mean surrender. There are African traditional symbols, European and Chinese traditional symbols, Igbo traditional symbols, Indian traditional symbols and so on, as opposed to private symbols which are the creative inventions of the writer. Both private and traditional symbols converge in that they help to create pictures in the mind of the reader. They contain abstract or hidden connotations in contrast to denotations, and they appeal to the individual's senses, which means they appear as auditory, kinesthetic, visual, gustatory, olfactory, tactile and organic.

Whether a symbol is private or traditional, Chadwick (2018,1) says symbolism can be used to describe any mode of expression which instead of referring to something directly, refers to it indirectly through the medium of something else. Abrams (2005,12) describes a symbol as anything that signifies something which in turn has prominence or an important reference. Cuddon (2013, 699) describes it as an animate or inanimate object that stands for something. Booth, Alison and Mays (2010, 209) state that, 'a symbol usually conveys an abstraction or cluster of abstractions from the ideal to the imperceptible or the irrational in a more

concrete form'. Childs, Peter and Fowler (2006, 232) describe a symbol as an aesthetic idea in terms of attributes of an object which serve as a substitute for logical presentation. These mean that a symbol is not just a substitution of one object for another, but the use of concrete imagery to express abstract ideas and emotions.

Niyi Osundare has no doubt solidified his stance as a lover of nature and continues to speak for the earth as his ever-green 'mistress'. As a result, many critics have studied the poet as an eco-poet who uses various symbols to discuss issues affecting his ever-green mistress. Whereas most of Osundare's critics such as Jeff (2009, 66-77), Alu (2008, 62-84), Addo (2015, 28-42), Alabi (2021, 2-7), Ndifon (2022, 138-143), etc. have examined the poet's private symbols, there is a gap in his use of traditional symbols. This paper intends to fill this gap by looking at traditional aquatic symbols of Osundare, using the poet's erotic anthology called 'Tender Moments.' This love collection is the poet's celebration as well as demonstration of the twists and turns of filial and erotic relationships in the human ecosystem. The study presents the aquatic symbols and shows how he uses them to buttress the theme of love throughout this special collection. The study hopes to open up a new perspective on appraising Osundare's works symbolically.

Theoretical and Methodological Consideration

This research is enabled with Freud's psychoanalytic theory which affords us the opportunity to truly explore the motives of the writer vis-à-vis the emotion of love. Freud (1946, 4957-4865), while outlining the principles of psychoanalysis, exposes us to his postulations on the mind having three structures: the 'id' which is ruled by the pleasure principle, 'ego' which is ruled by the reality principle, and 'super-ego' or 'ego-ideal' which is represented by values from the society and from a father figure. Ultimately Freud avers that human actions are engineered towards gratification.

Freud (1921, 66-71) describes love as the over-estimation of the erotic or sexual object. He describes the processes that lead to the selection and identification of the object as connected with the oedipal complex which to him forms the basis of man's sexuality. This is why Freud's postulations are ultimate for the analysis of the love collection of Osundare.

In analyzing the manner with which Osundare expresses his erotic love for his mistress in this collection, we lean towards the thoughts of Freud as we deal with the origin of the emotion under study and the reason why the poet expresses himself so profoundly. Cuddon (2013, 568) states that the psychological approach to literary criticism deals with an enquiry into the mind of the writer or his characters with an attempt to know the motives that drive them. The reason for this, he says is because the activities of man are borne from the conscious and subconscious state of his mind. Thus, the psychoanalyst seeks to probe into the mind of the writer via his diction, as well as his background. Scott (1962, 82) postulates that a writer expresses himself by invoking his emotions in the mind of his readers. Fiscalini (2004,10) says, 'The co-participant inquiry into the nature of the personal self and the process of self-fulfillment mirrors one of the central themes in post-Freudian psychoanalysis". As a psychoanalyst seeks to enquire into the mind of a writer or his characters, he comes face to face with how man struggles to express himself. He encounters instances of what Freud (1946, 4865) tags 'repressed' emotions. Thus, he finds what is not expressed through what is expressed. Psychoanalysis will thus, allow the researcher to probe into the mind of Osundare through his manner of expression in order to understand his work, his motives, and love as portrayed in this love collection.

The collection 'Tender Moments' was published in 2006. It is the poet's first collection after he lost numerous valuables due to Hurricane Katrina in The United States of America (USA). This is

the first collection of the poet to be based on erotic love. It is broken down into three sections: In the Mood, Songs of Absence, and Metaphor. In the Mood contains thirty poems focused on the praise of a lover as well as description of tender moments and feelings. Songs of Absence contains twenty-six poems dedicated to expressing the pains associated with the absence of a lover. Metaphor contains nineteen poems focused on the expert usage of words. There is a total of 75 poems in the collection. The study is done qualitatively through the analysis of poems in the collection. Thirteen poems were selected, five from the first section, five from the second section and three from the third section. Some of the poems are used twice to portray different symbols, e.g., 'Bless' and 'You Are.'

Traditional Aquatic Symbols in Tender Moments

The paper identifies three traditional aquatic symbols in the anthology: river, ocean/sea and rain. River is a traditional symbol that is always used in literature as a representation of time and journey. This traditional aquatic symbol is at the core of Osundare's 'Tender Moments.' It is found in several poems in the collection. We present to you extracts from the poems 'Love Can', 'You Are', 'Tender Moments', 'Bless' and 'Love Grows in your Garden.'

a) 'Love Can'

'Love can turn
The hand of the clock
Make you sit by the Rio while you
Lisp a lyric beside the Limpopo'

Note that Rio (Grande) and Limpopo are important rivers in North America and Africa.

b) 'You Are'

'You are the river rippling coastwards
With tales of upland regions'

c) 'Tender Moments'

'Your eyes memories the hours

Stretch dry moments into succulent eternities
Then run them d-e-e-p
Like the Zambesi our rooted longings'

Zambezi is another important river in Africa like Limpopo.

d) 'Bless'

'Bless the spacious generosity of your heart
Whose pulse is confluence of two rivers'

e) 'Love Grows in your Garden'

From the hive of your clock
Your laughter is lush
Your voice a flowing river

Ferber (1999,170) posits that, the river is often seen in a flowing state, indicating motion of life or various journeys in the course of a lifetime. Cirlot (1971, 274) buttresses this point by describing the symbol as an ambivalent one, standing for the irreversible passage of time.

The ocean/sea is another symbol used by the poet in his love collection. The symbol is found in several poems in the collection, but here we sampled excerpts from 'Love Can III', 'Divine Command', 'Promise', 'Bless' and 'Metaphor V'.

f) 'Love Can III'

'Love can turn loud muse into quiet music
Little lakes into seamless oceans
Simple nod into hard command
Far cry into touching whisper'

g) 'Divine Command'

''Raise your hand', you say,
'and pluck me the moon;
Go down the sea
And bring my buried jewel'

h) 'Promise'

'I will walk a thousand miles
Climb a hundred mountains

Swim the wildest oceans
To catch a glimpse of your face again'

i) 'Bless'

'Bless the ocean which sunders is
Into one next of singing birds'

j) 'Metaphor V'

'And the sea sings from the vastness
Of her versery: dark rumbling tumb-
Ling thunder of energetic water;
The fame and foam where waves kiss'

According to Ferber (1999, 179), sea/ocean represents chaos, life and death, time and timelessness, menace and lure as well as boredom and the sublime. Cirlot (1971, 281) further buttresses this point by mentioning that both are not only symbols for life but the source as well as the goal of life. He mentions that to return to sea means to die and all living things live to die.

Below is how Osundare uses the rain aquatic symbol in the collection:

k) 'You Are'

'You are the Rain
Which fell before the sky'

l) 'Closer by Far'

'The rain fell
On New Year Day'

m) 'Song of Absence II'

'I could not ask the roof how many rains
Have fallen, nor pressed the almond tree
In the frontyard for news of absent branches'

n) 'These Many Moons'

'Did you watch the rain
Fall from earth to sky'

o) 'I see you'

'I see you
In the rhythm of the rain'

Cirlot (1971, 271) mentions that rain represents purification as it can be seen as a fertilizing agent. Ferber (1999, 164-165) postulates that the rain represents unhappiness since it falls to hinder the occurrence of something when found in poems. He describes the symbol as a cure to spiritual dryness.

Analysis of Traditional Aquatic Symbols in Tender Moments

Umeogu (2013, 113-116) mentions that symbols start where words have stopped, especially in Africa. He says symbols perform an interactive role to Africans and their power lies in their ability to represent something that can effectively communicate its meaning. This is apt because in the collection of study several messages are passed by the writer using just one symbol. It is fitting that Osundare makes use of symbols to write his high-quality poems, as Mtumane (1992) avers that symbolism and its use are features of quality poetry. Water symbols are very significant to Niyi Osundare as a result of his heritage. His middle name, Oluomi, translates to 'lord of the seas' and the name 'Osundare' means the 'goddess of the Osun river has vindicated me'. This is why finding aquatic symbols in his poetry is not surprising, traditional aquatic symbols are deeply rooted in the poet's culture as in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

In the poem 'Love Can', the poet expresses the power of love over time and place through the aquatic symbols 'Rio' and 'Limpopo'. While the poem is crawling with metaphors and images, the speaker buttresses this point by using Rio Grande which is located in North America and Limpopo which is in Africa to express the uselessness of time as regards this emotion. The fact that one can be sitting by the Rio in North America and still be singing beside the Limpopo shows how consuming the emotion can be. Again, for the poet, Limpopo, which is in Africa, represents home and Rio represents abroad. Thus, with love, you can be abroad and still be home enjoying the chants of freedom ('…lisp a lyric…'). This is in line with Cirlot (1971) describing the symbol as a representation of

the inconsequential passage of time. As Osundare puts it in the poem:

‘Love can turn
The hand of the clock
Make you sit by the Rio while you
Lisp a lyric beside the Limpopo.’

In another part of the poem, specifically part 3, the poet says:

‘Love can make you creak like a cricket
Prattle like a cockatoo
Flaunt your feathers like a peacock
Flow like a river like a river like a river'

The onomatopoeic use of language in the poem is something to marvel at, as it also enhances the musical nature of the poem along with repetition. Here we see the aquatic symbol of the river, repeated thrice to emphasize its importance and further enhance the poem’s musicality. The symbol is used in this part of the poem to express how easily time and moments flow when you are with the one you love. There is an easy flow of expression, so much that time becomes insignificant to the speaker and his persona. This fits in with Cirlot’s (1971) postulation that the river symbolizes inconsequential passage of time. In another poem titled ‘You Are’, the speaker uses the river symbol thus: ‘You are the river rippling coastwards | With tales of upland regions'. The fact that this poem is written with apostrophe elevates its literariness, so does the use of repetition in each of the two line stanzas. Here again, the speaker uses the aquatic symbol of the river to express the effect his mistress has on him. For the speaker, the persona represents time itself, as she is capable of making the past invalid as she brings newness home. With ‘coastwards’ representing home and ‘upland’ representing abroad, this analysis aligns with Ferber’s (1999) aversion that the river symbol is used to indicate dynamism in course of a lifetime. When this symbol is used there is physical or metaphorical journey involved.

The poem ‘Tender Moments' is the star of the first part of the collection and as such is adorned with numerous literary devices. The poet describes the facial features of his mistress with comparative and metaphorical language. He compares her smile to the sun when it ‘breaks through the mist’. He says she is ‘…the fragrance/that lends a name to varnished gardens’. That is, she makes his dreams a reality. He also describes her lips and how they “play around the base of her teeth” and compares her laughter to the “frothy song of a mountain stream”. This he does to lay emphasis on the fresh and alluring nature of his persona’s voice. When it comes to describing their ‘tender moment', the poet chooses to use the aquatic symbol of the river. In stanza four, he says:

‘Your eyes memories the hours
Stretch dry moments into succulent
eternities
Then run them d-e-e-p
Like the Zambesi our rooted longings'

The stanza focuses on the connection between time and love. This is why we find ‘eyes memorizing hours/dry moments stretching into succulent eternities' that run deep. The river symbol ‘Zambesi’ is used by the poet to describe and express the intense feeling he has for his mistress. Through this symbol the speaker portrays just how tender the moments with his mistress can be. That is, they feel like the home they have always longed for.

The poem ‘Bless’ is another one crawling with various images and symbols. This poem is the second one in the third division of the anthology called ‘Metaphor’. ‘Bless’ is a special poem as the poet takes time to give instructions on the infusion of musical instruments. After every seven two-line stanzas an African traditional musical instrument is introduced. The speaker also uses various metaphors to praise parts of his lover’s body in the first seven stanzas. He praises her eyes, her hair, her neck, her ears, her

nose and tongue before suggesting the usage of the 'flute', e.g., 'Bless that nose which spells out | The smell of a thousand gardens | Bless your tongue | So pink with truthful power (Flute)**.** Jeff (2009) and Alabi (2021) note that it is typical of Osundare to use symbols and images to praise nature. Here the poet uses symbols and images to describe his mistress. The poem is a typical example of a Yoruba praise chant as there's the employ of repetition as well as an infusion of traditional instruments such as flutes, horns and drums. This is why Anyokwo (2013,1-12) remains firm in his postulations that the poet has to look back at his Yoruba heritage in other to move forward. In the next seven stanzas, the poet praises nature for its efforts in helping his emotions for his mistress soar. Osundare thanks the ocean for chaotically bringing them together, the birds for their chants, and the dawn for providing the right atmosphere. It is in the third division of the poem that we find the aquatic symbol of the river: 'Bless the spacious generosity of your heart | Whose pulse is confluence of two rivers'. This is fitting because in this division the writer has moved from praising the lady's physical features to praising her character or personality. We find the aquatic symbol used to describe and praise the lady's heart as being generous. Yet, this generosity is described as 'spacious'. It is the usage of the river symbol in the second line that helps us understand what the speaker expresses as 'spacious generosity'. He likens her pulse to the confluence of two rivers, thus expressing that it is not always a smooth sailing with this lady. Cirlot (1971) opines that the river symbol also stands for a sense of loss and oblivion and can also be linked with negativity. The other stanzas in this division buttress this point. Like many poems in the last division, this poem is full of metaphors and messages expertly hidden in symbols. Chief among these symbols are those of the aquatic nature.

The poem 'Love Grows in your Garden' is another in the division tagged 'metaphor'. Just like 'Bless', the poet adorns his mistress with various metaphors. The speaker is direct in his speech as he

takes time to describe parts of his mistress. The comparative devices: metaphor and simile are the stars of the poems in this division and the poet makes sure he places a specific image or symbol in each stanza. In this particular poem, the poet uses the river symbol to describe the lady's voice. He says:

'From the hive of your clock
Your laughter is lush
Your voice a flowing river'

In using this symbol, the poet drags the reader's attention to how lengthy the conversations with his mistress must be and how sonorous her voice is. This shows that a single symbol can be used to pass various messages. It is no wonder Frye, Northrop, Baker and George Perkins (1985, 452-453) describe symbolism as the most important contraption for writers. They posit that symbols have meanings that extend further than what can be textually analyzed. Nabukonde (2012, 26) also posits that symbols are used to disclose hidden truth. Therefore, using traditional symbols like the river becomes a secret language between the poet and his readers.

Osundare is also fond of using the ocean/sea symbol in this love collection. In the poem 'Love Can III', the poet expresses himself thus:

'Love can turn loud muse into quiet music
Little lakes into seamless oceans
Simple nod into hard command
Far cry into touching whisper'

Aside from the use of antithesis in this poem and its effect on the message of the poem, one cannot miss the aquatic symbol strategically placed in the second line and its uplifting effect to the 'literariness' of the work. In this poem, the speaker uses the aquatic symbol to express the fact that when love is concerned, little things can mean the most. The fact that the symbol is contrasted with the lake which has a similar significance with the

river symbol, is the speaker's way of expressing that a short moment can mean a decade to lovers. The use of the adjective 'seamless' removes the chaotic tendencies of the symbol and leaves us with just little 'tender' moments lasting for a lifetime. Ferber (1999) discusses the symbol as a representation of chaos. Hence only the usage of the private image "seamless" could tone it down. While Elgezeery (2013, 62-67) mentions the poet's usage of private images to highlight an aggressive expression, here we find it being used to tone down chaos.

In another part of the poem, the speaker says:

> 'Love can bring the roaring sea to your door
> Make the Mississippi hiss at the end of your tap
> Transform your favourite chair into
> A tree in a distant forest'

Here the poet continues to express the strength and power that love possesses using figurative language while personifying the emotion with such transforming abilities. This poem begins with the aquatic symbol at the very first line of the poem where it performs the cohesive function of holding the stanza together. In using this symbol, the speaker expresses the fact that love can awaken, revive, renew and change a person's life in unexpected ways. Ferber (1999) and Cirlot (1971) agree that the sea represents birth, rebirth, death and life. This fact is enforced by the next stanza of the poem: 'Love can make you run without tiring | Grow without aging'. These lines buttress what the poet expresses with the use of the aquatic symbol of the sea. That is, love can show up and change a person's life and thus make the person capable of performing certain unexpected activities or possessing certain qualities. It is for this reason that the poet mentions 'Grow without aging', because people in love are always children at heart and express themselves in that manner. Aside from the overflow of images, what we see in this poem is the strength of love as

described by the poet using one of the most chaotic symbols and strengthening it with the word ‘roaring’.

In the poem entitled ‘Divine Command’, the poet says:

‘‘Raise your hand’, you say,
‘and pluck me the moon;
Go down the sea
And bring my buried jewel"

In the stanza before the above excerpt, the speaker asks his mistress what he must do to win her favour and inherit “the queendom of her softness”. In the subsequent stanzas he goes ahead to mention the impossible requests made by his persona, and in doing so we find the chaotic aquatic symbol in the second stanza of the poem (see above). The line ‘Go down the sea’ might seem simple or insignificant to the reader who does not understand the nature of the aquatic symbol ‘sea’. However, with the use of this aquatic symbol, the speaker is expressing the fact that his persona asked him to go to a very dangerous place and retrieve her jewel. The symbol here relays to the reader the level of danger that is suggested by the poet. Although the poem is about unrequited love, we can see the intensifying effect of the aquatic symbol. Again, in the poem ‘Promise’ the speaker promises his lover a lot of things that might seem impossible in an attempt to win and keep her interest. Aside from the usage of hyperbole and its emphatic advantage, it is not surprising to see the aquatic symbol ‘ocean’ being used to add intensity and express the depth of the profound emotions in a poem of this depth. In the first stanza the speaker says:

‘I will walk a thousand miles
Climb a hundred mountains
Swim the wildest oceans
To catch a glimpse of your face again'

The message of the entire poem is carried on the shoulders of the last two lines. Undoubtedly, this stanza is more intense than the

other three, as a result of the use of the aquatic symbol. The speaker uses the symbols and images to express the extent he is willing to go just to win his lover back. In this first stanza, he makes use of mobility: he is ready to walk, climb or swim. The addition of the adjective 'wildest' to a chaotic symbol buttresses the level of danger the speaker is willing to go through for his lover.

Almost every seven-stanza division in the poem 'Bless' contains the traditional symbol 'ocean'. The only exception is the last division which contains single line stanzas. This goes to emphasize the strength and significance of the symbol to the poet as an African and a love poet. In the first and second stanzas of the first division, the poet says:

'Bless those eyes which perch like eagles
On either side of your nose
'Bless the ocean in their sockets on which
Memory's boat glides from coast to coast'

That the poet uses a chaotic symbol to describe the eyes of his mistress is no surprise. After all, the eyes have long been viewed as windows to the soul. Osundare reiterates this fact by stating that 'memories' glide in them. What exactly is a soul if not a build up memories and experiences? The memories that build up a personality or soul are the ones full of chaos. In the very first stanza of the second division of the poem, the ocean symbol reappears. 'Bless the ocean which sunders us | Into one nest of singing birds'. Here the poet uses the destructive symbol to represent the situations or difficulties that keep trying to destroy his relationship with his mistress but instead ends up making them closer and happier. The symbol is as delicate as a bomb and can be used to express the deepest pains or experiences that people go through. In the second stanza of the third division, we find the chaotic symbol again: 'Bless your unquenchable thirst for sandy acres | and the blue laughter of diverse oceans.' As earlier stated,

the poet is more interested in praising the lady's character or personality in this division. Here he expresses that the lady has unquenchable desires that may be destructive to their relationship. He is however grateful for this too.

The poem 'metaphor' is the last and the longest poem in the collection and just as the name implies, it is full of images and symbols. The third section of 'metaphor' is rightly called so by the poet because the poems here are based on the employ of 'the word'. Anyokwu (2008, 111) posits that the poem is a marriage of love and poetry. The last poem which is seven pages long explores and expresses the relationship between well-woven words and love. The sea or ocean symbol appears eight times in this poem, as the poet narrates how the poor postman is able to get his Beatrice on the advice of Pablo Neruda and Mario is able to wed his own Beatrice due to metaphors. The first time we encounter the symbol is the second part of the poem, where Neruda is mentioned as living in 'the hills by the sea'. The use of the chaotic symbol to describe the imaginary home of the poet is deliberately done to show and express that the Bard himself had to grow in other to get to such a level of expertise. The symbol is also used to show the difficulties the postman encounters to have access to the so called 'oracle'.

We find the symbol being used to describe the effect of metaphors in this part of the poem. Neruda asks the postman, 'Do they (metaphors) hang your song | On the branches of the sea'? The chaotic symbol here magnifies the effect of well-woven words. In comparison to Neruda's metaphors, the postman's song cannot be compared to the wonders of the vast sea and may only hang on 'branches'. In this same part of the poem, the postman asks Neruda to 'lend' him metaphors to help him wade through his 'sea of sorrows'. When it is necessary to measure the extent of one's feelings, we see how readily the sea/ocean symbols falls on the laps of the writer.

The fourth part of the poem is also adorned with the symbol. As the Bard gives the postman words to use on his Beatrice, he expresses the financial inhibitions of the postman: "…I bring no gold | Nor treasures from foreign *seas'*. Again, the symbol functions as a magnifier of whatever emotion or situation expressed. In the very next stanza, Beatrice is asked to 'embrace' the postman's dream, so they could 'sail the widest *oceans'*. The fifth part of 'metaphor' equally has its own share of the chaotic symbol. The first stanza has the Postman in his own words, telling his Beatrice of a 'singing sea' and 'a dark drum in the ocean's belly' amidst other chaotic occurrences as he promises to calm his Beatrice' hunger with waters from his own verse. He continues to beckon on his beloved to allow their hearts 'throb in unison' with the beat of the sea so they could sing with it. Notice how this part of the poem is built around the symbol and it is elevated thematic as a result of the usage. From the beginning of this fifth part of metaphor, the poet (Postman) presents dangerous situations which signify death, unhappiness and destruction. However, as the part terminates the poet uses the same symbol to express the happiness that can come if Beatrice chooses to unite with him. He says:

> 'Unmatchable Beatrice, open your ears
> To the drum of the **sea**. Hear our two hearts
> Throb in unison with **its** rhythm. We sing. We sing.
> We sing with the **sea**. Beautiful Beatrice, listen.'
> ***(emphasis mine)***

At the beginning the ocean possesses a deep dark drum in its belly, but at the end the drumming is welcomed so that the postman and his Beatrice can have their hearts throb with its rhythm. Ferber (1999) and Cirlot (1971) emphasize the unstable nature of this symbol by stating that it can represent both death and life.

Anything that occurs naturally is symbolic to man, and 'rain' is one traditional symbol that has been used in literature, especially African poetry and oral tradition for ages. The rain is very

symbolic to an African and to man in general. For an African, it means a lot more. The rain is symbol of cleansing and rituals are often carried out to evoke the rain and have it usher in goodness. In the poem, 'You Are', the poet says:

You are my Earth
My root, my roost
The roof above my dreams
Fireplace for my frozen flairs
You are the Temple of my desire
With a thousand inner rooms and a thousand echoes
You are the race
Which lends a name to my legs
My infinite destination
Shepherdess of my nomadic fancies
You are the Rain
Which fell before the sky

Apart from the repetitive and apostrophic use of language which emphasizes the theme and adds musical qualities to this poem, one cannot miss the fact that the poem is full of symbols and images tactically expressed metaphorically. Here the speaker attempts to make his lover understand what she means to him. In his attempt to buttress this, he realizes that nothing can work better than symbolism. The major symbols employed by the speaker begin with upper case letters, though they appear in the middle of the lines. This is a deliberate attempt by the writer to draw the attention of his readers to these words as they are the key to unlocking the message of the poem. They include Earth, Temple and Rain. The poet tells his mistress that she represents life and death to him; hence she is the root (beginning, source) and his roost (end). He goes ahead to describe her as a "Temple" containing thousand of inner rooms and echoes. That is, she is a goddess to him as he lives his life for her and holds her in the highest of places. The poet inserts the aquatic symbol 'rain' to express the supernatural attribute of his love for his mistress. He

does not only describe her as the rain, but as the rain that fell before the sky. This is done to heighten the effect of this symbol in expressing the importance of the mistress to the speaker.

The poem entitled "closer by Far" is also decorated with various types of symbols expressed with expert metaphorical language. The poem goes:

The rain fell
On New Year Day
The sun has
Changed its address
The stars are tiny twinkles
On water-washed roads
This song is a tender stitch
In the garment of your
absence
I borrow one light sheet
From the book of the sun
And scribble this note with
The ink of the sea
The house echoes
My voice
Each time I give
Your name to the winds
I feel you
In the breath of every dawn
Beloved, the farther away you are
The closer to the of mybeing

The effect of the run-on-lines in this poem is outstanding and adds depth to the speaker's expression of how the absence of his lover makes him feel. The fact that the poem begins with the aquatic symbol drives the speaker's expression and helps him express the extent to which he is affected by the absence of his lover. When

the speaker says, 'the rain fell' he is referring to the fact that unhappiness started the day she left. Ferber (1999), said that the rain is a symbol for unhappiness and that is exactly what the speaker uses it to represent here. Undoubtedly, his unhappiness started the day his lover left. The poet goes ahead to use other categories of symbols to buttress his point. When the poet mentions 'New Year Day', he is attempting to lay emphasis on the effect of the rain or the lady's departure. He goes ahead to use the solar symbol of the sun and stars to further deepen the theme. The last stanza sums it up perfectly as the speaker says the further away his mistress is, the closer he is to her. The use of the apostrophic language in the three last stanzas elevates the poem and allows the reader to feel its depth. The effect of the 'rain' symbol in the first line is what prepares the reader for a journey of sadness with a glimmer of hope in the last stanza.

The rain symbol appears again in the poem 'Song of Absence I & II'. This poem is found in the second division of the collection titled 'Songs of Absence'. As can be inferred from the title of this section, the poems in the section bemoan the absence of a lover. Osundare uses imagery and symbolism to express how he feels about the absence of his mistress. The first two poems in the section are aptly named 'Song of Absence I & II'. 'Song of Absence 1' begins with the poet using 'raining' to express his emotional state at the absence of his lover. The rain in this poem, represents an hindrance or a reminder that the mistress is absent. Ferber (1999) mentions that rain can represent both suffering or bad luck and fertility. The poet thus uses this symbol to express his suffering and ill-luck on account of the lady's absence. In 'Song of Absence II', the poet says:

'I could not ask the roof how many rains
Have fallen, nor pressed the almond tree
In the frontyard for news of absent branches'

The poet uses the rain symbol just like in the first 'Song of Absence'. The falling of the rain here represent the unease, unhappiness and difficulty the poet experiences as a result of the lady's absence.

The third poem in the section is 'These Many Moons'. Here the poet tries to find out if his mistress is affected by his absence the way he is affected by hers. He does this by asking a series of questions using images and symbols. These symbols include Moon, night, and rain. In stanza four, the poet asks:

'Did you watch the rain
Fall from earth to sky?'

The transition in this section of the collection is typical of Osundare's ingenuity. He uses the first two poems to express his unhappiness at the lady's absence and the third one to find out if his feeling of unhappiness is mutual. In the fourth poem 'while you were away', the poet finally meets his lover again and tells her how hard it was when she was absent. One can not help but marvel at the speaker's use of the rain symbol, which is found in the first three poems being used to represent unhappiness. In the second section, the symbol is also found in "I See You". Here the poet says, 'I see you | In the rhythm of the rain.' The symbol stands to signify the speaker's sorrow at the absence of his mistress. This time he presents the symbol in the guise of auditory imagery. It is also found in the poems, 'Rain or Shine' and 'Elephant Across the Path.' In all these poems, the traditional aquatic symbol rain was used to represent suffering and ill-luck caused by absence.

Conclusion

Aquatic symbols stem from the very nature of man as he interacts with his environment. The curiosity and affinity towards the world around him makes him create meaning or assign meanings to various aspects of nature. Going about his exploration of his environment he discovers the power of the great element "water".

As water is a fundamental element of nature, it holds a key position in the subconscious and conscious state of man. Man has found himself worshiping this element, building deities around this element, studying this element and remains awed by its chaos and power.

When burdened with expressing self through a means that reaches deep down the subconscious, man comes face to face with his nature and there encounters the primal force called water. It is as a result of this that the aquatic symbols show up in poetry quite often and afford the reader an opportunity to fellowship with the writer in an innate level of understanding. Water unites and creates a link between the writer and the reader. As such there is a bond that forms in the subconscious mind of the reader when he encounters the aquatic symbols.

African poetry developed from chants and songs in village squares which are woven around the natural elements. These elements are significant as they convey innate messages. Deep in the root of African poetry is the water symbolism which is primal to Africans. Water deities were and are revered across various African cultures. During African marriages the symbols show up in songs as the water spirit of fertility is evoked. They also show up when lovers attempt to express the profound emotion of love. Osundare expertly places the aquatic symbols in the core of his love collection and in so doing connects to his roots, his "self", and connects with his readers in a familiar level. These symbols play a significant role in aiding writers, especially poets in expressing their various thematic concerns. They also help the reader to connect with the writer on a deeper level which exists in the very core of humanity.

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