Poetic Exploration of Obasa’s Prolegomenous Poetry

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Abstract
Mere mentioning of poetics often ignites the memory of Aristotle whose admiration is hinged on the elegance and clarity of his style in poetics. This is as a result of the historic influence of poetics or aesthetics as well as the quality of its thought. Thus, poetics is not devoid of philosophical nuances. Based on this premise, an attempt is made here to explore the poetic strands in Obasa’s trilogy, wherein Yoruba proverbs are strung together. The paper, therefore, considers aesthetic category of artistic mimesis, intertextuality and components of all diction alongside stylistic elements because the principal task of poetics is to measure its legitimate domain in language. Thus, it is averred that literature depends on linguistic structure for its existence since language is the substance of literature (in our own instance, poetry). The essay adopts an eclectic theoretical approach since Obasa’s craftsmanship and subject-matter span an avalanche of forms and structures imbued with stylistic features. Primary data are largely drawn from his anthologies which facilitate the content analysis. In its findings, the paper has brought to the fore the fact that Obasa employed adaptation and mimesis in his presentation creatively, while different stylistic elements in his trilogy are replete with deviation. An attempt is made to bring into bold relief the suggestion that metaphor forms the hub of all other tropes that give grandeur to poetics in Obasa.

Introduction
There is paucity of critical works on Obasa’s poetry. Extant studies on his prolegomenous poetry are Olabímtán (1975), Akínyemí (1987, 1991, & 2017). While appreciating the trilogy, Afolabi Olabímtán (1975) opines that
Qobasa’s greatness lies in “his ability to assemble traditional sayings (including chants and songs) which embody the traditional wisdom of Yorùbá society” (1032), and “his use of Yorùbá oral poetic language and style to ‘produce’ written poetry” (1034). Qlabímítán must have situated Qobasa’s trilogy within Longinus’ (1995) On the Sublime, which focuses on “appreciation of greatness (“the sublime”) in writing.”¹ He also observes that Qobasa goes beyond mere assemblage of traditional sayings as he brings in his creative ingenuity to deconstruct some of the proto oral texts as well as having his own original composition. Unlike Akinyemi (1987 and 2017) whose preoccupation consists of poet’s background, philosophical themes, and social value of Qobasa’s poetry, Qlabímtan concerns himself with language and style in Qobasa’s poetry. However, his treatment of the language and style has not been exhaustive, hence, the intention to focus on poetic diction and style in this treatise. A deep look at his poems reveals that Qobasa inundates his trilogy with poetic diction drawn from Yorùbá oral variety of language and cultural milieu.

It is important to point out that Akinyemi’s consideration of inherent philosophical issues on pages of the trilogy is not a misplaced one for indeed Qobasa taps in on Yorùbá pithy lore, thus given himself some sort of divergent style from other Yoruba poets of his period. In fact, philosophical outlook of his text marks him out as: “Ọ̀nkọ́wé Akéwí” and “Akwé Ọ̀nkọ́wé” (I am the poet’s scribe and I am the literate poet) (see Qlabímtán 1975; Akínyemi 2017). Both Qlabímtán and Akínyemi aptly note that Qobasa’s poems are “strings of traditional sayings”, but beyond this, he has creatively woven together different proverbs to form a whole unit of poem. The weaving together of proverbs is essentially employed, if viewed from classical perspective, as ‘foundational strategy’ to build up the form and structure of his poems. Suffice to say here that ‘foundational strategy’ has brought about ‘foundation quality’ hinged on Yoruba philosophical worldviews spanning destiny, virtues, vices, metaphysics, etc. It is important to say also that the weaving together of proverbs is meant “to explore an understanding of the world – above all, or human experience itself – through fictive representation and imaginative “enactment of experience” (Halliwell, 1995:8).

The intention here, therefore, is to take a poetic exploration of Qobasa’s trilogy which has not received much attention from scholars. This might have been caused by his creative style which could have “elicited admiration in some readers, and discomfort in others” (Halliwell 1995:7). A deep look at some of the poems exhibits creative ingenuity of Qobasa; and as such enlists the interest of readers. For instance, his creative skillfulness is visible in “Ìkà-Èke” (Qobasa 1982: 9-12), while “Gbà Qwọ Ọsì” (Qobasa 1982: 10), lacks poetic

luster. This poetic study of Obasa’s works, therefore, straddles both linguistics and literature or focuses on the interface between literature and linguistics. Thus, the essay concerns itself with the use of language in Obasa’s trilogy which falls under the purview of literary linguistics.

**Linguistics and Literature**

Poetic exploration focuses on poetic diction which exploits both linguistics and literature. This is premised on the fact that, “language is the instrument of literature and there is such affinity between language and linguistics” as such “the relationship between literature and linguistics should be more easily appreciated” (Vincent 1990: 139). We reason along with Vincent that “language is the substance of literature or that literature is a linguistic structure which encodes meanings”, for “language is the building block of literature” (138). Needless to emphasize here, that “the key to a true understanding of literature is a grasping of the linguistic structure” and so language is not merely analyzed for its own sake in literature (Vincent 138). In other words, we consider these three elements as indivisible tripod, for “language, literature, and linguistics are closely tied up in the task of explaining our world to us through the vision of writers and in our appreciating this world” (Vincent 141).

Fabb (1997: 2) attests that literary texts have linguistic form because they are texts (the product of verbal behavior), and they have literary forms. It is useful to affirm that, “the linguistic form nourishes the literary form; thus, literary form depends on linguistic form for its existence” (2). This implies that, “certain aspects of literary form are adaptations of linguistic form” (2). It is crucial to state at this point that, “the real wonder of literature is the achievement of expression” and “the manifestation of thought in language” (Fabb 230). Thus “thoughts are the real medium of literature; language is their vehicle” (Fabb 231); hence, we concur with Graham (1992) that the structures of rhetoric and poetics are actually the work of reason in language, because

… it is said that literary texts show or exhibit rather than just say or tell; that they embody or incarnate their meanings; that they illustrate, demonstrate, manifest; mirror, or reflect; that they dramatize, enact or mime a certain truth, and so present it as fact with all the force of experience (225).

It is little wonder then that “a literary work is meant to be a special use of words designed for a specific effect” (Graham, 1992:233), and so, language is frequently contrived in poetic art so as to allow “for ambiguity, paradoxes and some other irrational uses of language” (Olabode 2008: 230). And indeed,
proverbs are contrived; thus, given preeminence to their poetics (Olatunji 1984; Adeleke 2009).

**Theoretical Approach to Obasa Trilogy**

Poetic diction foregrounds different stylistic features, because “the components of all diction include element, syllable, connective, noun, verb, conjunction, inflection, statement” (Aristotle Year 1995: 99). Aristotle notes that, “[E]very word is a standard term, loan word, metaphor, ornament, neologism, lengthening, contraction, or modification” (Aristotle 1995: 105). All these aforementioned elements are prominently featured in Obase’s poems as he tinkers with phonological and morphological processes, as well as, the syntactic structure. This has, thus prompted us to engage in an eclectic approach since “no theory is ever sufficient in itself” (Graham 1992: 215) to analyze African literatures and in particular stylistic features. Wales (1989) has earlier affirmed that, “stylistics has always been remarkably eclectic in its approaches and influences” (319). As regards poetic diction, it is pertinent to underscore the roles and place of stylistics and stylisticians as “stylistics - and stylisticians who practice stylistics – have been the mid-wives in this delicate operation” (Vincent 139).

A profound look at Obasa’s poems reveals that it could accommodate many theories, be it at the major or subsidiary level. It is a matter of choice. From formalist’s perspective, Obasa’s trilogy is “a deviation from a norm” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998: v), as he weaves different and autonomous proverbs creatively to form various philosophical poems that eventually cohered. With this foregrounding, and perhaps, deviation from known norm, Obasa has forcefully displayed “the enduring presence of orality in African literature” (Vincent 1990: 141). He engages in the norm-deviation so as “to be stylistically distinctive, a feature of language must deviate from some norm” (Oloruntoba-Oju 1998: v). Both defamiliarization and cohesion are immanently featured and present in the trilogy. In sum, Obasa exhibits estrangement which is based on the Russian Formalist principle of poetic art; he defamiliarizes proverbs by weaving them together. Through deviation in Obasa’s , it is observed that stylistic ‘foregrounding’, a term borrowed from Prague School of Linguistics is employed by Leech and Short (1981:48) to refer to “artistically motivated deviation”; this notion is a detour from the Czech theorist Jan Mukarovsky’s original term, which focuses on the range of stylistic effects that occur in literature, whether at phonetic level – alliteration, rhyme; the grammatical level – inversion, ellipsis; or the semantic level – metaphor and irony. Though more will still be said on foregrounding later, it is needful to state here, that foregrounding manifests through a variety of means and these are largely grouped
into two main types: Deviation and Repetition, or, Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic foregrounding. Apart from violations of linguistic norms; grammatical or semantic, it has been noted that through employment of “unusual METAPHORS or SIMILES (the traditional tropes)” deviation brings about “unexpected conjunctions of meaning” and thus “forcing fresh realizations in the reader” (Wales 1989: 182). Obasa’s trilogy is replete with formalist’s strands as it will be demonstrated shortly.

It is also possible to have an interface with Obasa’s trilogy by applying postcolonial theory, especially the strand of parody. Obasa selectively makes deliberate choice of heterogeneous proverbs, if perceived from both context and content, to create homogeneous poems. The weaving together of these proverbs has brought about the issue of intertextuality. He parodies the poetic oral genre of proverb via displacement. For instance, in “Pelepelepele”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pelepelepele, pelepelepele!} & \quad \text{1} \\
\text{Pele l'arewa nri n} & \\
\text{Jejeje l'omo olo la i yan,} & \quad \text{2} \\
\text{gba oni pele ki i fo,} & \\
\text{Awo oni pele ki i faya!} \quad \text{(Obasa 1982: 7).}
\end{align*}
\]

Gently, with care, gently with care!
A beauty walks gently
An honorable citizen walks leisurely
The calabash of a gentle being is not broken
The ceramic of a gentle being is not fragmented

Both proverbs 1 and 2 are autonomous but now recontextualized in the poems. At autonomous level, both are proto-texts while at recontextualized level the two have become meta-texts and they cohered artistically.

Due to displacement and meta-texting, the meaning decipherable from proto-text becomes mutable; hence, the reader will be grappling with myriad of meanings. It is not surprise then that deconstruction theory is associated with intertextuality. On this, Wales (1989), has this to say:

Each deconstruction opens itself to further deconstruction. Text itself gives way to INTERTEXTUALITY, meanings are disseminated across text’s sources, and as a result, the boundaries are dissolved between LITERARY and other kinds of DISCOURSE (108).
We are not unaware of negative perception of deconstruction, for it has been seen as ‘destructive: nihilistic, counter-intuitive, and open to fanciful interpretative licenses/licentiousness, what Geoffrey Hartman wittily calls “Derridadaism” (Wales 108). This gives the reader a leeway to generate meanings at will.

It is plausible to say, ‘different readers, different horizon of expectations’ (Adeleke 1995). Based on this, it has been noted that, “double or multiple meanings” generated by readers arise as a result of indeterminacy, an inherent feature in Reader-Response or Reception theory; we need to state here that ‘strategic indeterminacy’ is a special characteristic of ‘LITERARY, especially POETIC LANGUAGE’ (Wales 243). Three important variables accounting for myriad of meanings are psychological, sociological and physiological (Adeleke 1995). Apart from these three variables, figurative language also leads to polysemy, different from literal meanings; we have expressive devices in mind that give grandeur. Qbas’a’s creative exercise has brought about ambiguity, known as amphibologia in rhetoric. For instance, lexical ambiguity occurs in the poem “Pełépełé”:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pełé} & \text{pełé l’à n’pa,} \\
\text{Amúkurù} & \text{pełé} \\
\text{Pełé} & \text{pełé ni} \\
\text{Ejo} & \text{fi } \text{i } g’ọpè
\end{align*}
\]

It’s with caution that one lash out
The perching \text{amúkurù} on the scrotum
It’s with extreme patient that
The snake climbs up the palm tree

Through reduplication or compounding, pełé, which is a verb or adverb or noun, forms a new word or morpheme pełépełé. The morpheme, pełé, being a homonymous word, can mean ‘caution’, ‘patient’, ‘be careful’, ‘gently’ and ‘scrotum’, notwithstanding, the fact that the three morphemes are the same in form but having different semantic origins. In short, different readers with different interpretations, more so, “literature is obliquely symbolic; its words express a meaning and that meaning is a symbol. Thus, literature has entire range of verbal meaning as its medium” (Graham 1992: 242).

**Tropes and Literary Linguistic Features**

There are different tropes and literary linguistic features doting different pages of Qbas’a’s trilogy. Time and space, however, will not permit a detailed
analysis of all the literary features. Attention will focus on form and structure, use of traditional materials, tropes and literary linguistic features.

**Form and Structure**

Obasa exhibits a unique style as regards form and structure of his poems. In his trilogy, he frequently welcomes his readers, and this is not unexpected for the Yoruba to thrive and enjoy courtesies. Obasa, being a cultural man, intersperses his poems with different kinds of Yoruba greetings that show the Yoruba dialect groups, foreign language, as well as the time of the day and climatic period. For example, when a visitor is about to enter any household Yoruba, it is of importance that such a visitor utters, *àgò onílé* (landlord, I hope the way is clear); the landlord may now respond as dramatically presented below by Obasa:

*Onílé ní, ‘Wọ ta ha nù un?’*
*Ọ́ibò ní, ‘who is that?’*
*Èkó ní, Ìwọ tani yên?*
*Iwọ ọmọ lèṣi yên wà?’* (Obasa 1982: 1).

The landlord asked, ‘Who are you?’
The European asked, ‘Who is that?’
The Lagosian asked, ‘Who is it?’
Whose child are you?’

The lexical item *onílé* refers to the proto-Yoruba otherwise known as the standard Yoruba (SY) that is intelligible to all Yoruba native speakers, irrespective of the dialect areas. For instance, Adetugbo (1982) identifies three dialect areas of Yoruba as Central Yoruba (CY), Northwest Yoruba (NWY), and Southeast Yoruba (SEY). Contrary to these three Yoruba dialectal areas, Oyelaran (1978) has earlier come up with the following dialect grouping: West Yoruba consisting Oyo, Ibadan, Egba, Ohori-Ifohiin, Saki, Iji’o, Ketu, Sabo, Benin, Ife (Togo), Idaasa, Manigi; South East Yoruba – Ondo, Qwọ, Ijebu, Ikalẹ, Ilaje; Central Yoruba – Ile-Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti; and Northern Eastern Yoruba – Igbomina, Kakandá, Ibolọ, Jumú, Bunú, Qwọro, Owe and Egbè. There are overlaps in the classification of the two scholars. To avert any controversy, some scholars have gone into the specific by listing the available dialect groups including: Oyo-Ibadan, Onko, Egba, Ekiti, Moba, Ijebu, Igbomina, Ibolọ, Iyagba, Jumú, Owe, Ife, Ijesa, Ondo, Qwọ, Oka, Akoko, Ikalẹ, Ilaje, Yoruba-Eko, Awori, Okun, and a host of others (Awobuluyi 2001; Adeniyi & Onadipe 2000). In the above excerpts, Obasa parodies the
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Qọ́yọ̀-Ībàdàn and Yorù́bá-Èkó varieties. He further alludes to some other dialect groups by miming their varieties thus:

Ẹgbá ní, ‘Lè é iyèn?’
Ìjèbú ní, ‘Lès’ón wá?’
Ìjèṣà ní, ‘Ìwò yèṣí ré ní?’
Ife ní, ‘Ìwò yèṣí ré ní?’ (Obasa 1982: 1).

The Ègbá asked, ‘Who is that?’
The Ìjèbú asked, ‘Who is that?’
The Èjèṣà asked, ‘Who is that?’
The Ifè asked, ‘Who is that?’

To show that the Yorù́bá is not a close climate, Obasa draws attention to the heterogeneous nature of the Yoruba society, where the foreigners are allowed to co-exist with the Yoruba; hence, he brings in the English language to show the existence of Europeans in Yoruba community, Òibò ní, ‘who is that?’ (The European asked, ‘Who is that?’). It is important to state here that, the WH- question, which is common to all linguistic groups identified, only takes a new form in those linguistic varieties. In sum, the phonological, morphological and syntactic forms account for dialectal variations. Obasa, through dramatic form presentation, injects life into his poetry by cashing in on bi-dialectism, bi-lingualism and multilingualism that are common features in heterogeneous society. It may not be out of place to postulate that Obasa has knowingly or unknowingly brought to the fore the issue of language confounding when the tower of Babel (see Genesis 11: 6 - 9) was being constructed. This may lead one, therefore, to infer that the employment of bi-dialectism, bi-lingualism, and multi-lingualism is a metaphor of allusion to the story of Tower of Babel parodied by Obasa. Aside from this we align with Ìsọla’s (1998) submission that, “This device of making characters speak appropriate languages and dialects increases our confidence in the story teller. We believe that he knows what he is talking about” (110). This excerpt aptly fits Obasa’s poetic endeavors in his trilogy.

Through his opening form and structure, Obasa has been able to establish some sort of phatic communication between himself and his readers. The rapport already established, plausibly may enlist the interest of the readers or listeners to willingly be receptive to his poems. He also taps in on traditional homage paying to audience by the egúngún aláré. For instance, he acknowledges the presence of his anonymous audience:
Eni t'o duro, e ku iduro!
Eni joko, e mà kú ikalè
erè orèrè, e ku ọgbọ-dide!
Gbigbo nyin ni mo ki,
Mi kò l’olodi kan!
Mo ki nyin t’ẹṣo-t’ẹṣo,
Mo ki nyin t’olagon-t’olagon... (Qbasa 1934: 17).

All who are standing, we appreciate you!
All who are seated, you are acknowledged
Those of you in crowd afar off, you are welcome!
I greet you all,
I nurse no grudge against anyone!
I salute all the Lieutenants
I salute all the Generals...

The eégún aláré tradition thrives and cherishes ibà – paying homage to animate and non-animate, before engaging in any public performance. Little wonder then that Qbasa employs the egungun aláré structural mode of homage paying, beginning from line 1 to line 100. It is an art ingrained reader-response or reception theory.

Obasa deploys stanzaic format in ìwọn akéwì, ìwé Kinni, not based on regular rhyme and metrical schemes like the western format. The verses in the same poems do not contain the same numbers of lines. Let us illustrate with “Etéto-eto” where there are 10 stanzas. In verse one there are five lines; verse two: seven lines; verse three: four lines; verse four: 11 lines; verse five: seven lines; verse six: seven; verse 7: four lines; verse 8: four lines; verse 9: four lines; and in verse 10: five lines. It is important to state here that all the separate stanzas are thematically linked, as they all focus on ‘limitations’ and ‘inhibitions’ with which all beings have to contend with. However, it is instructive to draw attention to deviation brought in by Qbasá in his ìwọn akéwì, ìwé Keji and ìwọn akéwì, ìwé Keta where he deploys free verse in the two texts, a departure from stanzaic style employed in book one. This free verse allows him to unlimitedly explore and exploit his creative ingenuity, as such; he is able to bring in his own ideas and thought to bear on different poems. The free verse has enabled him to engage in serious and long narratives, as demonstrated in “Ìtan Tápà ati Yorùbà”, and “Ilú Ilorin”. In employment of free verse, poetic default occurs along the line as revealed in “Gba Qwò Oṣì”.
This act has come to being, just as in Lagos and Abẹokuta. This tradition is a familiar one already known in our clime; since ages do our progenitors have been singing thus;

'It's by the left,
That a nursing mother unstrapped a baby to;
Whosoever takes right hand is doom;
Adhere strictly to the left hand.

This excerpt verges between prosaic and poetic genre. It thus lacks poetic candor.

**Use of Traditional Poetic Materials**

We agree with Qlábímtán and Akínyemí that Qbasá has made use of traditional materials covering òwe (proverb), orí kì (praise poetry), ẹkún ìyàwó (nuptial chant), ọkú pípé (elegy), ọfọ (incantation), and àló (riddle). All the afore-mentioned traditional materials are deftly deployed in his poetry.

**Òwe (Proverb)**

It is apparent that age-long sayings and proverbs inundate Qbasá’s trilogy. Olatunji (1984) has forcefully demonstrated that, “Yoruba proverbs are terse and pithy”; little wonder then that, “The Yoruba value proverbs very highly, for they are considered to be the wisdom lore of the race. And because the proverbs are considered to be traditional, and originate from the observation of natural phenomena and human relations, old people are regarded as a repository of proverbs” (p.170); and as such, “Great respect is therefore given to anyone who can use proverbs frequently and appropriately.” And indeed, Qbasá has earned himself great respect as master craftsman who dexterously recontextualises through deft weaving of separately autonomous bloc of proverbs piled up unit by unit to form a cohered semantic theme. Through his creative skillfulness, Qbasá employs intertextuality to soar up meta-poetics in his trilogy, as well as deploying deviation device that estranges proto-proverbs from their normal norms to bring about displacement.
As aptly observed by Isọla (1978), just like other authors, Ọbasá has been able to “re-animate some old proverbs that are almost obsolete and bring them into circulation again” (92). There are many examples; however, two will suffice here:

a. Ẹ̀kẹ̀ tan ‘ni s’i jà Ẹkùn,
   Ọ f’orùn sì sè s’á pó ēnì! (Qbasá 1982: 36).

The Deceit lured one to confront a Tiger
He then stored one’s quiver with broken arrows

b. ‘Nì sò! Nì sò!, kì i sí wá jú,
   Ọ sin ’mọ dè ’gbó è rù padà sè hi n (Qbasá 1982: 36).

‘Go on! Go on!’, will never take the lead
Having accompanied the lad to the dreadful forest only for him to desert thereafter

These two proverbs are rare to come by as they are not constantly common in quotidian communication. Sometimes Ọbasá engages in deconstruction of proverb in order to defamiliarize a well-known proverb to his audience. For instance, the example below illustrates the estrangement of a proverb:

Kò s’ágbà l’ọ́jà mó
Orí ọmọ gbogbo ńwọ!
Ògèdègèdè ọmọ kéré (Qbasá 1982: 82).

No elder in the market anymore
All infant heads are becoming crooked!
Just mere little children remaining

The proto-text of the proverb is, ạgbà kì i wà lọjá, kórí ọmọ tuntun wọ - the elders present in the market will not allow the heads of newly born babies to be crooked. The poet has not only veered off the usual rendition of the proverb, he has also embellished it with a noun phrase, Ògèdègèdè ọmọ kéré (Just mere little children remaining). We need to recall here that he has informed us that he is Ônkòwé Akéwì and Akéwì Ônkòwé (I am the poet’s scribe and I am the literate poet); therefore, he cashes in on his poetic license to rupture the proto-proverb for aesthetic purposes. He sometimes deploys structural deconstruction or sentential deconstruction, for instance, in
Ebi mbẹ léhin ayo,
Ayọ mbẹ léhin ebi. (Obasa 1982: 76).

Hunger comes after bounty
Bounty comes after hunger

he deliberately illustrates that life is static, it is just like a clock pendulum which swings to and fro, fro and to. There should not be disillusionment or whatever. This further affirms that Qbasá employs structural deconstruction to enhance meanings and understanding of his poems.

Qfọ (Incantation)

He creatively weaves qfọ, another rich traditional material, to his poems. Qfọ thrives on esoteric language in order to invoke spiritual assistance from celestial world. He mentions omi (water) three times in the example below through the form of semantic repetition, for calculus is a vital force that fans the ember of potency in qfọ

Omi òkun ki i gbẹ,
A ki i b’odó kó l’ójú;
Àbùdì ní t’omi,
Èìyẹ ki í fọ,
K’ó f’orí s’ògi,
Èèwọ Èdùmàrè. (Obasa 1982: 8).

The Sea does not dry
Scooping water from the river is never impactful
Scooped water leaves no traces
A soaring bird
Will never hit its head against a tree
Oló’dùmarè forbid it.

In the above excerpt, the semantic repetition here includes omi, òkun and odò. Generic name for the three lexical items is water. In the next example, esoteric language - which is referred to as “entirely a stock of centuries-old magic formulas” (Babalola 1966: vi) – dominates the excerpt:

Ile, òrigí, a k’odi s’igbà!
Àwon agba kóribójo
F’inu igbo ṣe ’lé,
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Ọkété f’orí èkíti se ’yèwù; (Obasa 1982: 15).
Building, firmly erected, with fortified outer walls backs the sands of time
The coiled agba ropes
Have their abode in the forest,
The giant rat inhabits the ant-hill as its abode

All the highlighted lexical items are magic words affirming the importance of building to different human and animal species. Thus, he concludes that:

*B’íló kò dùn,*
*B’ígbé n’ilú rí.*
Ilé san-mí dùn joyè lọ! (Obasa nd mimeograph:16)

If the household is devoid of happiness
The town looks deserted.
The home has proved beneficial to me is better than contesting for chieftaincy!

Anybody with home to live in; will at least, have a blissful life.

Oríki (Eulogy)
Obasa integrates orí kì in some of his works. This oral material may be in form of orí kì sòkì or orí kì àbíso, orí kì orí lè, orí kì bòròkinnì, orí kì ìlú, orí kì granka, etc. It is expedient for him to use orí kì ìlú (praise name of a town), especially when he has a poem titled, “Ìlú Ìlòrin”:

*Ilorin, ọpá n’íló Olódó*  
Agèré ni baba ilú;  
Ìlú tó báyí kò l’órò?  
Ìlú tó báyí kò l’Égun?  
EEśin l’Égun ibè!  
Ókò l’Orò ibè’ (Obasa 1945: 35).

Ilorin, the Paddle inhabits the abode of Owner-of- river  
Hunter’s drum is the father of all drums  
A town is as big as this without its Oro (bull-roarer)?  
A town is as big as this without its Masquerade?  
The Horse is the Masquerade therein!  
The Spear is the Oro therein
Ilorin is a town flourishing in Islamic religion and culture; as such, it will sound strange to find Ilorin to celebrate ‘Oro’ and ‘Egún’ festivals. He dwells on “distinctive attributes” of Ilorin (Akinyemi, 2017:198). As regards the orí kì orí lè, Obasanjo has orí kì of two lineages Ologbo’s and Oloponda, wherein he highlights that both lineages thrive on egungun dramaturgy as they belong to Ojè troupes. Outside this, he also has orí kì on Qtí (Liquor) and Erin (Elephant) to show that the Yoruba people are very creative as they have praise poems for living and non-living things. Let us demonstrate as follows:

Qtí, ati’mọ l’asọ!
Ṣàngó inú àgbáa!!
Oya inu un sago!!!
Ọmọ sì mì ní fìlà,
Kí mì tì q subù,
Ọmọ tè mì yè kè
Kí mì yí q gbiri-gbiri (Qbasanjo 1945: 36)

O Liquor, you make it impossible for a person to have adequate clothing!
Sango, dwelling inside the cask!!
Oya, dwelling inside the demijohn!!!
You take off my cap,
I will push you down,
Bend me double
I will make you roll on the ground. (Qlabimtan’s translation 1975:1052).

In the praise of liquor, Qbasanjo adopts different stylistic devices to illustrate types of imagery and perception that could be cut for different readers. According to Qlabimtan, Qtí (Liquor) is personified, while both Sàngó and Oya deities are employed metaphorically. This has shown that orí kì is frequently laden with stylistic devices that add aesthetic values to it. Personification is also featured in his poem, Erin (Elephant); he writes:

Erin f’ọla mí.
Erin f’ọla yan! (Obasa 1945: 12).

The Elephant breathes with dignity
The Elephant swaggers slowly and joyously with dignity

The characteristic manner of walking majestically is foregrounded in the Elephant orí kì with the aid of a literary trope, personification.
Ekúnyàwó (Nuptial Genre)

Ekúnyàwó is also known as epithalamium and it is one form of the rites of passage associated with marriage. In traditional Yoruba community, the bride is expected to render the nuptial to commend and appreciate her parents, siblings, relatives, guardians, friends, neighbors and sundry. While chanting, she will be emotive on account that she is about “to be uprooted permanently from her ancestral home to live with a man whose character she knows vaguely, to live with parent-in-law with whom she has hardly had any conversation, and with whom numerous other people in the new household whose ‘dos and don’ts’ she does not know” (Faniyi 1975:679). Obasa cashes in on his exposure to this nuptial chant as follows:

Ìkèwì mi kò jọ t’arà ọko
Ìkèwì mi kò jọ t’àgbè
Ekà ti mo bà ká ti kò bà pé
K’ègbé ó bọ̀ mì l’áso; (Obasa 1982: 2).

My chanting is not like that of a rustic
My chanting is not like that of a peasant farmer
Any counting I have counted and is incomplete,
My peer group should strip me naked;

This is an allusive reference to:

*Odo* kan odo kàn,
*Aní tí n bẹ̀ lààrín igbé*,
*Araà wa jù o gbọ̀dọ́ bù wè*;
*Erọ ẹ́yi n o gbọ̀dọ́ bù wè*;
*Emí Ayòkà débè, mo bù bọ̀jú*
*Ojuù mì wá dojú ogé*;
*Ìdí ì mì wá dì dí i ìlekè ọ̀,*
*Ìlekè, aní tè ẹ̀ bá kà ti o pé*;
*Èlègbé̀ mo mì*
*Gbogbo araà ‘lè, ẹ̀ mǎà kò mì lásò ọ̀* (Faniyi, 1975: 688-689; see also Ajibade 2019: 9).

A secret river
That flows in the jungle
Those who walk in front dare not drink out of it
Those who walk behind dare not bathe in it.
I, Ayoka, reach there and wash my face
At once, I change to a lovely virgin.
My waist is full of lovely beads
Count the beads, oh my dear friends
If any is missing, strip me naked……

Obasa has decided to parody this in his poem, “Îkíni” to show how sure he is as regards his creative ingenuity and capacity, just as a bride is sure of her virgo intacta with pride (Fadipe, 1970).

Elegic Verse
In traditional Yorùbá, when an aged dies, the family members accord the dead honor by rendering dirge to commemorate and mark the rites of passage that human transition from one stage of life to another is part of the ontological journey of man from earth and back to the world beyond, i.e. terrestrial plane to celestial plane. It is known as ọkú pípè in Oyo area or ịgbálá in Ègbá area. Òbasa has drawn from mode of ọkú pípè as follows:

B’ilé l’o bá wà, o w’òde,
Bí ‘yàrá l’o bá wà, o w’òdèdè;
B’èhinkùlé l’o bá wà,
O w’òkánkán ilé, (Òbasa 1982: 4).

Should you be indoors, kindly peep outside,
Should you be in the bedroom, please glimpse the passage;
Should you be at the backyard,
Please surface at the center of the compound

It is believed that the spirit of the dead will continue to hover around the household stead until the funeral rites are performed; hence, the chanters will invoke the spirit of the dead to come in and witness the burial rites being performed. This is the reason why we share Dejo Faniyi’s view (1975), that the act, “points to the belief of the Yorùbá people that their dead ancestors are still around” (683). However, Òbasa deviates from the traditional rendition format, by composing an elegy for his former editor who died:

Ọgá mi d’erù, ó ròrun-
Ọrùn Alákeji, Àrèmábo!
Ọrùn rere, Ọrùn rere!!! (Òbasa 1982: 3).
Poetic Exploration of Obasa’s Prolegomenous Poetry

My boss garnered all his, he transposed to heaven -
The Alakeji’s heaven, heaven of no return!
Blissful heaven, Blissful heaven!!!

He thereafter mentions the name of his boss:

Ọgbéni G.A Williams onínúure!
Editor àgbà n’Ilé-Èkó –
Ọun l’Ọgá mi (Obasa 1982: 3).

Mister G.A Williams a kind-hearted man
Chief Editor in Lagos –
He was my Boss

He does this to show he can still create his own original composition without leaning on the traditional material.

Àló Àpamò (Riddles)
Àló Àpamò, known as riddle, is poetic in form (Olatunji 1984). Akintunde Akinyemi (2015) has written extensively on àló àpamò wherein he considers Yorùbá in performance in terms of content and context, riddles vis-à-vis metaphor and creation of meaning. Riddle flourishes on “the elements of intellectual exercise and verbal skill” in order to resolve the verbal puzzle posed (Akinyemi 2015: 11). Obasa, who is quite familiar with the Yorùbá àló àpamò, recontextualises it in one of his poem, “Ikà-Èke”:

Èké ilé, èké ọde
Awọn l’àgádágodo
Nwọn kò f’ínú han ara wọn (Obasa 1934: 10).

The deceit within, the deceit without
They are the padlocks
Who are not faithful to each other

The above excerpt has stemmed from the body of an àló àpamò as demonstrated below:

Ọmọ iyá méta sùn,
Wọn kò finú han ara wọn

Three siblings from the same mother sleep together
They are not open to themselves

The solution to this riddle is *awùsá* (walnut). Obasa creatively foregrounds the tenor of the *àlọ̀ ̀pamó* while the vehicle *ọmọ iyá mèta* is expressly suppressed. This kind of deviation falls under the purview of postmodernism.

**Drum Language**

He deploys the drum language otherwise referred to as surrogate language vitalize his poetic creation and making it dialogic. This has been possible through the use of talking drum. According to Fatona Adewale (1979), “the most effective and popular among these non-verbal traditional media in Yoruba land today is the talking drum” for “The talking drum actually ‘talks’” (cited in Ajikobi, 2017:29). This has been made possible as a result of tonal flexibility of the three pitches of the voice – High, Mid and Low (Olateju, 1990). Obasa has only reenacted the performance of drum language in his trilogy. However, two examples will suffice for now.

*Ní gbangba ní gbangba,*
*Ní kedere, ní kedere;*  
*Ọrọ ikọkọ ní gbangba ní mbè,*  
*Ní gbangba* (Obasa 1982: 10).

Openly, openly  
Plainly, plainly  
A secret conversation will soon be revealed  
Openly

*Ěnu won l’òfà*  
*Ěnu won l’òje*  
*Ěké ọmọ aráiyé*  

Their mouth is six  
Their mouth is seven  
The hypocrite of man  
Their mouth is seven

It is important to state that the membranous sound draws its materials largely from Yorùbá proverbs as exhibited from the above excerpts. Thus, the products from the drum language are meta-texts: the proverb in
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proto-language (i.e., the speech form) is parodied by the drummer via the talking drum (membrano-phonous form) and then released into the air and to be deciphered by the audience. The intertextuality scheme is as shown:

\[
\text{PROTO -TEXT} \quad \Rightarrow \quad \text{META-TEXT}
\]

Proverb in its original form \quad Proverb transposed

This surrogate speech deployed is also known as paralinguistic code, and this often complements the verbal code.

**Tropes and Literary Linguistic features**

Here attention is on a number of tropes and linguistic features that are preponderance in his trilogy.

**Archaic words**

It is observed that linguistic anachronism is employed, as the poet intersperses his poems with non-quotidian words, perhaps to gain the attention of the audience, (in our own instance, reader), or to revive or imitate older forms of language. Leech (1969), refers to this style as archaism. For example,

\begin{align*}
\text{Ẹsìn kò nj’oko bí?} \\
\text{Kò s’óhun t’ó dùn l’Eyò… (Ọbasà 1982: 4).}
\end{align*}

Hope the horse is gracefully grazing?
There is nothing more pleasing at Eyò

The archaic word here is Eyò, and meaning Òyò. Adeleke (in press), says, “It is on record that it was only the Òyò … referred to as Eyò; Hio” as early as 1850. Besides, the salutation preceding, Kò s’óhun t’ó dùn l’Eyò, that is, \text{Ẹsìn kò nj’oko bí?} referred to the Alaafin of Òyò in the time past until it has recently been corrupted, although it has been refracted in the poem in line with Chomskyan Transformational Grammar wherein language is both finite and infinite. The surface structure of the sentence, here, is: \text{Kẹsìn ọba jẹ ọko pẹ́} (May the king’s horse graze for long).

It is also observed that very opaque archaic words are employed. For instance, Obasá deploys an archaic metonym as demonstrated below:

\begin{align*}
\text{Ẹnì tí yìò f’aso bòra,} \\
\text{Ki i dájó ógòdò l’èbi, (Ọbasà 1982: 4).}
\end{align*}
Whosoever will use coverlet
Will dare not apportion blame to ọgọdọ̀

In this instance, ọgọdọ̀, refers to the cotton wool fruits, of which end product is cloth. There is an Ifa verse that corroborates this: Ogbodo ọwú sòke odo; Payín keke s'oloko (The ripe cotton wool fruits up the river bank; invitingly, beckons on to the farmer). This same lexical item, ọgọdọ̀ has been personified as human attributes have been given to it, that is, payín keke, which implies laughter (rèrìn-ìn) in this instance, for, payín keke, could be interpreted as ‘gnashing of teeth’.

Repetition

It is difficult to define repetition, considered as a vital rhetorical strategy, which is deployed to emphasize, amplify, clarify, and create emotional effect among the readers. Repetition cuts across different disciplines, and not exclusive to literary field, as well as cutting across age, profession, and personality. For instance, “when children repeat, it is imitation, when brain-damaged people repeat, it is echolalia, when disfluent individuals repeat, it is stuttering, when novelists repeat, it is cohesion, when morphemes are repeated, it is reduplication, and when conversations are repeated, it is reiteration” (Aitchison1994; cited in Oyedeji 2019: 51). It is a common knowledge, as noted by Olatunji (1984), that Yoruba oral poetry flourishes in repetition, and this can be in form of lexico-structural, lexical and semantic. We encounter repetition in Òbasa’s trilogy in different forms. Lexical repetitions, do recur to create intensity demonstrated in “Aláṣejù”,

Alásejù! Aláṣesá!
Alásejù, Aláṣetè;
Aláṣejù, Aláṣebó
Aláṣejù, pére ní i tél! (Obasa 1982: 21).

He-who-is-overzealous! He-who-labors-in-vain!
He-who-is-overzealous, He-who-labors-undignified!
He-who-is-overzealous, He-who-labors-disgracefully
He-who-is-overzealous, swiftly, he loses his prestige!

The lexical item Aláṣejù has been repeated four times to reinforce the theme of and the characteristic features of an Aláṣejù as exhibited in the poem. Besides, there is a partial repetition, Aláṣe... in the poem which form the root morphemes for all other nominalized lexical items: Aláse + jù, Aláse
sá, Álase + té, Álase + bó. The bold lexical items are suffix morphemes in this instance. They are adverbs employed as complementary morphemes because they add more meanings to the verb sé as established in the word formation: oní + a sé + ju/sá/te/bó.

Qbasa engages in the use of the repetition of the last part of one unit of the sentence at the beginning of the next line.

A nsunkun Awugbo,
Awugbo ko sunkun ara rè?
A nja f’Oja, Oja ni:
Tani nja l’èhinkule on? (Obasa 1934: 21).

We are grieving Awugbo,
Awugbo does not grieve for herself?
We are fighting for Oja, Oja retorts:
Who are fighting at her backyard?

Notwithstanding the structural defect in line three, Awugbo, which ends the first line, still begins the second line, while Oja is repeated on the same line, the second Oja ought to be on line four. The device deployed here is a very common one in the Elizabethan poetry and it is known as anadiplosis. The essence of anadiplosis is to link lines, stanza and to reinforce the progression of ideas. Another poem, “Oní Ìjèkuje”, aptly demonstrates this:

Oni-i-je-ku-je o-e ẹ,
Oni-i-je-ku-je –ó;
O je ‘reke, je mọsa –a l’Ejinrin-
O je ‘reke, je mọsa –a l’Ejinrin-
L’ Ejinrin-o-onijekuje o e ẹ! (Obasa 1982: 27).

Glutton oh,
Glutton oh;
He consumed sugarcane, thereafter, ate mọsa at Ejinrin
He consumed sugarcane, thereafter, ate mọsa at Ejinrin
At Ejinrin, the glutton oh!

The noun phrase ending line four begins line five.
Line 63, Ṭe rùn Ṭba Koëkọyí-beèrè (Obasa 1982: 8), under the poem titled “Oore” is repeated creatively on page 22, as Ṭe rùn Koëkọyí-bírì under the poem, “Aláṣeju” (line 21). By the time the reader gets to lines 43 and 101, s/he now encounters Koëkọyí and Koëkọyí-bírì respectively. This style adopted
by Òbasa is known as foregrounding which manifests through a variety of means and this falls largely under Deviation and Repetition. We have four types of the lexical item Kòkò́yí. Three suffix morphemes foreground the deviation from the proto-lexical item; these are - Kòkò́yí-bèèrè, Kòkò-̀yi-̀bìrì and Kòkò́yí-bìrì. As revealed in these examples, the deviation manifests at the level of free morpheme + free morpheme, (Kòkò́yí+bèèrè, Kòkò-̀yi-̀bìrì and Kòkò́yí+bìrì); and, at the level of supra-segmental phonemes. A close examination shows that the tonemes on bi-̀rì are defamiliarized in order to foreground semantic deviation between the two suffix morphemes. The tones on bi-̀rì Low=High contrast bi-̀rì Low-Low. This tone contrasting is what Olatunji (1984) tags tonal counterpoint. In another breath, these three lexical items, Kòkò́yí beèrè, Kòkò-̀yi-̀bìrì and Kòkò́yí-̀bìrì can be aptly referred to as partial repetition since Kòkò́yí is the based form for all of these lexical items.

Another figure of repetition which features in Òbasa poems is epizeuxis, in this instance; such repetition has no intervening variables or lexemes. The apt example is drawn from the poem “Alà́igbò́ran”:

```
Aṣà́ n'kè́règbe, kè́règbe,
Bi ̀agbèbò adìè l'ákitàn;
Nítorí ̀ọ́ṣí́ọ́ ̀ọ́mo adíè
Ó ̀di ́fì-ri-́rì-́gbà-jà!
Ó ̀di ́fì-ri-́rì-́ṣà-ka!
Ó ̀di, ̀síó́! ̀síó́! ̀síó́!
'Un l'òmo adìè í peyà́rè́:
Ì́yá́ o! Ì́yá́ o! (Òbasa 1982: 16).
```

The hawk is spuffing, spuffs,
Just like a layer bird on the refuse ground;
All because of the chick sound
In furry flight, it grips!
In furry flight, it strikes!
Grievously it ends in ̀síó́! ̀síó́! ̀síó́!
That is how the chick beckons to its mother
Mother! Mother!

The endangered chick is beckoning to its mother to rescue it from the claws of the hawk. It is noted that epizeuxis occurs when somebody is apprehensive or agitated. Deliberately, the poet makes use of onomatopoeic ideophone to reveal the excruciation of the poor chick. See this other example below:
'Kòì gbó, kòì gbó', l’enu onilé,
‘Ó gbó’ l’enu ọlẹjọ:
Ebi ní i jẹ́ báun! (Obasa, 1982:72).

‘It is not ripe, it is not ripe’, uttered the host,
‘It is ripe’, responded the guest:
That’s hunger!

The host is telling his/her visitor not to harvest unripe farm products from his/her farm but because the visitor is hungry, s/he contradicts or counters the farm owner who is already agitated. In another instance, epizeuxis may be employed for caution as demonstrated below:

“Má jẹ̀ ẹ̀, má jẹ̀ ẹ̀,
Má jẹ̀ ẹ̀, má jẹ̀ ẹ̀ -
Má má jẹ̀ ẹ̀”! Obas 1945: 27).

“Don’t eat it, I will eat,
Don’t eat it, I will eat,
Don’t ever eat it”!

Thus, it is used to emphasize the warning that the unknown character should heed the warning given.

Before closing the discussion on repetition in Obas’s trilogy, it is important to state that the poet dotes many of his poems with full and partial repetitions. It is therefore important to illustrate with just two examples in this write up:

Ọ́ní, Ọ́yèkú bààrà
Ọ́lά, Ọ́yèkú bààrà (Obasa 1982: 43).

Today, Ọ́yèkú bààrà
Tomorrow, Ọ́yèkú bààrà

Both lexemes, Ọ́ní and Ọ́lά cause the partial repetition in the two sentences. Thus, Ọ́yèkú bààrà is the partial repetition. The excerpt below is sample of full repetition:

Àbá f’èyí sè ‘wọ
Ìwọ jẹ́ fẹ́? Ìwọ jẹ́ gba?
Should you be the one at the receiving end
Would you like it? Would you accept it?
Would you like it? Would you accept it?

This full repetition, here, is emotionally laden, hence, the regurgitation without any intervening lines. Equally, the poet transposes same lines from one poem to another as typified with the example below:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Esè ń se giri – giri} \\
\text{L'ode girigiri} \\
\text{Ofa nta firi-firi} \\
\text{Logun firi-firi} \\
\text{Ibọn ńró perepere} \\
\text{L'ohun, pere-pepe} (Ọbasa 1934: 8). \\
\end{align*}
\]

Feet are bustling
In the frontage of the hustle and bustle
The arrows are flying ceaselessly
In the fiery war
Guns are pumping ceaselessly
Over there, roaring ceaselessly

These same lines which appear under the poem, titled “Orin Agonnigan” are re-echoed in poem “Agonnigan” (Ọbasa 1945: 27). Ọbasa resorts to echo-lalia in order to connect the second poem having same thematic focus. It may be plausible to state here; that the poet might have enjoyed the puns soars up in the re-echoed lexemes: giri - giri, girigiri; firi-firi, firi-firi; perepere, perepere. The use of homonym firi-firi, firi-firi, unknown to Ọbasa, he has added grandeur to his creative works for the two homonyms have different semantic imports.

As regards the next excerpt earlier ingrained in poem “Orin Agonnigan” and later, transposed “Agonnigan”, the two lines have cultural connotation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{E wí f’álejò k’ó lọ} \\
\text{E fi ọsara b’agbo! (Ọbasa 1934: 9).} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Tell all strangers to steer off
Deep the brooms in the concoction
The cultural signification is premised on the Yoruba axiom: Ẹni mé jì ní Ọ̀ṣẹ̀lú (Two beings jointly govern the town); these are onílé (citizens) and ãlejo (denizens), where the ãlejo, is forbidden to participate in ritual rites of the indigenes of a given town, “even if s/he has had a theoretical exposure the traditions” (Adelèke 1995: 76). The lexical item, ṣaṣara, a metonym, is metaphorically employed to represent a bunch of brooms known as ọwọ, while agbo is indexically deployed to signify harmful charms. Needless to remind ourselves that ṣaṣara is also an archaic word.

**Parallelism**

The characteristics of parallelism include “juxtaposition of sentences having similar structure”, “matching of at least two lexical items in each structure”, “comparison between the juxtaposed sentences” “and a central idea expressed through complementary statements in the sentences” (Bamgbose, 1969:12; also see Olatunji 1984:25-30). Let us demonstrate with the example below:

Fílànì bímọ bí kò mu wàrà:
Ọmọ rè kóùn, ọmọ ólómọ ni!
Bí Gàmbàrí bímọ bí kò r’èrù:
Ọmọ rè kóùn, ọmọ ólómọ ni!
Bí Tápà bímọ bí kò kokùn:
Ọmọ rè kóùn, ọmọ ólómọ ni!
Sabarumọ bímọ kò sán wìlìkí?
Ọmọ rè kóùn, ọmọ ólómọ ni! (Ọbasa 1934:17).

If a Fílànì’ begat a child, and does not drink cow milk:
That child is not his; it is a child of another person!
If a Gàmbàrí begat a child, does not carry load (on its head)
That child is not his; it is a child of another person!
If a Nupe begat a child, and does not fish nets:
That child is not his; it is a child of another person!
A Gbagy/Gwari begat a child, and does not wrap leather apparel:
That child is not his; it is a child of another person!

The four highlighted lines are juxtaposed sentences having similar structure, while the four bold lexical items match one another. The intersperse sentence, Ọmọ rè kóùn, ọmọ ólómọ ni! is deliberately employed to emphasize the incongruous activities being engaged in by the offspring of different ethnic groups. Each cultural group has its innate tendencies; as such any cultural
traits, not in tune with the proto-characteristics of the given culture will put
doubt on the consanguinity of such a child. Perhaps, who knows, Qbasa may
be drawing attention of his readers to traditional DNA in existence before the
modern day one. The central idea being conveyed here is that any behavioral
traits not in tandem with known norms of any given culture is considered
alien or alienation.

It is equally observed that parallelism may occur without any intervening
sentence as revealed the example below:

Élùbọ̀ sègbodò rí,
Ìkúṣú s’aró rí,
Arúgbó s’oge rí... (Qbasa 1934:1-2).

The yam flour was a yam tuber earlier,
The waste product of indigo was proto-indigo,
The aged was once fashionable

This example is a perfect structural parallelism and suitable lexical matching
along both paradigmatic axis and syntagmatic axis. The lexical matching
along syntagmatic axis is as shown below:

Élùbọ̀ ➔ ègbodò
Ìkúṣú ↔ aró
Arúgbó ↔ oge

However, at the paradigmatic axis the lexical matching will be:

[Élùbọ̀]  [ ègbodò]
[Ìkúṣú]  [ aró ]
[Arúgbó]  [ oge]

We therefore agree with Olatunji (1984), that “the relation between the lex-
ical items in the sentences is equated in order to bring out the implication of
the comparison” namely, that nothing can exist in vacuo, as life is a process
and stage that is never static (20). The last example here,

Ajá ki í gbàgbé olóore Ẹkọ,
Ágùtàn kò gbàgbé eleriki bọ̀rẹ̀; (Qbasa 1982: 7).

A dog can never forget the provider of pap,
A sheep does not easily forget the provider of maize remnant;
shows that “in parallel sentences, the significant lexical items occur in identical places in the structure of the sentences as in the sentences that display partial lexico-structural repetition and tonal counterpoint” (Olatunji, 1984: 27). The partial lexico-structural repetition with Ajá and Aguntán; and, olóre èkọ and eléérí bòrò shows “area of lexical variation and also contrasting in tone as tonal counterpoint” (Olatunji 1984: 28; also see Bamgbose 1982).

Simile

Ołasa engages simile maker bi in his poetry to show overt comparison so as to show attributive similarities between two objects. See examples below:

Ọlọrun kò dá kanyinkanyin
Kó ni-ńla bí ẹsin; (Ołasa 1982: 9).

God did not create the ant
To be big as the horse

The size of kanyinkanyin (ant) is compared with the size of ẹsin (horse), but the attributive comparison intended here, is the pain being inflicted on man by both kanyinkanyin and ẹsin. It is important to allude to the Yoruba sayings: Bẹsin dá’ni, á tun ńgun (If a horse inflicts one with pains, one will still mount it), whereas with regard to the ant, its inflicted pain is more painful for it stings its victim unexpectedly. If it is seen, the victim or the sympathizer will snuff life out of it. In the next example, the inability of the guest to sleep off as a result of hunger makes him to flip his ears like that of a dog that is infected with fleas:

Ebi kò j’álejò ó sìn lọ
Ó ń gbọn’tí pàpà bí ajá! (Ołasa 1982: 72).

Hunger does not allow the guest to have deep sleep
S/he flips her/ his ears clangorously like a dog

Just as the fleas or tick will not allow the dog to rest so also is the hunger will not permit the hungry guest to have a blissful night rest.

Metaphor and Metonymy

Two other tropes that resonate in Ołasa poetry are metaphor and metonymy. Olatunji (1984), describes metaphor as “an object, action or situation described in a terminology proper to another” (51); while in case of metonymy,
it is, “a figure of speech that substitutes the name of a related object, person, or idea for the subject at hand” (Morner and Rausch 1997: 134). In the example below,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ebí kò pà́́ 'Mále} \\
\text{O l'oun kì́ i j'ayaá} \\
\text{Ebí pa Súlè, ó j'ó́bo! (Obasa 1982: 73).}
\end{align*}
\]

Hunger has not caught up with the Muslim faithful
He says he does not eat monkey meat
Hunger caught up with Sule, he ate monkey meat

the lexical item Súlè is metaphor for the Muslim body 'Mále, however, the name Súlè, is metonymically adopted as a substitution for 'Mále. In this instance, there is a substitution of one noun for another. As noted by Olatunji (1984), it is possible to submerge a metaphor without explicitly mentioning the analogical object. Let us consider this example in Obasa (1982: 23) Ọba Gëësi, Ọba tí i f'ọ́ba je (The king of England, the King that enthrones other kings)

The submerged metaphor here is Olódumáre (the Supreme Being), whose innumerable attributes include Ọba tí i f'ọ́ba je. Thus, the Ọba Gëësi has been given the Supreme Being’s attributes. This is so, because the British Government had colonized so many countries around the world, Nigeria inclusive. All the colonized countries were coerced to accord respect and pay homage to the sovereignty of the Queen or King of England, to the extent that they were forced to render the England’s national anthem below across colonies on the Empire Day for the Queen possessed a tremendous and awe-inspiring power:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Olorun, d' Ọba si} \\
\text{K'Ọba k’o pé́ titi} \\
\text{Dá Ọba si.} \\
\text{Jó, fun ni iségun} \\
\text{Irọra at’ ogo} \\
\text{K’ o jọba pé́ titi,} \\
\text{Dá Ọba si.}
\end{align*}
\]

God save our gracious Queen
Long live our noble Queen
God save the Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us,
God save the Queen!

It is interesting to note that an anonymous composer composed verses 1 and 2, while the verse 3 was composed by W E Hickson (1803-1870). The English version cited above is in the Yoruba Hymnal Book of Anglican Communion, Hymn 600. Suffice to say here that the Queen wielded her powers on the Church of England that was synonymous with Church Missionary Society. This song was regularly rendered on Empire Day. This narrative has been given just to give an insight to why the Queen has been compared with God directly.

**Personification**

The poet employs anthropomorphism. The device allows the poet to endow non-human “with human feelings and attributes” (Olatunji, 1984: 49) or “in which human characteristics and sensibilities are attributed to animals, plants, inanimate object, natural forces, or abstract ideas” (Mørner & Rausch 1997: 165). In this example:

Ekóló mì gbàgọ,
Inú mb’ádìéṣùùṣù (OBASE, 1982: 31).

The Earth worm gleefully moves around,
The fowl is seriously enraged

In the above excerpt, the Earth worm (ekólo) and the Fowl (adié), are personified. Two other animals – the Doe (ágbònrin) and the Tiger (ékùn) are also personified as revealed below:

Áṣà t’ágbònrin ìdá

The fashion being flaunted by the doe
Does not entice the Tiger!

They now take human attributes of showing off and jealousy.
Pun

Qbasa ingrains in his poetry pun also known as wordplay as exhibited in his poem “Aláṣejù” thus:

*Ọba Nàpó, Nagiri Napoleon*

Oba nà ‘kòkò, nà ṣasùn (Qbasa 1982: 23).

King Napo, stoutly built Napoleon
The King who strikes the pot as well as striking the cooking pot

The syllable nà has been used in different ways to bring about tonal contrast as well as creating new meanings among the following lexical items Nàpó, Nagiri, Napoleon, nà ‘kòkò, nà ṣasùn. The example above is phonologically based for the tones bring the new meanings.

Hyperbole

The poet sprinkles hyperbole in a number of his poems to evoke emotions of his readers; that is, “obvious, extravagant EXAGGERATION or overstatement, not intended to be taken literally, but used figuratively to create HUMOR or emphasis” (Morner and Rausch 1997: 102). For instance, in the example below

*Ọjọ ńlá m’ilú titi:*

B’ó ti ŋ m’ié
Bẹ̀ẹ́ ní ŋ m’oko (Qbasa 1934: 25)

Heavy rain shakes the whole town
Just as it shakes the homestead
So it shakes the farmland

The turbulent rain has simultaneously disrupted lives in town, homestead and farmland. The excerpts here appear to negate the Yorùbá axiom: bi Ìlà kò bá șe é gbé, à má a gbé Ìlalà – if Ìlá is not a safe haven, we can opt for Ìlalà). All the three abodes could not have been unsafe at the same time; Qbasa employs the hyperbole to illustrate the stormy rain. Thus, ìjọ ńlá m’ilú titi is equally a metaphor for storm. There is another hyperbole deployed by Obasa which will likely shock the sensibility of the reader:

*Oore tí a șe f’ádiẹ kò gbé;*

B’ó bán ọgún ọdún,
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Omitoro rè, a kàn sí ‘ni l’ẹnu! (Obasa 1982: 7).

Any good deed to the fowl is not in vain;
When it would be twenty years thereafter,
Its delicious soup will still be felt in the mouth

It is unimaginable that a fowl will be reared for 20 years before it would be ready for consumption. It is deployed to create humor.

Ideophones

Olabimtan (1975) has written extensively on ideophones, both onomatopoetic and phonaesthetic. These are very common in world languages, Yoruba language inclusive, for ideophones invoke ideas of sound. As regards onomatopoetic ideophone, the sound of the word employed mimics the sound of the object being named (Morner and Rausch 1997). The perfect illustration from Obasa’s poetry is: Ò òdi, síó! síó! síó! - Grievously it ends in síó! síó! síó! (Obasa 1982:45). The sound coming from the endangered chick is echoed so as to imitate the sound of the chick, which conveys sense to the reader. On the contrary, the phonaesthetic ideophone will create a mental image of the movement, intensity of action and surplus of a named object. The example underneath basically creates a mental image of the dawdling movement of the sago worms (palm weevil) at the dunghill: Níbi ọgòngò ńjó wúyéwúyé - Where the sago worm is dancing slowly (Obasa, 1982:15). It is necessary to stress it here that the English translation has made the poetic grandeur in the proto Yoruba lusterless.

Alliteration

It is observed that in some instances, alliteration appears in poems wherein there are repetitions of consonant sounds k & m be it at the beginning or within words as exhibited in the examples below:

A ki í kí ‘Kú ijèta’ (Obasa 1982: 4).
We do not re-appraise, ‘You had been splendid two days ago’

Máku kò m’awo, ó mbú Òpa,
Máku kò mò’wè, ó mbò ńjó (Obasa 1982: 7).

Maku is not a cultist he contends with the......
Maku does not know how to swim he jumps into the river
When will Maku not eventually die?

The poetic value of alliteration is for unity, emphasis, as well as for musical effect. This is visibly seen in the examples cited above.

**Allusion**

Allusion is made to fictional characters in the Yoruba folktales by Qbasá so as to refresh the memory of his readers as exemplified in the tale of “A ọ m’Erin j’Qba”

*Ogbón l’Ajàpá fi m’Erin
Bo wá sínú ílẹ;
L’Erin bá fi wá joyè* (Qbasá 1982: 60).

Through the use of native intelligence, the tortoise was able to bring the Elephant
Back home
That was how the Elephant was enthroned

This is a form of intertextuality employed to accentuate the thematic focus of the poem; in this instance, “Ogbón”.

**Employment of Foreign Words**

It is not strange that Qbasá’s poetry have an avalanche of foreign words, perhaps this must have borne out of his experience as journalist who must have come across many cultural groups. There are borrowed words from English, Hausa and Arabic languages. In some instances, has to domesticate some English words through eye and ear loans, while there is wholesale borrowing.

*Mààdí pe Kíʃìnà n’íjà* (Qbasá, 1982:26).

Without ceaseless pumping (Machine gun)
(Lord Kitchener) Mahdi challenged Kitchener to a battle (Lord Kitchener)
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*Kí l’a ti máa ṣe e?*
*A jí bùrèdí: (Qbasa, 1982: 48).*

What should we do?
To who stole bread

*Olówó Mótò ‘sọ́tì’*
*A-wa-mótò ń kọlé mọ́lé! (Qbasa, 1982:56).*

The motor seller made a loss
The chauffer is putting up building, upon building!

The following lexical items in italics are ear-loaned: Ọgẹ́sì (British), Sẹ̀n-Télí (St. Helena) and Kíšínà (Kitchener), while bùrèdí (bread), mótò (motor), sọ́tì (short) and Mààdị (Mahdi) are eye-loaned. From postcolonial perspective, Qbasa is writing back to the center as such he domesticates these foreign words. However, the wholesale borrowing is deliberately employed to give inkling as regards the source of a particular poem. A very good example is that of Mahdi Muhammad, a Nubia religious leader, whose followers were involved in the battle of Omdurman with Lord Kitchener. Also in the same poem, “Alàṣẹṣú”, the historical reference is made St. Helena Island where Napoleon Bonaparte was detained by the British Government in October 1815, and he died there on 5 May 1821 (see Qbasa 1982: 23).

The poet also borrowed from both Arabic and Hausa languages as reflected below. Example from Hausa language goes thus:

*Gàmbàrì, ọmọ kò-yó, kò-siré!*
*Gàmbàrì, ọmọ ‘Kàwó Àbínísì*
*Nwọn n í, ‘Fáří, fàří, fàří,*
*Ọ l’óun kò l’órí í fá (Qbasa 1982: 75).*

Gàmbàrí, he who when starving, will never play
Gàmbàrí, the offspring of ‘Kàwó Àbínísì
They ask him, “Scrape off the hairs, scrape off the hairs, scrape off the hairs
He says he will not scrape off the head hairs

The title of the poem is “Ebi”; because Qbasa wants to show the gravity of what hunger can cause, he picks on a character, Gàmbàrí, which is a corrupt name for the Hausa in Yorùbá language. As demonstrated in the poem, Qbasa employs two significations to show that the referent here is Hausa, namely: language i.e. Kàwó Àbínísì, and her itinerary barbing profession - fàří, fàří,
fári. This only affirms the Yorùba axiom: ebi kì i wọnú, kọrọ mì iràn wọ ọ̀ (a hungry man is an angry man). However, the poet consciously uses the loan words as deviation to arrest the attention of his readers. The metaphorical import of ebi is visible and impressive. With regard to the borrowing from Arabic language, he illustrates as follows:

Aláróò ní, Sàlám àlékù
Onílé ní ‘Sàlám, àlékù kan kò sí
Bí k’á j’ólóunj ẹk’ó jẹun! (Qbas, 1982: 80).

The Stranger greets, Sàlám àlékù (peace be unto you)
The House owner replies,’ there is nothing like, Sàlám, àlékù (peace unto you)
Than to allow the eater to eat its food

These excerpts are drawn from “Iyàn Èléfẹ́.” This is a caricature of Arabic language deliberately used to invoke laughter. This is a form of salutation in Arabic language meaning, ‘peace be unto you’ uttered by the stranger to alert the house owner of his/her arrival, but the house owner who is eating and is not prepared to share his or her food with the guest twists the meaning to mean, Sàlá ma’lé kù (Sàlá has left over of debris); and so, he or she cautions the in-coming stranger to let the eater eat his or her food in peace. The significance of this is accentuated in Wande Abimbola’s Òtua Mèjì:

Wútúwútù yáákí
Wútúwútù yaambèlé;…
Lékèélékee, ẹye ọmọle,
Bọ bà ṣí lórí ópọtọ,
A bà sórí órombò
A màa fi gbogbo ara kéwú éléwú kiri; (Wande Abimbola 1969: 96).

Wútúwútù yáákí
Wútúwútù yaambèlé;
The cattle Egret, the Muslim bird,
When it takes its flight from the fig tree,
It perches on the lemon tree,
And as such, it will continue to be parasite

In other words, the house owner takes the stranger as a parasite. Traditionally, the Muslim faithful relish eating sàráá̀ (free food), that is the reason they move from one destination to another: (Bọ bà ṣí lórí ópọtọ, A bà sórí
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It is not a surprise then that Obasa, intentionally, cashes on this Arabic phrase: *Bísímiláí*, to expose some gluttonous Muslims who delight in eating free food by deploying pun so as to rupture the original meaning of the Arabic phrase i.e. “In the name of God” in order to delight his audience/reader:

*Bísímiláí, Lau! Lau!
Lo d’ifá fun ‘Mòle
A b’èwù règèrè:
T’o faiyè gbogbo se ‘fèjè
Bisi ki i’là lásán!
Bí kò bá là ‘yán
A la kà, a là ‘kọ:
A la ‘bi, a l’amálà,
Orè onimòle l’èmi! (Obasa 1934: 9).

*Bísímiláí, in its totality! In its totality!
Divined for the Muslim faithful
Donning overflow garment:
Who always scavenge for free food
Gyre is not for fun!
If the Gyre is not for pounded yam
It will be for pasted yam flour, it will be for pap
He will break Kolanut lobes, he will eat pasted yam flour
I am an associate of the Muslim faithful

Apart from the wordplay deployed, to present the burlesque inherent in this Islamic tradition Obasa combines alliteration – B, K, L and assonance - là lásán, bá là, la kà, a là, la ‘bi, a l’amálà, along both paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, as well as employment of lexical matching - là ‘yán, la kà, a là ‘kọ - in one breath, so as portray the insatiable greed of a set of group of people within the Islamic religion.

Obasa openly parodizes explicitly the complexity of Arabic language to the non-native speaker to expose the interpreter of Qur’anic verses who takes delight in exploiting the naivety of the other adherents who are not verse in Qur’an thus in “Írèje tàbí Ògbufò Kèwú Ìbàdan”:

*A-la-mu, tàrà-ke fa
Fa-a - la rà buka”
O ni:
Ọlórùn yio mu ‘Ka șùgbôn*
“Alefi, Ba sin, Lamu
Nugunda, Mimu, Ra, Ja
O ni:
Eni t’a ba julọ l’ai irejẹ
Mo ju o lọ, mo rè o je
O ni:
“Lakum ó dinni kun,
Wali a dinni
Labi-kulubi,
O bi mọ tun ṣọbi bi
O ṣubú təbí ko i ṣubú? (Obasa 1934: 34).

“A-la-mu, tərə-ke-fa
Fa-a - la rà buka”
He says:
God will catch the evildoer but
“Alefi, Ba sin, Lamu
Nugunda, Mimu, Ra, Ja
He says:
Whosoever we are superior than, we cheat
I am your superior, I therefore cheat you
He says:
“Lakum ó dinni kun,
Wali a dinni
Continue to procreate
You begat a child and retrain the child
Has he stumbled or not

Obasa has domesticated via pastiche of the Arabic words in tandem with Yoruba style of writing to create humor. He places premium on ka which is the last syllable in the lexical item buka. The cleric interpreter is intentionally misleading the Muslim congregation to suit his own whims and caprices; hence, he capitalizes on ka to give corrupt interpretation as follows:

A-la-mu, tərə-ke-fa
Fa-a - la rà buka
Olorun yio mu ‘Ka sìgbọn

A-la-mu, tərə-ke-fa
Fa-a - la rà buka
God will catch the evildoer
Whereas, the interpretation ought to have been as follows: “A-la-mu, Tara-kefa, fa-a-la ra buka. Have you (o Muhammad) not seen how your Lord dealt with the possessors of the elephant” (Q’uran 105: 1).

Equally, the interpreter also tinkers with some of the Arabic alphabets: Alifi, Ba sin, Lamu / Nugunda, Mimu, Ra, Ja thereby, super imposing wrong meanings to his unwary Islamic believers by harping on, Ba …, Lamu … Mimu, Ra, Ja to convey the sense of oppression of the poor or the lowly. Lakum ‘dinni kun, Lakum ‘dinni kun, / Wali a dinni Wali a dinni is interpreted out of tune: Lakum … kun – procreate … continue…to procreate. The gullible Islamic believers will definitely take this interpretation hook line and sinker on the premise that Muslim faithful are allowed to marry more than one wife, which in excess will bring about procreation of more children. The untainted meaning should have been: “Lakum ‘dinni ku’n, wali a dinni. To you be your religion, and to me my religion - Islamic monotheism - (Q’uran, 109:6). Obasa has brought to the fore how religious interpreters have gulled so many religious faithful through the use of foreign languages.

**Aphesis**

It has also been observed that Obasa’s poetry is inundated with aphesis. In Linguistics, it is known as either elision or clipping. Clipping in lexicology is a process of shortening lexical items. Hardly, will one read his poem without seeing elision or clipping of a lexical item in which the initial syllable is omitted. For instance, in

‘Un ‘ó wọ ọ ká ‘gbo’

E’hìn ara rè ni i fi ọ̀ lè ’na (Obasa 1982: 41).

‘I ’ll drag you through the forest’

He will have to create the pathway with his back

the following syllables have been deleted yọ; ọ̀ gbọ́; ọ̀ na. The use of aphesis has given the lines colloquial coloration peculiar to oral community. In another instance, Obasa thus applies aphesis in order to create ambiguity in meaning as revealed below:

O b’éégún jà, o d’éégun,
O b’órisà jà, o sì d’órisà;
Ìgbà t’ó b’Olórun jà,
Gbangba l’O dá ọ́!
You wrestled with the masquerade, you defeated the masquerade
You wrestled with the gods, you defeated the gods
When you wrestled with God
Uncontestably, He defeated you!
Whosoever God has created.

The ambiguity is to task the mental capability and capacity of the reader
that a poem could be finite and still be infinite if perceived from Chomsky’s
Transformation Grammar. It is plausible for another to take the excerpts as
follows:

O b’égún jà, o d’éégun
O b’órisà jà, o si d’órisà;
Igbà t’ó b’Olórun jà
Gbanga l’O dà o!
Eni Olórun dá

You engaged in fisticuffs with the masquerade,
you became the alter-ego of the
masquerade
You engaged in fisticuffs with the gods,
you became the alter-ego of the gods
When you engaged the Supreme Being in fisticuffs
Openly, He created you
Whosoever God has created

The multiple meanings generated are always premised on indeterminacy
which is deeply hinged on the Reader-Response or Reception theory. Notwith-
standing this strategic indeterminacy, the central semantic idea being passed
here is that, you do not engage your chi or your élédaá in fight. The last phrase
is incomplete, the full rendition is:

Eni Olórun dá;
Kò șé f’ara wé

Whosoever God has created
You dare not mime
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Little wonder then that Olabode (2008), says that, “The way language is contrived in poetic arts confirms that it allows for ambiguity, paradoxes, and some other irrational uses of language” (230).

Thus, aphesis adds grandeur to poems; because the excess of clipping or elision is to economize in speaking, writing, and space in order to create memorability in artistic creation.

**Lexical Choice and Selection**

A poet of note pays conscious attention to selection or choice of words in line with the thematic preoccupation of his or her poems so as to make his/her creative works memorable. Right diction and appropriate register will not only enhance the poetic cadence, it will also reveal the artistic ingenuity of the poet. There are so many examples, an example dwelling on flora and fauna will suffice for this essay:

Àwọn ejò kékéké
Un l’ológun le gbe!
Ọka mbè n’igbó,
Ológun kò gbe e;
Ere mbè n’igbó
Oloógun kò gbé e
Agbaadu mbè n’igbó,
Ológun kò gbé e
Sèbè mbè n’igbó,
Ológun kò gbé e
Abirusooro m bè n’igbó
Oloógun kò gbé e
Paramòlé m bè n’igbó
Oloógun kò gbé e
Gun-nte mbè n’gbó
Ológun kò gbé e
Gbágbá Fuù fuù mbe n’gbó
Ológun kò gbé e (Obasa 1945: 31).

Only small snakes
That the snake charmers can carry
Gaboon viper inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
Royal Python inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
The small cobra inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
The Spitting cobra inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
The Green Tree snake inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
The Night Adder inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
\textit{Gun-nte} inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it
The Puff Adder inhabits the forest
The snake charmers dare not carry it

Obasa titles this poem “\textit{Awọn Ejo}” and thus enlists the names of different snakes with their actual names - \textit{Ọka}, \textit{Agbaadu}, \textit{Sèbé}, \textit{Abiruṣọоро}, \textit{Paramọ̀lẹ}, \textit{Gun-nte}, \textit{Ere} - without depending on the generic name \textit{ejo}. Even, he knows their characteristic features; hence, he informs his readers that only small snakes could be carried about by the snake charmers. Since Obasa is very verse in Yorùbá proverbs, it is logical to say that he could have elicited his information from them. For instance, the following proverbs give insight to the inherent danger associate with snakes:

(i) \begin{align*}
\text{Mónámóná lọọ̀gùn lẹ gbé} \\
\text{Oloọ̀gùn tó gbé paramọ̀lẹ} \\
\text{Yoó kàn yonu}
\end{align*}
It is only the python the snake charmer can play with
Any charmer who ventures to carry the night adder
Will find himself to blame

(ii) \begin{align*}
\text{Eni tóká niru} \\
\text{Yoó kàn yonu}
\end{align*}
Whosoever tramples on the tail of gaboon viper
Will find himself to blame

These proverbs demonstrate that some snakes are very poisonous as shown in the poem above. This skillful selection of apt lexical items for different poems has shown Obasa as a wordsmith of grand style.
Conclusion

Demetrius’ treatise on style reveals three distinct styles – grand, plain and forceful - that make the works of arts sublime and grandeur are profoundly found in the trilogy of Obasa; thus, his poetry is fresh, insightful, and enduring in the heart of his reader(s). Obasa has exploited and explored Yoruba language to its fullest by deploying linguistic features and literary devices suitable and memorable for all his poems. Obasa displays great thought, strong emotion, noble diction, dignified word arrangement that all add up to poetic grandeur par excellence. His works transcend mere aping of traditional materials as Obasa’s poems are replete with deviation.

References


