

## The Use of Animal Symbols in Niyi Osundare's Tender Moments

## استخدام رموز الحيوانات في لحظات نبي أوسونداري الرقيقة

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### الملخص:

يستخدم نبي أوسونداري الصور والرموز لاستكشاف القضايا البيئية والقضايا الاجتماعية والسياسية. وبينما حلل الباحثون بشكل موسع صور أوسونداري الشخصية، إلا أن هناك ندرة في الأبحاث حول توظيفه للرموز التقليدية واستكشافه لموضوع الحب في ديوانه "لحظات حنان". تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى سد هذه الفجوة من خلال دراسة استخدام أوسونداري للرموز الحيوانية التقليدية لتعزيز موضوع الحب في ديوانه "لحظات حنان". ويهدف هذا البحث إلى هدفين: تحديد الرموز الحيوانية التقليدية التي استخدمها أوسونداري في قصائده العاطفية، وتحليل دلالاتها في سياق الحب. وقد اعتمدت هذه الدراسة منهجية بحث نوعية، تتضمن تحليل البيانات والملاحظة. ويرتكز الإطار النظري على نظرية التحليل النفسي لفرويد، التي تفترض أن استخدام الرموز، بما في ذلك الصور الحيوانية التقليدية، يمكن أن يوفر رؤى ثاقبة حول شخصية الكاتب ودوافعه الكامنة. تُظهر نتائج هذه الدراسة أن أوسونداري يُدمج رموز الحيوانات التقليدية بفعالية في قصائده العاطفية، وأن هذه الرموز تلعب دوراً محورياً في تعزيز موضوع الحب. تُسهم هذه الدراسة في فهم أعمق لفن أوسونداري الشعري، وتؤكد على أهمية الرموز التقليدية للإنسان.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** رمزية الحيوان، الشعر الأفريقي، لحظات حنان، صور الحب، نبي أوسونداري

### Abstract:

Niyi Osundare uses images and symbols to explore environmental issues and socio-political matters. While scholars have extensively analyzed Osundare's private imageries, there is a dearth of research on his deployment of traditional symbols and his exploration of the theme of love in his collection Tender Moments. This paper aims to address this gap by examining Osundare's utilization of traditional animal symbols to enhance the theme of love in Tender Moments. The objectives of this paper are twofold: to identify the traditional animal symbols employed by Osundare in his love poems and to analyze their significance within the context of love. A qualitative research methodology, involving data analysis and observation, is adopted for this study. The theoretical framework is grounded in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which posits that the use of symbols, including traditional animal imagery, can provide insights into the writer's personality and underlying motivations. The findings of this paper demonstrate that Osundare effectively incorporates traditional animal symbols into his love poems, and these symbols play a crucial role in reinforcing the theme of love. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of Osundare's poetic artistry and emphasizes the relevance of traditional symbols to man.

**Keywords:** Animal symbolism, African poetry, Tender Moments, Love imagery, Niyi Osundare

## Introduction

Niyi Osundare is a renowned poet, playwright, and critic, who has authored over eighteen poetry collections and two plays. He frequently employs imagery, symbolism, and oral techniques derived from the Yoruba oral tradition to express his environmental, socio-political, and emotional themes. Animals are a dominant source of imagery and symbolism throughout his work, particularly in his environmentally focused collections, such as *The Eye of the Earth*. His use of animal symbolism also extends to his first love collection, *Tender Moments*, highlighting his affinity for this type of imagery. This predilection likely stems from his appreciation and adaptation of the Yoruba oral tradition, which is replete with animal symbols. The qualities of animals are often depicted in Yoruba praise chants and songs, explaining Osundare's occasional use of the Yoruba language when referencing them in his poetry. For instance, in "You Are the Reason" (from *Tender Moments*), he uses "Àlabaun," the Yoruba word for tortoise. Osundare is not the first writer to recognize and utilize the power of animal symbolism in literature. Animal symbolism is a ubiquitous phenomenon across various cultures, particularly evident in myths, legends, and literary works. As such, it is not surprising to find its prevalence in the poetry of renowned figures like Niyi Osundare.

Orhero and Okon<sup>(24)</sup> investigate the significance of animals in the African socio-cultural context, noting the prevalence of human-animal transformation and symbolism in oral traditions. They define animal symbolism as the representation and signification of animals in literature. While the critics do not explicitly differentiate between private and traditional animal symbolism, they emphasize the importance of these symbols and explore their archetypal significance in Joe Oshie's poetry. Hassan and Sadeek<sup>(15)</sup> observe that animal symbolism is employed across cultures, both in real life and in mythical narratives. Although their research focuses on Indian-American literature, they underscore the significance of animal symbolism to humans by demonstrating the primordial connection between animals and humans. They mention the Native American belief in a kinship between animals and humans and their yearning for its restoration. Lakshmi and Mani<sup>(20)</sup> assert that animal symbolism plays a pivotal role in the history, tradition, culture, and philosophy of literature across ages. They connect oral traditions to animal symbolism, noting their frequent appearance in proverbs, music, folktales, and stories. According to the duo, ancient people utilized animals as distinctive features of their traditional states, aiding in the differentiation of ethnic groups. When exploring the significance of animal symbolism in narratives, the critics refer to complex mythological systems created by Ancient Egypt, Rome, and Greece using animals.

Haghshenas<sup>(14)</sup>, emphasizes the importance of animals to humans by citing their use as totems in primitive tribes. It is not surprising, then, that Jung<sup>(19)</sup> views animals as symbols of man's primitive and instinctual nature. Schwartz<sup>(27)</sup>, observes that animal imagery and metaphor have been used throughout literature for derogatory, satirical, or sympathetic purposes to enhance characterization and offer generalizations about human beings. Jose and Preethi<sup>(18)</sup>, highlight the significance of animal symbolism, noting that animals play a crucial role in writing by revealing hidden messages and satirizing politics. They also emphasize that the use of such symbolism enhances the impact of the writing and provides readers with a break in the flow, akin to an "in-between" story. Tracing the origin of animal symbolism to cave wall depictions of animals, the scholars continue to stress its importance in aiding readers' understanding of a writing's meaning and the author's objectives. Furthermore, they argue that authors have employed animal symbols to discuss controversial and sensitive social issues, strengthening and emphasizing their points and thereby fulfilling the purpose of their work. This explains the abundance of animal symbols in Niyi Osundare's socio-political poem, "The Leader and the Led".

There is a substantial body of literature emphasizing the importance and instinctual nature of animal symbolism. As expressed by the aforementioned scholars, these symbols are beneficial to both writers and readers. For writers, they offer the opportunity to convey hidden messages, regardless of their sensitivity, and to say much with a single element. For readers, they facilitate a deep connection with the writer, leading to easier understanding and deeper insights.

Many critics have studied Niyi Osundare's use of private symbols to convey his thematic concerns. Jeff<sup>(17)</sup>, Addo<sup>(2)</sup>, Olaluwoye and Ekueme<sup>(23)</sup>, and Alabi<sup>(4)</sup>, for example, all discuss the poet's employment of personal imagery and symbols to express his ecological concerns. They argue that Osundare utilizes these images to defend and celebrate nature. Ndifon<sup>(21)</sup> and Alu<sup>(5)</sup> examine the poet's use of private imagery to portray his socio-political and economic concerns. However, there is a dearth of scholarship on Osundare's use of traditional symbols. While Anyokwo<sup>(6)</sup> has drawn attention to the poet's love collection *Tender Moments*, his research does not investigate its theme of love. It is Akpoti<sup>(3)</sup> who provides an analysis of the theme of love in *Tender Moments* through the lens of traditional aquatic symbols.

This paper differentiates itself from<sup>(3)</sup> by focusing on Osundare's use of traditional animal symbolism to portray the theme of love in *Tender Moments*. The aim is to explore the significance of these symbols and propose a novel perspective on Osundare's poetry. The research centers on *Tender Moments*, a love anthology published by Niyi Osundare in 2006. It is the poet's first and only

collection dedicated solely to love. The anthology is divided into three sections: “In the Mood”, “Songs of Absence”, and “Metaphor”. From the 75 poems within this anthology, eleven have been selected and analyzed qualitatively through observation and analysis. These eleven poems are distributed across all three divisions.

## 2. Traditional Animal Symbolism And Psychoanalysis

Symbolism, as defined by Chadwick<sup>(8)</sup>, is a mode of expression that indirectly references something through the medium of another. However, it is more than just a method of reference; it is a fundamental instrument of knowledge, capable of revealing aspects of reality that other forms of expression cannot Cooper<sup>(10)</sup>. Symons<sup>(28)</sup>, argues that symbolism is inherent to literature, beginning with the first word uttered by the first human. He posits that words are symbolic in nature, carrying messages and conveying a form of innate reality and knowledge. Rahme<sup>(26)</sup>, in her study of Coleridge’s concept of symbolism, supports Symons’ view. She suggests that symbols are part of an innate knowledge that unites us, forming a part of our existence.

While the concepts of “unity” and “reality” may not apply to all symbols,<sup>(10)</sup> identifies traditional symbols as being central to the unity of nature. These symbols, recognized and understood innately, transcend the individual and are ingrained in the spirit. Booth and Mays<sup>(7)</sup>, note that traditional symbols have acquired agreed-upon significance over time, standing for something before the writer even mentions them. Jung<sup>(19)</sup>, distinguishes between natural and cultural symbols. Natural symbols are innate, while cultural symbols, according to Abrams<sup>(1)</sup>, are determined within a particular culture. Jung 19 (p93) further emphasizes the tendency of cultural symbols to evolve into collective images and eventually become traditional symbols. Newmark<sup>(22)</sup>, categorizes symbols into universal, cultural, and individual. The universal symbols he identifies align with the traditional and natural symbols described by earlier scholars. For instance, the symbol of a sword, as used by Newmark, can represent power, authority, warfare, the masculine principle, and perhaps more in the collective unconscious. Cultural symbols are specific to a particular society, while individual symbols are subject to personal moods and emotions. (22,16,1) refer to individual symbols as private symbols, created by writers in their works. Unlike traditional symbols, private symbols do not contribute to the unity described by (26) and (10). Booth and Mays<sup>(7)</sup> assert that private symbols lack agreed-upon significance and require readers to decipher their meanings within the context of the work.

We can therefore identify three primary types of symbols from these scholars: 1. Traditional, natural, or universal;

2. Cultural or conventional; and 3. Private or individual. The terms “natural”, “traditional”, and “universal” are essentially synonymous, referring to symbols that are widely recognized and shared across different peoples and societies. This paper will focus on these symbols, particularly those associated with animals.

This research is grounded in Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, whose connection and relevance to literature were elaborated upon by scholars in the twentieth century. Freud’s theory centers on the exploration of the psyche to uncover repressed emotions, thoughts, and sentiments. Dipio<sup>(11)</sup>, postulates that its application in literature involves examining how these elements manifest in art. Based on this theory, writers express their desires, ideas, and true selves through their art, utilizing signs, devices, language, and even punctuation marks. Therefore, studying the use of traditional animal symbols in Niyi Osundare’s poetry entails an exploration of his psyche to understand him, his creative process, and the impact of the symbol on the readers. In employing psychoanalytic theory, we also consider Carl Jung’s postulations. Jung proposes a collective unconsciousness that exists in the memory of humans and is expressed in art. This perspective is significant because this research focuses on “traditional” symbols whose significance is innate. Psychoanalytic theory is utilized to explore the poet’s psyche to ascertain why animal symbols are employed, their significance in reinforcing the theme of love, and their impact on the readers.

## 3. Animal Symbolism in Tender Moments

Niyi Osundare employs vivid animal imagery in his love collection *Tender Moments* to explore the diverse nature of love. Through these symbolic representations, the poet expresses nuances of this powerful emotion, using imagery that captures the essence of love.

### a) “In the Mood of Love”

The opening poem, aptly titled “In the Mood of Love”, sets the stage for the collection. It is the first poem in “In the Mood” section, and it uses metaphorical language to convey the sensations and emotions associated with being in love. The speaker’s intense passion is evident in the personification of the moon, which is described as playing hide-and-seek with the entire sky, symbolizing the speaker’s overwhelming desire. In the second stanza, the poet introduces the symbol of the deer to the mist, creating a visual image that evokes a sense of gentleness and grace. The deer, often associated with beauty and innocence, becomes a metaphor for the speaker’s love interest.

Tides tease and tangle  
At the water’s edge. The buck eyes  
The doe with a deep, alluring passion (TM3)

The deer symbol is not unique to Osundare's exploration of the theme of love. Ferber<sup>(12)</sup>, postulates that the doe and buck, as well as the fawn and the hind, appear in literature as symbols of metaphysical love hunt and the physical hunt for game itself. In using this symbol, the speaker conveys the intensity of desire for the beloved. The speaker is consumed by desire and yearns for the beloved passionately. This is further emphasized by the refrain, "Sún mó bí, Ológùró (move closer sweetheart)/I am in the mood for love tonight". We see the transition from the speaker's buck-like hunger to immediate desire for lovemaking which highlights the significance of the animal symbols and buttresses<sup>(19)</sup>'s postulations that animals represent man's instinctual nature. This significance becomes even more apparent in the third stanza, where the speaker says:

I can hear pigeons cooing  
In their coop. I can hear alapandede  
Swapping notes in the shady eaves (TM3)

Poets often use birds as symbols of love. The reason for this preference lies in their significance.<sup>(12)</sup>, expresses that birds are generally symbols of freedom, connected to their independent lifestyle and nurturing habits. They are also regarded as angelic and mystical.<sup>(10)</sup> and Cirlot<sup>(9)</sup>, have similar views, expressing that birds symbolize spiritualization, angels, supernatural aid, thoughts, and the soul. Love can be described as the freedom to express and enjoy desires without restrictions. This explains the use of two bird symbols in a three-line stanza. Osundare aims to stay close to natural phenomena and convey a lot with less in this love collection, hence the use of symbolism. In the above stanza, the poet continues to use animal imagery and their symbolism to express the theme of love. The poem fittingly begins with the pigeon symbol. Pigeons, along with doves, are viewed as birds of love mostly portrayed in poetry as carriers of love messages. The poet uses onomatopoeia, such as the sound "coo", to express the understanding of the pigeon's language of love. Despite being far away from the pigeon, it can be heard cooing due to their communal language of love. Moreover,<sup>(10)</sup>, expresses that pigeons represent fidelity. Thus, the speaker uses this symbol to express desire and unwavering fidelity for the love interest. Using another animal symbol, the alapandede (swallow), to continue the expression of desire, the speaker says that in addition to hearing pigeons, he can also hear the swallows expressing themselves in their own love language. This brings to mind<sup>(15)</sup>'s postulations on the connection between animals and humans and further buttresses the significance of this connection. Cooper<sup>(10)</sup>, expresses that swallows represent hope, new life, rebirth, and fertility. Therefore, after using the pigeon symbol to express desire and fidelity, the speaker uses the swallow symbol to express hope that the desire of making love with the mistress "tonight" will be realized.

In accordance with the postulations of<sup>(18)</sup> regarding the usefulness of animal symbols in enabling writers pass their messages with ease, the use of sound devices in these stanzas, along with the animal symbols, adds depth to the poem and facilitates the easy passage of the message. The poem continues to take on a deeper feel as more images and metaphors unfold. In the very next stanza, the speaker uses yet another bird, "ògé", which the poet describes as a yellow wagtail or grey wagtail, to express the intensifying desire. The bird is being personified as having powers to taunt the wind. As the reader explores more stanzas, they feel the passion poured into the poem. After the above stanzas, the speaker's language becomes more imperative. The beloved is given a series of instructions: "touch my tale", "smell my song", "unfurl my flower", "unravel my ravel". Through this alliterative use of language, we see the heightened desire. The second half of the poem tells the reader that the speaker has finally met with the beloved, and we feel his passions grow until they culminate in "say my name", which is repeated thrice to emphasize the release from a long journey of desire. The use of bird symbols in this poem elevates it and allows the reader to journey with the speaker until his point of release. As Jose and Preethi<sup>(18)</sup>, mention, animal symbolism indeed helps in passing hidden messages and through this poem the poet emphasizes this fact.

### b) "You are the Reason"

In the poem entitled "You are the Reason", the use of animal symbolism helps the poet express immense admiration and love for the beloved. The poem's musicality is immediately noticeable, resulting from the repetition of the lines "you/are the reason" in every stanza. The speaker ascribes several metaphysical powers to the beloved, emphasizing that through the powers, the sun, the river, and even animals can be affected. The speaker exaggerates the qualities of the beloved to express the depth of the love that is experienced. Freud<sup>(13)</sup>'s, definition of love as the over-estimation of the sexual object is relevant here because of the obvious over-estimation portrayed. The poem comes to life with the use of various images placed in every stanza. In the fourth stanza, the speaker says:

You  
Are the reason  
Pigeons coo in their coop  
Ants built their turreted castle (TM5)

The bird symbol reappears in this poem, representing freedom. For the speaker, the object of admiration is the *raison d'être*. Amidst metaphors, the beloved is portrayed as the reason why natural things do what they are known for, making this beloved the reason for life itself. 10(p13) expresses that ants are symbols for orderliness and industriousness, hence they build. However, for the speaker, the love interest is the

reason for this. The symbols in this poem convey the message that the speaker feels he can only see and enjoy these things because of the love they share. The poem continues in a similar vein until the end.

In the fifth stanza, the poet expresses that the beloved is the reason why “the scorpion forgets to sting/Alàbaun (tortoise) abandons his tabernacle of tricks”.<sup>(12)</sup>, and<sup>(10)</sup>, both agree that scorpions represent darkness, negative energy, death, and destruction. Therefore, when the speaker says the “scorpion forgets to sting”, it means destruction, pain, or any negative energy is far from their lives. The beloved thus has the powers to make someone’s life perfect. This is further strengthened by the tortoise symbol. Although the speaker refers to the tortoise as a symbol of tricks in the poem, metaphorically the tortoise represents longevity and strength. Its usage further deepens the poem’s message. Moreover the mention of Alàbaun(tortoise) is a direct reference to the use of the tortoise as trickster character in several African folktales. This brings to mind<sup>(20)</sup>’s assertions regarding animal symbols and their use in oral traditions. Moreover (6) and (3) in their works mention the poet’s reliance on oral techniques. This poem embodies these postulations aptly. The poem terminates with the use of the bird symbol. The speaker says, “you/are the reason/ birds fly”. The entire message is summarized using the bird symbol. The beloved gives the speaker the freedom to live, love, sing, and even write. The last line of the poem says, “my song comes in stanzas of seven”. That is, the love interest is the reason the song comes in stanzas of seven.

### c) “Love Can 111”

Animal symbols enhance the theme and metaphor of the poem “Love Can 111”. Jose and Preethi<sup>(18)</sup> Squarely discusses the enhancing nature of animal symbols and we see it portrayed in this poem. The speaker portrays the strength of the emotion “love” by personifying it with various features. Each stanza contains various images. The first stanza presents visual imagery as the poet plays with colors to express the prowess of the emotion. The second stanza is decorated with auditory imagery, using words like “music” and “whisper”. The third stanza is expressed with kinesthetic imagery, which continues into the fourth. However, one cannot miss the animal symbols positioned towards the end of the poem. The speaker goes:

Love can make you creak like a cricket  
Prattle like a cockatoo  
Flaunt your feathers like a peacock  
Flow like a river like a river like a river (TM6)

The poem’s effective use of onomatopoeia, repetition, and simile enhances its musicality and emotional impact. The gentle creaking of the “cricket” contrasts sharply with the loud and fluctuating prattling of the “cockatoo”.

This deliberate contrast mirrors the highs and lows of love experiences. The bird symbolism in this poem is significant. As seen previously, birds often represent freedom in love poetry. The “peacock”, with its showy plumage, symbolizes the pride and openness associated with love. According to (12) and (10), the peacock also represents longevity, royalty, and love. These animal symbols contribute to the poem’s beauty, depth, and overall theme of love.

### D) “The Evening of your Smile”

In the poem entitled “The Evening of your Smile”, the poet makes use of animal symbols to further illustrate the theme of love. The poem is cast in a descriptive manner:

In inhabit the evening of your smile  
Your golden grace coasts home to me  
Like swallows claiming back their niche  
In the eaves of dusken skies (TM9)

The poem opens with a celebration of the beloved’s “smile”, which extends into a second line praising the love interest’s “grace” as a home to the speaker. The postulations of (17,2,23 and 4) regarding Osundare’s use of symbols to celebrate nature is again apparent here since humans are a part of nature. Through this poem there is confirmation of Osundare’s tendency to bend towards symbols when there is need to praise or celebrate something or someone. These lines celebrate the speaker’s love interest and highlight the strength of their love while emphasizing the beloved’s paramount importance. The recurring bird symbol of the “swallow” reinforces the theme of home and newfound warmth. Swallows are known for their territorial nature, embodying the idea of homeliness. By describing the beloved as claiming the “niche”, the speaker conveys the idea of defenses being broken down and love being secured by the love interest. As 10(p232) observes, swallows also symbolize hope, new life, and rebirth, further emphasizing the speaker’s sense of renewal. While the second stanza lacks explicit animal symbolism, it is rich with devices that support the theme of love. Enjambment and oxymoron are used to describe the beloved’s face as both “mildly trembling” and “alive with joy”, creating a paradoxical image that highlights the speaker’s deep appreciation. The use of simile compares the beloved’s radiance to “burnished mahogany”, adding to the overall sense of beauty and admiration. The speaker’s primary goal in this poem is to convey the overwhelming power of love and its ability to consume one’s existence. The repeated use of terms like “dwell”, “inhabit”, and “live” in three of the five stanzas underscores this theme, emphasizing the central role the beloved plays in the speaker’s life.

The significance of animal symbols in passing this message cannot be overemphasized. In the third stanza of the poem, which is filled with numerous animal symbols, the speaker mentions that the beloved

possesses magical qualities that are capable of detaining one's "gaze". Using a simile, the speaker compares this magical detainment of "gaze" to the sexual instincts that cause "roosters" to "chase their hens" under the approval of the "agama".

Your magic detains my gaze  
Even roosters chase their hens  
Around the frayed skirt of the forest  
The Agama nodding its ancient head (TM9)

In using these symbols in this poem, the speaker expresses the natural and instinctual nature of love. The love the speaker has for the beloved is as natural as the sexual tension between "roosters" and "hens" and the instinctual nodding of the "agama". The use of the "agama" symbol itself is done to show how natural and ancient the emotion is. This becomes even clearer when one looks closely at the symbolic nature of the stanza as a whole. The use of symbols like "forest" and "agama" is deliberate, as they emphasize the instinctual, ancient, and deep nature of love and that of man as buttressed by<sup>(19)</sup>. Moreover, the use of the symbols underscores the essence and innateness of traditional symbols as put forward by<sup>(10)</sup>.

#### e) "Forbidden Song"

The bird symbol reappears again in the poem "Forbidden Song". Similar to several poems in this collection notably: "tender moments" and "the evening of your smile", the speaker starts by drawing attention to the face of the beloved. In "Forbidden Song" the speaker is charmed by the "largeness" of the beloved's eyes which are compared to "the sunflower" and "the sun" using simile. The speaker says this charm occurs because of the manner with which they open and close like the "sunflower" rising and setting with the sun. In the second stanza, we find the speaker using synesthesia to emphasize the effect of the beloved's voice. The voice is described as powerful, so much so that it can make "rivers change their course" and even compel "the weaverbird" to abandon its nest. The comfortable nature of the weaverbird's nest is expressed by the use of metaphor and alliteration in the last line of the stanza "singing straw". This is done to emphasize the strength of the beloved's voice. Moreover, using the bird symbol itself as earlier expressed is done because of its representation of freedom. Thus by using a bird that weaves its excellent nest, the speaker emphasizes the strength of the emotion. This is even more apparent because of the choice of bird used in the poem. The weaverbird is known for its well woven and well patterned nest, it is as a result of this skill that it is named "weaver". Its use in this stanza pushes the message that love can make one do unexpected things. 10(p190) elaborates on the symbolic nature of the act of weaving itself. He says weaving is a representation of life, creation and even time, since the act of weaving involves creating even as the creator is

said to have woven the world in various oral traditions. 9(p369), agrees with Cooper by expressing that the symbol basically represents creation and life. However, he takes it a step further by emphasizing that It is indeed a universal and prehistoric symbol. This analysis further buttresses the essence of this poem. The speaker's love for the beloved is described as "all powerful" since it is capable of affecting life itself.

The third stanza continues this message as the speaker begins to create sexual imagery by mentioning the "secret flower" between the beloved's legs. The speaker wants to possess this "flower" but is unable to due to the "ticket of thorns" around it and the number of "touch-me-nots" the love interest says. The poem terminates with the speaker expressing love and desire for the beloved. The speaker expresses the desire to eternally wait for the beloved despite being "forbidden". The speaker goes ahead to personify the beloved's "silence" as being "sophisticated" rather than being a sign of rejection. Apparently the message of the entire poem is carried by the second stanza where we see the significance of the infusion of the bird and the weaving symbols.

#### f) "Chase"

The second division of the anthology is tagged "Songs of Absence" and the poet expresses the effects of being away from one's beloved. Various images and symbols are used to express the emptiness that comes with the absence of one's love interest. Here we find animal symbols helping the poet to buttress this message and enable the reader to fellowship with the speaker in an innate level. The poem "Chase" is one that embodies the message of absence and emptiness. The poem has only eight lines divided into four stanzas but expressing the depth of the emotion. In the first stanza the speaker mentions failed efforts made towards making the beloved stay and the devastating effects of the failure. The speaker emphasizes this situation by repeating the word "plead" which enhances the poem. In the second stanza the antelope symbol "duiker" is used to express the significance of a "turning of the back" act by the beloved.<sup>(10)</sup> mentions that the antelope is a symbol of divinity. This emphasizes the importance of the love interest and expresses the significance of the back-turning. It is because of the so called extra-ordinary (divine) nature of the beloved that the speaker continues to be enticed despite being rejected. Rather than being heartbroken as the beloved walks away, the speaker is enthralled by the dance-like walk. This is further buttressed in the third stanza where the speaker uses the bird symbol to express the decision to freely express thoughts regarding the beloved. The desire to send messages to the love interest wherever and whenever is clearly expressed by the line; "it the message-carrying bird) will nest in your eaves". The use of the bird symbol in this poem is significant because it emphasizes the freedom of expression that

comes with the emotion. That is, although rejected by the beloved the speaker is free to send messages and hope they get to the beloved wherever and whenever. Through this poem, we truly appreciate the importance of symbolism to authors. Its use enables writers to pass various messages with few words. The use of the antelope symbol in stanza two carries the essence of the message and the bird symbol in stanza three buttresses it. Without these two symbols the poem would lack depth, but with their use we can say the poem may be physically short but it is long in terms of message.

### g) “Fly Fast”

The poem “Fly Fast” is also a short poem through which a long message passed with the use of symbolism. The speaker says:

Fly higher  
Oh bird of the sun  
Fly faster  
My heart is waiting  
On the other side of the sea (TM55)

One can not help but appreciate the use of sound devices in the poem. The use of assonance in line one helps the reader to ease into the message of the poem which is carried on the wings of the bird symbol in the very next line. Here the speaker expresses that though the beloved is absent messages can still be sent. The bird device is used to express this freedom of expression that lovers have. It is as a result of this freedom that the speaker is able to send messages to the love interest and express lingering emotions. Again, the speaker describes the bird as belonging to the sun. This is apt since the sun itself is a traditional symbol known to represent life, nature, rebirth and time. Thus we find the speaker expressing belief in the idea that they (the speaker and beloved) are connected and communicate freely despite either party's absence. The fourth line makes the message even clearer as the speaker uses the comparative device (metaphor) to mention the receiver of the message the “bird of the sun” is tasked with delivering. Moreover, the use of the term “my heart” is also a deliberate act of the speaker to express the importance of the beloved.

### h) “Under Another Sky”

Another poem where we see the significance of animal symbols is the poem entitled, “Under another Sky”. Here again the speaker uses the bird symbol to express freedom of communication. In the first two stanzas of the poem the speaker uses images and symbols to express the duration of time they have been apart. In the first stanza, the speaker begins by using the symbols; “the sun” and “sky” to express how much time has passed. It is expressed that “the sun” seems to have risen from “a different sky”. That is, it has risen over and over

again. The irony of it rising “here” and somewhere different is the speaker's way of expressing not only the duration of the time apart but its effect. The second line of the first stanza buttresses this fact. The speaker says “Days answer to different names”. Aside from the use of sound devices such as alliteration and consonance and their musical and emphatic advantage, the speaker uses “days” which is personified to portray that so much time as passed since the last time they saw each other. This pattern of expression continues into the second stanza as there is a mention of “journeys” undertaken to be close to the beloved who remains far. The speaker says “three jumbo jets” have been used, “one ocean” has been crossed, and “one desert” traversed and still the beloved can not be reached. The use of alliteration in every line of this stanza also lays emphasis on the idea of absence and enhances the musicality of the poem. In the third stanza, the speaker goes into details. Here the speaker says despite the time and the efforts invested, they “remain many zones apart”. This distance notwithstanding, the speaker still feels close to the beloved whose “heart beats” in the speaker's “chest”. The poem is also decorated with several devices, for example there is the use of alliteration in every line of the stanza analyzed above, and the visual imagery of a heart beating in one's chest. However, in the fourth and last stanza of the poem we encounter the bird symbol used to sum up the entire message of the poem. Indeed the bird symbol is of importance to love poets because of its significance as earlier expressed. Love is an emotion that frees and the bird symbol represents that freedom. Unlike the poem “fly fast” where the bird is in motion, here the bird is perched on a tree as the speaker listens to messages from the beloved. We therefore notice two scenarios involving the use of the bird symbol. In the first case, the bird is in motion as it carries the messages of the speaker to the love interest and in the second case it sits still as the speaker hears the beloved's “daily song”. This entire affair is symbolic and portrays the freedom that is expressed by the animal symbol of the bird. That is, so powerful is the love between the speaker and the love interest that even when they are apart they still share messages. This is further buttressed by the last line in the poem “behind our house of memory”. Here we see that despite the distance of the lovers “the bird” still sings in a house that exists only in their memories. The strength of the emotion is expressed in this poem and the fact that absence cannot uproot love is also portrayed. The bird symbol pervades this part of the collection because this division is about absence and communication. Overtime birds have come to be seen as messengers and representatives of freedom and love.

### i) “Tidings/Trade Winds”

In yet another poem entitled, “Tidings/Trade Winds” we see some bird symbols used to portray the theme of love. The poem goes thus:

For sometime now  
 We shall live in the mailman's bag  
 At the pleasure of the wind  
 But the cock which crows every dawn  
 Will bring my song to your door  
 Àwèró  
 When you see a pigeon near your window  
 Check its beak for distant tidings (TM66)

Here the speaker talks about communication even in absence. In the first stanza the speaker expresses that they will always find ways to reach each other no matter the distance. Hyperbole is used to effectively portray and emphasize this conviction. The last line of the stanza shows that the speaker trusts nature to enable a constant contact with the beloved. This line of expression continues into the next stanza when the speaker assures the love interest that as long as new dawns come they will reach each other. The cock symbol is used by the speaker to buttress this idea of communication or contact with the beloved despite distance and time. 12(p44) expresses the representation of time by the cock symbol and its importance in literary works. 9(p51) in his own part expresses that the symbol represents vigilance, time and activity. Thus, the speaker uses this symbol to express the unwavering decision to continue reaching out to the beloved through any means possible. In the last stanza we see another bird symbol used by the speaker to express the desire to maintain communication with the beloved. This time the bird symbol "pigeon" is chosen by the speaker to ride home this idea. This symbol is right for this kind of poem as<sup>(10)</sup>, expresses that it represents longevity, fidelity. Etc. Since the speaker hopes for the longevity of the liaison with the beloved, there is the continual pledge of fidelity and loyalty expressed by using this pigeon symbol. Clearly, the speaker will not literally send messages to the love interest through a pigeon's beak, this symbol and the revolving expression is only a way of reaffirming unwavering commitment to see their love soar. Moreover, there is a deliberate exaggeration at play from the beginning to the end of the poem which gives an emphatic advantage and allows the reader to flow with the speaker on this journey of emotional unburdening. Also, the use of sound devices such as consonance and assonance and the infusion of the Yoruba term Àwèró (beloved) make the poem musical, show the depth of the poem and keep the reader hooked. It is worthy of note that the poet often expresses traditional symbols and images in his indigenous language to portray his pride and identity. Moreover,<sup>(20)</sup> discuss a connection between animal symbolism and oral tradition. The infusion of Yoruba words amidst animal symbols lends credence to the critics' postulations.

#### j) "Elephants Across the Path"

The last poem in the division "Songs of Absence" is entitled "Elephant Across the Path". For the first

time in this division we see the speaker give excuses for not going to meet the beloved. This poem is very special, not only because the poet gives instructions on the preferred way to read the poem for maximum enjoyment but also because the poem is full of symbols and images. Osundare is fond of using Yoruba oral techniques in his poetry and he instructs the reader to read in a call-and-response which is a feature of the Yoruba chants. The lines "I cannot come for the dance tonight/ elephants across the path" are repeated all through the poem and they act as some kind of "response" to the "calls" which are the three line stanzas that precede them. This use of oral techniques amidst animal symbols in this poem further buttresses<sup>(20)</sup>'s postulations and lays emphasis on their assertion that animal symbolism plays a pivotal role in the tradition, culture, etc. of literature across ages. Moreover 21(p142) and 5(p79) mention Osundare's fondness for the Yoruba oral techniques and their emphatic advantage. The major animal symbol in this poem, is the "elephant" which is a large animal representing the obstacles that prevent the speaker from meeting with the beloved "for the dance tonight". 10(p60) and 9(p96) agree that the elephant is a symbol of strength. This is not a surprise because of its largeness. The fact that it is a traditional and natural symbol means that the speaker uses it as an obstacle in this poem to refer to the strength of the natural occurrences that prevent the rendezvous with the beloved. This point is buttressed as the speaker goes ahead to mention these natural obstructing forces in each stanza after the refrain "I cannot come for the dance tonight/elephant across the path". The first call which is the first stanza after the refrain has the speaker expressing that the "moon-soon rain" has created flood that now prevents their meeting. Aside from the sound devices and use of enjambment in this stanza one appreciates the literary richness here-in. The speaker uses symbols and images such as "rain", "moon" and "flood" to portray the obstacles that are apparently obstructing the meeting with the beloved. The last line is the most powerful line in the stanza as the speaker says; "A brown fury dances in the streets". We notice the use of devices ranging from metaphor, to synesthesia and personification all in one line. The poet does this deliberately to portray the strength of the obstacles standing in the way of the lovers. In the next stanza the obstacle becomes "the air" which is said to be "so thick with a blanket of mist". The speaker expresses that even "passionate longing" for the love interest is no match for the natural forces that stand in the way. This is emphasized by the portrayal of the rain as being heavy to the extent of undoing "the spine of the roof" with the sound of its drop. Just like the last line of the first stanza, this line carries the weight of the message of the poem itself that is why it is the most decorated line (decorated with devices). The speaker begins to express some emotions of love towards the beloved from the third stanza. The love interest is reminded of their moments together under the moon,

even as the speaker continues to emphasize the fact that their meeting will not take place due to natural occurrences.

The stanza after this takes us a bit deeper and shows us that the speaker uses these natural issues to express the challenges that couples or lovers go through. By continuing to express desire and love for the beloved despite these issues, the message of the poem becomes glaring. It is even fitting that this should be the last poem in "Songs of Absence" to show the reader that it is not always easy in relationships and problems can occur but when they do lovers should hold on to their love for their partners. The fourth stanza makes it all clearer. The bird symbols are used to express the unchanging nature of the speaker's love for the beloved. The voice says "pigeons" still coo in their "coop" and the "alapandede" (swallows) can still be seen. That is, the speaker still desires to be with the love interest. The speaker continues in this expression of desire in the fifth stanza by saying there are still thoughts of the beloved and memories of their time together lingering around. In the last stanza the message finally bursts out, as the speaker expresses hope that "the moon will shine again" tomorrow and the "elephant will vanish". The speaker expresses hope that the challenges and obstacles they are experiencing will "vanish" eventually and they will go for the dance. Absence is an obstacle and the message of most of the poems in this division of the anthology especially this last poem is one of hope. The speaker uses symbols and images to portray that despite the challenges (like absence) that lovers may encounter they should hold on to the hope that tomorrow, "the moon will shine again" and "elephants will vanish".

### k) "Bless"

The speaker continues to use animal symbols even in the third and final division of the poem entitled "Metaphor". The poem "Bless" is especially decorated with various symbols as the speaker praises the beloved. The poem is another poem tailored after the Yoruba oral techniques as the writer gives instructions for the use of traditional instruments like drums, flute and horns. It is divided into four parts separated by the above instruments. The first part is introduced by "drums", the second by "flute" and the third part introduced by "horns". The fourth part is the only one introduced by all three instruments and it is also the only part that contains seven single line stanzas as the others contain seven two-line stanzas. "Bless" is a unique poem in the anthology both in technique and literariness. The poem opens with the use of a bird symbol that is known as the "lion" equivalent of the air because of its ability to stare at the sun. The speaker uses the eagle symbol to describe the eyes of the beloved because of the significance of the symbol.<sup>(12,9,10)</sup>, all agree that the eagle is a powerful symbol of light, life, power, divinity and it is the symbolic opposite of the owl which signifies darkness and evil. The eyes have long

been seen as the gateway to the soul and it is fitting that a powerful bird symbol like the "eagle" should be used by the speaker to describe the beloved's eyes. Moreover, the manner with which the symbol shows up with the comparative device, simile is interesting. The speaker dedicates the first part of the poem to describing and admiring parts of the love interest's body. Images and symbols are used to emphasize the value of the body parts described. Personification is the favoured device in this poem as we find a "neck" carrying a "head", "ears", translating thoughts that are yet to be spoken, "sighs" that are galloping and a "nose" spelling out smells. Also, one can not miss the musical nature of the poem engineered by aptly used sound devices like assonance, consonance, alliteration and repetition. In fact, it is the use of repetition that ties the poem together. The word "bless" is repeated from the start to the end to emphasize the speaker's appreciation of the beloved. The second part of the poem is introduced by the "flute" and the use of the bird symbol. The speaker says:

(Flute)

Bless the ocean which sunders us  
 Into one nest of singing birds  
 Bless the birds  
 Which chant your name at every dawn. (TM75)

This second part is different from the first part as the speaker takes the last word from a previous stanza to begin the next stanza. As we can see from the above, the first stanza terminates in "birds" and the poet begins the next stanza by saying: "bless the birds". This technique is used all through this part of the poem. The second stanza above ends with "dawn" and the third begins with "Bless that dawn". This repetition of aforementioned terms further enhances the musicality of the poem and deepens the meaning. Unlike the other three parts of the poem where the speaker praises attributes of the love interest, in this part nature is praised for making the experience with the beloved marvelous. The bird symbol is used in this part of the poem to express the free and open nature of the relationship. The term "singing birds" refers to the speaker, the beloved and their free and closely knitted lives. Moreover, the sound devices in the first stanza make this emphasis. The speaker goes back to praising the beloved's attributes and qualities in the third part; the voice praises the "heart", the "laughter", "wisdom", "soleprints", "toenails". Etc. It is no surprise that the last part should be introduced by all three instruments as the speaker expresses a depth of emotion. The speaker describes the beloved's "thighs" as divine and proceeds to "bless" the love interest's genitalia which is described as "the eternal flower between yours legs". The "summons" of the beloved's "eyes" are also blessed along with the "rounded magic" of "hips". The speaker creates sexual imagery in this last stanza and pushes the poem to a higher level. The animal symbols in this poem are strategically placed and help in passing the overall

message of the poem. Bird symbols are important to love poets and the fact that we encounter them often in this love collection proves it. The use of the eagle symbol at the very beginning of the poem to describe the beloved's eyes and the use of the bird symbols to describe their love experiences uplift the poem thematically.

#### 4. Conclusion

Niyi Osundare effectively uses animal symbols to convey the depth of love in his poetry collection *Tender Moments*. These symbols serve as powerful metaphors that enhance the emotional impact of the poems. Birds, particularly pigeons and swallows, are frequently employed to represent freedom and the unconstrained nature of love. Animals like deer and the ògè bird symbolize intense desire and longing. The cockatoo and peacock symbolize pride and the public display of love. The scorpion and tortoise represent the transformative power of love, capable of overcoming negativity and obstacles. The duiker and elephant symbolize the challenges and obstacles that can arise in relationships, particularly during periods of separation. Birds, such as the pigeon and weaverbird, represent the enduring nature of love and the ability to maintain connection despite distance. Animals have held significant meaning for humans throughout history, evolving from objects of reverence and fear to cherished family members and, most often, admired creatures. This admiration likely began with our earliest ancestors' encounters with the diverse animal world. Observation fueled our appreciation, leading to animals' enduring presence in literature. The use of animal symbols in poetry elevates narratives beyond the superficial, leading to deeper meanings. For instance, the inclusion of a powerful symbol like the eagle can intensify a poem's message, while gentler bird symbols such as pigeons and doves can soften its mood. We can appreciate Osundare's creative ingenuity and the broader significance of these symbols in literature, sociology, love, and life.

Osundare incorporates Yoruba chants and call-and-response structures, enhancing the cultural and rhythmic elements of his poetry. Moreover, this usage emphasizes the connection between oral tradition and animal symbolism. The poet skillfully combines animal symbols with natural elements like the sun, moon, rain, and rivers to create vivid and evocative descriptions of love's experiences. Osundare's use of animal symbols in *Tender Moments* adds depth, richness, and cultural specificity to his exploration of love. These symbols resonate with readers on both emotional and intellectual levels, making the poems memorable and impactful. Through their usage we appreciate their importance to humans and their relevance in enabling a fellowship between the poet and the readers.

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The Data used in the course of this study are available on request from the author.

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