

THE POETRY OF SELECTED PROVERBS IN THE SONGS OF *AKOBE* – A FOLKLORIC MINSTREL OF BENIN KINGDOM

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Abstract

This article seeks to analyse the poetic elements of proverbs in the songs of Akobe – an accomplished 21st Century genius in Benin oral performance art and craft. From a very humble beginning, the artist has become a household name. His career also provided important insights into creative artistry of an archetypal Bini minstrel as entrenched in the oral tradition of the people. Within the theoretical framework of cultural semiotics that establishes the conceptualisation of an objective word as almost entirely dependent on cultural codes, there is an attempt to explore the argument that beyond the social and cultural implications of proverbs is an intricate interplay of poetry and other aesthetic resources, leading to the conclusion that the selected proverbs have creative elements and artistic qualities that justify their appreciation as essentially literary constructs.

INTRODUCTION/ BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada observes that proverbs remain a documentation of the lives of people at a particular time. Proverbs thus record the history, experience, trauma, and tension of a society at every stage in its evolution. In doing this, proverbs draw attention to an event outside itself, making even a non – metaphorical saying an encapsulation of a course of action or an observation a summary view of tradition. Proverb is a weighty speech act that could be as crucial in a communicative event as a lexeme is in an utterance (Cram, 1993, 53-71). In the African context,

proverbs can be described as short, popular witty sayings incorporating words of advice or warning. Proverbs are also viewed as a repository of native intelligence, code of moral laws and philosophy of both life and social justice. Proverbs are kernels that contain the wisdom of the people entrenched in their philosophical outlook on life. Proverbs are then used in many different situations and occasions to affirm traditional values. Social problems and personal difficulties can also be settled through appeals to the sanctioning proverbs. The famous words of Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* that, “proverb is the palm-oil with which words are eaten” readily adds to this. In other words, proverbs are used in conversation to enrich speech, and make meanings more concrete. Odebunmi(2006:153) examines proverbs from the function that they perform in society and thus sees them as more of a social construct. Mollanaza 2001:53) has defined proverb as "a unit of meaning in a specific context through which the speaker and hearer arrives at the same meaning." Norrick (1994:78) situated his definition when he defined proverb in its semantic ramifications as “a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning.” Furthermore, the use of proverbs in traditional African society is both important and inevitable. They are greatly valued and held in high esteem, often used to portray actions or events in a picturesque manner.

Alagoa (1968:235) argues further that proverbs are witty sayings of the wise that, embody personal and general historical experiences. R.B. Browne (1968) argues succinctly that a proverb is a powerful and effective means for transmitting the basic elements of culture, social morality, manners, and ideas of a people from one generation to another. On the basis of their neatness of structure or sharpness of poetic appeal, proverbs are said to enjoy greater popularity, and by extension be a finer art form, than such longer forms as folktales or songs. Accordingly, they are "by far the most popular of these shorter forms and have been widely collected and studied by

foreign and native African scholars alike" Okpewho (1985: 8). From the ongoing discussions, it is acceptable to assume that proverbial usage remains a popular and enterprising vocation among Africans, despite the damaging influence of technological sophistication that has tended to reduce with impunity everything associated with traditional way of life in Africa.

The contribution of Iyabode Omolara Daniel (2016:67)) to the discourse is quite enlightening. According to her, proverbs increase in value when the original texts are compared to their post proverbial forms as an indication of their modern adaptation, communicative creativity and the linguistic dynamism of youth. For his part, Ambrose Monye (1996:9) establishes the significance of proverbs in African orature, noting that the participant-observation method enables a community member to explore proverb use in Africa in conversation, prayer, dance, song and tales. While exploring the place of proverbs in literature, Adeleke Adeeko (1998) observes that proverbs are commonly used to mark thematic shifts, indigenous high rhetoric self-conscious speech, and the intellectual sharpness of characters. Proverb citation also often complements laudatory portrayals of village life.

Many cultures and peoples of the world have proverbs that serve important socio-epistemological purposes in their world. We can easily be in consonance with D'Angelo's (1977) assertion that "almost every nation has its share of proverbs and wise sayings" (366). In Benin, proverbs are understood to be aphoristic expressions with usually deep meanings and truths known to a limited circle of people within the culture but that through popular and common usage have become accepted by everybody within the culture or community. African proverbs undoubtedly consist of home truths expressed in a pithy manner resulting in their recommending themselves to extended circle of speakers of a given language.

Orality and Performance

Oral literature in Africa is tied to performance for the full actualisation of its potentials. The inherent interplay between the audience and the performer is vital to oral literary realisation that they are mutually inclusive. The question of performance as applicable to oral literature was first mooted in the traditional Japanese theatre. Andrew Gerste quoted by Ruth Finnegan raised the issue of the centrality of performance in analysing the literature of Asia and Africa. He felt that the practice where critics analyse the literature of the Asian continent with Western criteria based on written text was destined to be narrow, lop-sided and misleading (Gerste, 43; Ruth Finnegan, 1). Finnegan supports this point of view when she examined the in-depth relevance of performance in the study of African literature. Her major reason for doing this was to seek for ways or a way to formulate an enduring theory of literature that would bring to being the relevance of oral and written literature instead of the biases towards the text as the primary subject of analysis and consideration.

Despite Finnegan's avowed objective in her writing that performance must necessarily be a part of literary studies, the importance of performance in oral literary studies still lacks in-depth attention. Nonetheless, the truth of the matter is that performance and oral literature are mutually inclusive, as folklore is usually transmitted through the practice of oral tradition or orality.

Flora Davantine (2009:12) views orality in literature as coterminous with performance. Indeed, she sees orality in Africa and Asia as based mainly on performance, as appealing to the senses of sight and touch as well as sound. The beauty of this literature relates to the performer's spontaneous oral creation that draws on deep seated cultural ideas. This view is also akin to the one expressed by Elliot Oring (1986: 34) when he stressed that oral societies rely solely on memory which in turn relies greatly on culture for remembrance and relevance (34). He is of the view that

the power of creation feeds on the muses provided by spontaneity as the performer continues in the craft of literary oral creation. Oring writes further:

In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retrieving and retaining carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in highly rhythmic, very balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings, and in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone, so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is usually intertwined with memory systems.

It has therefore become increasingly clear from the discussions on orality and performance that literature can be analysed not only as the content setting for some enduring –writable text but also as itself being the central reality. This enables us to extend the concept of literary expression so that the analysis and interpretation of literature can accommodate unwritten forms. It will also draw attention to the orality and beauty of African literature. The style used by the praise singer in the community cannot be confused with any other and it provides inspirations through acoustic effects--rhythms, sonic voice, and endearing performances (Opland (1983:19).

Orality is crucial and germane to the understanding and appreciation of African literature and for any full, relevant analysis. Ruth Finnegan (1988:15) supports this line of reasoning when she identifies the central position of the narrator's voice and performance in Sierra Leone's literature. In his writing, Nkem Okoh (2008: 29) is also of the opinion that oral narrative communicates to the audience as a performed act. He stresses the fact that oral narratives are a communication system in which a social transaction takes place principally between a narrator and an audience (11). The fact of performance in African literature is expressed by Finnegan. Her stance is clearly summed up in the fact that oral literature is principally dependent on a performer

who formulates it in words on a specific occasion and that this is the major, if not the only way, it can be realised as a literary product.

In addition, Guenther (1999: 77-99) provides important insight into the performative aspects of oral narratives. Even if the content of a story is the same, its meanings are produced in part by the performance context. He further observes that the content of a story is influenced by aspects of the physical setting such as the immediate surroundings, the weather, and the season. Style and content are affected as well by the formality or informality of the social setting. The purpose of telling a story virtually influences the rhetorical strategy and intent of the narrator/s. All of these aptly suggest that a story is a historically contingent textual event rather than an unchanging sacred object of anonymous authorship.

Oral Poetry

The subject of oral poetry has been variously discussed by scholars but not much has been done on the Poetry of Akobẹ- the Bini minstrel. Poetry is a part of the culture and tradition of a people. It is a means of communicating with every spiritual deity worshipped. This may vary across cultures but it stands as an integral part of their lives. Sone Mirabeau (2001) in his study on the religious poetry of Bakossi people of Cameroon observes that religious poetry can be used as a vehicle for social control within a society, since core values and precepts are made around it. Besides its social and moral relevance, poetry is inspirational and a 'spiritual nourishment' for the soul of man (Reist 1998).

In Benin, the practice of oral poetry takes various forms include prayers, songs and poetry. All these share a common characteristic; they reflect the spiritual life of the people. The religious world-view of the people is usually contained in the poetry of the people. As a result, the performer of this type of poetry is necessarily familiar with the social and literary background of his audience.

Finnegan (1992:204) agrees with this when she asserts that “The religious significance of a poetic product can only be assessed with a detailed knowledge of its social and literary background, for only then can one grasp its meaning.” The Binis historically had an oral culture and all the varieties of religious poetry can be found amongst them. There are the songs sung to praise the gods, incantations and divination, praise-poetry, eulogies, lyrics, ballads, and so on.

Egbeyemi Ifeoluwa in her work on ‘The Poetry of Pastor Adeboye’s Praise Songs examined selected poems of Pastor Adeboye and concluded that the themes of oral poetry vary and could be adapted to different situations and have diverse preoccupations. The poetry is usually “embedded in strong themes” Egbeyemi (2011:40). The poems teach lessons of perseverance, thanksgiving, faith and salvation. Just like the Yorubas, the Binis have a deep-seated respect and reverence for God. They know and believe that God is the supreme deity who should be accorded respect by all. This is shown in their poetic creation. As such, there is hardly any object or person that is not devoted to a Supreme Being. O. B. Akinfenwa (2005:97-98) is of the opinion that the Supreme Being “begins, controls and ends all the affairs of life for the Yoruba people” Thus God as a Supreme Being is a predominant theme in the poetry of oral literature.

The Portrait of the Artist

Mr Wilson Osasumwen Ehigiator is a household name in Benin as well as outside the country. He is a multi-talented artist; a musician, bard, and a dramatist. Also known by his praise names Akobe-Eghian (the trap for the enemy) or, lately, Akobe no mu igho - the trap that catches money, he was born on Saturday, May 1972 to the family of Ehigiator in Benin City, Edo State. He is the winner of several musical awards in and outside the country. The father of Wilson

Ehigiator is still alive. He is a notable and respected, chief and holder of the title of the Oṣon-Qlāye of Benin kingdom.



Mr. Wilson Osasumwēn Ehigiator a.k.a Akobē-Eghian in performance, 2016.

Wilson Osasumwēn Ehigiator, alias Akobē was taught the formal skills of acting and public entertainment by a notable dramatist and cultural artist Mr. Qzin Qziṅgberiuwa a.k.a. Erhatiro-Solē when he came to Benin later in life. Before then, he had been initiated into acting in 1999 by a friend he simply knew as Brother Friday. (He never knew this person was his half- brother of the same father till several years later). Today, he sees music as a great weapon of social reconstruction. He believes that music is for happy people and for those that are light-hearted,

concurring with William Shakespeare that anyone that is not moved by the sound of music is dangerous. He has become a household name in Benin, having acquired his fame through music and acting.

Analysis of Texts

Akobe's songs are rich in proverbs which are in themselves poetic in nature. In other words, the proverbs are laced within figurative expressions, stylistic features and rhetorical devices. The location of a few examples of such poetic devices within the context of the proverbs used in the songs of the artist should suffice in this paper.

Personification - Personification, or in the Greek, *prosopopeia*, is a device in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings.

Edo: Ugu wẹ rẹ iren dia ẹvbo na na gbe ọdion

English: The vulture says it forbids the land where elders are beaten

Here the vulture is personified as commenting on the life of the people, arguing for respect for elders. The proverb presupposes that the reason the vulture is rarely seen by the people in open places is because the young ones do not respect their elders. The elders here are the older people in the society. The vulture proposes that elders be respected.

Edo: Amẹn gbẹ ikpafẹn, iba gha ghoghọ; ọ ma rẹn ogha vbe sẹ egbe ẹde ọvbere

English: Rain beats the veranda of the house and the pavement is happy, not

knowing its own turn will come

What are personified here are the veranda and the pavement of the house. These proverbs help to promote the fact that we need to feel for others. It is not always justified to remain unconcerned when matters or misfortune do not directly affects us. Such personified objects help to bring the message within the experiences and observation of young people who are to learn from the proverb's teachings.

Edo: mẹn oka sẹ agbọn na khẹ uwe, o re yi irunhun gbẹ iyan

English: 'I came to this world before you,'-that is why the grass overgrow yams

Here grasses are personified in order to bring the message closer to the people. In a society where agriculture and cultivation historically played a large role in the life of the people, the need to have respect for elders can be communicated using the symbols of yams and grass two major opposing vegetation in farming. Just as the grasses will always grow on the farm, so will the seniority of the elders be propagated continuously in social life. People can easily connect with these symbolic references.

1. Edo: Ugu we iren ma ro ni iren rie oya vbe obẹ ebaba, o re ye iren gbẹ eto ke erinmwın re.

English: The vulture says it does not want to receive insults from the barber, that is why he barbed his hairs from heaven.

The vulture is given the attributes of a person in order to teach the need for self dependency. The vulture is known to have a bald head so he does not need the services of a barber. Thus if we learn to take care of ourselves, we will have independence and be self- sustaining.

2. Edo: Ehen okpa o ren oro no ru uwe eze

English: Only the fish knows the secret of the river

The fish is personified here to promote the idea that certain issues should be left with the experts. Novices should not interfere in matters that can be best handled by experts. Since the fish is always inside the river, it knows the river better than others such as humans who hardly go as deep as the fish. One only has to know the relationship between the river and the fish to understand the meaning of this proverb.

3. Edo: Idu wẹ re owa ọ re owa

English: The dove says 'home is home'

The dove - a bird is also given human qualities. It is given the ability to recognise its home. This proverb is used to teach the idea that one should always value what one has regardless of what others may openly display before you. It is used to emphasize the value of satisfaction that is gotten from contentment. It is noted that the nest of the dove is not as refined as those of other birds, yet the dove flies there and stays in it as it is.

Simile

Simile is a comparison between two distinctly different things. It is explicitly indicated by the words "like" or "as" (Abrams 97)

Edo: Ẹfe no sun vbẹ ọrẹrẹ

English: The wealth draws like slimy 'ogbolo' (seeds of bush mango-*Invingia Gabonesis*)

Wealth is compared to *ogbolo* which is sticky and draws like a gum. The simile communicates here that the wealth referred to will stay with the owner for a long time and not disappear quickly. This type of wealth stays with the owner till old age, and not leaving him in poverty. Just as the *ogbolo* sticks together, so will the wealth stick with the owner.

1. Edo: Ikebe okhuo ye vbẹ na gbale ẹyẹn ne mu ye ekpo isa

English: The buttocks of the woman are like a live snake tied in a raffia bag.

The comparison of the buttocks to a live snake is anchored to the image of the live snake inside a raffia bag will move, be restless and attract attention like the buttocks of the woman. This suggests that sexy female buttocks are robust and fleshy enough to attract the attention of all when in movement, especially the attention of men.

2. Edo: evban eso ni fe gha van vbe awa na ye igbo ẹviẹn de

English: Some rich men shout like the slave bought with the proceeds from the sale of a dog.

The comparison achieved in the reference to the slave bought with money received from the sale of a dog lies in the fact that the money acquired from the sale of the dog retains the barking characteristics of the dog. Because the dog from which the money was gotten barks, any animal bought with it will acquire that characteristics. In the days of slavery or the days where the buying of domestic servants was common, such observations were made. Thus, a product is always affected by the source of the money used for the purchase.

3. Edo: unu ọmaen ma ghi khe unu na ka ya wen

English: The mouth of the aged does not look like the one that sucked breast before.

This simile compares the mouth of the aged to the mouth of a younger person. When one sees the mouth of the aged that has become dry and without flesh, one wonders how it could be the same mouth that sucked the mother's breast. This proverb illustrates the fact that things may turn out differently from the way they appeared at the beginning. When one has become experienced in life, one is no longer the same as in the period of youthful innocence.

4. Edo: ẹvbo no ogie ghi ye ye vbe okhuo ne mwẹn ọdọ

English: A land without a king is like a woman without a husband

This comparison is founded on the cultural roles given to women and kings. A land without a king has no leadership and so is prone to chaos and other social vices. A woman without a husband is also seen as lawless, since in Benin culture, the man is the source of control that the woman has. Thus if a woman has no husband, there is nobody culturally assigned to control her and give her the peace that will keep the community going.

Irony

Irony (traditionally classified as one of the *tropes*) is a statement in which the meaning that a speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation, but with indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite, attitude or evaluation.

Examples:

1. Edo: erhan na mu yaen okherẹ ọ re ọka wu khẹ nẹ okherẹ

English: The wood placed on the fallen palm tree dies before the palm tree.

The irony is that the wood placed on the fallen palm tree is usually fresher than the palm tree that has been cut or has fallen down. However, the fresh wood dries faster than the wood of the palm tree. It is ironic that the dead plant stays 'fresh' longer than freshly cut wood.

2. Edo: evban nẹ ma gie ọvban urhunmwun nọ ghi do gha nọ vba rie re

English: Those who did not send a message now ask you what you brought from your

Journey.

One expects that it is only those who send you on an errand who can question you about the journey and ask about the things you brought home. It is therefore ironic that those who were not a party to your journey are now those who stand to question you as to what you have brought. This should

not concern them since they were not privy to the reason you went for the journey. However, in life we find such situations where those who should not be concerned about your private life takes it upon themselves to question you about it.

3. Edo: agbe ghe gia aren, a fian no ovban fo

English: You want to eat in secret; (yet) you gave it out to another person.

The irony here is that when one wants to eat or do something secretly, one is not supposed to tell anyone so that the action can remain a secret. But in this case, the person who intends to keep the secret gave part of the ‘food; to another person. That person will tell others about what he has been given, exposing the secret for all to see or hear. The irony is that if you want to keep something secret, you should not go about talking to others about it.

4. Edo: na we nọ mu igbina ọ ka fi ekpa

English: Those expected to halt/prevent the fight struck the first blow.

One does not expect those who are supposed to rescue you from your problems to be the ones compounding the problems. This twist in natural expectation is ironic.

Metaphor

In a metaphor, a word or expression that in literal usage denotes one kind of thing is applied to a distinctly different kind of thing, without asserting a comparison. The traditional way of analyzing metaphors holds that a metaphor is a departure from the *literal* (that is, the standard) use of language and serves as a condensed or elliptical *simile*, in that it involves an implicit comparison between two disparate things.

Examples:

1. Edo: a gha ke ugbo re, ama ghi khuẹ, ugbo ẹ re aye ye

English: A man who comes from the farm without taking his bath is still at the farm

The man who comes from the farm without taking his bath is directly compared to the man who is still in the farm because he is still as dirty as the man who remained at the farm.

2. Edo: evba re kẹ ọ re ya nẹ ọmọ

English: The wealth of a man earned during his lifetime and left to his children after his death is metaphorically compared to food left-over from a meal that is given to children

Edo: ai khi uro gue aro Ọsa

English: One cannot lock the door against the eyes of God

The act of trying to hide from God is metaphorically compared to the act of trying to lock the door against the eyes of God.

3. Edo: oṣen nọ gbe evbin okọ

English: The sun that kills the plant

The metaphor here is that the direct activity of the hot sun on the plant results in death. Just as the hot sun scorches the plant, so does death come to human beings. The plant is a metaphor for human beings.

4. Edo: ọmọ gha gbe ẹse, ẹko gha riẹnriẹn ẹmwinbiọre

English: English: A parent is happy when the child dances well

The metaphor is the word dances. Here it refers to good behaviour. When one dances, others watch and comment on the dance. Similarly when one behaves, others also comment for good or evil.

5. Edo: okhiọnkpa ghi mwẹn uyi

English: The man who walks alone is not respected

The man who walks alone is a metaphor for a woman with no child or husband. When a woman has no husband or a child in Benin, she is not accorded any respect or honour. The woman without a child walks alone because children are the accompaniment in marriage and life.

Edo: okpan nẹ mwẹn ugue ghi mwẹn uyi

English: A plate without its cover has no respect

Usually it is a plate that can be covered or was manufactured with a cover that is used in serving esteemed visitors, indicating respect. The plate in this proverb is another metaphor for a woman without a husband. The husband is seen as the cover and the glory of a worthy woman.

6. Edo: ru ẹwạen vbe egbe no wọn amẹn vbe avan no wen esaiẹn vbẹ asọn

English: Beware of those who drink water in the day and drink blood at night.

Those who drink water in the day and drink blood at night is a metaphor for witches and wizards. They always appear harmless during the day whereas they do their nefarious work at night. To drink water in the day is a metaphor for transparency and harmlessness while the drinking of blood at night is a metaphor for evil and secrecy.

7. Edo: ọmọ na mu vbo vbo marẹn vbe nẹ ode re re

English: A child that is backed by the mother does not know that the road is long.

A child that is carried on back by the mother is a metaphor for someone who has been shielded from suffering by another person. He is compared directly to the child carried by the mother. Because the child does not have to walk, he does not feel the discomfort of the long journey. This is also the case with anybody that has been protected from the problems of life by the parents or any other person.

Edo: otọ ọ re ọ miẹn uhe enọ nẹ

English: It is the ground that sees the anus of the one that defecates on the floor.

This means that there is no secret that can be hidden from God. When a man defecates on the floor, even when he is not seen by anybody, the ground sees him. In the same vein, when one does anything in secret, we cannot hide it from God.

8. Edo: erhen ọ re ovbiye obalo

English: Fire is the sister of pain.

The word 'sister' is used as a metaphor here. Human beings have sisters that come from the same mother. Likewise fire and pains are also from the same mother since they both bring discomfort and harm to man.

The metaphors discussed above can be translated into a statement of literal similarity without loss of cognitive content (that is, of the information they convey). These metaphors serve mainly to enhance the rhetorical force and stylistic vividness of the texts. This is done by bringing together the disparate ideas of the vehicle and tenor so as to affect a meaning that results from their interaction and that cannot be duplicated by literal assertions of a similarity between the two elements. A metaphor is simply used as a rhetorical or poetic departure from ordinary usage, in that it affects the ways we perceive the world.

Synecdoche

In synecdoche (Greek for "taking together"), a part of something is used to signify the whole, or (more rarely) the whole is used to signify a part. (Abrams 99)

Examples: the words used as synecdoche include the following:

Edo: uhumwun ne ọgha lo ọdion re, ẹeinmwun ọ re ke le uro ẹgbẹ

English: The head that will be the eldest starts visiting family members from heaven

1. Edo: e no mu uhumwun ye ẹze , ọ vbe mu ẹ re

English: He who puts his head in the river brings it out himself

2. Edo: e ne mu ohan Oba, uhunmwun iran ya taẹ

English: Those who do not fear the Oba pays with their heads

3. Edo: uhunmwun no ra agbon o re dole egbe yi

English: The head that is alive maintains itself

The use of synecdoche in the above proverbs is to emphasize specific aspects of the things or persons that the synecdoche represents and to minimise the importance the objects themselves. It is also use here to emphasize the function of the specific parts mentioned. Example is the use of the head and the hand in the texts.

Euphemism

An inoffensive expression used in place of one that is felt to be disagreeable or embarrassing. It is the substitution of a milder or less direct expression for one that is harsh or blunt. (Abrams 83)

Examples:

1. Edo: e te ne mu ohan Oba, uhunmwun ni yan o ya taẹ

English: Those who do not fear the Oba pays with their heads

This means that those who do not fear the Oba, and so challenged him, are killed.

The pay with their heads.

2. Edo: ai ghi tohan oleghan na miẹ re ewu gha yo

English: One does not pity the prisoner to the extent of collecting his clothes to wear.

To collect the clothes of the prisoner is euphemism for taking his place. No one, even out of pity, wants to replace the prisoner in his cell.

3. Edo: ohue ghi ye osisi fi egui

English: The hunter does not shoot the tortoise with a gun. That would be an over kill.

One does not kill the tortoise using a gun

4. Edo: okhionkpa mwẹn uyi

English: The man who walks alone is not respected.

Walking alone is euphemism for bareness. It refers to a man without a child

The value of euphemism in these texts resides in how, when, and why they are used. Generally they are used for dealing with taboos or sensitive subjects like sex and human problems that may have a negative emotional impact on those listening, and also to avoid vulgarity. They are used to avoid too many unpleasant connotations. They are also used to upgrade the denotatum: to conceal the unpleasant aspects of such denotatum like bareness or sex.

Allegory. An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification. In the sustained allegory of ideas, the central device is the *personification* of abstract entities such as virtues, vices, states of mind, modes of life, and types of character. In explicit allegories, such reference is specified by the names given to characters and places. Many proverbs are allegorical in that the explicit statement is meant to have, by analogy or by extended reference, a general application: "(Abrams 8.). The above discussion is never truer than the case of the proverbs used by Akobe in his songs. Most of the proverbs under study here involve a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage. Examples:

1. Edo: uwu no gbe iye ofen, ẹ rẹ re orion ni ivbi ẹre fian ẹro nẹ

English: The death that killed mother rat does not want the children to grow up, having denied them a motherly care. At one level, this makes coherent sense in that death would not have killed the mother-rat if he really wanted the rats to survive, as they would likely die without their mother. At the secondary level of signification, this statement means that one evil act can result in multiple consequences. This has nothing to do with rats or children. When an evil act is committed against anyone but has far reaching effects, the proverb is appropriate.

2. Edo: ai ya aro rẹn no rie omwan vbi igbọn

English: One cannot tell a cannibal by looking at the face

This proverb in its non-allegorical stance and interpretation means that it is not easy to differentiate a cannibal from any other human being just by looking at the face. At the secondary level, it means that the outward appearance of somebody is not enough to classify him as bad or good. There are those who pretend to be friends but are really enemies, and it will take more than looking at their faces to know who they really are. The proverb warns that you must be careful and thoughtful when dealing with strangers.

Edo: owa ma maṅ emẹ buan, agha te vi ivbi ẹre lele egbe

English: If the monkey had a settled home, he would not have been travelling with his children

This comment is based on the observed pattern of monkeys that always travel in the bush in the company of their wives and children. At the primary level of meaning, this proverb suggests that the home of the monkey is not settled, accounting for its pattern of being with the children in the bush. At the secondary level of meaning, this proverb pertains to how people behave and how inferences can be read in real life. For example if a person's mind is settled, it will reflect in his actions. The state of one's house reflects one's social behaviour.

Edo: vbe odin khian ya ta ma aruaro re ghe uke wu

English: How does the dumb one explain to the blind that the cripple is dead

On the non-allegorical level of meaning, this statement suggests a difficult situation in which someone who cannot speak is faced with the task of explaining the death of a cripple to a blind man. This difficulty is an allegory of the situation in which one cannot explain a difficult, mainly culpable situation without being implicated.

Allusion

A figure of speech which makes brief, even casual reference to a historical or literary figure, event, or object to create a resonance in the reader or to apply a symbolic meaning to the character or object of which the allusion consists. Since allusions are not explicitly identified, they imply a fund of knowledge shared by an author and the audience for whom the author writes. (Abrams 1999:9)

1. Edo: ose mwen we ni su ihen gha rie egbo ogharefe

English: He has asked me to follow him to the forest of Ogharefe. This proverb is a direct allusion to a real historical event in the then Benin kingdom when it was made up of what is now Edo State and Delta State. The people in Benin used to go to the market at Ogharefe village now in Delta State. To go to this market, they passed through forest that was very dangerous because of thieves and gangsters operating on the road without hindrance. It was considered very risky and dangerous for anybody to pass through the forest. Thus when it is used as in discourse; it means somebody is asking you to embark on a journey that is fraught with danger, including death.

2. Edo: ai ye akpolo mu emila ye Edo

English: One does not take the cow to Benin on account of size.

This proverb alludes to the historical events in Benin kingdom during the late nineteenth century. During an annual festival celebrated in the kingdom, a live cow was brought to Benin by the strongest medicine man around. This animal was brought by the man who held the cow from underneath the neck with his teeth, dragging it while spectators cheered the man who was able to do this. This animal was taken from Ogba community and brought all the way to the Oba's palace. So was no mean feat that this was accomplished. Anyone who could do such a thing in those days was highly revered and rewarded by the Oba. It presented the community's show of spiritual prowess, since the cow could, as was often the case, kill any man attempting to hold it by such means. Thus this proverb refers to this ancient act by saying that bringing the cow to Benin, has nothing to do with one's physical size.

3. Edo: ọvbokhan ọ re ọ gbe Eguan vbẹ ore Udo

English: It is a small child that defeated Eguan in Udo

Eguan was a notable Benin warrior and great wrestler who was and is still highly regarded in the kingdom due to his extraordinary strength and exploits. In fact if he leaned on a palm tree, the tree would fall down. Despite his strength, he was floored one day by a small child who had no reputation for wrestling. This proverb is an allusion to the unexpected defeat of Eguan. Thus it serves as a warning to be careful when dealing the younger generation or new challenges, and not to under-rate anyone at any times.

4. Edo: ọdionwere gha se emiowo na zẹ na ra, ọna gbẹ kọyọn ghe na zẹ nẹ omwan ọvbere, ughi rẹn ghe enikaro ọ re gui ma

English: When the eldest in the village envies the meat given to another in the meeting,
he is complaining to the ancestors.

This is an allusion to a village head who was maltreated by his people. They first refused to make him the village head because he had no wife. They finally made him village head after pressure from a nearby village that threatened to stop them from getting water from their stream. Once he was finally made the village head, his villagers shared meat and proceeds from the village unjustly. He usually complained to the ancestors by looking at the meat given to him with scorn and eyeing the one giving to him. The ancestors eventually punished the village for their behaviour. This proverb alludes to this event and thus is a warning that the head of a village has a different way of reaching the ancestors and that they would usually listen to him. To the people it means they must behave carefully, and be fair and just in all that they do.

Conclusion

Although, it is not in dispute that the proverbs examined are a reflection of the cultural context and worldview of the Edo people, this paper locates and situates their aesthetic value and poetic tradition in the overall rendering of the texts in translation. It is therefore not out of place to conclude that because the proverbs in the songs of Akobe have artistic merits, we are justified in appreciating them as literary masterpieces.

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