

UNDERSTANDING IGBO POETRY

by Ihechukwu Madubuike

1. PREFACE

POEMS FROM ANCIENT TIMES. Our Igboland is a land of various customs. From year to year customs are observed. The life of every Igbo person is surrounded by observances. From childhood to adulthood, and in old age, many customs await every Igbo person. Some of these traditions are carried out when

- (i) a child is born
- (ii) a child is named
- (iii) one joins a masquerade cult
- (iv) a girl enters a young women's group
- (v) a man enters various groups, such as "taking Ozo title"
- (vi) eating yams
- (vii) going to war
- (viii) wrestling
- (ix) performing a funeral
- (x) marrying
- (xi) building a house
- (xii) doing farm work

These customs involve eating and drinking. People prepare for them. Igbos say that if you perform a sacrifice but do not see a vulture, you know that something has happened in the land of the spirits. If a ceremony is performed in Igboland without music and poetry, you know that it is not a tradition that is being carried out. It is at the time of these celebrations that experts recite their poems for the people. It is also at that time that they create music [use mouth to write songs].

POETRY. This Igbo word is very meaningful: it is a word filled with depth and power. Two things explain what I am saying and support it, according to [inherent in?] the way Igbos use proverbs, being figures of speech, and poetic proverbs, which are two things that make Igbo language strong. Learning them will bring out the depth of Igbo words, as well as show their beauty and wonder. We will also see how Igbo has explanatory words and is an adequate language that brings out things that are inside the heart and things outside it.

Poems have been chanted and sung since olden days, when the rat and the lizard were friends and brothers. There are various times when they are chanted. Some of these times I have written about above. Other times that poems are chanted are when the heart is troubled, or when any kind of sadness occurs; like when a person is in deep sorrow over his personal affairs. Another time is when something of great happiness causes the heart to be extremely joyful.

Any time someone, either man or woman, who has a gift to use his hand or voice to perform something to watch or something pleasing to the ears, sits down and thinks about the world and the things in it, he will, out of these thoughts, realize deep things that he will put into his music or ~~songs~~ ^{poems}. Sometimes it is a proverb or a real event that could be a riddle, or any story showing how people look at this world we are in: like something that joins us together, we who are called humans and God or Creator; the situation of humans in the world or in creation; and various other things.

Some things make poems be poems, rather than being something else. Poems are not folktales, nor are they proverbs, or riddles or music. One can see all of these things in the poems, but they themselves individually are not poems. What is a poem? A poem is words put together that come from the heart, explaining thoughts and moods, into verses that are not very long. Deep words or figures of speech are sentences used to support the poems and beautify them.

As I said earlier, deep words in all of Igboland are proverbs--the oil with which we eat words, and suck out their meaning. Proverbs consist of very meaty words. Difficult words. It is like an uncracked palm kernel. You have to crack it and remove the shell before you see its seed. When you finish doing this you come to chew the kernel and then you reach the place where its juice is. When you reach that place that is the white area and you penetrate the best of the liquid, you know that you have reached the heart, and what you are touching is marrow and not bone.

To explain it another way: the Igbos who know our language are fluent. But not all people know how to use it. One must learn it. One must also go to school for it. The first school one attends is to open the ears,

listen, and hear how the elders who know the language of our land use Igbo words. It is these people who are called: "those who are eloquent," or "the orators."

Several Igbo poems require deep words for speeches. They are indeed works of art whose beauty is obvious. Their beauty stems from figures of speech, proverbs and other artful words in them. Listen to a praise poem that is recited for a man who does strong things:

Handsome young man, you are,
(Nvuru) who climbs a hill speedily
A knife so sharp
A rope who pulls an elephant
A lion who kills a leopard
One whose head does not touch the ground
Inyi tree that does not die

This poem is very strong. It describes the deeds and behavior of a young man whose "head does not touch the ground." A head not touching the ground can be a bad quality. But the way it is said in this poem shows that it is a good thing that is being described. You will see that it is only very deep words that are used to describe the behavior of the young man, in a few words. What the arrangement of these words brings out to us is indeed the imagery of a young man. Out of this imagery, we can know that the young man is really and truly a man. He is one who, when shaken, stands firm in things that concern manliness. One who speedily climbs a hill is one who is healthy and full of stamina. The rope that can pull an elephant is stronger than other ropes. The head that does not touch the ground is the head of a wrestler, or one whose back does not touch the ground. The *inyi* is a large, strong tree that is known in Igboland. The knife that is not sharp can not cut it.

Thus, we have seen that it is from using examples, from calling a young man various strong names, that this praise poem describes for us the type of man he is. It is also from understanding the expression of these words, and from understanding their depth, that we come close to this man and know who he is. One who wants to gather his firewood from his (the young man's) back yard should know how he is going to do this. Clearly, the type of man being discussed is not one we can put in a bag and

then leave. Again, it is not fire that one uses to a small bamboo bed to warm oneself by. The bad child is carried by the knees. Whoever meets him finds out about his behavior.

If you look closely, you will see that there is something else outstanding in this poem. This is how explanatory words, or all the examples in this poem, are tied together. They all have their own parts to play. None of them is (there for nothing). Taken singly, they can not describe this man well. But considering them together is the way to know well-written poems in our land. Strength and polish also come from the arrangement of the words. The arrangement of the words sometimes comes out of the way one recites this poem--that is, out of its sound; sometimes it is a drum or shaker that is used to recite poems, that brings out the way the arrangement of words in the poem should go along.

RHYTHM. In some Igbo poems there are words which are seen and heard repeatedly. There is also the sound of the words line by line, sounding and sounding again. These things are among those that support the arrangement of the words of the poem. They are among the things that make the song ~~dreamy~~, or ~~delicate~~, running like water.

This is to illustrate what I am saying. The poem I am using to explain it is "Thievery," by M.C. Ogunjiofor. It is in *Akpa Uche*, on pages 55-56. We shall look at the first verse:

One day, a sunny day,
Tortoise went to Rabbit's house,
He greeted him and then went outside
Rabbit took Tortoise and went thieving;
They went to the house of Ibeziako;
They saw Ibe and his three children;
They had corn in their mouths;
They went over to the back passageway, and remained quiet.
They stayed there until their waists broke;
Rabbit said he was going to go home;
They then got up and started to go.

These words require each word arrangement to have a certain rhythm, or sound resembling their counterparts: anwu, esi, ohi; (Ibezi) ako, ato; onu,

onu; ha, ala, ala, ɔla. The rhythm in these makes this poem like music that is sung. This underscores what is being said, that Igbo poems and Igbo songs resemble each other. One thing that makes them similar is what is called musical sound (*udo agwu*) or drum sound (*udo nkwa*). This makes it no problem to include these poems in music. Clearly poems and songs are not the same. Their scale is not the same. Neither is the emotion in them the same. The emotion in poems is more than that in music. The language of poetry is also different. It is more complete than the language in music. That means that it is not correct to think that poems and music are the same. The recitation of meaningful poetry uses proverbs, figures of speech and other linguistic arts, and oration. What is most important is that one cannot have a poem without words; however, one can have music without words.

SOME WORDS USED IN WRITING IGBO POETRY

1. *Udeme (onomatopoeia)*: This is a word that sounds the way it is pronounced. Some onomatopoeic words resemble the sound of what is being talked about, or the character of what is being talked about. This will illustrate what I am saying: (tree) stands *kwekem*; the stars are twinkling in clusters *r/r/r*; the bird flew very fast *fjam*; *nwjm* it pounced on the rat; *pjam*, it crushed to death the millipede; the breadfruit fell *gbim* (splat) to the ground.

2. Tongue-twisters: Like: Nwa nwere arɔ ɔ na-arɔ arɔ arɔ (asks for). Ti nchi [bedbug] *gbim*, tifu nchi nsɔ n'ike. Ana m aru agwa [cook black-eyed peas]; na-eri agwa; na-agba agwa aja n'ukwu [divination on waist]. Nwanyɔ na-eho ero [mushroom], i na-ere ero ere ka i na-eri ero eri? Ata [stake or cross-beam in house] na Achara [pillars] di n'isi ɔlɔ [sides of house] Okeke; ɔ bu ata ka [exceeds] achara, ka ɔ bu achara ka ata?

These things I wrote here are among the artful words. They are used to demonstrate the way some words are used in Igbo. Because of this they help in pronouncing Igbo words.

3. *Asusu Uda (tone language)*: One task that a poem can perform for Igbo language is to make all Igbo dialects meaningful by explaining our world and our lives however it may be. Sometimes it can do this by writing a word as it is not written in other literature. This makes one think about

this word, and examine it as it is not examined in literature or other kinds of writing.

A strong-handed poet should use poems to make the Igbo language grow and progress. He will do this by the way he uses Igbo poems to explain about the lives Igbo people live: the life in the world and the life nearby, the outer life and the inner life. He will also do this by using new words and old words in writing his poems; by using all the various ways that Igbos use to speak Igbo and write poems.

The Igbo language is a tone language. What is a tone language? It is that the understanding of some words or their explanation follows the way one pronounces them, or places the voice in speaking. See this word that is written *akwa*. *Akwa* can mean wrapper; or the egg the chicken lays; its meaning can also be the place where one lies down to sleep; or it can also be the running down of tears when something sad happens to a person, or when a child is beaten.

Many other words that are confusing, or have more than one meaning are numerous in Igbo. By using the correct tone the confusion of these will be removed. My point is that the Igbo poet can take the confusion that is in an Igbo word and create something artistic, write a beautiful poem, or a drama. The poet can know how to take words like "ikpu," "amu," "Uzoagbe," "ngala," "ala Umyaka Olu," "ala a mu nna gi," "ime B.K. . . ." and write an amusing poem, showing the versatility of Igbo words. One who is angry can forget his anger. This is one benefit of poems for people: soothing us and making us laugh causes us to forget our troubles.

4. *Figures of Speech*: Figures of speech alone do not make a song become a poem because figures of speech or artful language are in other literature. One uses figures of speech to write songs, and also to tell stories. Allusion, repetition, imagery, similes, and metaphors are among the things that distinguish poetry. It is the thought and the emotion in a poem that make it a poem. Especially the way one writes this emotion is very important in making a poem become a poem.

This is some artistic language one can see in these poems selected in this book:

Adamma touches beauty (is beautiful)
Her night fell in the afternoon
My eyes should not see my ears
I have seen an elephant in the afternoon
I have stayed in the house, sat and burst my testicles
One who is bathed in beauty
Dry meat fills the mouth [expands]

MODERN AND TRADITIONAL IGBO POETRY

The main thrust of new Igbo poetry is the recreational activities that are observed in our land. It is what undergirds Igbo poetry. Igbo poetry is also quite varied. There are poems for relaxation, for cursing, for praising, for telling stories, for explanations, for work, for mourning, and other types of poems. Look at this poem used for praising a village woman.

Young lady, you are:
A mirror that must not go out in the sun
A child that must not be touched by dew
One who is hairy
A lamp with which people find their way
Moon that shines bright
An eagle feather worn by a husband
A straight line drawn by God
(Egudu & Nwoga, 1971, i.k 31).

The reason this poem resembles modern writing is in the way the figures of speech explain things. These figures of speech lend imagery to these poems.

Modern and Traditional Poetry

Other things are common to modern poetry and traditional poetry: The most outstanding one is the Igbo language itself. Poems both written and unwritten are explained by using Igbo words. They both also use all types of Igbo words to support them: figures of speech, proverbs, riddles.

The poem of J. C. Obienyem that he calls "Paper Money," in Akpa

Uche, (i.k 42), opens with a riddle and becomes a complete poem:

Something drives a person to suicide
Something that a woman follows and rejects her husband
Then runs off with an osu husband
Something that leads the blind person and the lame to steal
Isn't that what caused the Ndia people to sell their children?

Isn't it that, too, that pushed the clergyman into prison?
What is it that calls the poor person "worthless one"
Is it not because there is nothing he can measure up to?
I hold this thing in my hand
It flutters back and forth
It becomes a fan
It is nothing but a little piece of paper.

If you include riddles in the meaning of the words that begin this poem, we will have something like this:

- Tell me tell me tell me: tell me:
What drives a person to suicide?
- Tell me, tell me, tell me, tell me:
What does a woman follow and rejects her husband
Then runs off with an osu husband?
- Tell me tell me tell me, tell me:
What leads the blind person and the lame to steal?

Four sentences make this poem turn into a riddle. Their answers are the same thing: "Paper Money."

"Tell me tell me tell me" is one of the traditional recitations where there is reciting and chanting. Modern and traditional poetry resemble each other in various other ways. Many of their thoughts, and the order in traditional poetry, show themselves in the new poetry now being written

These riddles are beautiful in because of the words that are in them:

kpem n'isi (touch me on the head)
kpem n'ike (touch me on the bottom)

kpem regede (touch me anywhere)
Aku a gbara n'ogwe (the arrow shot at the log)
Aku n'ahụ (the arrow shot at the body)
Ogwe n'ahụ (the log in the body)

There are also riddles that are beautiful on account of their sound. The sound causes them to be very beautiful in themselves in poetry writing because the beauty of Igbo language and Igbo is sound:

----Broom that swept the compound swept the house
----The thing that laid eggs on the ground returned to the sky
----One who is in a city should speak to the city people
----Tum tum gem gem (tra la la)
----Tum tum bem bem

Because of their sound, and because of the allusions made, riddles, like proverbs, are necessary in writing Igbo poetry. It would be good if people who wrote Igbo poetry learned it well and saw that they made their poetry beautiful.¹

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2. UNDERSTANDING IGBO POETRY

Anyone who wants to understand Igbo poetry should know Igbo traditions. He should also know something about all Igbos, know the type of people they are, know how they behave, and how they view the world. Clearly, knowing these things is very important for explaining everything the poem wants to say. Especially, he should know the Igbo language well. He should know what proverbs are, know what real events used proverbially are, know what riddles are, and the artful words and figures of speech that abound in the Igbo language. If you do not know these things, you cannot understand well what Igbo poems are saying. You will not understand well the benefits of poetry, you will not know what caused the enrichment of our lives through showing us all parts of the world; how we live, how we lived in a place when we were there, you will not

¹ It would be profitable to see what Mr. Nolu Emenanjo wrote concerning riddles, "Agwugwa. A Genre of Traditional Igbo Literature." This essay will appear in *Nsukka Journal of Arts and Humanities* in 1979.

understand what is ahead of us or what our history was. If we do not know these things, our lives will not be worthwhile as they ought to be. They will not be as satisfying as they should be.

What I am saying is that there are many things to be learned in well-written poems. (Look at the poem called "Imo." Why is one state in Nigeria called Imo? Can you explain what lies behind it? What does this poem say about it...?) Poetry makes us know ourselves. It makes us forget the troubles of the world; have patience when things are difficult. Through poetry, we can be happy or joyful, as someone who is drinking wine or dipping snuff sometimes is.

Poetry and other recitations are ways (as I have said before) that human beings communicate with each other. It is one way a person explains to others how he sees world events, what is around him. I have said in the beginning that it is necessary to know Igbo language well if we want to understand Igbo poetry. I also want to say now that if you understand Igbo well you will know a good poem and one which is not good. You will be able to remove the black goat from the white ones.

Anyone speaking to you touches your body. But there are words that are not useful, and those that are useful. Those that are useful are those touching our spirits or our blood [appealing emotionally], words that enter the ears. Any poem that touches our bodies, spirits or blood, is a beautiful poem, a well-composed one. Any poem that is well-composed will touch the body. But the best poem touches the spirit.

Thus when you study Igbo poetry you will see how the one speaking to you explains himself, how he causes what he is saying to reach your ears, touch your body or spirit. You will learn whether his speech is satisfying or not. Because poetry is nothing else if not a set of words--artful words, words better than others.

EXPLAINING POETRY

In the new book he wrote,¹ Mr. Nolué Emenanjo gave seven ways to explain Igbo poetry. These seven ways are:

1. Nolué Emenanjo (1979) *Utari Nti* Evans Brothers (Nig. Publishers) Ltd, i.k 6-13.

- (i) Who wrote this poem?
- (ii) What order was used in writing it?
- (iii) What is its topic?
- (iv) What are the thoughts in it?
- (v) Does it have figures of speech?
- (vi) What tone was used in writing it?

There is no one key that is best to use for unlocking poems in order to completely understand everything in them. The method that Nolué gives is good. In order for it to be complete it would be good to add a few words to it. Here, it would be good to review what I have already written about Understanding Igbo Poetry, because you do not explain what you have not understood. Before you explain any poem you should understand it. This causes you to read the poem many times in order to grasp what it is saying.

(i) The one who wrote the poem: It is not enough to say only the name of the one who wrote the poem. It is good to know something else about him: like his work, where he lives, where he studied and various things he has done. This type of understanding can help us to explain a poem well, especially if the poem looks into details about the writer.

(ii) The order used in writing it: Here we start to look at the artistry in the poem. The order used in writing poems varies. Any artist can follow his own order, which will bring out what he has in mind. In some well-written poems, the order used in writing the poem and the thoughts in the poem have something joining them together. Look and see how the sentences in the poem being presented go together with the others.

(iii) Topic: Every poem has a topic. Persevere in finding it. That is what you will start with and then discover other things in the poem. When you know the topic of the poem, you will begin to find out what is said about it, or what the topic tells us about other things.

(iv) Thoughts in the poem: It is from reading the poem well that one gets the poem's thoughts. What we know is that the poem's thoughts come from the way the poem touches us. The way the poem touches a person's

spirit might not be the way it touches another person's spirit. Because of this, two people can read the same poem and not agree on what is the thought of the poem. If you understand a poem well you will look for the thoughts in it.

(v) Artful language: At the beginning of this explanation, I said that one uses artful language and various figures of speech to write Igbo poetry. I said that they are things that make a poem become a poem. When you look at the artful language in poetry you also look at figures of speech. If you interpret poems well, you will understand proverbs, real events, riddles, and know what they mean. Thus it is good for you to learn these things one uses to make the Igbo language artful. You will also know what makes proverbs, riddles, or real events become the best wherever they are placed. When you talk about artful language you will also talk about the other kinds of language found throughout the poem: allusions, onomatopoeia, tongue-twisters, euphony, similes, tone, imagery, both metaphors spoken together, and words. These things are important in interpreting a poem well. It is good to explain how they make the thoughts in the poem appear polished.

(vi) Find out whether a strong voice, a gentle voice, or a musical voice is used in writing the poem you are examining.

(vii) Summary: When you use these methods to examine a poem, look at it closely, you will gather your thoughts together and say what you think about it. Tell whether this poem is good, whether it is well-written, tell whether you have seen that type of poem before, how it resembles others like it, what is in it that is new . . . tell what struck you about this poem . . . what makes it well understood.

3. TRADITIONAL POETRY

One thing different about the traditional Igbo poem is that one does not know the name of the author or who first recited it. It is not said that the poem belongs to this person or that person. This does not mean that everyone in a town is an artist. When one comes into a town one knows the ones who are the artists--those who are able to write songs, or those who are craftsmen. But any recitations brought out belong to the town,

belong to everyone. It is not the one who thought of it first who owns it. If he does that, it means that the people of the town do not take his poem as a true and beautiful poem. It is only he who will recite it, within its topic, since there is no one who will listen or contribute.

Now, we will look at traditional poems that are recited in Igboland. These poems come from towns around Enugu.

1. THE MORTAR

When the crowd comes to the gathering place, you should listen.
Listen
Because it is the Mortar that hears the market's commotion
The Mortar lives near Nkwọ market
Sounding its voice - gbo gbo gbo
I tell you all
No Mortar swallows my log
Or is a branch for me
Let alone a morsel of pounded food for the children of Odegbulu hill
Ran around, buried the one who came to its house
I, the Mortar, swallow the commotion of the market
The stick one uses to strike the gong) -
I, the bird pecking at the corn
I, the one who knows and does, Firestand used in cooking
The pot stands firm
Firestand carries thoughts
The pot is very strong
Looking for the cook, all the time long ago
I told the hawk eating the locust
Please, follow behind
Odomagana, Husband of Uyoko ekeyilu [place name]
A bunch of hair
Tried itself (?)
Large-headed ant sings, and in singing
Large-headed ant forgets, and in forgetting
Basket-holder, take the basket and come out from the wilderness
On account of the locust (ukoto?)
Amajukwa is in the wilderness gwom gwom
I, Ozo, killed an elephant

I, Ozo, took a palm branch and swore innocence
 I, Ozo, took title on Eke day
 Took Olie day and ran to the town square
 I, the bird
 I, who am thorny leaf not good for making headpads from ancient
 times
 I carry a basket of inyi wood, it becomes medicine
 One who cuts down a tree
 I am the woodpecker
 Pecking at the tree
 The tree we cut down
 It is I who used it and traveled long ago
 Ha Ha Ha Ha
 I am the Mortar who flew strong, flew around all of Igboland
 Mortar that lives in Eze Ekwulu town
 Mortar that used a shovel and filled the hole in his house
 Mine is like a child's walk
 It is said that one who runs jumps
 Slowing down and pacing
 I am the gong
 Striking the gong
 The gong then starts to talk
 I am the gong, the mouth speaks
 The crowd stays
 The white ant is swaying
 The white ant is swarming
 Is it good (right)
 For me to call the Mortar
 I come, I come, I come
 Odomagana,
 One who writes books does not finish writing
 What is in my mouth, what draws me
 Is endless

In this poem, the Mortar says that it is a Gong, it is a bird, it is a Firestand.

This Mortar is of the spirits. It can converse with Eke (The Creator). It is something that happens in two verses, where the mortar tells what

created the locust to allow it to go home in peace.

The third verse is solely praises. It is filled with "I, I." This masquerade does not praise another one, or another spirit. Only itself. All the sentences in this verse are praises. See also how the sounding of the tones here make the poem pleasant to the ears, sounding like a song. The repetition in this poem helps to bring out very well the Mortar's character and deeds.

In the other verses at the beginning of this poem, you will see that it is "my poem" that is the starting word. This shows that this poem is a personal one, a poem explaining about the person reciting it.

Igbudu = Igwe mmadu
Ony iro = Olu uto
Inono = ahuhu ocha
Kwuta azy = Laghachi azy
Ijele = Ijere, ahuhu isi ukwu
Ogbadu = Oka, ybo oka
Okpulu = Ogwe osisi
anakala = ngalaba osisi

2. ADVICE

The winetapper climbs the palm tree and attaches the pot
If the palm tree does not hold wine, the pot will;
One who tells lies talks nonsense
Until one who tells the truth forgives him,

Is it not my continually going to the diviner
That means I know something
The dog who remains in thought
It is said that he is sleeping
One tells the tortoise to think
He says that he is under cover;
If the music carries the message clearly (follows the mouth)
A little gesture follows;
One who pursues the chicken
Is the one who has a fall

The stick used to flick away the millipede
It and the millipede are thrown away together
One who does not eat the apple
His face does not look sour
Because the one who is innocent
Does not get lost on the road

This poem is advisory. It is bathed in artful language. Indeed, only proverbs were used in writing this poem. These various proverbs are put together to say one thing. There is nothing that is not beneficial there, from beginning to end. They all are proverbs of advice, or proverbs about wisdom.

tili oterme = tell a falsehood (lie)

Mkpulukpu aka = finger

QUESTIONS

Explain all the proverbs in this poem. Write something about them.

MODERN POETRY

(A) : I. E. AKOMA

Isreal Akoma is a Ndokki man. He is a person who loves Igbo literature and poetry and is skilled in it. Thus he has written many things in Igbo, among which are a well-written drama called *Obidiya*, and a book of poems called *Poems in the Igbo Language*. He also wrote a few poems in *Akpa Uche*.

Now, Akoma is a pastor of the CMS. He lives in Aba.

3. CHILD WHO TRAVELS BACK AND FORTH

NJOKU: There has been too much trouble
There has been too much suffering
Every year discussion about Nwamkpa
You shoot the first time, it hits the log

Shoots the second time, he hits the tree trunk
Was the arrow carved only for a tree trunk?
The small child has suffered
Is not this the ancestor's finger?
We cut it off so it would not come again
Children are given gifts
These things are according to his wishes
What else have we not done? (What remains?)
But since you prepared to punish us
To treat us roughly without looking back
Having no pity for suffering
Suffer five times
Near the small river
Let the load of firewood and kerosene
Speak to you, words you will hear
Let this be your final journey.

IJE: Where are you taking me?
Are you taking me beside the river?
Is it there that you received me?
Is it not you who are crying
Looking for me every day
So that your kitchen is filled up?
Is it not you who performing divination
To find out what you will do.
May I enter your house?
Have you done what I wanted?
The load of firewood and kerosene
Is it not the flesh that it burns?
I am still waiting and watching you
See how your thoughts are going
Setting me on fire will make
Me be very black
It is a black person you will give birth to again
I pity all of you
I have seen your suffering
But have patience indeed
Two journeys remain
I am not in control of my time

Let me then stay and become yours.

I. E. Akoma

Child Who Travels Back and Forth

This poem has something different in it. It is Njoku and Ije speaking in it. Only their two voices are heard. When Njoku finishes, Ije answers him.

Questions:

1. What is an *ogbanje*? Explain it well, and also tell why *ogbanje* is troublesome.
2. What sacrifices are performed so that the *ogbanje* should not come and give people trouble?

(B) : KEVIN AMASIKE

Amasike was born in 1940 in Amaku - Orodu Mbaitolu. He went to school at St. Patrick's School, Coal Camp, Enugu, and at National School of Commerce, Oguta. Kevin has written various poems. His poetry is among the selected poems in the book of poems called *Akpa Uche*. He is also among those who won the prize the people of Onibonoje gave at one time. He works now at the Imo radio station called Imo Broadcasting Service.

Mr. Amasike's poems are varied. Several of them concern what God created, people's bodies, and things concerning children. Some of these poems are: "Chicken," "Tortoise," "Eye," "Tongue," "Palm Tree," "Pear," "Patience," "Peace."

4. THE FATE OF THE CHICKEN

O! What shall we do about the fate of the chicken!
What shall we do about the fate of the chicken!
The chicken lays an egg and it is taken out,
If it hatches, the hawk carries it away.
The diviner takes some for use in sacrifices.
The mongoose takes them, the flood takes them, children
kill them

Some, that she is able to raise are killed by the owner.
O! What shall we do about the fate of the chicken.

Chicken, your world is half and half
Chicken, god created you, what will he do!
The chicken raises the chick but does not enjoy its benefit,
what shall we do
Chicken, O! You are condemned not to enjoy the benefit of the
chick
Chicken never becomes wealthy,
Because those whom God created, he and they use its chick
To amass wealth, or obtain riches
That caused the chicken to excrete everywhere
It sees, because it does not enjoy the wealth of the chick
What shall we do about the fate of the chicken

This is a lament. A poem of lament is where one is crying, or expounding on fate; the trouble and sorrow that are our lot, or that exist. In this poem, it is the chicken's troubles that are referred to. This poem explains that the fate of the chicken is a bad fate, a fate without any happiness in it. Notice that this poet looks very carefully and brings out all the catastrophes that befall the chicken!

Questions:

1. What is the chief thought in this poem? Tell all the disasters that befall the chicken and its offspring.
2. This poem is not written verse by verse. Can you explain why? Is it good that way?
3. Explain these words: mpekele mpekele - half and half
azi igba (azi iri uru nwa gbara gi) - condemned

5. EYES

God, God thanks be to you.

You are the one who created eyes.

Gave them special gifts.

Gifts to see.

The eyes see far away.

God created man and gave him eyes

One on the right and one on the left and told them,

Look, see where feet will not reach,

Hand will not reach, nose will not reach.

Everything you and all other parts will not reach

Except you the eyes

Eyes then raise their two hands, raises them up

Thank God saying, "O! Father, you have done well."

Then opened his eyes wide, peering

It looks above, it looks below.

It sees good, it sees evil.

The eyes then bring bad things to a person

many bad things that lead people to hellfire

Which is what the eye caused

The eye is bad and is also good

All the thanks the eyes gave God from the time

He gave them the gift of seeing, now

it has been something wasted

Eyes, does it mean that you do not know that the eyes that look

at the world are looking at you.

Eyes that God created for man and gave them so you could look

at something good for them.

But you then are putting them in trouble.

This poem starts by praising God for the gift he gave and explains the good deeds that God did for the eye, and how it also brings men bad things. The eye is beneficial, but it can put men into trouble.

Questions:

1. What is the lesson in this poem
2. What else in this poem makes it pleasing to the ear?

6. THE TONGUE

The thing one holds in the mouth that is good is the tongue.
I am the kola that keeps a person's life
If I do not speak
A person is good for nothing.
If the mouth is opened, you will see me
If one says something good, it is I who spoke.
If one says something bad, it is I who spoke.
People have a proverb that says
The thing one holds in the mouth that is good is the tongue
It is true that I am good
But I am a two-edged sword
I cut ahead, I cut behind
If a person is killed, or a person is tied, it is I,
The tongue, who caused his death
If gossip is everywhere, it is I.
If I stop saying to the earth it is I
I tell the eye to go and look
But I say go
If the chicken fails to cluck
How will she train her children?
Our gifts are varied,
Women are told to stop gossiping.
If I am not told, she will not stop.
There is a proverb that says if you don't run the tongue
How can the knife come out and start cutting all the body
But the tongue will not look good
Use your tongue to count the teeth in your mouth [figure it out]

Kevin Amasike

This poem is as good as the poem called *Anyo*. They both have one thing in common. They touch a person's body. In addition: What the eye sees is what the tongue talks about. But in this poem, it is the tongue that talks about itself. This is not true of the eye because the tongue is mouthy or talkative.

QUESTIONS

1. Pick out all the figures of speech in this poem. Explain them.
2. In your opinion, what are the characteristics of the tongue?

7. RAINBOW

Rainbow,
My heart is glad when I see you,
When the sun is setting in the sky,
You come out in all your glory, Rainbow.
When I look at you
I cannot describe your golden appearance
When you encircle the sky,
God's creatures watch you.
My mother told me,
If a rainbow appeared in the sky
Rain would not fall,
Except when a rainbow has gathered in
All its brightnesses, drawn them into the sky.
Rainbow,
All this beauty of yours,
How beautiful is your creator?
Your beauty is of great value, which cannot be bought in the
market
Praise be to God, who created you.

Kevin Amasike

This poem is one of praise. It praises the "Rainbow" for its beauty which shines like lightning. This is a poem that describes a creation--one of the many things God created that are in the sky. In Igboland there are many traditional stories about the Rainbow. This poem touches on one of them. All the beauties of the Rainbow--all the beauties of everything in the world are praises to the one who created them. They show how their creator is beautiful in himself.

(C) : R. M. EKECHUKWU

R. M. Ekechukwu is an outstanding teacher in Aggrey Memorial College in Argochukwu. He is not new to the field of Igbo literature and recitation. His profession is teaching, but he also likes to write in Igbo. He is one of those whose poems are in *Akpa Uche*. Indeed, it is he who collected the poems in *Akpa Uche*, put them in proper order and wrote the prefaces and explanations in that book.

8. NOBLE CABRAL, REST IN PEACE

If the iroko tree falls
Children climb it
If trees grow many new leaves
And flowers, branching out,
Finally, it dries up!
The wind comes, it batters it.
Termites will have it.
The tree was life
What was alive was dead.
If one dies today, he will not die tomorrow!

Cabral has died, it is true,
He died struggling for his fatherland
Africa has really suffered,
A stranger worth more than a native son
It has done us in!

A snake that swallows its companion
Is never healthy
Where is your murderer now?
Tell us, people of Portugal.
The spirit of Cabral has hunted him down.

We are glad
That the thing crying "p!!" has died.
The thing you used your life to sacrifice for
Perhaps, will be yours.
In the near future.

Amilcar Cabral, rest in peace . . . !
Do not weep in spirit land
You are alive, even today
If a guest among us wants to kill us
When he goes home, let him develop a hunchback.

R. M. Ekechukwu

The beginning of this poem is good. Its first section is like a divination, or a blessing. In the middle of the second section an explanation starts of what was touched on in the first section.

The iroko is a great tree, and life is also a great tree. The iroko that fell is a dead tree. In this poem, noble Cabral is the iroko tree. But this poem comforts us because noble Cabral has not died in vain.

QUESTIONS

Where was noble Cabral from? What do you know about his life and the battle he fought for his country?

(D) : IHECHUKWU MADUBUIKE

He was born in Isuochi-Okigwe, where Imo (River) runs out and floods everywhere. He went to college in Calabar and came to teach school at Alvan, Owere, after he returned from Europe. Now, he is Minister of Education in Lagos.

This man is a newcomer to Igbo literature and recitation. But he has written poems and other things in English and French. He has written poems in various books in America, France, and in Nigeria. The poems he wrote in the Igbo language are among the selected poems that Mr. 'Nq̄lue Emenanjo brought out in *Litara Ntị*. Madybyike is a person who holds the Igbo language dear to his heart. He believes firmly that it is through Igbo poetry that it is demonstrated that the Igbo language is strong, and widespread.

Mr. Madybyike is a person who has an ear for music. He is also one

who believes that music and poetry go together. He feels that using the musical instruments-- *udu* (water pot) and *ogbo*--is supportive of some poems he has written in Igbo.

9. TEETH

One who does not know who I am, ask questions
If you want to know if there are also teeth in the mouth of the
leopard
Touch its tail
When I was a child I did more aggressive things
What hands were unable to do were left for me
Because if one seeks a knife but does not find it, he seeks teeth
Do people fight without biting?
Why does one leave bones for the dog?
What do you tell him and the spirits to do [without the bone]?
Take your tongue and count your teeth
Perhaps, you will understand what I am saying
The thing that bit the dog to death really knew how to bite.

Who can describe what is in a person's body without mentioning the
teeth?
Did that person sprout buck teeth?
Did he want to be toothless?
If he is a dummy
Those who have wisdom teeth will tell him
How the water entered the pumpkin stem

Do you want to know the artful words of Igbo people that occupy my
thoughts?
They are numerous, but you should know that one should not see the
child's newly sprouted teeth emptyhanded
If you are a stubborn person I will show you
Medicine one uses the dog's teeth to prepare
This will cause grinding of teeth
Or rattling the teeth

Water sticks on the teeth of one who has bad luck
That is why

When the dog eats feces, the goat's teeth rot.
My friends, I have heard
It is not only the apple who bore offspring whose mouth can be
squeezed open

If the old woman is told to watch the child
And she says that she has no teeth
Is she being asked to bite the child?
If a person hates me
He should not use his smile to like me
My friend, I do not know what I bit and bit down on the teeth
I am one who chews well and then eats
The teeth that are sharp flash like lightning
One should not use smoke to cloud my future
Because the one I wait for is a big person.

Ihechukwu Madubuike

This poem uses various figures of speech. One surprising thing is that it is the teeth that are speaking about themselves in this poem. First, they start by calling themselves various names: "One who bites and eats," "sharp teeth flashing like lightning," "One who holds [something] does not look for a knife." Second, they start explaining to you that they think they are beneficial to both humans and animals. Third, they explain how Igbo people use them to speak artful words. See how the artful words pervade all the sections of this poem.

Second section: See how the teeth explain the work they do. They are guards that exist in the mouth. Whatever enters the mouth that is a lump belongs to them.

QUESTIONS

1. Show the various kinds of artful language in this poem. Explain how they enhance this poem.
2. To whom do you think the teeth are describing themselves? Why are they beneficial to human beings and animals?

10. OGBUNIIGWE (Mass Killer, Mine, Explosive)

One who destroys great people
One who kills strong men
If the pot is underestimated, it extinguishes the fire
Dry meat that fills the mouth
One who kills four hundred diseases
You are a gun of water
You travel through the wind
You split open the earth and the forest
You do not know a friend from an enemy
You cause the strong man
To use his eyes to see his ears
You cause the strong man's heart to be in his stomach
You cause the strong man to be in a situation (dead) that
enables the goat to eat palm branches from his head
One who travels to towns and makes enemies
Fire that burns the savanna
You are one who accomplishes things in time of scarcity
You are also one who does things when he is able
Your work is still beginning
Because you are still young
When you grow up,
We will use you to set right the continent of Africa
And black countries the world over!

Ihechukwu Madybuike (Oct. 1977)

This poem describes one thing used in the fight the Igbos put up during the war in Nigeria. It is a praise poem. That is why praise language pervades it.

QUESTIONS

1. Look at the section four, lines 5 and 6. What do these two lines show?
2. Explain the last section?
3. What is "Ogbuniigwe"?

11. NAIRA

My name is Money
It is I who control the world
I who am the beginning and the end
One who does not have me is crying
Sometimes having naira is like
The trouble of gathering firewood
At that time it is a thing that brings on
Trouble of the heart with no rest
It is like a sheep strolling out and meeting one to whom it
 owes a debt
One who has money does not want to become poor
Because one does not like, after being used to eating at a table
To start eating on the ground.
Some say that the naira is Nigeria's sickness
It is what causes thievery
It is what causes hatred
It is what causes giving and taking bribes
The naira causes great confusion these days
These are bad things
But one who has no naira
Does nothing but cry

But some people say:
If the eagle throws away its feathers
Wherein will lie its beauty?
If the masquerade falls to the ground
Its honor is defiled
If a man has no money
Of what use is he?
Is it that money is a man's goodness and also his honor?

Some also say:
The *utu* fruit is not only food the monkey eats
Cloth is not the only thing that makes a woman beautiful
If a young man has no wealth
The person with wealth will pay for his father's funeral
Children and people are better than money

He who has people is better than he who has money
Children and people are wealth
They are like eagle feathers
If one does not have them, his honor is defiled.
My name is Money
It is I who control the world
I am a thing of sweetness and wonder

Yes! Money is sweet, a wonder
But remember that it is not because of a thing's sweetness
That one eats too much of it
One who goes by the sweetness of meat
Eats the flesh of the vulture
He eats human flesh
Let him who has ears hear
To have money is like gathering firewood with ants in it
One who eats the ram's testicles owes a debt to hydrocele.

Ihechukwu Madubuike

From the first sentence, it is seen that it is Naira talking about itself. It shows itself as one who owns everything, one who holds the knife and also holds the yam. One will say that one who has money has everything, one who does not have it is Aaron--he has nothing. But there is also another strong voice in this poem saying: "No, Naira is not something that comes and stands and then leaves, that there are other things better than it."

QUESTIONS

1. Write all the artful words in this poem. Explain them.
2. What work do the sounds and tones do in this poem?

12. IMO

Your name is Imo
If you ignore the pot, it extinguishes the fire
Dry meat fills the mouth

A traveler has no enemies!
Does one know those who will become chiefs?

Imo!

Great river that begins in my father's land
And stays small until it reaches a town and becomes an ocean
The whole world reaps benefits from you

Imo!

Old woman
You came out when the land was not strong
Before my ancestors bore Isu
Before Isu bore EzinaiHITE
Before our great land became a great land
Strong men's land, beautiful River; River of life
Well-known River. Towns up ahead of you
Towns of men, towns of the strong
Your highways are strong ropes that hold us
Your waters are food that nourishes
Giving us wealth and power

Imo

River overcomes the basket and slings the leopard skin around
its neck
I want no other river
I want no other country
Do not give me other food
I will not live in another country

It is the Imo and I
In death and in life.

Ihechukwu Madubuike
(February 16, 1977)

This poem is one of praise. Its theme is the great river in Igboland called Imo. It is from the name of this river that one state in our land received its name when it was created in 1976.

Things from various traditional stories are in this poem. The mouth of the Imo is in Isuochi, near Okigwe. Isu was the son of Ochi and also the father of Ezi na Ihite.

Ọ ta sịkọrọrọ: Where the mouth of the Imo is in Isuochi is a place called Umyaku. It is a small stream running gently, or *sịkọrọrọ*. *Ọta sịkọrọrọ* is an onomatopoeic word showing how this water drips in the pot.

QUESTIONS

1. There are various traditional stories told about the Imo River in several different towns in Imo State. Can you recall them?
2. What does this figure of speech mean? Mmiri nsọrọ ekete (nkata), ma nara (koro) akpukpọ agy n'olu?

13. PATIENT AFRICA

It is a terrible
Have you ever seen something like this
That a man can stay in his house
And break his testicles?

My God, don't agree
Lord in heaven, don't agree
God of the Land, don't agree
Imo don't agree

Anyim shrine don't agree
The wealth of a child is not more than the child himself
One runs round the base of the pepper plant
One does not climb it
When the fly finished buzzing around
The heap of feces is still too much for him
There is nothing they [the detractors] can do

When did the wealth of a child start
To bring tears to him?

It is terrible
My God, don't agree to wickedness
Let the hawk perch and let the eagle perch
The one who tells the other not to perch
Let its wing break; or
Let it continue to fly away - without perching
The one who tells me to die
Let him die

When did a guest become better than a permanent resident?
The child has a dream
Does he plead for the dream?
I hold the oath stick
I hold the sacred staff

Africa, you are the land of the blacks
People can not take you away from us

Ihechukwu Maduabyike

South Africa is the country of the blacks that the whites took by force. The first verse of this poem is solely a cry, asking questions whose answers are obvious [rhetorical]. It also cries out that future evils should be avoided, that all the gods in Igboland should help so that wickedness should stop. One thought in this poem is oppression. The poem says that oppression is not good.

QUESTIONS

1. Many questions are asked in this poem. Tell how they help explain what is happening in South Africa.
2. Explain well the third verse of this poem.

14. UGOMMA

I saw you in the midst of our town's market
A beautiful one shining like the eagle
In my heart
Great Beauty has a neck like the Antelope
Ugomma! Your body is dark like ebony
Beautiful one! Your teeth shine like drops of water
iroko Tree! You are bathed in the mouth of the Imo
Ebony body! You shine like the moon at night
My star, the midnight dies for you.

Young men tremble when you break out into a smile
Your walk makes your enemies jealous
And your walk makes fire burn in men's hearts.
Their bodies all seek to die for you
At that time your steps remind them of
The dances young men do on village roads
(Water pot, Gong and Rattler are used to play here)

UGOMMA

I want the smiles that come out of the heart
Smiles that kill anger and cure troubles
Smiles that kill sadness, prevent difficulties
Tell me words that bring new life every day
Which make life go on
Which bring me new birth

I am hungry for mangoes
Mangoes fill the stomach
Mangoes do not stick in the teeth
Mangoes of the rainy season
That sprout between dry season and famine
Take me to go to my mother's people
Where the land produces an abundance of food
Where people do not work themselves to death
Where the oil palm and the raphia palm grow like okra
Pears and corn sprout without planting

Yam and cassava grow without staking
Where God's gifts are unfathomable
Birds and animals are plentiful

Give me the wild mango of the dry season
The wild mango which quenches thirst
The wild mango on the path which is sweet like honey
The wild mango which tastes like the bad bush in my grandfather's
compound

Come let us go to the stream
The stream of our town that is on Anyim hill
Anyim, Daughter of Imo, sister of Omeladike
Which kills a person when his life tastes like salt (in the prime of
life)

Come let us go to the stream of our town
Where we will laugh and die
Scoop the water of love in the palms of our hands
Where the rainy season beats a drum
The water runs into our pots
It makes you thirsty.

There we do the dance of love
The dance of young men and women
We play in the water, laughing heartily.

Ihechukwu Madubuike

This poem was written for a beautiful young woman named Ugomma. Pick out one by one all the sentences used to describe her beauty. Are there figures of speech in them? What are they?

From Verse four, see how this poem is like a song that is sung. In all these verses, there are many sounds and tones. These help to make this poem flow like a river.

QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, what makes this poem a well-written poem, or a poorly-written poem?

2. Is there anything in the language of this poem that touches your body?
What is it?

15. SAVE ME

On the kind of friendship between Elephant and Millipede
Which made us call Millipede
Friend of Tortoise and Ram
Friend of the guest and of the home-owner
Of one who brings and one who eats
Friend who caused Tortoise to go walking and not kill Millipede

Don't let me and them become
Jealous friends
Jealousy between neighbors
Jealousy between Lizard and Chameleon
Which caused Chameleon to run out of his house
Ran to Eagle
One who gave him effective medicine
The effective medicine he uses to change color
And follow his enemies around
The medicine made Lizard live on the fire-shelf and on the wall

Don't let me and them be friends
Friends who have two tongues and gossip
Those whose mouths are open
Those whose tongues are like razors
I do not want a rat friendship, one who bites and blows cold
Friendship of highly educated people who do not know how to get
things done in the village

Those who stay at home while labor afflicts the goat
Those who eat fish but do not know how to close the basket
Save me

From the kind of friendship between Tortoise and Squirrel
Friends who have no trust
Friends who, after discussing together, turn around and do the
opposite

Give me Eagle friendship, beautiful bird
One with a pure heart, whose smiles come from the heart.

..Ihechukwu Madu-byike

Various folktales were used in the writing of this poem. Do you know some of them? If you can remember them, interpreting this poem will be easy. It talks about lack of trust, anger, jealousy. It illustrates all of these things through the behavior of various animals. Through the behavior of animals, this poem teaches us how some people behave.

QUESTIONS

1. Write all the animals in this poem. Is there a way that they resemble each other? What things are used to know them in Igbo folktales?
2. What type of artful language is used in the writing of this poem?

16. SLOW AND STEADY IS THE JOURNEY

Fellow humans,
Hot soup should be sipped very slowly
One should not, because his friends do a thing, do it himself
It is said that snoring is not sleep
That is, do as much as your strength allows
Don't say that your companions have surpassed you
Because of this you will overreach
And break yourself in half
A short person should hang his bag where his hand can reach
If the rat jumps into the water with the lizard
The lizard will dry off, will the rat also dry off?

My friend,
Remember that the place a runner reaches
The walker also reaches and passes
Remember that
Taking things easy overcomes troubles
Patience is the journey

Do according to your strength
Do the work expected of you
Leave the others
You should not carry the world on your head

Do what you like [come what may]
You are only one person
You have one head
One chair you can sit on at one time

Fellow humans
Remember that
The firewood in the town is enough for them to cook with
What a person does not have he should not long for
If he longs for it, it becomes jealousy

Jealousy is a thief
Jealousy brings gossip
Jealousy is hatred

But patience overcomes trouble
Patience is the water of life
Patience is deep
Patience is forgiveness
It is also what is best

Slow and steady is the journey
The place a runner reaches
The walker still reaches
Where a person is,
He does his mending [of thatched roof].

Ihechukwu Madybuike
(October 1977)

This is an advisory poem. There are many things in it. It talks about the world and what is in it, about the efforts we make all the time so that things will go well for us; so that we will be like our friends, or surpass them in money, wealth and progress.

This poem explains the value of patience, and also explains what jealousy and envy bring.

QUESTIONS

1. Proverbs are used to undergird this poem. Write and explain them.

2. What is the subject of this poem? What is the main thought in it?
3. What other way can you explain the last verse in this poem?

(E): JOSEPH CHUKWUEMENA MADUEKWE

Maduekwe is from Ojoto, a town near Idemili, which is in Anambra State. It was in Ojoto that he started school. Other places he studied are in the teachers' training school in Nsulu Mbawsi, St. John's College, Diobu, and St. Andrew's College Nnewi, where he completed his studies at the time the war ended in the year 1970.

Maduekwe is not a newcomer to Igbo literature. A well known piece he has written is *Dinta* (1974). He also wrote several other books like *Otu Mkp/sj Akw* (a play), *Nkw Okwu* (a poem) and *Lru Nwa* (a fictional story).

Maduekwe writes well-written poems. It is he who took first place in the competition held to select the poems in *Akpa Uche*. His poems are very satisfying.

Maduekwe used to teach in Enugu. That is where he wrote the news for the radio and various other writings. And now, he is one of the chief people who see to the spreading of Igbo language and traditions at Anambra Broadcasting Corporation, Enugu.

17. MOSQUITO

If one looks for creatures in the world that are small and strong,
The mosquito is one of them;
You know that the fight it puts up so it can own the world
Is not like the brave deed that an elephant would do.

If one looks for creatures in the world that are fearful and sharp,
The mosquito is one of them;
See how it shoots itself like an arrow
When it recognizes the smell of its enemies in the world.

If one looks for good ones in the world who are hated
The mosquito is one of them;
Why did it not learn to farm?
~~Let it imitate the small black ant without an enemy in the world.~~

If one looks for creatures in the world that are plentiful and die
quickly,
The mosquito is one of them;
It is slapped, poisoned, swatted away!
Is the butterfly in this type of death?

If one looks for creatures in the world that have no usefulness,
The mosquito is one of them;
It does not help the tree to grow its fruit.
It does not convert refuse to manure.

If one looks for everything that should be eliminated from the world,
The mosquito is one of them;
Let me ask, is it the thing that saw everything that it was good
That created the mosquito and spread it over the world?

Creator, use your grace and kindness which are great
Gather together those who use their mouths like needles,
Dump them in the mighty ocean.
The bottom of the ocean will be good for their corpses.

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

It is clear, after reading this poem, that something displeased the
writer. The mosquito is not a pleasing creature. It is not beneficial to
humans. Rather it is a bother to humans. What is surprising is that the
mosquito is small but has the strength of an elephant. What is good for
this creature is to dump it and others like it in the ocean. It is one bad
thing God created that spoils the world.

Kuryububa - Butterfly, a flying mosquito that has various spots. It does
not stay long before it dies.

danda - a worker ant

homiri - doing something you see another person doing. [imitating]

QUESTIONS

1. Is there another animal, or something created in the world that you know has no worth at all?
2. What animals use their mouths like needles?

18. WAR

War moves fast in work, although it is terrible!
Death is terrible, although it is important in the world.
War is death's child, whom it loves,
That is why, after observing it, it was named:
One that travels quickly, one that eats when it is hot,
One that kills the living, one that kills in great quantity.

It is not sickness that seizes one he went to pick up
It is not an accident befalling those with merciful hearts,
They met together, they discussed, they longed, they mourned,
It is not murder, since suffering afflicts the killer;
War consumes, brother still runs for his own life
It is not hanging, of which it is said that fear of death faces it,
If one runs backward for peace, it is in vain

Death is in the world because of good face (currying favor) at the
end of life.

Death, the living person leaves the world's suffering, enters into
rest;

The knife that God the creator uses to reduce the number of people in
the world.

The anger of death, its workers are effective, are proud,
Depending on war, its child does not hold life to mean anything.
War, good child of death, is a sad person
Running its errands violently, ever striking and killing!
Death has a job, war, its child, is terrible.

Okwudor, 13 February, 1970.
J. Chukwu Maduekwe

This poem talks about war. See how the poet calls the names of war: "One who travels quickly," "One who eats when it is hot," "One who kills in life," "One who kills in great quantity." These things are what we know about war. War is called "child of death." That is that the father of war or mother of war is "death." Do you think that this name is correct?

This poem also explains the things that war involves that are terrible. It is as though this poet says that war is worse than death. Death is necessary in this world. And war? Is it also necessary? Death comes when life is over, it brings rest, the creator uses death to reduce the number of people in the world. Do you believe that death is beneficial in this world, or that it is not beneficial at all?

19. OUR MOTHER AFRICA

If you look for a land that has suffered most at the hands of the world,

People quickly mention you, land of Africa
The land of the blacks, the land where the sun shines greatly
You suffered at the hands of the whites who look so bleached
They call you bad names, treat you badly;
The whites completely ruin you, strip you naked!

The children you bore used other women as children.
Because, the whites make your honor rotten;
We thought, one who answered to the name of your child was rotten.
If a man marries you, he leaves you so that you are like a widower.
Your children run to other women, you are like a childless woman
We abandon your language, your dancing style, your artistic hands!

But today, our Mother Africa,
Those who hated you are loving you.
Those who praise you today, criticized you in the old days
Afraid of you because of what you can do.
If your children counted the ridicule used to insult them in old times
They were not to blame if they reacted in anger

Those who used you as a laughing stock at that time

Did not know all your beauty and honor.
They were amazed, snapped their fingers, and then said:

J. Chukwu Maduekwe

This poem explains the disregard of Africa in olden days, and all the shameful things the whites did to her. It criticizes the false accusations the whites made against Africa.

This poem is also one of pleading and forgiveness. It begs Africa to forgive all the evil her children did to her, because it is something they did when they were children, washing only their stomachs.

QUESTIONS

1. The way this poem is written is good to observe. It is true that it talks about Africa, the land of the blacks, but the poet calls it "Our Mother." Can you explain how our land can become "Our Mother"?
2. Show how all the metaphors about women bring out the thoughts in this poem well.

(F): J. U. TAGBO NZEAKO

Tagbo Nzeako is from Abagana which is in Ochi in the town of Njikoka in Anambra State. This strong man has written much well known literature. Several of his books are used in the WASC and GCE examinations from time to time. Tagbo has also written poems. Some of these can be seen in *Akpa Uche*. Tagbo works in Anambra Broadcasting Corporation Enugu, where he is chief editor now.

20. VULTURE

People scorn the vulture,
As a nasty bird;
But the vulture should be thanked,
Because the work it does is important.

When the corpses of the chicken and the goat lie smelling,

It is not only that the vulture laments,
Because of the maggots people see, because of the bad smell,
The vulture then goes and carries them all away and eats them.

There are many proverbs about the vulture:
And as the vulture told his friends,
His wife's pregnancy pleases him.
Because there is no dance that turns out badly.

If its wife bears a child safely,
It eats the placenta and carries its child,
But if the vulture's child dies,
It eats the child and the placenta.

But the vulture gives thanks to its creator.
Because the knife does not touch its head.
It does not waste money to buy garments,
Because the garments God gave it do not grow old.

Who is the vulture's friend,
Who can explain the vulture's life?
Why does it hate good things,
And eat only dead things?

The elders say,
"If you sacrifice a chick and do not see a vulture,
Something has happened in the land of the spirits."
Can it be that the vulture is a friend of the spirits?

What happened to the vulture's head,
Because it has no hairs on its head?
It is true that you think you are holy,
Because of it you will walk like a holy person.

You ought to look at the other birds,
How they stay alive on their own,
Then, you would see many ways,
You could have a better new life.

J. U. Tagbo Nzeako

This poem discusses the benefit that the vulture, a very bad bird, a bird taken as a creature that defiles, together with the spirits, brings to humans. This benefit is that it eats dead, bad-smelling things that can bring people painful sickness. This is the value of vultures for humans. Because of this the vulture is a special bird among other birds. It does not like living things and good things. It can eat the corpse of its own child.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe "vulture and say how it looks" _ _ _ from its head to its tail.
2. What various proverbs are quoted in your place about the vulture?

21. LAZINESS

Laziness is the worst sickness in the world,
And only one thing cures laziness.
When a lazy person covers himself with his mat,
Only hunger uncovers him.

At dawn,
The lazy one is sleeping.
When people go to their work,
The lazy one is at home looking around.

Laziness uses tiredness,
And goes to the house of his friend, a man.
Gossiping, stealing and playing around,
They are things that laziness uses for work.

Laziness is the enemy of man,
Because it does him no good.
It misleads man in the world,
And causes man to blame himself.

Sometimes, laziness brings to a man,
Fever, flu and headache.
But all these things go away,

Laziness has no value for man,
Laziness gives nothing to man,
Laziness loves no one,
Because laziness is not a good thing.

You men and women who are lazy people,
Go and think well,
So that you begin to do what ought to be done,
So that your stomachs may not rumble.

J. U. Tagbo Nzeako.

This poem is an advisory poem that teaches a lesson. It speaks of laziness as an enemy of mankind. It is not only an enemy. It is a bad sickness, bringing on many bad things.

tororom: - (udana): stomach rumbling (throat sound) that happens when a person is hungry.

QUESTIONS

1. What lesson is in this poem?
2. Write out all the repetitions in this poem. Explain them.

(6): J. C. OBIENYEM

J. C. Obienyem is from Agulu which is near Oka. He was born on November 14, 1940. He studied in Agulu and in Onicha. He matriculated at the big school in Nsuka called the University of Nigeria.

Mr. Obienyem has written a few books. Some of them are *Modern Igbo Essays and Letters* and *Udoka Nwa Ogyadimma*. He teaches now at the Federal School of Arts & Science, Aba. His poetry is among those selected in *Akpa Uche* and in *Utara Nli* from which we took some of his poems that are in this book.

22. THE MOON

One whose face shines out at night,
Young woman whose laughter comes out like a star.
If it is a python's egg, I do not know,
If one plants yam in it, I do not see.

Rain clouds darken her face.
The afternoon is bitter to her.
But she joins me looking for apples at night in dry season
Moon, the old woman and the young man are rejoicing.

This is a poem that is not very difficult to understand. The moon is something we all know well, especially those who live in towns where there is no electricity (European moon). The moon is something that shines in the night. It brings happiness and joy to everyone. When it shines children can go picking up apples, and when you go the moon follows you.

QUESTIONS

1. Are there any supporting words in this poem concerning the moon? Can you explain them?
2. Explain "Young woman whose laughter comes out like a star."

23. SLEEP

Sleep, brother of death
The place where all your strength is finished
Is in opening the door of death's house
You ask people or animals to wrestle
Whose eyes are close by (sleepy). ?

You overpower the leopard,
The duiker comes and blows on its face
Your boldness goes at all times and all places
If one chases you away, soon you come back
But no one perceives you.

If a person sits down to stretch a bit
The eyes open but not seeing
The body in a state of stupor, the ears deaf
The head nods like a lizard's
When the neck wants to touch the ground, the person catches himself
And looks around to see if anyone has seen him.

J. C. Obienyem.

Sleep is one of the things that comes upon a person whether he wants it or not. Because of this, it is like death. That is why this poem says that sleep and death are brothers. Sleep is powerful like death. It does not recognize either the big or the small person. It does not recognize either the house or the compound. The reason that sleep is terrible is that one does not see it when it acts powerful in all of these ways.

ise utiri -- to stretch oneself
jky uduri -- to act like a person who is sound asleep
jky pam -- to stay quiet, acting like a lifeless thing.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain everything that is written in the third verse of this poem, showing how sleep is strong, and underrates a person.
2. How many words of art are there in this poem? Explain them.

24. A NIGERIAN

How many automobiles do you have?
How many kinds of lace do you have?
How many bags of money do you have?
What about your elegant things?
How many boxes do they need?

Do you drive a Mercedes Benz or a Bentley?
How many girlfriends do you have?
How many men friends do you have?
Or is it only one?
Do you and she go around together?

In how many towns are your storied houses?

Of which town are you a chief?

Which person and his friends

Are you close to?

How much money do you have in the white people's land?

How many people see you in one day?

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

This is a poem of questions. Nothing but questions were used in writing it. All the sentences in it are questions. However, they are questions without answers because what this poem seeks to do is criticize the behavior of some Nigerians. The lives of many Nigerians are lives of hunting for money and big things. This poem criticizes, by means of questions and humor, this type of life.

QUESTIONS

1. Are there any new words throughout this poem? Can you write them and explain what they mean?
2. What is "na-ach|ch|"? What type of word is it? (verb)

25. WINE

Thing of sweetness, it is pleasant to the last drop:
Instead of leaving it in the pot, let it stay in the stomach;
Seeing wine is enjoying life;
When palm wine fills the stomach, people sing iyoo and iyaa.

Wine blocks the road
Palm wine uses force to take away a man's wisdom
Palm wine beats open the mouth of a little dumb person
Takes a garment and puts it on all askew.

Wine, thing that comes from the container and starts to appeal to
the thirst;
Wine leads down two paths

One leads to life, one leads to death -
If you drink well, you go home in peace,
If you drink too much, your dress is hung up in the forest.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem
10th August, 1977

In the first verse of this poem, Obienyem tells us that wine is sweet, and something one uses to grow into a strong young man in igbo land. "Rather than staying in the pot, let it stay in the stomach." These are words known among wine-drinkers: "gathering life". Wine-drinkers say that they are enjoying life. Another way they say it is "eating life" and "lyoo and iyaa," which is wine talk, the way people talk when wine starts to go to their heads.

In the second verse, we see the troubles wine or palm wine bring to the drinker. This poem closes by giving advice.

Ony ihirijhi -- closed mouth
Ogbi -- One who cannot speak

QUESTIONS

1. Describe the customs the igbos follow when they drink wine. Can you remember any drinking songs?
2. What is "askew garment"?

I WILL COMMIT MURDER

Give me a knife so I can kill Ian Smith
He caused Africans to regress; [in all aspects of life]
Give me a gun so I can shoot John Vorster
He raped African women in front of their husbands;
Give me a hoe so I can bury Idi Amin;
A strong chief is in the house;
Leave me to draw a knife and go to the spirits to ask:
Why has Africa become a continent that eats only by begging?

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

This poem is one of sadness; a poem of an angry person; a poem of one who has been harmed, one whose mouth has been rubbed in the dirt. It is a poem about struggling for power. This poem has only one verse. The writer did not have time to chase rats when his house was burning. The man's penis does not harden while his wife is in labor. That is why he wanted to speak out what was in his heart, before his heart broke.

QUESTIONS

Explain these figures of speech: *Ime ihu fere azu* - regress; *imago* (*nwanyị*) *n'ihu di ya* - rape a woman in front of her husband; *ike bu n'ụlọ* - strength is in the house; *igbu ọchụ* - commit murder.

(H): NNAMDI OLEBARA

Nnamdi Okebara joins those whose poems are in *Akpa Uche*, selected poems. He is also one of the Oduke who wrote plays called *Ojaadiji*. He works in the Imo Broadcasting Service where he produces plays and things concerning Igbo traditions. He has recorded some of his songs and poems.

26. CRYING BAD LUCK [Cry of Mourning]

Why do people cry?
My brother, something big happened on market day
It became dark in the afternoon
My eye has seen my ear
I have seen a hippopotamus in the afternoon.

The unexpected rain has fallen
The chicken of a poor person does not return,
If a big tree falls
Women climb it
If you fill a bag, you tie it up.

Who has died?
Do you not know the brave man who keeps his word?
The brave man does not sharpen his knife in your face. . .
The brave man who instills fear?
When you see a huge man, you see his long nose.

2. Explain the meaning of these: "Night has fallen in the afternoon," "My eyes have seen my ears," "I have seen a hippopotamus in the afternoon."

3. Explain the other words of art in this poem.

(1): TONY UCHENNA UBESIE

Anthony Uchenna Ubesie was from Achij which is near Ogwu. He was born in Enugu in 1949. He also grew up in Enugu and started to school at St. Luke's School in Ogui. When he finished at that school, he went to study in the secondary school of the college of Anglican Grammar School which is in Achij.

Anthony Uchenna Ubesie is one of those people who are very skilled in Igbo literature. He has written these published books:

Ukwa Ruo Oge Ya, o daa
Mmiri oku e ji egbu mbe
Isi Akwu Dara N'ala
Ukpana Okpoko Buuru
Ojinala ndi Igbo
Jup Obinna
Aka Ogoli na-ehi n'isi

Ubesie is also among those who wrote a book of Igbo plays called *Ojaadiji*. Ubesie has also written beautiful Igbo poems. His poems are among those selected for *Akpa Uche*. He is the only one who wrote ten fine poems in *Akpa Uche*.

Anthony Uchenna Ubesie is a person who is enthusiastic about the Igbo language. He also likes to learn about Igbo traditions. If he continues to do this, the Igbo language can, through him and others like him, expand and grow.

Ubesie was working at the Anambra Broadcasting Corporation. Now he is studying at the University at Nsukka, where he is expected to graduate in 1980.

27. THE BACHELOR

If the bachelor chases out the lizard, with whom will he live?
Or if the bachelor chases out the lizard, will he live with the
termites?
But a town without lizards, they live in peace.

if the bachelor goes out in the morning to his palm plantation
And when finished returns home, fireplace soot and charcoal await
him
if he leaves his house early in the morning, who will sweep it?

if he uses a goat for sacrifice, who will eat with him
if you ask him who will eat, does he say that he was not able to
consume the whole goat alone?
Leave him the goat, when he invites you, you come.

People criticize him for no good reason
The benefits of bachelorhood are as numerous as sand
People look at him and say regrettable things.

Leave the bachelor alone to enjoy life while he can
Because the enjoyment a man has in life is when he lives alone
His life is nothing but joy when he lives alone.

Any time it pleases him to leave his house
Take the key and lock the door, go where he is going
if he returns at midnight, who is going to say a word?

if the bachelor kills a chicken, it involves him and the animal
if he has a wife, the children get the head
They also get its legs, the wife gets its hind part.

if one who is married takes out the meat he will eat
And one of his children cries and comes out of the house
He takes what he has and gives it to him and goes away hungry.

if the bachelor goes out early in the morning and rushes out

His soup becomes sour, he returns and picks out the meat
He picks out the meat and eats until full, then throws out the soup.

If the bachelor is short of money, he is the only one who weeps
He has no wife and children to feed
If he likes gari, he drinks hurriedly and goes out.

But if a person has a wife he is always involved with something
If he wants to rest a bit, his wife comes.
If he wants to harden his heart, he remembers his children.

The bachelor enters the market, buys a cup of salt and goes home
One cup of salt will last for a week
If he says that his salt is gone, who else was eating with him?

The bachelor will enjoy life until it happens that
He keeps on eating his soup, looks back
And looks all around, to find out what is left for him in life.

T. U. Ubesie.

This poem explains a few things concerning the bachelor--a man who lives alone, unmarried. It is only he and the lizard who own the house, he gathers up the kitchen ashes, and sweeps his own house. It is clear that Igbo people do not completely accept bachelors among them. This poem says that bachelor life has its own advantages that people do not see or do not remember.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain all the advantages of being a bachelor.
2. What disadvantages are there in being a bachelor?

26. THE OIL PALM

If you enter the country of the Igbos
And look all around their land
You see something standing erect
Greeting you from on high

The oil palm is not big, it is tall and stately
Greeting you, who are a guest
While you enter its cluster
Which the Igbos use to make money

Tall trees bend over
Those that stand straight refuse to grow tall
The oil palm stands straight and grows tall
It never bends over

Its feet are firmly in the earth
Its head is like a chief's cap
As the young man protects himself from the sun
It protects others from the sun

Great, persistent tree
Says that those who stay under it
Will not see the sunshine
Since they are under it

But you, oil palm, are like strong young men
They know that the sun is important to them
So they can have a chance to live
And join their companions in growing large

Just as your body looks good
So also are your thoughts
You are tall and huge
And give the wine tapper a place to put his feet

If it were not for all those things
All the benefits people get from you
Would not be possible
And climbing you would be difficult.

Your benefits are as numerous as sand
Is it the broom used to sweep the house?
Is it the basket used to gather rubbish?
Is it the palm frond used to build houses?

Is it the palmtree that comes from your body?
Is it the wine we get from you?
Is it the rope used to tie things?
Or is it the oil used for eating?

Oil palm, you are very beautiful
Your trunk is very long
You are wide as well as tall
I thank God in heaven

T. U. Ubesie

This poem praises the oil palm tree. It shows the pleasure the writer takes in palm trees. It is in the last verse that this pleasure and this praise are summarized:

Oil palm, you are very beautiful
Your trunk is very long
You are wide as well as tall
I thank God in heaven.

QUESTIONS

1. List all the benefits that the oil palm brings to humans.
2. Look at the fourth verse of this poem. Explain it. Tell why it is well written.

29. THE BACHELOR AND THE YOUNG WOMAN

The bachelor puts the pot on the fire and climbs the palm tree
If he does not fall, the pot will break
The bachelor starts to cook and sighs
He knows that the time for marriage is approaching

If a young woman puts on a beautiful dress
Know that her friend is outside
If the young woman is looking for beauty
Know that her eyes are outside

Wait, let me cook food
My husband is still at work
When smoke from the fireplace hits the man
He knows that women are strong

If the pretty young woman keeps on refusing a husband
The vulture comes to marry her
If the bachelor remains without a wife
He will marry the daughter of a spirit

If the bachelor has up to four women
He sews a garment, tears come (because his parents are worried)
If the spinster has up to four men
When she finishes with them, who will marry her?

T. U. Ubesie

This poem resembles the one we have seen called "The Bachelor." What is different is that "The Bachelor and the Young Woman" are being talked about. As I said, a bachelor is a man who has not married; the young woman (in the poem) is a woman who has not married.

The language used in writing the poem is solely in proverbs, or figures of speech. Two proverbs that support each other are used in every verse of this poem.

EXPLANATIONS OF SOME WORDS

[ma oso: the noise a person makes when he is troubled.

anwury mkpuke: smoke, coming out of the place where food is cooked

QUESTIONS

1. Look at verse 4. Is there a story that the people of your place tell about a young woman who is choosy about selecting a husband? Is there one they tell about a man not wanting to marry? Can you tell these stories? How are they similar?

30. THE TOPSY-TURVY WORLD

A living person keeps on living
His mind wanders
He goes from the oil palm to the breadfruit tree
He goes from the breadfruit tree to the oil bean tree

Thinking of things that people will do in the world
So the world will abandon whatever makes it special
So it is if those who are on earth
Fall heavily on those who are in the sky

What is popular in these times
Is that women say
That the God who created men
Is the one who created women
Since all people are human
They will be equal to men
If you start to speak, they argue
That the whole world is becoming civilized

My brothers, start to pay attention
So we may find out if it is true
That men and women
Will be contesting for leadership in the home
If the child says that he is a strong man

He is given a share of the taxes
If he says that he is now an adult
He is given a share of carrying the coffin.

One thing I want to tell you
Is that there is no time when God
Takes men and women
And speaks out saying that they will be equal
Let's say that men are not superior to women
Let's agree that women are superior to men
One who is superior to others should be doing
Something that will show that he is superior

When a woman goes to her husband's house
When a man marries a woman
The man carries wine for the woman
He also provides the bridal deposit
The woman is betrothed to the man
Giving the man permission to marry the woman
She leaves her father's house
And enters the man's house

If women
Want us to believe that they are superior
They should carry wine and come to talk
Saying that they are inquiring about the men
They should give wine for the men
And lead the men to their houses
We then believe that men
Are subject to women

If they married men into their houses
The men would answer to "wife"
The woman would become the owner of the house
The man would adore her
If thieves come at night
She should bring a knife and chase them
Without calling the man
Because the woman owns the house

If women want to govern the house
They should be providing the food money
The men they married will go to market
And buy things to cook at home
If the man buys tough firewood
And keeps trying to split it but it does not split
Since the woman is stronger than the man
She should come and take the axe

If women
Do everything I have told you

They will answer us as "man of the house"
As men will answer to "wife"
If they are unable
To do things like the head of the house
They should be the wives that they are
We will continue to answer to "man of the house."

T. U. Ubesie

This poem tells about a change that is seen in our land today. It is how women toss their heads and say that they are equal to men. The writer of this poem is not in favor of male and female equality. He says that one must exceed the other. If the man does not exceed the woman, the woman exceeds the man. If a woman exceeds a man, let her show how she exceeds the man.

SOME WORD EXPLANATIONS

Uche na njem ana-eme: He thinks big thoughts; he thinks high and low.

Utu obodo: Land tax; money paid for upkeep of the town.

Anyike (nku): A small tool (axe) with carved handle, used to split wood.

QUESTIONS

1. Explain all the figures of speech in verse four.
2. What special things does a man do that a woman does not do? These things, do they really show that men exceed women? Think well before you answer this question.

31. THE KOLA NUT

One who holds a kola nut does not hold life
Kola nuts are different, life is different,
Kola is the firstborn son of a son of the land
Life is the son of the land in itself.
One who goes to bring out a kolanut
If he sees life, he will bring it.

Since kola is the firstborn son of the land
it does not want defiled hands.
Since kola is something good,
it is not a brother to evil.
When men and their fellow men chew kola,
The evil in their hearts runs out.

The orange is a sweet fruit
The *wie gcha* tastes like honey
Pawpaw is in the house
Meat is there, food is there
Kola is more bitter than they
What does one give kola first?

Kola is food of the spirits and of men
Which we and the spirits eat together.
It is said that the eye that sees the spirits
Does not stay alive to boast about it
Men and spirits eat kola
Afterward men are still alive.

An adult takes the kola, and feels deep emotion
The spirits are listening
To why men are calling them
To come and listen to men.
An adult holds kola in his hand
And prays for human life.

Let good things happen, isel
Let bad things depart, isel
Let good things come to us, isel
Let bad things leave us, isel
Wealth and plenty, and children, isel
Good people and friends, isel

The kite will perch, isel
The eagle will perch, isel
The one that goes and perches, then refuses

The other a chance to perch, isel
Let its wing not break, rather
Let it fly and never perch, isel

The thing that we pursue
Let us catch it, isel
The thing that pursues us,
Let us run from, isel
What a person desires, let him have
Whether it be good or bad, isel

Kola is small in human eyes
But what it is used for is great
When one has a guest, kola comes out
it is used in sacrificing, or
is used in making new covenants.

Kola, thanks is due to you
Because people see you
As small and bitter as you are
And believe that you are something to be honored
Because you are the child of the land
You are the enemy of abomination.

T. U. Ubesie

The first verse of this poem supports the well-known Igbo traditional kola saying, "Whoever brings kola brings life." The other verses describe various other things concerning kola.