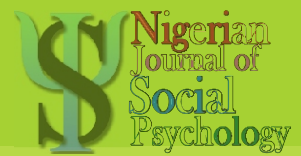


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Symbolism and Destruction of the Ideal: A Behaviorist Reading of Beti's *Perpetua*

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Abstract

Symbolism is a fundamental cultural concept that represents ideas, values, and beliefs through symbols, which can take the form of objects, colours, gestures, persons, or rituals. Symbols serve as a means of communication and identity. In literature, it is a literary device where objects, characters, or events represent deeper meanings beyond their literal sense. It has played a major role in great literary works like Dante's Divine Comedy, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and George Orwell's Animal Farm. Symbolism plays an important role in African literature, allowing authors to embed cultural, political, and spiritual meanings into their narratives. They often use symbols to reflect historical struggles, colonial resistance, identity, and the interplay between tradition and modernity. These symbols frequently derive from folklore, nature, and everyday life, making them relatable to readers familiar with African traditions and history. This article explores the use of symbolism in Mongo Beti's novel, Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness, focusing on the character of Perpetua as a symbol of political oppression and economic destruction in post-independence Cameroon. By employing behaviourist theory, the analysis highlights how societal pressures condition individuals into habits that perpetuate oppression. Unlike other interpretations that focus on marriage or feminist perspectives, this approach considers Perpetua herself as the primary symbol, reflecting Beti's intention to critique broader societal issues beyond gender.

Keywords: Behaviourism, Mongo Beti, Neo-colonialism, Oppression, Symbolism

Introduction

Symbolism has always been a literary device, irrespective of its origin. Simply put, a symbol is that which stands for something. According to Mihkelev (2018), *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines a symbol as "something which represents something else (often an idea or quality) by analogy or association (white, lion, rose, etc)" (p. 368). It is a fundamental cultural concept that represents ideas, values, and beliefs through symbols, which can take the form of objects, colours, gestures, or rituals (Geertz, 1973). Cultures develop unique symbols that convey meanings understood within their social context. For example, in Western cultures, the colour white often symbolizes purity and peace, whereas in some Asian cultures, it represents mourning and death (Turner, 1967).

Symbols serve as a means of communication and identity. National flags, religious icons, and traditional attire are examples of how symbols create a sense of belonging and shared heritage (Durkheim, 1912). Additionally, language itself is symbolic, as words and gestures hold meanings shaped by cultural norms (Saussure, 1916). Symbolism also plays a crucial role in rituals and mythology. In many indigenous cultures, animals symbolize spiritual forces or natural elements, shaping folklore and religious practices (Eliade, 1959). For instance, in Native American traditions, the eagle represents strength and freedom, while in Chinese culture, the dragon symbolizes power and good fortune (Levi-Strauss, 1963).

As societies evolve, symbols adapt to reflect new meanings. Globalization has led to the blending of symbolic meanings, such as the widespread use of emojis as a universal symbolic language (Danesi, 2017). Despite these changes, symbolism remains a powerful tool for cultural expression and identity.

In this article, our aim is to examine how Mongo Beti uses symbolism in the main character, Perpetua, to convey the message of political oppression and economic destruction. In order to effectively demonstrate this, we have relied on the behaviourist theory.

Symbolism in Literature

Symbolism in literature is a literary device where objects, characters, or events represent deeper meanings beyond their literal sense. It enhances themes, emotions, and ideas, allowing authors to convey complex messages subtly (Frye, 1957). Symbolism has been used across various literary traditions, from classical epics to modern novels, to add layers of interpretation to texts.

One of the earliest examples of symbolism in literature is found in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1320), where the dark forest represents sin and moral confusion (Auerbach, 1953). At the beginning of the poem, Dante finds himself lost in a "selva oscura" (dark forest), an image that reflects his confusion and sin. The forest is a traditional symbol of peril and moral chaos, a place where individuals stray from the right path. According to Auerbach (1953), this forest represents not only a personal crisis but also the broader concept of sin that has led Dante away from God's grace. Dante's journey through the forest is symbolic of his quest for redemption, an effort to find his way back to spiritual clarity.

Similarly, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the letter "A" symbolizes adultery, guilt, and ultimately, redemption (Baym, 1993). In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, the letter "A" emblazoned on Hester Prynne's chest is a powerful symbol that changes meaning over the course of the novel. Initially, it symbolizes adultery, as Hester has borne a child out of wedlock, and the Puritan society demands public penance. The letter is a mark of guilt and shame, and it serves as a tool for social control, branding Hester as an outsider. Baym (1993) notes that the letter's symbolism is deeply tied to Puritanical values, where strict adherence to moral laws is enforced through public shame and punishment.

However, as the novel progresses, the meaning of the letter "A" shifts. Hester transforms the symbol through her strength, resilience, and acts of charity. The once negative symbol of adultery begins to stand for ability and a woman's strength in the face of adversity. Through this transformation, Hawthorne critiques the harshness of Puritanical moral codes and demonstrates how symbols, like the "A," can evolve and carry different meanings depending on the context.

Hawthorne's novel also highlights the complex nature of guilt and redemption. The scarlet letter, rather than solely representing Hester's sin, ultimately becomes a symbol of redemption and personal growth. As Baym (1993) points out, the "A" becomes a mark of suffering and dignity, especially as Hester chooses to stay in her community, not flee from her shame, and uses her experience to help others.

Nature is often used symbolically in literature. In William Blake's poetry, the lamb and the tiger represent innocence and experience, respectively (Bloom, 2003). The lamb, featured in *Songs of Innocence*, represents purity, meekness, and divine grace, often associated with childhood and Christian ideals. Blake uses the lamb to convey mystical knowledge and spiritual connection, portraying it as a creation of God that embodies tenderness and joy. The

child-speaker in *The Lamb* intuitively understands the divine nature of creation, linking the lamb to Jesus Christ as "meek and mild"—a figure of innocence and sacrifice (Annarao, 2023, p. 22). Likewise, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) uses the green light as a symbol of hope and unattainable dreams (Brucoli, 2002). Positioned at the end of Daisy Buchanan's dock, it becomes an object of Gatsby's obsession—a beacon for his aspiration to reclaim his past love with Daisy. Initially, the green light symbolizes Gatsby's idealistic vision of a future where his dreams are realized through hard work and determination.

Religious and mythological symbols are also prevalent. In William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954), the conch shell represents order and civilization, while the "beast" symbolizes primal fear (Kinkead-Weekes & Gregor, 2000). Similarly, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) uses the white whale as a multifaceted symbol of obsession, fate, and the unknown (Matthiessen, 1941).

Modern literature continues to employ symbolism to explore contemporary themes. In George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945), the farm animals represent different political ideologies, serving as an allegory for the Russian Revolution (Rodden, 1999). Manor Farm, later renamed Animal Farm, symbolizes the Soviet Union itself. The farm's transformation mirrors the political upheaval in Russia, from the oppressive rule of the Tsars (represented by Mr. Jones) to the idealistic revolution and subsequent corruption under new leadership. Additionally, J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) uses the scar on Harry's forehead as a symbol of destiny and resilience (Gupta, 2009). Symbolism enriches literature by deepening meaning and encouraging multiple interpretations. It allows readers to engage with stories on a more profound level, uncovering themes that transcend time and culture (Eagleton, 1996).

Symbolism in African Literature

Symbolism plays a crucial role in African literature, allowing authors to embed cultural, political, and spiritual meanings into their narratives. African writers often use symbols to reflect historical struggles, colonial resistance, identity, and the interplay between tradition and modernity (Ngũgĩ, 1986). These symbols frequently derive from folklore, nature, and everyday life, making them relatable to readers who are familiar with African traditions and history.

One key example is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), where the locusts symbolize colonial invasion, initially appearing as a harmless phenomenon but later leading to destruction (Achebe, 1994). The sacred silk-cotton tree represents ancestral wisdom and spiritual guidance, reinforcing the importance of tradition in Igbo society (Gikandi, 1991). In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), the harvest season symbolizes the hope and struggles of Kenyan independence (Ngũgĩ, 1986). Similarly, the character Mugo, torn between guilt and redemption, embodies the psychological impact of colonial oppression (Killam, 1980).

Nature also serves as a powerful symbol in African literature. In Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), the horse symbolizes duty and sacrifice, as the king's horseman is expected to follow tradition by taking his own life (Soyinka, 1975). Likewise, in Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971), rain symbolizes renewal and cleansing in the face of racial discrimination in Botswana (Eldred, 1987).

African literature also employs religious and ancestral symbolism. Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) uses spirits and the supernatural to symbolize the journey of self-discovery and the relationship between the living and the dead in Yoruba cosmology (Okpewho, 1992). Similarly, in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), the protagonist,

Azaro, is a spirit child, symbolizing the blurred boundary between the physical and spiritual realms in African belief systems (Okri, 1991).

African writers use symbolism to deepen the meaning of their works, connecting personal stories to broader social, political, and cultural themes. Through symbolic storytelling, they preserve traditions while engaging with contemporary struggles. After examining symbolism in literature and specifically in African literature, it is expedient to note how other critics have handled this concept in their interpretation of *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*.

Critics' view of symbolism in *Perpetua*

Some critics have noted that Mongo Beti's *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* employs symbolism to critique post-independence Cameroonian society, particularly regarding familial dynamics and gender oppression.

The protagonist Essola's investigation into his sister Perpetua's death reveals that their mother, Maria, who "sold" Perpetua into marriage, mirrors the actions of corrupt national leaders who betray their citizens for personal gain. This parallel suggests that familial corruption symbolizes broader societal and political decay (Ugwanyi, 2020, p. 274). He therefore considers the family as a microcosm of the state. Closely linked to the idea of political decay espoused by Ugwanyi, is Essola's complicity that reflects political betrayal. His transition from a political activist to a collaborator with the corrupt regime symbolizes the moral compromises that individuals make under oppressive systems. His personal guilt and familial obligations mirror the broader theme of political betrayal and the erosion of revolutionary ideals (Ugwanyi, 2020, p. 273).

Another critic considers symbolism in *Perpetua* from the point of view of marriage and female subjugation. Her forced marriage and subsequent abuse symbolize the systemic oppression of women in post-colonial African societies. Her tragic fate serves as a critique of traditional practices that commodify women, reflecting their marginalized status (Smith, 1976, p. 304). These symbolic interpretations highlight Beti's nuanced critique of the intersections between personal relationships and political structures in post-independence Cameroon. While other critics have used marriage, etc as symbols, we consider the main character herself as the principal symbol in the novel. This is in line with Beti's thoughts when he distances himself from a feminist interpretation of the novel. According to Yong (2010, p35) Cilas Kemedjio says "Mongo Beti does not claim to be speaking for women, actually he has repeatedly said that it is up to the African woman to speak for herself, to fight for her liberation from the chains of imperial and patriarchal structures". From this statement, it is obvious that Beti does not want the novel to be interpreted mainly from the feminist perspective as Antonella Colletta and Victor Aire insinuate. While the latter says in her text: *Mongo Beti, écrivain engagé* that *Perpetua* can be considered the first feminist African novel, the latter affirms that Beti has joined other female and male feminist African writers (Yong, 2010, p34). To effectively explore *Perpetua* as a symbol in the novel, we have relied on the behaviourist theory.

The Behaviourism and *Perpetua*

"Habit" in the title of the novel suggests the behaviour of the main character, Perpetua. We therefore consider behaviourism as an appropriate framework for our analysis. The foundations of behaviourism can be traced back to the late 1800s and early 1900s. John B. Watson, an American pioneer in the emerging field of psychology, is often regarded as one of the initial advocates for behaviourism. He is credited with coining the term 'behaviourism'.

Watson believed that psychology could only evolve into a true science through detailed objective observation and precise scientific measurement. This idea of observation and measurement became fundamental to behaviourist research. Any focus on mental processes, which are inherently unobservable, was excluded from their self-defined scope of interest. Thus, behaviourist theories and explanations for learning emerged from the analysis of observable phenomena.

Behaviourism centres on the fundamental idea that a specific reaction is triggered by a particular stimulus. This seemingly straightforward relationship has been utilized to explain even the most intricate learning scenarios. At its most basic level, we can observe behaviour, which can be described as 'learned behaviour,' across a diverse array of situations. The significance of responsive practice has been emphasized in recent years and is articulated in terms of the reinforcement of specific neural pathways in the brain, resulting in quicker and more seamless execution of certain actions and reactions (Mambrol, 2020).

Mekonen's point of view deserves examination:

In general, both Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner are considered behaviorists. This means that they focused on measurable, observable, and specific behaviors and how these behaviors can be manipulated and changed. Unlike many psychological theorists of their time, who focused primarily on thoughts and emotions, these behaviorists sought to deal with more concrete actions. Pavlov was the first to demonstrate conditioning, where behaviors can be created and reinforced through a system of pairing behaviors with stimuli. On the other hand, Skinner denied the importance of what comes before a behavior. Instead, he believed that it is what comes after the behavior that is most important. Following behaviors with rewards and punishment determines whether these behaviors will be repeated (2020, p 167).

From the quotation, just like in the statement before it, the important thing to note is that behaviour can be conditioned. This simply means that one can be made to behave in a particular way to the extent that it becomes a “habit”. This explains the stimuli-reaction phenomenon that is effectively used by the oppressors in *Perpetua* against the vulnerable and complacent population represented mainly by Perpetua. In the second segment of the analysis that follow, we shall dwell on the application of this theory. Before then, let us consider the ideal, that should have been the lot of Africa, before its destruction, symbolically.

Perpetua, Symbol of the Ideal

The choice of the name, Perpetua by Mongo Beti strongly reinforces the power of symbolism in literature. Though all research attempts we made failed to establish a connection between Beti's Perpetua and the Roman Catholic martyr, who with Felicity succumbed to the wrath of the sword in 203 AD, we strongly hold the opinion that Beti's main character may be a literary reincarnation of Perpetua, the historical Christian martyr. According to the story, “Vibia Perpetua, a 22-year old educated woman of noble birth (*honeste nata*)... relates her disagreeable experiences from the prison, where she found herself together with her newborn baby. She conveys the painful unravelling of all social ties with her family” (Kitzler, 2007, p. 5). The physical and emotional torments she endured in prison and her eventual execution in celebration of Emperor Severus' birthday is akin to the treatment Beti's Perpetua goes through before her gruesome death during childbirth.

The linguistic symbolism embedded in her name is also worth mentioning. According to www.the-meaning-of-names.com/35193, Perpetua is “derived from the Latin word *perpetuus* meaning ‘continuous’. This was the name of the 3rd century Saint martyred with another woman named Felicity”. This quotation leads us once more to the most prominent feature associated with the most significant person who bore the name: the martyred Perpetua. It is

thus in place if we interpret the name as “suffering in perpetuity” as portrayed by Mongo Beti in the novel, *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness*. Unhappiness becomes a habit of the main character. The author’s portraiture of this main character in superlative terms is to further emphasize how she symbolises Africa in her purity, richness, verve, greatness, etc., before her eventual rape and destruction even to this day.

At the age of 14, in the middle of a lesson in her school, her mother Maria comes to take her away not just from the school but also from her dream. Perpetua is described by her elder sister “as an angel” who wants to spend her life taking care of the sick. Her admiration for Dr. Delestraine, makes her arrange to be working with her daily. Knowing that all expatriates or medical expatriates always return to their different countries afterwards, she decides to master the art of caring for the sick so as to take over from Dr. Delestraine when she eventually returns home. By so doing she aims at perpetuity so far as medical care is concerned.

Perpetua likes her studies to the extent that when her mother comes to forcefully remove her from school, she pleads with her to at least allow her take her certificate exams, a request that falls on deaf ears. Even after being forcefully married to Edward and taken to Zombotown, she manifests her intellectual superiority over her husband’s. She can give the right explanations and solutions to the problems both in Dictation and Economics. Her intellectual capacity is evident to anybody who comes in contact with her especially Jean Dupont and his wife Anna-Maria who think that no man can compete with Perpetua in intellectual competence.

She is well respected in Zombotown. When her husband refuses to give her upkeep allowance, she opts to work. In the morning, she does her chores, prepares breakfast for her husband, takes her bath, runs all the errands for her husband, gives him lunch, and around 3 pm, after a little rest, she diligently starts her sewing business. This she does with a type of zeal and diligence that had never been found in the women of Zombotown. She starts her business by sewing for her clients without making them pay for her services, but later on, Anna-Maria encourages her to commercialize her talent, and both women get into a business partnership.

Another aspect of Perpetua’s life is seen when she gets arrested with Anna-Maria for doing business without paying tax to the state. The police officer in charge, M’barg Onana, tells them that they would pay a tax of 10,000 francs, but they would be let off the hook if only they would support and campaign for Baba Toura. Both women prefer paying the tax to supporting such a fraudulent government

In the preceding paragraphs, we have shown Perpetua’s innocence, good nature, selflessness, overall efficiency, intellectual capacity, etc., qualities that make her a symbol of the ideal. She represents what a nation should be. Unfortunately, African countries south of the Sahara have been destroyed by neo-colonialist leaders who have proven to be worse than the colonial masters. This destruction is symbolized in the suffering and death of Perpetua. The superlative presentation of Perpetua foregrounds the mental, physical, and emotional torture faced by a destroyed and devastated country and continent. Her suffering and death signify the annihilation and destruction of these qualities. Her death is likened to that of Ruben, whose demise signifies the truncation, extermination, and abolition of the development and liberty of the black man, especially in Cameroon.

Destruction of the Ideal

Perpetua's ordeal starts from the day her mother forcefully removes her from school and pursues her till her death in Zombotown. She is forcefully given into marriage at a very early age of 14, without her consent. Her mother sells her off at a very high price to satisfy her selfish desire of getting a wife for her preferred son, Martin. She is given no chance or choice of refusal, because even her aunt Katri, noticing her displeasure to continue with the ceremony, tells her that it is already too late. She has to continue with the ceremony irrespective of the way she feels about the marriage. Her mother, who represents patriarchal hegemony that kicks against women's rights, is simply acting in tune with tenets espoused by behaviourism. The society has come to accept unwholesome practices because they have become customary. For her, a girl's education is not just valueless but unnecessary. She believes that marriage is more important in a girl's life than education. She tells Perpetua that a woman who has a marriage proposal should not be talking about examination, an attitude geared towards totally discouraging Perpetua from achieving her dreams. It is therefore very obvious that the journey to Perpetua's death started with her leaving her education for marriage. No wonder Essola accuses his wicked mother of not only abandoning her but of killing her. He tells her "you sold Perpetua to her executioner and that was sending her to death" (Beti, 1974, p, 212). Essola didn't want his sister to be sold at all, an idea that Reuben propagated while he was alive; he was against girls being sold in the pretence of marriage. Essola, being an ardent believer in Reuben, accuses his mother:

You killed Reuben or rather you accepted his murder so that you could go on selling your daughters, without having to answer to the misery inflicted on these slaves by the cruelty of their husbands. You killed Reuben or anyway you accepted the crime so that your favourite sons, whom you spoil until they become irresponsible, can go on making money with their sisters' ransom, in a way, feeding on the blood of those wretched women like cannibals (Beti, 1974, p. 212).

It is evident in this text that Maria is against what Reuben stood for, little wonder she wanted her daughter to share Edward's bed on the night of the marriage, contrary to her belief and what she was taught in the Catholic school which she attended; that a marriage should be sanctified in the church before the couple could sleep together.

One cannot talk about the bride price without taking a critical look at the character, Martin who wastes his life on drugs and liquor. He is Maria's favourite son, who must also be blamed for Perpetua's suffering. He is the reason why Perpetua is sold to Edward at a very high price. A prodigal son who, instead of using the 100,000 francs, Perpetua's bride price that he steals from his mother, to get married as his mother desires, he travels to Zombotown with the money and wastes it on liquors, women, drugs, and extravagant living. He is also wicked, selfish, and insensitive to Perpetua's plight, because despite the kind of inhuman treatment Perpetua receives from her husband in his presence, he pretends not to notice. Even when Perpetua pleads with him to take her to their mother, he tells her: "I don't get mixed up in things like that. You don't come into the world to get tangled up in that kind of situation. Our ancestors taught us to steer clear of quarrels between husband and wife. As they say, between tree and bark it's dangerous to poke your finger" (Beti, 1974, p. 207). This attitude stresses the fact that even the young are in support of patriarchal hegemony against women; a learned behaviour that tallies with behaviourism.

Mongo Beti, through Perpetua, exposes the moral decadence in the society. After failing his exams many times, Edward decides to "sell" his wife for a good post in the civil service. This time, she is still not consulted. The greed that pushes him to act thus can only be compared to that of Perpetua's mother. Edward forces his wife into prostitution until he becomes the

most powerful man in Zombotown. The fact that such a man, who cannot pass his exams, can attain the height and occupy the post of the most powerful man in Zombotown just by pushing his wife into another man's bed, does not only show the extent of the moral decadence in the society but also, shows the place of education and the value given to it in Baba Tura's tyrannical regime.

In addition to the negative aspects of the culture, the selfishness of her wicked husband, the efforts she makes to be happy, to get her independence, and her liberty constitute the last straw that broke the Camel's back. She decides for the first time to make her own decision when she tells Anna-Maria:

I know that I am the property of a man who paid a lot of money for me four years ago. I am not supposed to do anything without getting his permission first. But now, for the first time, I want to do what I want. Up till now, I've done everything I've been told... Well now, just for once, I want to feel what it's like to do something of my own free will. (Beti, 1974, p. 170)

In this quotation, Perpetua makes it clear that she has always responded to stimuli that made her unhappy. Her first attempt at self-liberation hits the brick wall. As a symbol, the message here is clear: any attempt to rebel against constituted authority is met with ruthless repression. In her pure innocence and naivety, she asks Zeyang the footballer if he had come to rescue her. One can only imagine her disappointment when he fails to do so, and is eventually tortured to death because the national team lost a football match. Helpless and hapless Perpetua must therefore continue to live in unhappiness until her own death. That she falls in love with a known supporter of Ruben reinforces her symbolic role in novel.

The stimuli-response phenomenon espoused in behaviourism is effectively deployed in the novel to checkmate any form of rebellion or contrary political opinion: Essola's silence as the young Greek driver tries without success to get him to discuss the nation's politics; Amougou and Essola discuss politics in Cameroon and the effects on the citizens, but as soon as they come out of the forest, they either shut up or change the topic for fear of Brigadier Norbert, who would not hesitate to arrest them. Amougou tells Essola, "from this point frerot, lips sealed. It won't be long before Norbert shows up in his Jeep with his three strong-arm men. If he finds that you're talking politics, he will pick you up" (Beti, 1974, p. 22).

Not only were men banned from discussing politics. When Anna-Maria and Perpetua go to the clinic to see a doctor, she warns her not to allow herself to be dragged into discussing politics: "Be careful, my little Perpetua... They say the town is swarming with informers and trouble-makers. They will worm something out of you and then go and tell the police that you are a secret Rubenist... Don't talk politics in public with people you don't know" (Beti, 1974, p. 112).

Mongo Beti does not want the public to read this novel just to see and analyse the character of Perpetua as a young lady that is destroyed by the negative aspect of the African culture as exhibited by her mother and her brother-in-law; he wants his readers to see Perpetua as a symbol of a destroyed country: Cameroun and the black African nations. He wants his readers to see the gravity of the damage done to these black African nations by the colonisers and the neo-colonisers. He therefore juxtaposes the symbolism of the main character, as analysed above, with the coarse reality of political repression and economic exploitation in a nation that in itself is a metaphor for corruption, political repression, and economic devastation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Perpetua and the Habit of Unhappiness* by Mongo Beti delivers a deep analysis of Cameroonian society after independence through the use of symbolism. Beti highlights themes of political oppression and economic degradation by using the character of Perpetua as a metaphor to examine the intersections between interpersonal relationships and political structures. This method differs from other interpretations that emphasize feminist viewpoints or certain symbols, such as marriage. Instead, it makes use of behaviorist theory to investigate how social influences shape people into behaviors that sustain tyranny and subordination.

The symbolic name "Perpetua" may have been inspired by the pain and social rejection that Roman Catholic martyr Vibia Perpetua faced. The themes of fortitude and selflessness in the face of repressive structures are highlighted by this analogy. Beti criticizes the deterioration of revolutionary ideals and the commodification of women in post-colonial Africa through Perpetua's tragic fate.

Ultimately, the novel demonstrates how symbolism can be a potent weapon for cultural expression and critique by delivering nuanced social and political messages. By examining Perpetua as a symbol, we gain a deeper understanding of the novel's themes and the broader societal issues it addresses, highlighting the enduring relevance of symbolism in literature as a means to explore and critique contemporary challenges.

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