

Symbols as Tools of Yoruba Cultural Communication in Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku*

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Abstract

The Yoruba people have their methods of doing things. Their culture is embedded in their language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, rituals, ceremonies and symbols. These have been passed down from generation to generation through their oral traditions: myths, folklores, songs, proverbs and wise sayings. Despite the scientific assertion that the life of a man ends after his heart ceases to breath, the Yoruba believe that there is a state of existence, attainable by human beings beyond the limits of our present mortal lifespan. The primary data for this research are aspects of oral tradition and folklore treated in Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku*. Mambrols 2022 literary symbolism is the theoretical underpinning for the study. The analysis shows that aspects of oral tradition and folklore used in Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku* perform many cultural symbolic functions: horse whiskers symbolizes respect and honour to the king, the white colour portrays royalty, purity and peace, Biblical Ruth is a symbol of devotion and loyalty in marriage, Milk of life is a symbol of strong tie between the two people in oath, *Ileke Iku* renders the life of Abobaku a game, and burning oil lamp portrays continuous living while dead lamp represents sudden death. Other traditional symbols are drums which portrays joy, sword of Ogun and Fitila. The paper is concluded on the view that Ahmed Yerima writes to portray the deep knowledge and experience he has about Yoruba culture and tradition which he understands very well.

Key Words: Symbols, Yoruba Culture, Ahmed Yerima

Introduction

Symbolism is an art of using an object or a word to represent an abstract idea. An action, person, place, word, or object can be used as symbols in reference to meaning. Frye (2001, p. 22) sees it as any unit of literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention. He further explains it to be a word, phrase or an image used with some kinds of special reference (which a symbol is taken to mean) are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis. Symbolism is an integral component of fiction because it enriches the narratives by pulling its message down to the level of air unconsciously and anchoring there (Bernado 1998, p. 15). Folklore is all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which has come down through the years. It may be folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials preserved in words or in writing. Murphy (2012, p. 120) expressed that there is hardly any phase of tradition and life that is not affected or regulated by some aspect of the folklore, because it is the medium through which the behavioral values of the community, the cumulative wisdom and technology devised, bygone ages are made available to the present generation and preserved for posterity.

Yoruba folklore is the traditional art, literature, knowledge and practice that is disseminated largely through oral communication and behavior among the Yoruba speaking people. Yoruba Folklore is just like every other tribe, Yoruba also has its own traditional beliefs, stories told from generation to generation right from creation time to the present time (Mbunda, 2006). Yoruba Folklore is the aspect of culture and traditions of the Yorubas which entails their identity, mode of dressing, language, religious rites which is practiced by the people as a means of upholding their culture (Amuta 1989, p. 46). Literature focuses on the experiences, happenings to include the artistic or creative composition representing the emotions, feelings and thought of a person or society. Folklore and Symbolism are devices used in literary works by Writers to portray their traditional heritage mixed with modernization whereby their works bring about realism.

African Tradition and Culture differs as each African country has its own which varies from ethnic to ethnic, tribe to tribe with their own belief, African Countries like Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, Benin republic, Congo, South Africa, etc. also practice their culture and traditions among their people. African Writers are mostly concern with the reflection of cultural and traditional affairs in their subject matter thereby bringing out stories using symbols in relation to their stories. Almost all the African contemporary mix elements from oral tradition (stories) to the fiction (African Literature). This is because it illustrates moral points as used by writers (Killiam 2002, p. 49).

Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku* delves into the Yoruba traditional institution of the long time beliefs in life after death and the need to have Abobaku, (a man who is expected to die with the king) a man who is believed to be the king's shadow in the context of the text. The play concerns the story of Ajibade (the "Abobaku"), his wife Daramola and the entire Adeoti villagers. Ajibade has just been sworn in as the Abobaku of Adeoti village as the tradition of the land has laid it down. The Abobaku title, although it is a honorary one, places Ajibade side by side with king Karunwi and makes him enjoy almost every luxury of life that the king enjoys and even his eldest queen.

Before Ajibade is made the "Abobaku", Chief Karunwi and other chiefs explain the consequence of the decision he has made to him. He is also made to swear to an oath to pledge his allegiance to the 'serious game of death' he is playing and the whole community sings his praise afterward. Not too long after his coronation he marries Faramola the daughter of the Ilari but their marriage has not been blessed with a child. Faramola thinks about the fate that awaits her as the wife of the "Abobaku". She is so confused for the unconditional love she has for Ajibade and at the same time a pierced heart of having to become an untimely widow. Although she is experiencing a momentary joy mixed with the sorrowful fate of death that awaits her husband. Among the major themes of *Abobaku* are traditionalism, duty, fate/destiny and love. Yoruba tradition/culture laid emphasis on the continuity of life both here on earth and in heaven at the demise of a king. The tradition takes care of both the living and the death so that life will be abundant for the people. This study looks into how Ahmed Yerima uses symbols of Yoruba culture to portray Yoruba cosmology in his play *Abobaku*.

The specific objectives of the paper are to identify the folkloric elements used in Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku*, identify the symbols and significant aspects of Yoruba folklore used in the play with a view to revealing how the writer uses symbols and folklore to portray Yoruba belief in life after death.

Review of Related Literature

Definition and Characteristics of Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Symbolism can take different forms. Generally, it is an object representing another to give it an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant. Sometimes, however, an action, an event or a word spoken by someone may have a symbolic value. For instance, “smile” is a symbol of friendship. Similarly, the action of someone smiling at you may stand as a symbol of the feeling of affection which that person has for you (Frye, 2001, p. 37). Symbols do shift their meanings depending on the context they are used in. “A chain”, for example, may stand for “union” as well as “imprisonment”. Thus, symbolic meaning of an object or an action is understood by when, where and how it is used. It also depends on who reads them.

Among the characteristics of symbols is the fact that they lend universal meaning and grandeur to the theme and characters of a literary work. Often symbols extend their meanings to the readers of a work as well as making the characters seem significant and “larger than life.” For example, the symbolism of Madame DeFarge's frenzied knitting of names to be sent to the guillotine magnifies her cruelty and makes her a villain recognized by many readers. This knitting, too, enhances the theme of revenge in Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1860). In addition, symbols often unite theme and characters together in a narrative.

Symbols pique the interest of readers as they interact with the text. With the interpretation of symbols, readers formulate the meaning of a literary work. In *Great Expectation*, when Pip first arrives at Satis House, he and the reader both are amazed at the decay and darkness of this mansion that was once beautiful. But, as readers continue through the narrative, they discover the ironic meaning of the mansion's name that denotes satisfaction, or happiness. Symbols are keys to the writer's mind and intent. With symbols in a narrative, the reader better understands the deeper meanings of the text. For instance, the spears sharpened on each end that the hunters carry later on in *Lord of the Flies* certainly points to the increasing savagery which lies innately in the boys in the beginning of the narrative. Symbols engage readers as they offer the reader a creative opportunity. When a reader tries to interpret the meaning of symbols in a narrative, he/she exercises the imagination, an act that is satisfying on its own as well as helping to deepen the remembrance of a work of literature. Certainly, reading skills are improved as a result.

Symbols in Literary Works

The first appearance of symbolism was in France, 19th century. The symbolist movement was an aesthetic movement. According to Karen Bernando, it came as continuation of the romantic tradition which served as a catalyst in the outgrowth of the darker side of romanticism”. Also it was a reaction to realism and naturalism novelist such as Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola (Symbolism in Literature). Symbols are dealt with in different domain of human life. It forms the basis of literature and has a direct relation with poetry. Symbols are used more in epic poems, allegorical poems and Gnostic with poetry. (Frye, 2001, p. 38) classifies symbols into two types; arbitrary symbols and personal symbols. Arbitrary symbols are those common and familiar ones that the reader simply can recognize their meanings, like ‘spring’ that is a symbol of ‘youth’ and ‘freshness’. Personal symbols are those fresh and new ones which the writer or the poet newly created, and contrary to arbitrary symbols, their recognition is difficult for the reader, like “lion” which is the symbol of God in Molana’s poems. Characterization, dialogue and plot work on the surface to move the story along, but symbolism works under the surface to

link the story's external action to the theme. This is exactly *Abobaku*. Before the narration of the fiction, symbolism was often produced through allegory. It gives a relationship between the literal event and its allegorical elements counter correspondence. Allegory is certainly simplest way of adding more details to the theme. However, it limits the ability of understanding. Thus those works of literature in which an element of mystery exists are the best. Likewise, these works tends themselves to variety interpretations (Bernardo1, 3-4).

Symbolism refers to three phases of a vital part of the development of literary modernism: first to an artistic movement in France and Belgium during the last decade and a half of the nineteenth century; then, retrospectively and most importantly, to its immediate sources in French poetry beginning in the 1850s; and finally to the influence that both of these had on European and American literatures throughout the first half of the twentieth century. The designation then, had its original and official application to the second and, it must be owned, from a literary point of view the least significant of these phases (Zola, 2001). The perceived failure of the Symbolist movement to generate major works drew attention to the writers from whom it drew inspiration, and so by the 1920s the especially suggestive term Symbolist had come to be associated primarily with the movement's four great predecessors who remain among the most influential writers of the French tradition, not only with respect to France's poetry but across national boundaries and genres (Durkheim, 1963). While the emphasis in this brief introduction will be predominantly literary, it must be pointed out, too, that the second phase, the Symbolist movement proper, played a vital cultural role and is an area where much original research is currently being conducted. Hall (2005) opines that symbolism is often used by writers to enhance their writing; it can give a literary work more richness and color and can make the meaning of the work deeper. In literature, symbolism can take many forms like a figure of speech where an object, person, or situation has another meaning other than its literal meaning and the actions of a character, word, action, or event that have a deeper meaning in the context of the whole story.

Metaphors as Symbols

A metaphor is a figure of speech that uses symbolism. It compares two things that are not similar and shows that they actually do have something in common. In a metaphor, there is an additional meaning to a word. This makes it an example of symbolism; Examples of symbolism that take the form of metaphors include: 'Time is money' – This is symbolic because it warns you that when you spend your time, you are giving up the opportunity to be doing something else with that time (just as when you spend your money, you give up your chance to do something else with the money). Further, like money, time is not infinite. 'Life is a roller-coaster' – This is symbolic because it indicates that there will be ups and downs in life that you have to weather. 'He is a rock' – This is symbolic because it signifies that he is strong and dependable. 'Love is a jewel' – This is symbolic because it suggests that love is rare and pressure.

Allegory as Symbols

Sometimes symbolism takes the form of a literary tool called an allegory. Allegory is an extended use of symbolism and metaphors. A story, a poem, or even a whole book can be an allegory and the symbolism will permeate throughout. One example of an allegory is the monologue from Shakespeare in "*As you like It*" says "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time

plays many parts” – This is symbolic of the fact that people are putting on a show and that they play many roles over the course of their lives. Symbolism in Poetry can also be viewed as the device employed by many poets used to deepen the meaning of their poems. Here is an excerpt from William Blake's “Ah Sunflower” 1983. In it, Blake refers to life cycle and uses sunflowers to represent humankind and that they desire everlasting life – “Ah Sunflower, weary of time, who contests the steps of the sun; seeking after that sweet golden clime where the traveler’s journey is done”..

Symbols in African Literature

Since the colonial period, the African culture has changed. Thus, the contemporary African culture has become a mixture of the traditional elements and alien features. As Okere (1999:53) stated that “the African (people/ individual) today is a living confluence of cultural rivers, the major being rivers, on the one hand, the traditional culture with its tributaries of religion, social structure, language, values and world view, and on the other hand, the Christian-Western culture (and other alien cultures including Islam) with its own tributaries”.

The African identity is in crisis, and there is a need to give back and to preserve the authentic cultures especially those which are in practice. How? According to Deena Metzger in her book: *Writing for Your Life* (1997), "Self-discovery is more than gathering information about oneself." She continues, "In the process of ... discovering our story, we restore those parts of ourselves that have been scattered, hidden, suppressed, denied, distorted, forbidden, and we come to understand that stories heal". Since the past, the African societies have restored and preserved their identity and history through the arts by using symbols, animal symbols that represent the nature of man, in forms of arts, myths, rituals, language, and names. In the African literature, symbolism is the main feature as N.K. Dzobo (1993, p. 28) said, “Symbols are sources of insights into African orientations to life”. He continued to make the distinction between signs and symbolism in the degree of qualitative of information that they convey, "While signs provide simple information, symbols are used to communicate complex knowledge".

Folklore as Symbols in Yerima’s Dramaturgy

Ahmed Yerima leads other third generation Nigerian dramatists, defining the direction of contemporary Nigerian dramatists of socio- political realism who use the medium of drama to comment on the prevailing socio- economic and political situations in which in his own country of Nigeria and indeed in Africa as a whole (Dasylva, 2004, p. 55). Adeoti (2007) opines that in some of Ahmed Yerima’s work, we see true blend of poetry and the indigenous, artistic style of chants and proverbs, music and dance coalesce to give an African performative style. Most of his work blends myth, poetry, symbols and folklore to present a picture of traditional African elements. In many cases, elements drawn from contemporary African and world realities come together to carve a positive for human society (Ademola, 2004, p. 54). Yerima in his works speaks more about the people and the society. Some of his play like *Idemili*, *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees*, *The Sick people*, *Ameh Oboni the Great* and *Mojagbe* are permeated with Traditional African lore, performance resources, music, song, story – telling, symbols and audience – player rapport, Yerima employs aspects of folklore as symbols to serve these plays as interplay to form a link between traditional and contemporary African dramatic works (Adeoti, 2007, p. 42). His plays are categorized under three grouping such as historical, religious, socio- political issues

Theoretical Underpinning

Symbolism is an aesthetic movement devoted to discovering the true nature of poetry. It originated in France in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé are the central figures in the theory and practice of symbolism in France. The theory was developed by Edgar Allan Poe and was based on the major premise about the poetic principle—that poetry is an evocation of eternal states through the discrete image or symbol—into a program for purifying poetry of the non-poetic. The artists we classify as Symbolists aimed at purifying their art of all that was nonessential. Symbolist poets such as Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud, for example, rejected both the superficial rhetoric of argument and discussion and the dense notation of description and narration. They reject all things that had obscured the true nature of poetry, in favor of the severe purity of a symbolic lyricism. The Symbolist poem was necessarily short, evocative, and mysterious.

Symbolism became a conscious movement in the late nineteenth century as a necessary reaction against the dense, descriptive method of the naturalistic school of Émile Zola and others. The Symbolists restored purity to the arts, Symons maintains, by suggesting rather than saying, by evoking through symbols rather than submitting to the “old bondage of rhetoric, the old bondage of exteriority” (5) and describing through the logic of argument or the record of details. Symbols both reveal and conceal: they blend the visible and the invisible, the particular and the universal, the finite and the infinite. Symbols communicate indirectly: concrete images, such as the rose or the cross, summon up emotional and intellectual associations that cannot be precisely numbered or named (Nasrullah Hambrol 2025).

Methodology

The primary data for this study is Ahmed Yerima’s play, *Abobaku*. Symbols and symbolisms drawn from the text were subjected to content analysis. Symbolism comprises of symbols used to signify ideas and qualities by giving in depth meaning to the context. The symbols are examined from the point of view of the Yoruba traditional images in the text. Symbol drawn from the aspects of Yoruba folklore treated in the text are subjected to symbol analysis.

Analysis of Symbols in Ahmed Yerima’s *Abobaku*

Ahmed Yerima uses many universal and Yoruba cultural artifacts symbols to beautify his play, *Abobaku*. Among them universal symbols are: horse whiskers, black and white colours, Biblical Ruth, Milk of life, Ileke Iku and Oil lamp. Other traditional symbols are drums, beads, gigs, sword of Ogun and Fitila.

1. Horse whiskers (Irukere)

Horse whiskers are a type of mammalian hair that are typically characterized, anatomically, by their large length, large and well-innervated hair follicle, and by having an identifiable representation in the somatosensory cortex of the brain. These whiskers are very useful to the horses as it serve as a protector to the horses also because horse’s eyes are set on the side of their heads; they have a blind spot in front of and right under their noses. So, their whiskers act as a sort of “third eye” helping them to negotiate objects close to their noses, such as food, water and the ground, avoiding injury and making sure they don’t eat the wrong thing. Horse whiskers in the Yoruba traditional setting is of great significant to the kings as the horse tail whiskers are symbols of authority and stateliness to his royal highness. In *Abobaku*, Yerima

uses horse whiskers to give a symbol of respect, and authority to Oba Karunwi the ways kings in Yoruba land likewise as a means of identification, in a statement made by Abore;

“...these are the horse whiskers from the tails of the king’s favourite horse that will gallop with his spirits to the land of our ancestors. These will be the *aroko*, symbol of identification, when you leave for your trip to meet with the king” (p.10).

The whiskers symbolizes the king’s symbol of authority a form of identification, for both the Abobaku and the king when they get to the land of the ancestors.

2. Black and White Colours

Colours are used in Yoruba culture as symbols. The white colour symbolizes purity and cleanliness while the black colour is a symbol of darkness or evil. No wonder there are white whishes representing good witches while black witches represent evil ones. In *Abobaku*, the playwright uses white to symbolize purity, holiness, royalty and peace. In the play, King was presented in the Ipadì room with white wrapper and white small cap, a pure, royal and clean picture as white is generally known among the people to be without dirt. From the author’s note, on (p.6), Yerima describes the Oba putting on a white cap on his aged head, which indicates royalty, purity, cleanliness and honour given to Oba by the people in the society “... Opens it. She brings out a white sack full of things.” (p.21). In the white sack, she kept Jesus Crucifix (god of love), Osun Segese (small image as protector) and Money (which she says to remain calm and steadfast), these three things symbolize holy, cleanliness and purity.

3. Biblical Allusion: “Ruth Abokoku”

This is a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing or idea of historical, cultural, literary or political significance. It is just a passing comment and the Writer expects the reader to possess enough knowledge to spot the allusion and grasp its importance in a text. As a literary device used by writers to gives deepen meaning to their works, Yerima made use of this device into his play. He gave Faramola the name Ruth Abokoku, a symbolic name given to women that remain loyal to their husband’s family. ‘Ruth’ is a character in the bible that followed her mother-in-law back to her home country even after the calamity of her husband’s death. The name Ruth is common in the society and is mostly given to women who show commitment to their husband; hence, *Ruth abokoku* [one dies dies with her husband] as such women are usually called in the Yoruba society. In *Abobaku*, Faramola thus symbolizes Ruth who is ready to give up all for the sake of her husband; “Ruth... a woman in the Bible who was loyal to her husband till death” (p.18). The same attribute is put on by Faramola, she did not understand the strength of the oath sworn to by her husband. Efforts were made to prevent him from carrying out the requirements of the oath he had sworn to. At the end, she has to share in the punishment of death that was inflicted as a consequence of the oath.

4. The milk of life: Oath of Blood

Milk is known to be nutritious to the body, but in the Yoruba cosmology, in the traditional activities of the people such as rituals, sacrifices and other rites, milk is used to represent blood that is used during oaths that involve blood. It is used in the process of oath taking to bind two souls together. Yerima uses this symbol in *Abobaku* to capture the ritual acts in the Yoruba traditional system. In *Abobaku*, the blood of Oba Karunwi and Ajibade which was given to the

two on the enthronement day binds both of them together in oath. It is given to Ajibade after he is made the Abobaku. He was told to drink the milk of life with Oba Karunwi in a statement made by Abore; "... Drink the milk of life. (Slowly, they drink, one after the other. "Your blood now flows as one" (p.9). Ajibade had a reoccur of what the milk of life represents as he was jubilating based on his entitlement being the Baba Kekere of the village and he said; "... the milk of life... Ha, that line sounds so familiar..." (p.22). The milk of life, which is blood, is used to bind the two parties together in oath.

5. Symbol of death: (*Ileke Iku*)

Oath making is part of the traditional rites in Yoruba culture, as it is a means through which two parties are bound together in an agreement. To seal up an agreement, things are used based on the situations as it could be blood, water, iron, etc. In the case of *Abobaku*, the playwright improvises 'Ileke iku', as a spiritual instrument that makes death of the abobaku easier. Ileke Iku serves as the symbol of death given to the king and his Shadow:

Abore; "ileke iku, the link with death. The symbol of your oath, the reminder that your life remains a serious game henceforth" (p.9).

This symbol is the carrier of the oath between Abobaku and Oba, the reminder to Ajibade that his life remains a serious game (*Ere laa fi omo ayo se. Ayo* is an instrument of cultural games among Yoruba people) and they are to wear it which will serve them on their journey to the land of the ancestors.

6. *Abobaku*

The title of the text is symbolic and cultural. The Yoruba believe that this world is a market place but heaven is their home. As a result, when a king is dead, the Yoruba people believe he is not dead but transited to heaven. As a result, they see him as a traveller who is going back home. Towards the journey home, it is believed that all the gains that the traveller had while on earth must accompany him. No wonder food items, jewellery, clothing, slaves, some chiefs, selected family members follow him to heaven. *Abobaku* is just one of the several people that accompanies a king to heaven when he died. The death of the *Abobaku* along with the king is symbolic too. It symbolizes respect, honour and merriment in the beginning due to all that is attached to it but the latter part of it is death as the horseman has to die with their Lords with the believe that they continue his duties with the king at the other side. The name *Abobaku* has the same symbolic meaning as used in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's horsemen*, where the Abobaku is also honoured at the beginning of the play because he has been elected to die with the king. The Elesin Oba was to travel with his master whom he had pledged to serve even in death. Yerima uses the title *Abobaku* to symbolize the traditional belief that a king was not to die alone.

7. Oil Lamps

When light is taken out comes darkness as light brings forth life and illumination while that of darkness come with destruction, this is a belief in the Yoruba society. The three oil lamps are meant to save lives yet it was blown out and this led to destruction of lives. Yerima uses this to symbolize the lives of Ilari (Faramola's father and the messenger to the king), Faramola and her husband which was given to Mama by Ifadeyi which he said:

...Take three oil lamps. Light them, and keep watch all night. Not one of them must die. As they go off, the life of each member of your family will end (p. 27).

The oil lamp symbolizes life only if it is kept burning and the family members escape death that lies ahead. But if the light of the three oil lamps is extinguished, all members of the family die as the “death” of the lamp symbolizes the destruction and darkness that lie ahead of them.

Traditional Symbols

The figurative or descriptive language in a literary work or pictorial images and formation of mental images, figures, or rhetorical images by the action of imagination is referred to as imagery. Imagery ignites the visual, kinesthetic, gustatory, thermal and auditory sensations in a reader. Local Images refers to imaginative or mental pictures with traditional relevance that make use of certain words that create pictorial representation of ideas in minds of the reader. Local images involves the use of traditional words and phrases to create “mental images”. Local images also represents words with cultural significance. To add to the understanding of readers, Yerima uses local imagery which added more value to the symbols in *Abobaku*.

8. Traditional Drums

There are different drum types in Southern Nigeria, which vary in both design and sound. In the Yoruba-speaking part of south-western Nigeria, the commonest drum is the *talking drum* (*Gangan/Omele*), a medium-sized drum consisting of a wooden core and leather-skinned on two ends. The drum is designed to produce tonal variations (the voice), based on the manipulation of leather strings, verged in even length across the span of the wooden core and attached to the edge of both sides, which produced sound variations when struck with the curved wooden drum stick. The other drum-type unique to Yoruba-speaking southern Nigeria is the multi-drum composite called the *Bata* drums. Historically these drums are believed to have been designed and played for the Yoruba God of Thunder, Sango, who would perform an eponymously named dance, known as the Bata. Other drums indigenous to the region are the *Sakara* drum, a flat circular drum played with the fingers or a stick, either by a single performer or as part of a larger drum orchestra, driven by the *gangan*. Drumming is a vital part of the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. Drums are used in special occasions, festivals, carnivals, ceremonies. They even add special effects and style to some bits of our culture. Drums are differentiated by the sound they make, how they are made, history, and appearance such as *Dundun*, *Gbedu*, *Omele ako*, *Saworoide*, etc. Drums are symbol of joy and happiness. *Terin-teye ni Keri-keri nba rode*. Drums go to ceremonial events with joy and happiness.

Yerima employed the use of drums during the enthronement of *Abobaku* the ‘Dundun’ drum was used to grace the occasion; “*Dundun* drums begin to beat and as they are joined by other chiefs amidst jubilations” (p.11). While *dundun* is meant for merriment, the *gbedu* drum has its own traditional purpose and message, it means “a big drum” and a percussion instrument traditionally used on state occasions or during ceremonies of Ogboni, the ancient Yoruba secret society. Gbedu drums is used by secret fraternities such as Ogboni and royal courts, historically only the Oba dances to the music of this drum. Yerima also uses this local image to embellish

the activities of the Awo: “Is that why they pound his ears with Gbedu drums, beckoning him to his untimely death?” (p.60).

9. The Beads (*Ileke*)

The use of the bead is common among the Yoruba, to add beauty to the body. There are many kinds of beads (*Ileke*), hand lace, necklaces (*egba orun*), and bangles (*egba owo*) that both male and female put on for adornment. In Yoruba traditional setting, beads are mostly worn by chief, priests, kings or people of royal descent. Some of these beads include *iyun*, *lagidigba*, and *akun* etc. They are common in the royal home and its use used mostly to indicate royalty and wealth. In *Abobaku*, Yerima made use of the beads especially when it comes to the kin; “The *Ipedi* room. Four men stand in white wrapper with beads.” (p.8). This way the reader will link up the image to the royal home (royalty). The royal home values the use of beads mostly as it indicates title and class. With the use of white wrapper and beads, Ahmed Yerima gives us the picture of a royal act which can also be traced to the chiefs.

10. The Gift

In Yoruba tradition, gifts are given as symbols. The gifts could be to congratulate, to welcome, to announce war or peace, etc. An example is a family that is given gifts when their daughter is found to be a virgin by the groom’s family. In Ahmed Yerima’s play, the gift given is to Faramola, the wife of Abobaku, signifying the need for Abobaku to fulfil his own side of the oath he made with the king

Iyalode: “the whole Village sent you a gift.

Faramola: (look at MAMA’s hands. Chuckles.) So you are the one they sent with the black Shroud (p.42).

11. The Sword of Ogun

Ogun is the ‘god of iron’ in Yoruba culture that is depicted by Ahmed Yerima. Ogun is the god of iron and metals. Followers of Ogun can swear in court of Ogun by “kissing a piece of Iron in the name of Ogun”. The iron sword of Ogun is his most potent symbol and by swearing to it, one is asking Ogun for his intervention to act as judge and be of witness to such oath. In *Abobaku*, Yerima uses the sword of Ogun to give justice to Ajibade as he says;

This is the sword of Ogun. The next time we meet will be at the shrine of Ogun where you shall remove my head in order to allow me the honour to meet my king ... my partner... My God, Oba Karunwi (p.9).

12. The Palm-oil Lamp Stand (*Fitila*)

Fitila is a traditional lamp powered by palm-oil. It is burnt through a wick for illumination. The Lamp stand can serve other purposes in the spiritual world as it could be used to depict the light and darkness in the traditional setting as uttered by Mama:

(Returns and sees the lanterns off.) Oh my God... the three lanterns are dead? This is a bad omen.....” (p.36).

Conclusion

This work is a proof that Nigerian writers write to bring out aspects of their culture into bear in their written works. Ahmed Yerima's use of symbols in *Abobaku* gives uniqueness to his plays the way writers such as Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Bayo Adebawale, Chinua Achebe and other African writers do. He writes to portray the deep knowledge and experience he has about the culture and tradition of his own people and uses his work as a vehicle to portray the traditional beliefs of the Yoruba people. His use of language is simple and easily understood by an average reader. He borrowed from the rich African verbal art forms to create new visions of life and new poetic idioms with remarkable originality. These borrowings occur in his recreation of African traditional symbols, images, proverbs, myth, and other traditional devices. As a matter of facts, his treatments of traditional beliefs such as taboos, spiritualism, incantation, divinities, and beliefs in life after death make his works unique. His use of symbolic items to depict aspects of the life of Yoruba people contributed to the message of the play. Thus, his work is considered as a model of a cultural and traditional play because he describes the history, culture and the tradition of the Yoruba people that he is portraying.

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