Didacticism and Philosophical Tenets in Obasa’s Poetry

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Abstract
Projection and promotion of Yoruba cultural ideology and philosophy are motifs in D.A. Obasa’s poetry. As an ingenious poet, Obasa adroitly blends the tropes of didacticism and philosophical tenets in his poetry. Existing works on his poetry have explored the thematic preoccupations of his poems, as well as their forms and stylistic features. However, little attention has been paid to the correlation between didacticism and philosophy in his poetry. This essay, therefore, identifies the basic tenets of philosophy in the form of ethical, metaphysical, and epistemological aspects of Yoruba philosophy in Obasa’s poetry with a view to establishing the way Yoruba philosophy is used to teach morals in the poems. Obasa’s philosophical inclinations are anchored on Yoruba philosophy. Some of the philosophical tenets identified are ethical issues, like obedience, truth, hospitality, and being respectful. Virtues are extolled, while vices, like jealousy, pride, disobedience, and deceit are condemned. The metaphysical beliefs of the Yoruba in death, destiny, and life after death, as well as the belief in the Supreme Being (Olodumare) are also discussed. The epistemological values of Yoruba communal system and iwà, and omolúàbí concept are also entrenched in Obasa’s poetry. It is also revealed that satirical elements, especially humor, are used to project Yoruba philosophical belief in order to imbue the reader with moral rectitude. There is a close link between Obasa’s poetry and the Yoruba sociocultural milieu. The essence of didacticism and philosophical tenet in his poems is to advance the social development of the Yoruba society and the larger Nigerian society.
Introduction

The works of Ọbasá, a veteran Yorùbá poet, have been the focus of literary critics. Notable among the critics are Ọlabimtan (1974, 1975), Ogunsina (1991), and Akinyemi (1987; 1991; 2017). All the three scholars have examined the issues of form, style, and themes in Ọbasá’s poetry. It has been established that Obasa aims at a systematic collection of Yoruba traditional sayings in order to bring to the fore Yoruba beliefs and thoughts for preservation and documentation (Akinyemi 2017). Citing Babalola and Gerard (1971), Akinyemi (2017) emphasizes the fact that through Ọbasá’s poems the inter-relationship between the traditional beliefs and writing in the modern era has been established. Ọlabimtan (1975) avers that “Ọbasá’s greatness consists in his ability to assemble traditional sayings…which embody the traditional wisdom of Yoruba society” (1032). Many of the Yoruba traditional sayings which Ọbasá assembled in his poems are products of the Yoruba philosophy, hence, Ọbasá sub-titled his poetry collection “Yorùbá Philosophy.” According to Akinyemi (2017), Ọbasá aims at popularizing Yoruba cultural values. He argues that:

Ọbasá deserves credit for popularizing a vision of poetry that assigns it definite social value, especially in its utility in instructing, correcting and influencing conduct. This implies that Ọbasá is placed on an elevated moral platform that enables him to use his poetry to inform, correct and educate his readers. This is exemplified by unique didactic precepts from Yoruba oral literature inscribed in many Ọbasá’s composition … (9-10)

The above position corroborates Olatunji’s (1982) claims that entertainment and didacticism are central to poetry in Ọbasá’s era. Specifically, he states that “didacticism syndrome” started with poetry of Sowande (Sóbọ Aróbiodu), Ọbasá, Ajísafe and Ọdúnjo (24). The didacticism syndrome, according to Olatunji, could be traced to missionary education, which aimed at moralizing. Trends in the Yoruba creative writings at inception affirm the above opinion, hence, earlier Yoruba writers pre-occupied their works with didactic elements.

It could be deduced from the above position that both Yoruba traditional sayings assembled by Ọbasá and his own original creation, which formed his poetry, are composed for didacticism. Using an eclectic approach combining philosophical and sociological insights, this paper, therefore, examines the philosophical tenets in Ọbasá’s poems. It discusses the didactic import of Ọbasá’s philosophical disposition with a view to determine the correlation
between poetry and philosophy as well as the correlation between the identified philosophical tenets and didactic elements projected in the poems.

**Obasa: A Philosopher-poet**

The moral question as it affects social, political and human development, is the focus of poems (Olabimtan 1988). Even in the traditional Yoruba setting, the desire to have good governance, peace, harmony, and sustainable development are the focal points on which the traditional poems are composed and performed (Adeleke, 2007; Adejumo, 2008; 2017). Yoruba philosophical thoughts and beliefs are the pivot on which these traditional poems rest. Obasa poems are rich in Yoruba worldview. Aspects of global philosophy are also projected in his poems. The three aspects discussed here are metaphysics, ethics and epistemology. However, aspect of ethics and moral values are preponderant in his poems.

**Philosophical Issues in Obasa’s Poetry**

Metaphysics, a branch of philosophy that addresses the issue of being and existence as well as reality of things, is projected in Obasa’s poems. Some of the metaphysical concepts identified are the Yorùbá belief in the Supreme Being (Olodumare) destiny (àyànmo/àkúnlèyàn), death (ikú) and life after death (aṣeyinwáyé). In four of his poems, “Oore,” “Ife Ètè,” “Oró èhin,” and “Èrè-Iṣẹ,” the nature and attributes of Olodumare are revealed. The Supreme Being is revealed as the giver of life and the one who sees everything and who will reward human deeds here on earth:

**Excerpt I**

*Ọlọ́run nii sèsan*
Igbá tá a bá n wín ká
Ọun làá fi sán ọkà.
*Ọlọ́run Òba kókóyí bèèrè*
Ọun lolórí Eléèésù
*Ọun lọba Èlésan* (Obasá1927: 8).

God is the rewardeer
The measure that we used to measure (for others)
It is the same that will be used to measure back to us
God, the unquestionable King
Is the master thrift collector
He is the Avenger
The above belief is further emphasised in “Erè Isẹ’’:

Excerpt II

_Ọlọrun lăilăi ní i ti i pé_
_Kí o tó mú ní_
_Ọlọrun tiwọyí kò pé_
_Esin ní nún gbèjá_
_Ẹni tá ò lè mú_
_Ọlọrun là á fí fún!_
_Ká fijà Fọlọrun jà_
_Ká fowó ẹlérán._ (Ọbasá1934:16).

The God of olden days
Takes time before he avenges
The God of nowadays is quick in action
He avenges in a lightning speed
Somebody who is more powerful than one
Should be handed over to God
Hand over your battle to God
And stand aloof.

The attributes of God as King in Excerpts I & II, are in line with the Yoruba worldview on the supremacy of the institution of _ọbaship_. _Ọba_, the Yoruba king, is a powerful and respected leader. He is referred to as _kábiyèsí- ká-bí-í-ò-sí_. (No-one-can-question-his-acts-and-doings). In the Yoruba belief, handing over one’s life challenges to Olodumare will yield a more profitable result than finding human solutions to the challenges. The philosophical question that may come to mind now is: Why is it more dangerous for a villain to be handed to God? One, God is the Supreme Creator; he created all humans; he knows their weaknesses and strengths; and it is his life that humans are using to breathe. He knows best to punish an offender and the degree of punishment to be awarded to the offender. Nobody can query him. If a victim decides to avenge himself it may even get him/her in trouble. In order not to get oneself in trouble while avenging for oneself, it is better to allow God’s judgment to prevail. The didactic import of God’s existence and his Supremacy in the affairs of man is depicted in the last portion of Excerpt II: _Ká fijà fọlọrun jà, ká fowó ẹlérán_ because He (Olodumare) will avenge man of his enemies more than what man could do. The above position is in tandem with Olajide’s (2012) view of Olodumare:
The existence of God (Olódùmàre or Àjàlọ́run) as he is usually called is taken for granted as given. He is conceived of as the giver of life, the sustainer of the universe and the ultimate source of which man and all other things must return... God is conceived of as the greater and source of being. He therefore made man (37).

God as the source of being is also paramount in the poetry of Obasa. In “Ìkà-Èké” he highlights how God created all things and with his omniscient attributes he decided to measure the extent of innate ability, resistance, power, and physiology he gave to all his creation.

Excerpt III
Olórun kò dá kainkanyin
Kó ní ñlá bí ẹsìn
Àtapa ní i bá ta ní
Àtapa ní i bá tànìyàn!...
Adię i bá lókó
Ibá jàkitàn ẹ níkan!...
Ìmàdò i bá ẹ bí èlèdè
A bá’lú jé,
Èrù i bá ọja Ènìa i bá ti kuù kan ọsọ! (Obasa 1927:9).

God did not create the ant
To be as big as the horse
It would have kicked and trample one to death
It would have kicked and trampled human beings to death!
Had it been that the hen has a hoe
It would have dealt brutally with the dunghill
Had it been that wild boar is like the pig
The city would have been destroyed
If a slave is enthroned as a king
He would have ruined the city!

The above excerpt, clearly reveals that God, with his supreme power, has set order in the world. Through his omniscient power, he knows the frailty of his beings and he has carefully set a control in order to set a social order that will promote peace and tranquility. For instance, as small as the ant is, its venom is painful. One would now begin to imagine if the ant had been bigger than the way it is, it would have been dangerous and harmful. Also, the tiny feet given to the hen is used to scavenge the dunghill, while the wild boar deals with the mud much more than the pig. In essence, the control of power and
power relation is in the hand of the invisible and Supreme God who created all humans. The didactic import of this is that whoever is bequeathed with a measure of power should use it right. In concluding the poem Òbasà says:

Excerpt IV

Ikà kò jè paramọ̀lẹ̀ ó ṣàgbà
A níkà nínú b’ì baakà!
A-ta-kóró wọnú ń àdó
ọmọ rẹ̀ ń kò?
Aya rẹ̀ ńkó?
Àgbà tó gbìèbú ikà
Lóri ọmọ rẹ̀ ní yìò hùlè...
Eni tí ń ṣe rere
Kó múra sí rere i ṣe;
Eni tí ń sìkà
Kó máa ṣeèkà ìṣò;
Atoore, àtiìkà
Ọkan ki ń gbé! (Obasa 1927: 12).

Evil did not allow viper (night-adder) to grow
The man that is callous as the Mule
I am- armed with metaphysical power!
Are your children also armed?
Is your wife armed?
An elderly person that plants wickedness
His children shall harvest evil
If you are virtuous
Continue to be virtuous
If you are wicked
Continue in wickedness
Both virtues and vices
Shall be rewarded!

Another existence of being is also deduced from Excerpt IV above. Human beings are created by Olodumare, but humans also have a part to play in making sure that they exist for long. Hence, the issue of marriage. In the Yoruba worldview, anyone who does not have children is regarded as a failure in life. Hence, one of the things the Yoruba desire from Òrùnlà, the witness of every human destiny, is children. Olatunji (1984:118) aptly captures the above view, he asserts that “Desire for children appears to be the most recurrent in èṣè Ifá, for the Yorùbá consider childlessness a misfortune, and children
are regarded as a major part of a man’s greatness and success” (118). Obasá’s poem corroborates the above view when he says for human to exist he/she has to have his/her own children:

Excerpt V
Ọmọ dá’yá rè lójú
Bí a bá lọ s’ájó
Bí á kọ sí nínú ilé
Ọmọ eni, á wo’lé de ni ...
Békọ bá kú kán
Ọmọ eni un la á fún un jẹ!
Abiamọ kí i kú, Ẹ’hin níi fi i t’òpó! (Obasá 1934:18).

Three philosophical thoughts will be discussed from Excerpts IV and V. One is the importance attached to procreation and bearing of children among the Yoruba. To the Yoruba, anybody that has a child is believed to exist forever; hence the prayer ò ò níí kú láéláé; (you shall never die). A person is believed to be in existence for life, if he or she has children that live after him/her; hence the saying abiamọ kí i kú (A mother never dies) in Excerpt V.

Excerpt IV shows that it will be disastrous that after all the desire to have children in order to prolong one’s existence in life, what one now bequeaths to one’s child is curse and evil, because àgbà tó gbin ìkà, orí ọmọ rè ni yóò hù lé (an elderly that planted evil, his children shall harvest wickedness). If this is the case, the essence of existence of such a person is already jeopardised. The didactic significance of this excerpt is that for human to really exist, they must conform to what is acceptable as “good” always.

The second is the fact that man is on earth to assist God in re-creation of man through procreation. However, as man’s creation and re-creation continue, death is imminent. Here, àjò (journey), within the context of the poem can mean physical travelling or eternal travelling because, as God is the giver of life, he is also the “ultimate source to which man and all other things must return.” If man now lives with this consciousness, it is pertinent to conform
to what is regarded as good always and train one’s children in a way that they will keep one’s existence for life. This is encapsulated in the poem “Àkẹjú and Òmúgo”:

Excerpt VI

Gọngosù Edidàré
Èni tó bímọ ti kò gbón
Iná jọ o tèbí ko jọ o?
A ni “ọmọ rè kò gbón”
O ni kí ó sa ma kú”
Kíni ni hà á p’ọmọ
Bí kò šàgọ
Orí ń ọmọ kò lè wí
Inú ń run ọmọ kò lè sọ
À ní-Níbo ni ń dùn ọ?
Ọmọ ń sunkún sá...
Gbáwo ọmọ ń ní kú? (Obasá 1934: 19).

A fool of Edidare
Whoever bore an unwise child
Is he doomed or not?
We say your child is unwise
You responded that he should not die
What kills a child like lack of wisdom
A child is suffering of headache
He could not express himself
He is suffering of stomach ache he kept mute
We enquired from him of the actual place he is suffering pain
He keeps on weeping
Will the child not die?

The following excerpt is an emphasis of the essence of wisdom and child’s proper upbringing.

Excerpt VII

Bọmọ èni kò bá gbón
A kí i felo rán an níse
Baba ni bi e ti n lọ yií,
Bí ẹ bá disú tán
Kí ẹ tan ná ran’ba oko
If a child is unwise
Do not speak irony to him when sending him on errand.
Father said ‘As you are going’
After tying the yams
Make sure you set the barn on fire
A fool that walks with his intestine
He tied the yams
And set the barn on fire
And after a great pandemonium
The question was asked ‘why did you set the barn on fire?”
He responded “it was father’s instruction that
I should set the barn on fire after tying the yam”.
If your child is not wise
Don’t speak to him ironically!

From excerpt VII above, the vivid illustration of the behavior of a foolish child is to emphasis the essence of training a child properly, in order to affirm the Yoruba philosophy of real existence. The action of the unwise child in the excerpt above could lead to both material and spiritual death and this may end one’s existence physically and eternally. The peak of the didacticism in the excerpt is the last line. It could be averred that different strokes should be for different people. Parents should nurture their children in wisdom. They should take cognizance of the level of knowledge and experiences of their children.

The third philosophical issue revealed in Excerpt V is the issue of death. This is further exemplified in his poem titled “Ikú.”

Excerpt VIII
Aiye lajò, Òrun nilé
Bí a bá kú láíyé
A ó ó ròrun re simi
Àsikò la ó mò
Ọmọdẹ a máa kú
Àgbà a rinrin a sọnù
Kò sẹni tikú kò lè kàn (Qbasá 1934: 22).

The world is a journey, heaven is our home
If we die on earth
We shall go and rest in heaven
It’s just that nobody knows the time of his/her death
Young children die
Adults also die
Death is inescapable

The above excerpt aptly explains the Yoruba existential belief in death as an inevitable end of man, as all humans will return to Olodumare the giver of life. It is also revealed that death is not limited to the elderly, anybody can die at any time. The question of dying at a younger age or at old age, is also answered in the same poem, as seen below:

Excerpt IX
Ṣákùnlè yàn oun lâdáyé rí
Ìgbéyín ayé kò lu mò (Qbasá 1934: 22).

That which is chosen kneeling down
Is what one is seeing on earth
Nobody knows the end of the world.

The above excerpt is in line with the Yoruba belief in destiny. According to Abimbola (1975) and Qlatunji (1984), and other African Philosophers, like Olajide (2012) and Bamikole (2016), man’s success, failure, exploit on earth and death have been predestined by the person’s orí (the inner-being). Orí is a detailed blueprint of one’s earthly life till death. If a person chose a good head (inner-being) from Àjálá Alámò (Abimbola 1975) while coming to earth, such a person will do well on earth. But if a person chose a bad inner-being such a person will not prosper on earth. This explains why somebody can die young and another person can die at old age; it is what they chose while kneeling to receive their destiny before birth. This metaphysical doctrine of determinism is also portrayed in Qbasá’s poem titled “Ēwà”:

Excerpts X
Didacticism and Philosophical Tenets in Obasa’s Poetry

*Ìwà lewà*
*Mórí lọ*
*Má mɛwà lọ*
Ôòjọ lewà á bọ*
*Orí ní i bá ni gbélé ọkọ.* (Obasá 1945: 24).

Character is beauty
Go with your inner being
Do not go with your beauty
Beauty will return the same day
While your inner being will
Ever remain with one in one’s matrimonial home

Within the framework of Yoruba philosophy as portrayed in Ifa literary corpus, it is only one’s orí (the inner being) that can accompany one on one’s farthest journey in life and will never forsake one. This is as portrayed in Odù Ògúná Méji:

*Ọrùnmìlà ló dòdèdè ní bẹrẹ*
*Ifá, mo ní ’Ta ló tó Alásàán bá rokun?*
*Orí ńkan*
*Ló’tó Alásàán bá ròkun*
*Bí mo bá lówó lɔwɔ*
*Orí ní ń ó rò fún*
*Orí i mi iwo ní*
*Bí mo bá bímọ láyé*
*Orí ní ń ó rò fún*
*Orí i mi iwo ní*
*Ire gbogbo ń mo bá ní láyé*

Orùnmilà said that on entering a room
One stoops down at the doorway
Ifa, the question is ‘who among the
gods can accompany his devotee
On a distant journey over the seas
Without turning back?
It is Ori alone
Who can accompany his devotee
To any place without turning back
If I have money
It is my Ori I will praise
My Ori, it is you
If I have children on earth
It is my Ori to whom I will
Give the praise
My Ori, it is you
All good things I have on earth
It is Ori I will praise
My Ori, it is you. (Abimbola's translation)

According to Yoruba belief and as portrayed in Excerpts IX and X above, ori is unalterable and irrevocable. However, some scholars hold contrary opinion, arguing that one’s destiny may be altered. As noted by Idowu (1962) and Makinde (1983) there are different ways in which one’s destiny may be altered. These are highlighted in Olajide (2012) as follows:

(a) Appealing to Orunmila the arch-divinity can change one’s destiny from bad to good.
(b) Ọmọ ará-ayé, the children of the world, known as earthly re-creation can change one’s destiny from good to bad.
(c) One’s own unpleasant character (attitude) like pride, laziness, impatience, inordinate ambition can change one’s destiny from good to bad.
(d) Becoming a devotee of Ọrúnmílà can change one character from bad to good.
(e) One’s destiny may be changed to worse by the machinations of the ‘ẹnikejì’ one’s heavenly replica from good to bad (146-147).

It is obvious from Ọbasá’s poetry that he does not get involved in the argument of whether a destiny can change or not. However, in his presentation of ethical issues, one can deduce that he also is of the opinion that one’s unpleasant character can bring misfortune unto one, and even one’s children. A father that is virtuous automatically extends the benefits of “good life” his children, while a father that embraces wickedness will also bring evil upon his children. The poet also projected hospitality, kindness, respect for elders, truthfulness, patience, and hard work in his poems. Equally, he condemns vices like lying, adultery, pride, laziness, covetousness, theft, envy, thuggery, and disobedience. It could be averred that one of the things central to Ọbasá’s poetry is the moral values as well as their relation to the existent of society. For instance, in the poem titled “Oore”, humans are encouraged to do good, because failure to be good will have negative effect on the members of their families.
In “Òítítọ”, the poet also admonishes people to be truthful. The negative impact of getting oneself involved in some vices, like pride and overdoing things is seen in “Alâṣejù”, where he discusses the power tussle between the British government and the Germans during the second World War.

One thing that is glaring is that many of the moral values raised in Òbasá’s poem fall within the ambit of Yoruba philosophy of ìwà ोmọlùàbí. In one of his poems, using external coloration from Ifa literary corpus, he extols ìwà rere (good character) above other things:

Excerpt XI
Ìwà rere lèṣò̀ènia
A-bá- mu-râgbá- tagbá
Ìwà, iwà là ń wá, iwà...
Ọmọ to dàra tí kò níwà
Ọmọ-lángidi ni!
Bobinrin dára bí Ègbárá
Bí kò níwà
Ọmọ lángidi ni!
B’ökùnrin sunwòn, sunwòn
Bí eja inú omi
Bí kò níwà rere
Ọmọ lángidi ni!
B’enia joba, bí kò níwà
Ọmọ lángidi ni! (Òbasá 1934: 12).

Good character is human’s beauty
It is good character we are looking for
A beautiful child without character
Is good for nothing
A lady as beautiful as a beautiful rat
Without characteer
Is good for nothing
A man may be very handsome
Like a fish in the river
If he is without good character
He is good for nothing
If a man is crowned as an Òba
And is without good character
He is good for nothing!
We can argue from the above excerpt that Òbasá recommends the exhibition of good character to every member of society. Children and adults, males and females, as well as rulers and the ruled. In essence, in discussing the issue of Yoruba philosophy about character, the various components of the society are addressed in his poem. Òbasá believes in the fact that the true existence of each individual in the society could be found when people relate in moral uprightness with one another. In essence, he is an advocate of everybody having a sense of community in all that is done. If people have a communal sense they will walk in truth, kindness, and hospitality.

Above all, Òbasá is also an advocate of the African family. The communal philosophy of what Mbiti (1969) refers to as “I am because we are and since we are therefore I am” (108) drive the ethical issues in his poems. Therefore, in many of his poems, Òbasá contends that human does not suffer the outcome of his/her attitude and character alone. Òbasá’s philosophical position is in tandem with Sartre’s (1975) view:

Thus the man who becomes aware of himself through the cogito also perceives others, and he perceives them as a condition of his own existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything unless others recognize it as such. In order to get any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person. The other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to my knowledge about myself (37-38).

The above position can be vividly seen in Òbasá view in “Àwọn Ejò”, where he encourages working in unity:

Excerpt XII
Ìbèrù kò jé
Ká tejò mọlẹ̀
Bí ẹ́ ti ń rejọ tí ń sá
Bẹ́l Èjọ ń sá pamo!
Ojú tò bà rọ
Un na ni rorẹ i sọ!
Sè nj Ejọ niyà
Qkan ni ni, ẹ̀ pà á
Ọun ni yì, ẹ̀ pà á
Tani ha jẹ dùrò?
Báwọn Sèbè tèle wọn
Káwon Òjòlá má wọ̀ bọ̀ lèhin
Tani ha jẹ dùrò? (Óbasá 1945: 31).
Fear prevents people from
Trampling on snakes
As the man that spots snakes
Is fearful
So, the snake also is hiding
It is a soft face
That breeds pimples!
The snake suffers because it moves alone
Here is a snake, let’s kill it
Here is another one, let’s kill it
Who can dare to confront snakes in their multitudes?
Many snakes, with cape-cobra (spit-snake) coming in front
And python-constrictor coming behind,
Who can wait to confront?

The moral lesson in the above excerpt is unity in diversity. Instead of being individualistic, the communal philosophy of the Yoruba should be the watchword. This will have good implications for the growth of Nigeria as a whole and it will promote sustainable development.

Through the use of satire and humor, Obasa’ also addresses the philosophy of harmonious living. For instance, Obasá is not a Muslim but he uses his poem to teach religious tolerance, in “Onímọ̀le”:

Excerpts XIII
*Bísimiláì, Lau! Lau!*
*Lo difá fún Mọlé*
*Abèwè règè jẹ!*
*T’ó faiyé gbogbo sè fẹ jẹ*
*Bísí ki ṣú láṣán!*
*Ọrẹ Onímọ̀le l’èmi.* (Ọbasá 1934: 9).

*Bísimiláì, Lau! Lau!*
Divine for Muslims
Who uses long garments
Who enjoys every good things
Who just don’t pray for fun
Am a friend to Muslims.

Hence, he extols tolerance, and living harmonious life. These are virtues that bring peace and tranquility to society.
Didacticism in Obasa’s Poems

Presentation of didacticism identified in Obasa’s poems is in tandem with Bamgbose’s (2007) classification on Fagunwa’s novels. The five types of didactic presentation are direct, indirect, scenic presentation, reference to folk narratives and humor. It is very difficult to draw a line among these forms of didacticism because there are times when Obasa juxtaposed two or more forms in a poem. However, the form that pervades all the poems in Obasa’s poems is indirect didacticism. This is because most of the traditional sayings he assembled are primarily meant for social charter. The sayings are meant to instruct, teach, and moralize. For instance, in the poem “Ahun”, a juxtaposed form of didacticism is deployed to teach on the negative side of being stingy. The use of the folktale on Tortoise, the Trickster, is adapted to project a miser and to highlight this basic attribute:

Excerpt XIV
Abahun, Àjápá
Tírókò, ọkọ Yánnibo
Ìín ijàpá kí i sọṣọ
Tani pe ẹ s’Ahun l’óge?
Ayán te mi jọ
Èrà ta mi jọ
Atele igi moogun jẹ!
Ahun kò pilẹ raṣọ ewu
À ɗó bó bá rigbero
L’ára aṣo-alaṣo! (Obasa 1934: 4).

Tortoise
The husband of Yannibo
The destiny of tortoise does not decorate
Who asked you to decorate Tortoise?
Cockroach, please gather me together
Ants, please gather me together
Who follows trees to make medicine effective!
Tortoise cares not to buy clothes
Except if it is able to collect
From someone else’s clothes.

Using the Tortoise folktale on how the Tortoise depends on others creatures, instead of buying cloth for itself, Obasa projects the miserable and dependent life lived by a miser. This way, Obasa uses stories to deploy
didacticism. In the same poem, Obasa makes use of indirect didacticism. Indirect didacticism is used when the speaker wants the audience to personally draw meaning from a story or a saying. The indirect and scenic presentation of didacticism unfolds in the poem as the author uses symbolism to depict the end result of being stingy and miserly:

Excerpt XV
Má ba mi lo sọ mi
Ipárá je é tán nínú okè
Ma bá mi je su mi
Iṣu gbebè o rà si
Ma bá mi jêkê mi
Ekó di bibu sínú ile!
Ma ba mi jeere mi
Eree di jiju sinu ile!
Ma ba mi Kópè mi
Eyin dirà sòrun opè̀
Iyán ahun ni ọdewu
Ọbẹ ahun ni i hohi (Obasá 1934: 5).

Do not wear my cloth.
The cloth in the sack was eventually eaten by termite
Do not eat my yam
The yam eventually got spoilt in the heap
Do not eat my pap-ball
The pap-ball eventually got spoilt
Do not eat my bean
The bean eventually lost its value
Do not harvest my plam kernel bunch.
The palm kernel bunch got spoilt
It is the pounded yam of a miser that also gets spoilt
The soup of a miser grows mold.

In Obasa’s attempt to achieve the peak of the didacticism in the poem, he uses a combination of scenic presentation and direct comment to warn the miserly people:

Excerpt XVI
Ajá-nlapa nitori oo là,
O ko jèun ka nú?
Ní gbogbo ara gbẹ bi awọ?
Ajanlapa! Because you are poor!
You refuse to feed well?
Imagine your body as dry as hide
It is Eṣù that spends the miser’s money
Someone with a soiled hand
The tortoise was instructed to sacrifice palm oil
The sacrificing palm oil was too much for his ailment
Since he refused to sacrifice palm oil
His stomach protruded
Then force to lick palm oil
When tortoise had protruding stomach
He sent Yannibo for some palm oil
Eventually before Tortoise regained his good health
Palm oil had cost more
One had better listen to instruction on time.

In the above excerpt, attitude of adoring money and saving money to the detriment of one’s health is seen in “Ahun”. The scenic presentation of the attitude of a miser, is topped with the direct moralization that a stitch in time saves nine, and that procrastination is the thief of time.

Also, in another poem, “Ọkànjúà-Ọlè”, Ọbasá adopts a combination of scenic presentation, direct moralization, and indirect didacticism to moralize against theft and covetousness. In this poem, he starts with scenic presentation; follows it with direct comment, and ends it with indirect moralization:
Excerpt XVII
Ọkànjúà t’ọn tolo
Ọgbọọgbọọ ni nwọn ighẹ!
Ọkanjuwa bokele,
Oju rè la mi!
Ma jẹ su ma jeru
Nibi ayo lo mọ
Kọtọ, kọtọ, ohun t’ọle
A fẹru patiẹ ni i to wọn (Ọbasá 1934: 11).

Covetous and stealing
Are equivalent
The covetous one bites a big morsel
That makes his eyes draw tears
Feeding on both small and big pieces of yam
Ends up filling one’s stomach
The insatiable one
Ends up not contented
Until he is thoroughly flogged.

He follows the submission on the act of coveteousness and theft with a direct comment on the outcome such an act may have on the children of those involved in such vices:

Excerpt XVIII
Ọní ‘sọnọnná ni o pa á
Olá, ‘Sàngó ni ó pa á’
Qtúnla “Oya ni ó pa á”
Épè kọ jomo olè ó dàgbà (Ọbasá 1934: 11).

Today, may Sanponna kill him
Tomorrow, may Sango kill him
The day after, may Oya kill him
Curses as above make the children of thief die prematurely.

The metaphysical belief in Sonponna, Sango, and Oya among the Yorùbá is also reflected in the above excerpt. These deities are believed to detest stealing. Once they are used to curse a thief the repercussion, it is believed, will be on the thief’s children. Hence, the direct didactic import of this excerpt is
that a thief should desist from stealing in order not to impaired the destiny of his or her children.

Similarly, in the same poem, Obasá deploys indirect didacticism to warn wives that support their husbands to get involved in stealing:

Excerpt XIX

Ẹẹmeji láya ole isun mú sí
Ijọ towo ọko ba de
Aṣẹda èran àjéyi!
T’on t’ata iganran
Ni imú won sun mú sí
Ijọ towo ba toko
Ori awe di gbii!
Nidi-ogun l’Oja ọba. (Obasá 1934: 11).

The wife of thief raises her nostrils twice
The day the husband brings home loot
She prepares meat in excess with no pepper
Which makes her raise her nostrils
The day the husband is caught
And beheaded as a sacrifice to Ogun.

The aftermath of stealing in the above is the inferred moralization used to warn on the evil of stealing.

Finally, through the use of satire, Obasá directly moralizes. For instance, in the poem “Ilú Sojá”, using the rhythm of drum, he composes a satirical poem to condemn wasteful spending:

Excerpt XX

O tori obinrin bụẹkún
Bụẹkún, Bụẹkún
Ọ tori obinrin bụẹkún
Ọmọ obinrin ni o
Sá máa yan nisó
Ṣe bi ọkùnrin
Bó bá jáfara
Ọwọ ọtá yo òe o
O jẹbà, ó jè raisi
O tún jiyán, ó jàmàlà
Ọ jè dodo, ó jẹpà
Oní jẹkújẹ ni wọ
Didacticism and Philosophical Tenets in Obasa’s Poetry

Bo bá nse bẹ̀ẹ̀ jẹ
O ko lè ni sòkótò. (Obasa 1934: 14).

He wept because of a woman
Weeping! Weeping!!
He wept because of a woman
You were born of a woman
Continue marching on
Act like a man
If you are careless
You will be caught by your enemy
You ate ẹ̀bà and rice
You ate pounded yam and àmàlà
You ate fried plantain you ate groundnut
You are just eating, anyhow
If you continue eating in this manner
You will not have clothes
If you continue eating in this manner
You will not have any trouser.

The moral import is in the last four lines. It can be deduced in these four lines that if someone indulges in living a riotious life, such a person will end in penury. Also, in “Ìrèjẹ” or “Ògbufọ Kewu Ìbàdàn”, Obasa deploys humor to condemn wickedness and to advance the importance of tolerance:

Excerpt XXI
‘A-la-mu, tara-kefa
Fa-a- la rà buka”
O ní:
Olórún yìò mu’ka sùgbón
“Alefì, Ba sin, Lamu
Nugunda, Mimù, Ra, Ja
O ní:
Èni tá bá jùlọ l àá iré jẹ
Mo jù ọ lo, mo ré ọ jẹ
O ní:
“Lakum dinni kun
Wali a dinni” (Obasa 1945: 34).

‘A-la-mu, tara-kefa
Fa-a- la rà buka”
Which means:
God will apprehend the wicked but
“Alefi, Ba, Sin, Lamu
Nugunda, Mimu, Ra, Ja
Which means:
One cheats on anybody junior to him//her
I cheat you because I am your senior
“Lakun dinni kun,
Wali a dinni
Meaning – practice your religion
While I should be allowed to practice mine.

The first two lines of the above excerpt is an introductory Arabic verse in the Quran that usually precedes prayer and call to Allah (God), but the poet changes its meaning to condemn the vice of wickedness. This teaches that the Supreme Being will deal with the wicked, hence, people should stop wickedness. He goes further to humorously pronounce some Arabic letters and change the meanings to project the evil of cheating an elderly person.

In short, Òbasá, through his poems, advances the ideology of ìwà ọmọláàbì that gives prominence to respect for elders. He preaches religious tolerance in the last part of the satirical projection of the act of some imaginary deceptive interpreters.

Conclusion

This essay has examined how Òbasá has successfully deployed his poetic creation to expound the Yoruba philosophy. The paper stressed that some of the philosophical tenets embedded in Òbasá’s poetry are for didactic import. All the five forms of didacticism are deployed by Obasa to strengthen philosophical ideas of his poems. The philosophical tenets, apart from instructing, teaching, and moralizing are also for creating a social order. Some tenets of philosophy, like metaphysics, ethics and epistemology, are reflected in Òbasá’s poetry. This essay affirmed that there is a close link between poets and philosophers. The ethical issues identified in the poems are for the promotion of authentic existence, a form of existentialism that is based on putting the society before an individual. Therefore, the paper advocates that the sustainable development desired by the Nigerian society would be a reality if the Yoruba philosophy embedded and moralized in Òbasá’s poems are taught and imbibed by all.
Work Cited


