

AKPA UCHE (A Bag of Thoughts): An Anthology  
of Modern Igbo Verse  
R. M. Ekechukwu, ed.

SECTION 1. Poems on Nature and Phenomena

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

GOD

Who created man and everything in the world,  
And does not want man to see him?  
Even when man looks for him,  
And he is not far away.

Is there anyone in the world who has seen God,  
Who will say whether he is black or white?  
God, man wants to see you,  
So that man can give you the praise you are due.

Many people think that you are in the river.  
So they perform sacrifices and throw them in the river.  
Others think that you are in the trees,  
So they perform sacrifices and give them to the idols.

Men do all these things,  
In search of you, God the creator.  
Because they see your good works,  
But they have not seen you even one day.

Perhaps God is hiding,  
Because men will give him trouble,  
Whenever he is creating something new,  
They expect new life for themselves.

I think there will be great rejoicing in the world,  
On the day men see their god.  
Many will acknowledge him with great joy.  
Only a few will be regretful.

And uncountable numbers of people will shake his hand,  
Because of the various gifts he gave them;  
Then sacrificing on the highway will stop,  
Worshiping the earth and praying to the idols will stop.

If the sky is God's house,  
May he not some day come out and visit the world,  
To receive the praise that awaits him,  
And give ear to the needs of men?

I think that when God comes,  
Men will tell him many tales,  
About the evils that Satan does in the world,  
And those they loved whom death killed.

J.Tagbo Nzeako

#### DEATH

There is no one who lives in a place  
That you do not reach.

Or has the cure  
Which can stop you.

Is there a land where you are scarce?  
The birds of heaven have not escaped  
The thing that went and met the shrew  
In the bowels of the earth.

Death bisected the toad  
Because Death has no shame on its brow  
It is also Death that killed the maggots  
Because if Death does not respect the small will it respect the large?

If there is something greater than Death,  
Why did the widow die on the highway,  
When she had gone to carry the corpse of the only child she had borne?  
I say,  
Why did Death stubbornly skip the old person and spread his wings over her  
small child?

If a woman is pregnant, she is full of worries  
If a man's head aches, he is full of worries--  
Death kills the rich  
Death kills the poor

Death, where is your matchet  
Death, where did you hide your dagger?

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

### DEATH

Everything that has life hates death,  
Because death has no friends at all.  
Death does not hear people's prayers,  
And does not recognize the great or the small.

What created death in the world,  
And made it everyone's enemy?  
And made it fearless,  
To go among people human and kill them?

What caused death to know everyone,  
Without forgetting anyone?  
Does death's eye see the entire world?  
Do his feet travel over the entire world?

What gave death power in the world,  
Does he never have even one sleepy day?  
Does he not grow old like humans?  
But the human eye can not see him.

Why does he not take money,  
And leave good people so they can have long lives?  
Why does he leave bad people alone  
While they do bad deeds during their long lives?

Death has a long life in the world,  
Which began when the world was created.  
But one question I want to ask you,  
When will you be tired of this world?

Death, I will not forget the evil you have done to me,  
You killed my brother and my good friend.  
Onykwube and my friend Akunna died in war.  
I will not forget them in the world.

Perhaps your power began in heaven,  
Where you were working for God.  
Because you were taking the saints home,  
While sinners went into hellfire.

There is another question I want to ask you, death,  
Why do you leave a person alone when he is suffering,  
And kill him only when he begins to prosper?  
Is that why people hate you?

There is something else I want to ask you,  
Why don't you knock  
When you go to kill a person in his house?  
Does it not show that you have no respect for people?

Death is something that awaits all people.  
We should not be afraid  
When we go to see our people in heaven,  
And praise our creator forever.

Praise be to death, which reminds people,  
That it is good for people to be afraid,  
Because death stays around a person's house,  
Warning everyone.

If death were not in the world,  
Which houses would people live in?  
What food would people eat?  
Whom should people fear? [Death deters bad people.]

J. U. Tagbo Nzeako

#### DEATH

Death! Where are you?  
You are like a farmer,  
Who does not wait for his corn to ripen,  
Before he picks it.

Death! Where do you live?  
My father looks for you with a gun;  
My mother looks for you with a pestle;  
But they do not see you.

Death! What are you?  
Your debt has no redemption;  
Your appointment has no leeway;  
Anyone you call must answer.

Death! Do you have any choice?  
You do not recognize the great;  
You do not recognize the small;  
Hei! I fear you.

C.W.O. Ajaegbu

## 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.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

## MY MOON?

Look at that moon,  
It has come out.  
For a long time  
It has been here.  
But it will follow me  
It will find me--  
My moon  
You are my moon.

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

## 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 rest  
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. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

SPIRIT-CHILD  
CHILD WHO TRAVELS BACK AND FORTH

NJOKU: There has been too much trouble  
There has been too much suffering  
Every year the archer  
Shoots the first one, he hits the tree trunk,  
Shoots the second one, he hits the tree trunk  
Was the arrow carved only for a tree trunk?  
The small child has suffered  
Is this not the ancestor's hand?  
We did it so you would not come again  
They have given people of the same age group  
They have given the children the ceremonial feast  
These things are what it wanted.  
What remains?  
But since you prepared to punish us  
To treat us roughly without looking back  
Not having pity for suffering  
Suffer five times  
Near the small river  
You are carrying firewood and kerosene  
Will 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?  
It is not you performing divination  
To find out what you will do.  
May I enter your house?  
Have you done what I wanted?

The firewood and kerosene  
Is it not the body that it is spoiling?  
I am still waiting to see you  
See how your thoughts are going  
Setting me on fire will make  
Me be very black  
It is a black person that you will give birth to again  
I have pity on you  
I have seen your suffering  
But have patience indeed  
Two journeys remain.  
Because I have just not stayed out my time  
Let me then stay and become yours.

SECTION II. Poems on Places and Things  
RIVER UDUMA--BEAUTIFUL WATER

I. E. Akoma

River Uduma, our beautiful water,  
Water that is calm and clear  
You make us love you  
More than rivers in other lands.  
We do not get very thirsty.  
It is from you that food comes  
Our crops grow quickly  
Everything in our land praises your name.

River Uduma, accept our thanks  
Ohafia River, town of brave men.  
You are always flowing, beautiful water  
We honor your name with sacrifices.

If I were given another river, I would refuse it.  
Give me the famous one  
Which is Great Uduma which belongs to the strong land  
I will take it to do what I want.

Iroha O. Iroha

FLY

How did you grow fat in the chest and thin in the waist?  
You are good to look at.



You are not even as much as something I can blow out with my mouth in  
the twinkling of an eye

Your horns are like daggers used for making war.

When you suck bad water,

You spread it on food people eat

When you suck feces

You spread it on food people eat

Anything bad you carry

You spread it on people.

Your wings are beautiful as though they were rubbed with gold

But your fate is to eat dirty food

Fly, it is said that if you were not something created by God

You could not fly into a place where you could be seen.

Kevin Amasike

#### 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?

How can the vulture stay alive,  
And hate everything living,  
One who begs its friends, saying,  
"I do not want bad words when I am eating feces."

What happened to the vulture's head,  
Because he has no hairs on his 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

#### LIZARD

If you build a house  
The lizard watches  
When you finish building the house  
The lizard is the first to pack and go inside,  
He enters the house  
He tears the roof thatch  
He does not tear the walls  
He is the one who puts the mud on the house.

If a human falls from a palm tree  
He is facing death  
But if the lizard falls  
He gets up and dashes away.  
One who falls down  
Is one who climbs down quickly  
No one praises him  
The lizard praises himself.

The lizard does not join the rat  
In stealing behind someone's back  
He knows how his life is  
That is why he avoids humans  
One who is not strong  
Should not get into fights  
He has no hair on his chest  
He turns his face to the ground.

The old woman tells  
The lizard to come and cut palm nuts  
The lizard looks  
And tells the old woman  
That he doesn't have time  
To cut the fruit that is above his head  
Let alone to cut  
The fruit that is at the old woman's house.

The matter that has been discussed  
Is agreed on with the head  
The lizard does not want to exchange words  
Let alone quarreling  
One who does not want him  
Should leave him in peace  
If one fetches firewood with ants,  
The lizard will come to keep him company.

Where the bachelor lives  
The lizard comes and lives near him

If he walks on the ground  
The lizard runs around on the roof  
If he leaves the house and goes out  
The lizard watches the house for him  
The bachelor lives in the house  
Knowing the first-born son of the lizard.

If a man builds a house  
The lizard comes and lives near him  
If a man sweeps the house  
The lizard chases out the ants  
We live  
And let the lizard live

Let the hawk perch  
Let the eagle perch.

T. U. Ubesie

#### THE MOUNTAIN

See how the creator shaped the mountain,  
And used greenery to beautify it.  
When one beholds how the mountain is shaped,  
One sees something for which to thank the Creator of the world.

A person may have a hump on his back.  
It is not like that that the earth was molded,  
Which means that the mounded earth is a mountain,  
The hunchback can walk around, but the mountain cannot.

And every mountain has a brother,  
Its brother is the valley.  
Wherever the mountain lives,  
There its brother lives.

Does it mean that the mountain hates other parts of the earth,  
Causing it to go and live apart?  
Many things are hated by the mountain,  
But valleys love them.

When rain falls in the world,  
The mountain chases it away,  
At which time the valley receives it,  
And makes that rain its good friend.

People love a mountain very much,  
Because of it, they go and live on it.  
The mountain breezes give coolness,  
Only in the mountain is there nothing hidden.

But there is something the mountain sets on its path,  
Which breaks a person's waist,  
When a person wants to go and visit it,  
But the mountain wants to be friends with only important people.

J. U. Tagbo Nzeako

#### THE OIL PALM

There is a tree with hundreds of uses,  
Nothing in it is wasted.  
Both when it is living, standing up,  
And when it falls to the earth in death.

When the oil palm is living and growing,  
The winetapper goes and taps wine.  
Its fronds give brooms and containers .  
And its branches stake up yams.

When goats and sheep are hungry  
They are given palm fronds to eat.  
It is the fiber from palm fronds  
That people use to make fences.

Palmnuts give people palm kernels and oil,  
And the monkey, the squirrel and the large squirrel chew palmnuts.  
Is it not from the kernels that we get ointment?  
And we use kernel shells to light fires.

Pounded palmtree fiber is used to light fires,  
And it is used in digging rabbit burrows.

When the stripped midrib of fronds is dry, it is used to tie on roofs,  
And it is also used as firewood in the kitchen.

When the dried core of palmnuts is burned in oil,  
People use it to make soap.

When the core of the cluster is rubbed with oil,  
It is used to light fires at night.

The young leaf is used in taking oaths,  
It is also used in tying things.  
Any time it is tied around a house  
It shows that the house is being forcibly sold.

The doctor weaves the palm frond into a basket,  
Which people use for sacrifices.  
The sticks that are cordoned round with palm fronds,  
Are magic sticks that kill people.

People who worship spirits tie fronds around shrines,  
When they kill meat for their spirits.  
Fronds are tied on the back and front of a vehicle,  
Showing that it bears a dead body.

People use the midrib and fiber for weaving baskets,  
And use the trunk of the palm to repair roads,  
Or split it lengthwise to tie houses,  
Or dig it in the ground to mark the back of a house.

The oil palm gives people much money,  
But it does not like laziness.  
Because it gives people a lot of work.  
But the oil palm is lazy.

See how the oil palm grows tall,  
But it is not heavy like other trees.  
It does not put down deep roots into the earth,  
That is why it falls when the wind blows.

The oil palm is good-hearted on its own,

Nurturing humans, birds and animals of the forest.  
But there is one plea I am going to make to you,  
That you not kill any more chickens.

J. U. Tagbo Nzeako

### 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 ~~opens it~~ uncovers it.

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

## ADAMMA

Today I saw a woman,  
Her name was Adamma;  
Adamma was very beautiful,  
And stood tall and stately.

Adamma had grown tall,  
She was an unmarried woman used as an example;  
Her whole body was soft and plump,  
Her hair was soft and velvety.

Her nose was pointed,  
Her eyes were sharp and piercing;  
Her teeth were white as snow,  
Her fingers were straight and smooth.

Adamma was very beautiful,  
Her greeting showed humility,  
Her smile was like the light  
That fireflies give in the darkness.

C. W. O. Ajaegbu

## MILIKEN HILL

The hand does not reach the place where the hawk lays its eggs  
in the iroko tree  
Nor does the foot reach the place its babies are on the ground.  
If I place my arms around the base of the iroko tree  
How many measures will it count?  
If I blink my eyes at the size of this earth, my eyes will not reach it.  
Then, I ask myself:  
Who created this land bigger than the iroko?

When I poke my head out of my house in Ogbete Enugwu  
Facing the west  
Every evening, the sun does not hide me  
When I look, I see the trees clustered in the contour of this land  
When I look at its canyon, I tremble.



If I stay far away,  
This land seems to be wearing a hat  
If I go near it,  
It is like limestone and chalk oozing water  
Who shaped this sand to stand up so high,  
Miliken Hill--famous work of God.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

### ENUGWU TOWNSHIP

When a traveler goes out to Miliken Hill  
Where his eye will fall is on the valley below  
Within it, the iron-roofed houses are shining  
The little grasses sprout fruit or flowers  
Swishing back and forth.

Flowering trees of gold, yellow,  
or white are in it.  
Small animals fly upward  
Flying around in the sky  
Within that valley which is Enugwu.  
If you look at it from afar  
It is like a place where birds build their nests.

When you enter you will see a large city  
Which is the chief city in Igbo land.  
If you go out on the highway  
Vehicles travel back and forth  
If you listen you hear the train whistles  
Their noise falls away . . .  
Port Harcourt to Ngwoo  
Port Harcourt to Ngwoo.

Kevin Amasike

### THE RIVER NIGER BRIDGE

Something with legs spread wide apart:  
One foot in Onicha  
One foot in Ahaba  
On top of the river

Where large boats go up like tree-climbing lizards  
But it is something that separates  
Ahaba in the west  
And also separates Onicha in the east.

One with legs spread apart, what is he doing?  
If you stay at the base of the Ojukwu Onicha shrine and view it from afar  
It is as though it stretched its two arms in Ahaba  
And set its two legs in Onicha.

Cars and humans mass thickly on its back  
Every night, every morning  
Since it is the one that cuts them off,  
You think, by praying to the river, that Eriko will come and ferry them  
across.

When a person has forked legs,  
He keeps on staying and his legs go to sleep  
If he brings his legs together  
The bridge placed on the path breaks and falls down  
When will you be tired  
Who will break the bridge of this river?  
The things the hand can make are awesome!

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

#### TIME

The firewood one gathers in his youth  
Is the firewood that will warm him in old age  
If the eye is injured in childhood  
It cannot be used to see the road in the future.

One whose companions are clearing their farms  
Collecting seeds for planting  
Goes around saying let everything be tomorrow  
Does he know that time said in the beginning that it does not wait  
for anyone?

Time causes tomorrow to be pregnant  
It makes the toad bite its finger [in frustration] today

Because in times past, it said that  
When tomorrow came it would grow hair

Time brought failure in exams to the intelligent person  
Made the fish lag behind on the sands, the people on the stream path  
caught him  
But tortoise, child of Father Tortoise, sensible one, starts on time  
To ward off the impediments of time.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

### THE OLD WOMAN

When a woman starts to grow old, it looks as though one did not marry her  
with money. [She is undervalued.]  
The bamboo palm is mistreated in marriage, she is called dry and empty  
Madness lifted her and she fell  
Hunger has spoiled her smile  
When the lion breaks his leg, the deer comes to collect its debt  
Such is the life of an old woman.

If the yam is planted today, it dies tomorrow  
This is the life of a woman.  
As a maiden, she grows like okra  
Shining in the sky  
She is soft and smooth like a ripe banana  
Age comes, it spoils beauty.

She is like a strong child  
Old mother, the child treated you this way,  
When one speaks a proverb about bones  
It is as though it were spoken for the old woman.

One should not curse tomorrow  
If one does not die, he will reach old age  
Because an old branch was a young palm frond  
The woman you see now  
Who looks like the spirits or death that kill people,  
Had a time when she caused  
Young people to go without sleep.

Old woman, hold fast in your old age  
You are complete as a woman  
Enjoy, old mother, children made you as you are  
Young girls should now take their hands away from evil  
So they will have something in old age.  
Old woman, enjoy  
I see the beauty in your face.

~~SELECTED NOW BY THE EDITOR~~  
Nnamdi C. Okebara

### THE TREE THAT GROWS MONEY

One of it here, one of it there  
As they stand, the seed of the earth  
They are ancient like the earth, like the sky  
High above this beautiful tree,  
Wealth sprouts on the tree, like a basket full of cassava  
Seed, money,  
Water, money  
Rope, money.  
The one who has oil palms has wealth hanging over him.

Its seed gives oil, gives palm nut gives palm kernel  
Its blossoms give wine, give food to the land give tinder  
Its trunk gives planks gives manure gives firewood.  
Its midrib gives rope, its fronds give stalks.  
One who wants to name it remembers fiber, dried flowers and young  
branches of the palm;  
One sees all the palm trees standing, much money also stands  
One who has oil palms has wealth hanging over him.

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

### THE MASQUERADE

I hid myself here, uninitiated child;  
So I could avoid the Agaba coming from the town.  
I am terrified that he might swallow me.  
Look at the face he carries! The teeth in his mouth pursue me.  
The sound of his gong and his swollen eyes petrify me,  
But I am fascinated by his sharp back and forth movements.  
"Stay, stay, gaze at the spirits who come from the bowels of the earth!"  
My mother told me, her uninitiated child:

*See comments  
at end of book.*

When you go out to watch where a masquerade stands,  
Stand fast, as a fearless young man comes out and stands.  
You do not know that behind every big and fearful thing,  
A real human being prepared a seat for him.  
When it comes to any tradition defying comprehension,  
The trained human mind can decipher it, to be sure.

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

### THE 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?

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

#### ATILOGWU

Dance of the Igbos  
Dance that is very deep  
Dance one does not tire of watching  
Dance that everyone knows about.

Dance of young men and women  
Dance of the strong and those with full stomachs  
One who is not strong does not dance you  
It is you by which the Igbos are known.

You have fearful magic  
Today, I have watched you, you satisfy me  
My body trembles with joy and excitement  
My heart waits for the time I will see you again

Tomorrow, I will watch you again  
But I will not have my fill at all  
Because you are a special dance  
Dance that is deep and deathless.

Chidi Emenike

#### THE BAT

The bat knows that it looks bad so it flies at night.  
It is not that night is better that makes it fly then.  
If you seek but do not find, you make do with what you have,  
The bat then keeps on looking and travels at night.

The bat is not brother to birds or earthly animals  
Its position is that when things get difficult, it follows the strong group  
If birds were stronger than earthly animals, the bat would join them  
If earthly animals were stronger, the bat would be one of them

When people look for arguments, they say the bat is bad  
Is the bat bad, yet human beings eat it?

People who eat bat meat know that it is not bad  
If it were, it would be a bad thing for people to eat.

My brothers, it is here that the matter of eating stays  
Humans do not eat bad things  
It is good things that are eaten by people God created  
Since people eat the bat, it is not a bad animal.

If a person stays in the house, he wants to go gossiping  
The bat slowly leaves every afternoon for us  
We don't use the afternoon but chase it at night  
To find out if it is true that the bat is bad

Friends, leave the bat alone so it can rest  
It knows that it is not strong, and flies at night  
If the bat comes out in the afternoon, people treat it badly  
If it tries to come out at night, people refuse to allow it.

T. U. Ubesie

#### 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

### THE OIL PALM

If you enter the country of the Igbos  
And look all around their land  
You see something standing ~~up~~ 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

### FIGHTER BOMBERS

If the hawk comes to carry off chickens  
The hawk is called only bad names  
But a human grew wings and came to war  
Coming to kill people  
His people are rejoicing  
Those he came to kill are weeping and wailing

Its roar is like the God of Thunder  
Its speed frightens the people of the world  
It flies and flies into the sky  
Its color is like the sky  
We know that it is fearsome  
When it releases chains of bombs.

You say that it shoots a gun,  
You hear a bang when it drops a bomb  
Its smoke fills the earth  
Its hot noise strikes the earth  
Disasters kill people  
The wind spreads its fragments

The fighter plane penetrates the white sky  
Like a hawk carrying off a white chicken  
Anti-aircraft gunners will be shooting their guns

So they can shoot it down with bullets  
Those who are killed are being buried  
Those who killed rejoice

If a hawk comes and carries off a chicken  
It kills it, it eats the flesh of the chicken  
But if the airplane kills a human being  
It leaves his corpse there  
A huge cloud of dust flies in all directions  
Loud cries go in all directions

Now everyone alive  
Knows why it is feared  
When it flies around in the sky  
Every place will fall silent  
Wild animals fear it  
Birds fear it as well

Heil Airplane used for war  
See how belligerent you are  
You are beautiful, but you bring up children badly  
You bring up children for death  
The airplane is intended for traveling  
But your purpose is to commit murder.

T. U. Ubesie

#### 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

### LIZARD

I am Lizard  
In the roof of your house  
I stay every day when the sun shines  
I continue swearing at you  
Because you do not give me  
The praise due to me

Are you strong like me,  
Have you fallen down and stayed alive?  
If you fall a short distance  
They take you to the hospital  
But every day  
From the top of a big tree  
I fall to the ground on my stomach

You who are a man,  
I praise you for your wisdom  
But since you are so all-knowing about things  
Why do you not praise me  
For this thing that you are unable to do?  
The tough man who does not praise his tough counterpart  
Is looking for death.

Nnamdi C. Okebara

## 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 as 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

### A WOMAN'S LIFE

Trees grow quickly  
And they age quickly  
But one who grows slowly and steadily  
Lives a long and enjoyable life  
Thus it is with women  
And the life they live.

The Igbos have a proverb  
Concerning the life of a woman  
That the woman's growth and her old age  
Come rapidly together  
Like corn planted on the farm  
Ripens as it grows

When the woman is very young  
She is watched carefully  
She grows strong like the yam shoot  
She is nursed carefully  
She is trained in the way she should  
Live well with a husband

When she matures  
She is difficult to control  
Her common sense tells her  
That she is an adult  
That she has reached the place  
That women should take in the world.

Her walking, her stepping seem to say,  
"Who dares stand in my way?"  
As she walks, she throws back her head  
As though the world belonged to her

Her head is turned, she pushes out her chest  
Praising herself.

When the young woman goes walking  
She keeps in mind  
That the breasts that are standing erect  
Will fall some day  
If she takes time now to watch out  
She will have a good life

When she is twenty years old  
More or less  
She sees the real world  
As the days pass  
She begins to behave  
Like someone with common sense

She will learn the difference  
Between two things  
She realizes that this world of ours  
Runs two ways,  
One is the way of wastefulness  
The other is life.

Now it is clear to her  
That she needs a husband  
Because it is not in her father's house  
That a young woman should live  
The hand that supports a woman  
Is that of the man who marries her

If she is a good person  
She does well  
If she is a bad person  
She covers it up  
She ties up bad things in her cloth  
Waiting for a husband to come

When her god brings a man to her



Who wants to marry her  
She humbles herself  
Behaving very well  
If a sensible man sees a bad woman  
He runs quickly away

If she lives answering to the mother of the house  
The world does not satisfy her  
She then sees that the standing breasts  
Have fallen down.  
She remembers her life as a youth  
She no longer smiles.

T. U. Ubesie

#### 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 paha* 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

SECTION III. A Bit of Philosophy

PAPER MONEY

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 brought war and all the struggles in the world  
today?  
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!

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

PROVERBS

The sharp knife has no handle,  
The one that has a handle is not sharp.  
The wealthy daughter should provide her father's burial ceremony,  
It is not the oldest son who killed him.  
If one thinks about what the dog eats  
Its meat is abandoned without eating.  
If the emaciated person goes to the barn  
It looks as though he is going to beg for a yam.  
One uses the right hand to strike a child,  
One uses the left hand to comfort him.  
When one wakes from sleep nodding groggily,

Who is he going to say awakened him?  
When good luck beckons,  
Good luck, is it not beneficial?  
One who uses a snare to catch a rabbit  
Does not know that digging in the earth is work.  
When the old woman fills her stomach,  
She says that her lineage does not know death.  
When a good apple falls in the dirt,  
Its goodness has been spoiled.  
I do not spank a child,  
And then tell him not to cry.  
When a mother is seen crying, and a father falling,  
Mediocre people are few.

M. C. Ogunjiofor

#### THE WAY OF THE WORLD

If the world tasted only salt (had only good in it)  
What would it be?  
If everything went smoothly  
How would it be?

If everything were of the best  
What would the world be?  
If all people were good  
How would life be?

If our world  
Were always good,  
If we did not have evil as an example  
Goodness would have no meaning.

If the world became nothing but good  
It would not be sweet,  
If one drank bitter water and then found something sweet  
He would notice the difference

If war did not exist  
There would be no peace.  
If a person did not face difficulties

He would know nothing.

If a woman did not marry two husbands  
She would not know anything,  
When a man carries water and wine  
He finds out which is heavier.

T. U. Ubesie

### DEATH

Death is life!  
Life everlasting--  
Both in hellfire and in shade. [Joel: restlessness]  
When the breath flies out,  
The heart falls silent  
Stopping its beat thump, thump, thump,  
The blood becomes cold and gathers in one place,  
At that time life begins.

When the whites of the eyes appear  
Shining like fragile plates,  
Blinking becomes a thing of the past,  
At that time, that new life has already advanced far.

Give me this new life!  
A breezy life and flying about--  
Comes from the beginning of this world and flies to other worlds;  
Life is deep,  
Life of the spirits  
Life everlasting--  
It is endless.

Take the life of this world from me!  
Worrisome life,  
Life full of problems,  
Jealousy, and wickedness,  
Life of envy.

One who is alive will reap what he sows;  
A good tree will yield good fruit.

A bad tree will yield bad fruit.  
Good deeds are not in vain  
Evil and goodness do not go together.  
When that time comes  
The living person receives his reward in full!

Chidi Emenike

#### THE WORLD AS I SEE IT

This world is very beautiful  
It is filled with everything good.  
Humans and all created things,  
Are astonishing things of beauty.

The world is nothing but goodness and plenty  
Everything created is nothing but joy  
But look! Though wealth fills the world where we live  
Many people are suffering greatly!

In all the various places in the world,  
Rich people abound, who oppress the poor,  
They all have much wealth  
But no compassion for others.

In the good world that we inhabit  
Only the strong man becomes wealthy,  
He will be the one whose voice is heard,  
The words of the poor carry no weight.

What has the world learned about the past?  
Truly, it seems to me that there is nothing.  
Because the bad heart does not seek to learn  
History will repeat itself.

Iroha D. Iroha

#### THE WONDROUS NIGHT

After all is said and done, the sun goes down  
When it finishes its task,  
The moon and stars come out.  
Their duty is to watch over the night.

The bright sky will recede  
The black sky appears  
Things happen in their own order  
Night will replace it.

The breeze will gently  
Seek a place to rest  
The heat dissipates  
And gives the earth the coolness it seeks.

The whole world changes  
Everything is different  
From the earth to the sky  
Who knows how it is done?

Man stops his labors,  
To take his rest,  
Close his eyes and mouth  
And stretch his feet and hands.

The great forest and trees  
Wait for darkness  
The grasses are bending over  
They know how the night is.

Animals domestic and wild  
Go back to where they came from;  
All the flying creatures and their young  
Return to their nests.

A few animals travel around  
Like the bat and the owl  
They and the night guardians  
As is their way of life.

The ocean is so beautiful  
Storms are not beautiful  
Fish and sea animals  
Swim around in the wondrous night.

The ants and mosquitos  
Do not crawl around on the ground  
All the snakes are resting  
And the python and the hippopotamus.

There is no sound at all  
Not even in the battlefield  
Enemies have a peace  
That people cannot give.

If you wake up during the night,  
You know that it is deep  
And it will not permit wakefulness  
Because the night is wondrous.

Emeka Egbuchulam

#### THE DEATH VEHICLE

The small world goes back to the large  
The body returns from whence it came  
One who has feet has taken his feet  
One who has hands has taken his hands  
How am I going to traverse you  
Without assuming a position?  
Since it is a public road?  
Let me greet you  
With final greetings  
Where all people will cross this road.  
But you who are crying  
Wipe your tears  
Because the death that carried off  
Ananias waits for Sapphira.

I. E. Akoma

#### INVOCATION

Why does the chicken  
Not urinate?  
Why is that the labor of those who suffer  
Does not come to light?  
Other brothers called on their guardian angels



They opened their door  
And had them enter in broad daylight  
Real daylight which darkness  
Cannot dispel.  
Intelligence that is deep-rooted  
Wisdom that is incomparable  
Goes down like a spring  
And splashes on all the brothers.  
This made my master take out his dark cloth,  
The dark cloth covered this prayer.  
Make the light come in  
Let it surround me  
Lest I worry myself to death.  
In work, in vain, in vain.  
Finally, let it happen  
That I am a rooster  
Which when it first cries out  
Has a tiny voice  
But afterward it sounds like a gong.  
Calling to all the towns  
Sounding as sweet as honey.

I. E. Akoma

OLUKU (Silly person)

Oluku, why are you acting foolishly?  
You cry tears that fill the water pot  
The Jezebel has no ears  
You have sent messages, written letters  
He gives you no answer

You have fasted like a sinner,  
You have not eaten  
You have prostrated yourself before him  
As though he were God the Father.

Greetings could not change him  
You sat like a vulture  
The beating rain was not the way  
You could get him.

The child who brings good fortune  
Manifests himself very early  
Since you are his enemy,  
Push him out to the spirits  
There are many who desire you.

I. E. Akoma

#### WHAT IS MY MISSION ON EARTH?

I do not live for the purpose of eating and drinking  
I do not live for fine clothes and pomade  
No! I do not live only for sweet things and modern dances

I did not come to the world to oppress others  
I did not come to the world for deceit and thieving  
I did not come to the world only for disunity and war and dissension

I did not come to rot away in body or soul  
I did not come to concur like a puppet  
I did not come to dance only to the music that others play all the time

I came to pluck fruit  
I came to be wide awake and clear the bush  
Plant my own seeds  
In the name of the Father.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

#### STORY OF AN ORPHAN

My father died when I was only five.  
My task at that time was to take care of babies.  
I did three other things:  
One was the food I took from Mama;  
One was the song I sang to Baby Boy;  
That and my sleep at all times.  
If something important was needed, I went out to the public gathering.

Three happy things I thought about in my heart:  
In the world there is joy, joy;  
Where they use the iron pot to cook meat;  
Dancing and laughter are there always.

Afternoon and evening, I was putting on weight and growing.

One day my mother fell ill.

She was ill for four weeks

Fate decreed that she should die;

The earth had taken its share, I was tired of the world.

That was when I saw the nakedness of the world:

I used to use soap to wash my head at all times.

Now I used my head to carry loads for three years

I did water and firewood work;

The food I ate, one time, three times

They made me fall sick one day.

The mouth I used to eat fish, eat meat

I used for taking medicine about three years.

When I went out most people laughed;

Those I had called friends stayed back.

The mouth that was used to speak opened wide;

What they asked was when I was going to die.

God who controls our lives! I was saying:

When I called, God answered;

The mouth that was used to rejoice returned to goodness;

Friends were in the hundreds; inlaws came.

M. C. Ogunjiofor

### PLANTS IN OUR LIVES

Everyone has life,

The life God gave us.

Everyone has strength,

The strength God gave us.

When life becomes pregnant, she gives birth to strength

When strength becomes pregnant, she gives birth to wealth.

If one is alive he is strong,

If one is strong he is also alive.

If one is strong without life--

That means that he is dead.

If one is alive without strength--

That means that he is sick.

Life and its children live in the forest  
If one looks for them, he enters the forest.  
If one is hungry and seeks food,  
The food he seeks is a plant;  
If a sick person looks for medicine,  
The medicine he seeks is a plant.

Oil palms and raphia palms fill the forest  
The one who planted them planted money:  
When oil palms and raphia palms start to yield sap,  
The winetappers take in money.  
One who has money has influence.  
One who has influence has power  
Gathering riches does not turn into wealth,  
One who is alive has become wealthy.

The work one creates is beautiful:  
Leaves rot and fertilize the soil;  
The soil they feed produces food.  
When trees dance in the breeze,  
Foul air returns upward;  
People are involved in life;  
Sick people are cured.

M. C. Ogunjiofor

#### I WISH I WERE A BIRD

I wish I were a bird,  
Growing wings, flying high.  
At dawn of a beautiful morning,  
I open my mouth and start to sing.  
After singing and praising God,  
I sing a song in praise of Mother.  
I flap my wings, pararam,  
Turn my body and fly away.

I fly to the place where trees bear fruit,  
I plunge my mouth in and take one.

I eat until my stomach is full,  
I join my companions and fly away.  
We want to fly to Onicha  
Leave there, fly to Aba;  
We are not in the business of wasting money  
To pay transport fare.

Any tree we see,  
Becomes a perch for us.  
We eat all the fruit the tree bears  
We fly to the ground to seek more food.  
We see a water-logged place  
We go there and are refreshed.  
We fly around until the sun sets,  
We go home and sleep.

We do not have to pay taxes  
We have no interference from parents.  
Each with his own thoughts inside of him ;  
One who has wisdom shall live long.

M. C. Ogunjiofor

#### DODGING THE THIEF

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,  
Tortoise said he was going to go home;  
They then got up and started to go.

When they returned on nkwo market day,  
Ako went to work on his bicycle;  
There were children in the compound;

They laughed gleefully, then closed their mouths.  
They then entered immediately  
Took a yam stake and dug a hole in the wall.  
When they entered Ako's house,  
They looked around and saw a basket of palmnuts  
They dropped to the floor and started to eat.  
But Tortoise was exceedingly crafty:  
He continued to chew, and started to go toward the compound;  
He turned back to the spot where they had burrowed,  
To see if he could get into it.

Tinomi tinomi Ako returned;  
Rabbit and Tortoise began to run.  
Tortoise was the first to reach the hole;  
He put in his head; it became his escape.  
Rabbit followed behind his friend;  
He put in his head; his head went in;  
He put in his shoulder, his shoulder went in;  
Come now and look at my friend Rabbit:  
His stomach was fat with oil palm nuts;  
The fellow tried, but he was exhausted!  
Ako ran forcefully;  
He caught Rabbit by the tail,  
Drew him upward, and beat him to death.

You know that I learned something from this:  
One who seeks life and goodness,  
Should use his head and avoid thievery,  
Because if he were not a thief,  
Rabbit would still be alive today.

M. C. Ogunjiofor

#### THEY FELLED THE GREAT IROKO WITH A KNIFE

I knew those who lived there,  
The river divided them in half  
But the population was larger on the left side--  
The land overflowed with people  
They did not grow taller than all the iroko trees [some dialects use iroko  
as a measure of shortness]

They were not heavier than --  
But they were like bamboo:  
When you cut bamboo, it grows all the more.

Except for the oppression rained down on their heads,  
They would have gone to cut down the big iroko tree with a knife.  
They would have been like the moon that shone in the dark sky  
Because they were irokos exceeding irokos.

Among them, they have rock-strong ones  
People who laugh together, do things together  
But it is not these things that caused their oppression.  
Perhaps it is that they are hard-working and keep going forward.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

#### DO NOT SING MY PRAISE ONLY WHEN I AM DEAD

Now that I have been nailed in a coffin  
Is when you remember that I am a man  
Now, you remember that I was one of you  
Now, it pleases you to speak well of me

When I was alive  
I was like a baby chick whose mother had left suddenly  
Or a pup that had not yet opened its eyes  
When its mother died.  
I was one who was in trouble, need and suffering  
One whose day prematurely darkened  
One who got fire from the land of the spirits  
Returned to earth and it went out  
All the time I was crying  
No one comforted me  
Let alone anyone asking what was troubling me  
All the time I was hungry  
Thinking was the only food I had  
Since I had no one to feed me

Always in my life the world rejected me

Fate led me out and blew out my light  
I was an outcast  
Someone who had nothing good said about him.

Now I am dead  
Now I have found out what the people of the world are.  
You who seek rest from your labors,  
My death has brought it to you today.  
Today people who like to gossip  
Will say whatever they want about me  
Today you will call me a good person  
Today you will call me a docile person  
Or a person of good behavior.

Now that they are trying to cover me with dirt,  
My sisters and brothers and friends will come out  
And make their faces look as though death killed me  
Now, everybody will try  
To say what is on his mind  
Now, people will say  
"Alas! God took his soul  
Because he suffered in this world."

Then they will start  
To throw money on my coffin.  
What good will this money do me?  
Now, I have reached the place I was going to  
Do whatever you like with my corpse  
You who own the living and the dead  
This is the way you own a person.

Now, I have been placed in the grave,  
Now, you tell me to go in peace,  
Since I did not have peace in the world.  
Listen to the dirt falling on me  
Dirt with which they are covering me  
Now, they are stamping their feet on my grave.



Now, I have been buried, everyone goes home,  
They return to their houses, eat and drink  
And forget that the future is uncertain  
Now, no one remembers me

I am glad that dogs did not eat the corpse  
Of a poor person like me  
But you who are alive do not know where you  
Will die, or whether someone will bury you.  
You do not know whether my friend the vulture will eat your intestines.  
This is how your wisdom is  
Those who own only in death!

Nnamdi C. Okebara

### LIZARD

Lizard!  
Fell from the iroko tree  
Rushed away  
And said

If no one praises him  
He will praise himself  
The strong one fell from the iroko tree  
And rushed away.

Lizard!  
The rat jumped into the river with you,  
The water dried from the lizard  
But it did not dry from the rat!

Lizard!  
They all lie stomach down,  
The one that has a stomach ache  
Who knows?

Lizard!  
Do what lizards are known for  
So that the next generation will not eat you  
In dry season or rainy season

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

## I WILL BE A VULTURE

When I return to this world,  
I am going to be a vulture.  
Being a human makes me angry.  
When I come again,  
I will not be a chicken--  
A mother deriving no benefit from her children.  
I will not be a dog--  
One who eats its vomit.  
I will not be a domestic animal--  
Its owner loves it  
But when feast day comes, he kills and eats it.  
Love in this world is meaningless.

When I return,  
I will be a vulture, one who owns the market  
I will be freer than humans  
I will perch on the houses of the great and the small.  
Your food and meat I will carry away without fear  
I will travel everywhere like a king  
And no one will kill me.

When I come again,  
I will be a vulture.  
I will have no friends,  
I will have no enemies.

Nnamdi C. Okebara

## WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

A hidden treasure house  
True happiness is;  
From north to south  
Everyone seeks happiness.

Is it easy to have happiness?  
Or is it difficult to have it?  
How does one look for it?  
Where is happiness hidden?

Happiness is indeed necessary,  
Some people do not know this.  
There is always something they are looking for,  
They do not know if it is happiness.

Some have good work  
They also have good wages.  
Many have wealth and prosperity  
But they still look for happiness.

Some have many children  
And also have many wives  
Indeed, they have households  
But they do not have happiness.

There is no humility  
Nor is there any satisfaction  
Love has been lost  
Because happiness is hidden.

Both white people and black people  
Both great and small  
In the world are in turmoil  
While seeking happiness.

Humans use good things  
To look for this one thing,  
But their good things last a short time  
They do not have happiness.

Drinking wine, smoking  
Dancing, celebrations,  
People do these things  
To be happy.

Airplanes and automobiles  
Boats and horses  
Men use them all for traveling

Because they are seeking happiness.

How does one live  
With true peace in the heart?  
What will end the turmoil?  
Is it this thing called happiness?

Can a person look for this  
And abandon it before death?  
Another big question is  
What will bring happiness to man?

Emeka Egbuchulam

### TOMORROW IS PREGNANT

Yesterday has disappeared  
It had passed away and entered  
The memory of the brain.  
Everything that has happened  
Has returned to that memory  
And has become something that happened long ago  
I knew how they happened.

Today is alive and breathing  
Different things are happening  
Both surprising things  
And ordinary things.  
Because man is not God  
Who can tell what things are going to happen  
And how they will happen.

Tomorrow is pregnant  
No one knows what it will give birth to  
Tomorrow has no end  
It is always pregnant  
Giving birth every day  
Only faith and prayer  
Will make tomorrow give birth to a good child.

Chidi Emenike

## NIGHT IS COMING

"Today is past" is a name,  
Night is falling, one does not curse the day  
When one starts, that is his morning  
That I am very old  
Or I am extremely old  
Will not prevent progress  
Or stop making efforts  
It is only death that can decide--  
The corpse does not work at crafts  
But one who is alive and breathing  
Will be continuing to try his best  
Because night has fallen,  
One does not curse the day.

Chidi Emenike

### SECTION IV. Poems on Politics and Society

#### WHAT THE TOWN CRIER SAYS

If you go across the bridge over the Anyim River,  
I am not concerned.  
Or row a boat to the moon,  
Or build a storied house,  
With costly gold  
When you do not observe your language and traditions,  
What you do does not impress me.

If you go to Russia or to America,  
If you know how to speak French or write German  
Or go to church in London or in Rome  
If you know mathematics or know how to do business  
When your language is falling into disuse  
What you do does not impress me.

Your fathers who died are not lost in the land,  
They are crying in the mirror that you see

They are blowing around in the wind  
Following the fast-moving water to run  
They are in the compounds, in the roads.  
Our people!

They are in the wombs of your wives  
They are inside the children, crying  
They are in the cooking fires watching you  
They are not lost.

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

#### THE CRY OF IGBO LAND

You were trained to clear the bush  
But you stayed back, looking at me with clear eyes  
My children, what did I do to you?  
Your wisdom is hard to understand  
You used it to cook soup for other people  
When you left me abandoned in the evil forest  
My people, what did I do to you?

J. Chukwuemeka Obienyem

#### AFRICA HAS BECOME INDEPENDENT!

It is fortunate that Africa has become independent  
From Verde to the Horn  
From Gibraltar to the Cape of Good Hope  
Rejoice, Africa  
Yes, joy for black people

But Africa, why are you joyful?  
What good is your independence?  
Since many Africans are strangers in their land  
Since your brothers have been sent out of their fine land  
Sent to places where the land is a desert?  
Africa, stranger in its own land  
Listen to South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique  
Hear the voices of your brothers  
You should feel ashamed  
Ugh! Poor you, Africa.

Nnamdi C. Okebara

## I AM ANGRY

Every day you ask me  
What is troubling me  
Why I look as though a bee has stung me  
Why my face is looking cloudy  
Why my mouth is closed like a corpse  
With no smiles

Questioners,  
Is it because I have no teeth?  
Or that my teeth are rotting  
That I do not smile?  
Leave me alone, I do not feel good  
I do not feel the same as you  
My heart is burning

It is not because I don't eat  
What good is food to me  
When my heart is sad?  
What is in my heart is worse than illness  
The muskrat says that there is no one who blows his horn  
Whose mouth will not become sharp  
There is no one who feels as I do  
Who will smile.

Leave me alone  
Slaves do not know that they are slaves  
It is not hunger or illness that is troubling me  
My friend the muskrat says that what makes him smell  
Is in his heart, not in his body.  
If it were in the body, water and sun  
Would have cleaned it off a long time ago  
You ask me what is troubling me

Questioners!  
I am fighting for my fatherland  
I am fighting for my birthright

A man does not sit in his house  
And burst open his manhood  
I want to be left alone to be myself  
I want my brothers who were sold out  
I want my debtors to pay me.

Questioners! What are you going to do now?  
Now there is blood in my eyes  
You have told me you are sorry  
But sympathy does not cure sickness  
When a fool learns something,  
What he owns is gone  
Whatever comes, I have prepared  
To go to war with my enemies.

The white people owe me a debt  
In their wars many of my brothers died  
My brothers whom they took away and returned  
And made their lives worse than death  
My brothers in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique,  
Rhodesia and other African countries that others are governing today,  
Why do they tell me to rest  
Do you not know that one whose father was killed by the antelope  
Does not use an antelope horn to drink wine?

Now, death is sweeter than life to me  
Death is what I want now  
Since the prayer that peace should come was not effective  
I will carry my cross.  
I do not look back  
Whether you follow me or do not follow me  
I have used myself for a sacrifice  
If I die, that is all right; if I live, that is all right  
But what I want is for those who follow me  
To be their own masters.  
If they are their own masters,  
My blood will not be wasted  
May Ofo and Ogwugwu not allow an enemy to govern me again.



MY EFFORTS

The efforts that I make are  
That I should write these things in Igbo language.  
The ancestors spoke in this language  
They told amusing stories, they laughed and laughed;  
Their anger came out everywhere in their words;  
They whispered and understood each other in Igbo.  
They became Tortoise In the thoughts of Igbo words,  
They became Dove, and also the bulbul.  
They answered to artist, and to warrior.  
They were called both orators and counselors.  
In joy and understanding, they were always Igbo.

The efforts that I make are  
That I should write these things in Igbo language,  
Raise the spirits of those who crave learning,  
Train the hand to use the pen in writing.  
They and their thoughts have joy and understanding.  
The road is rough and sprouts grass,  
But the knife is there, if needed to clear the grassy road.

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

THE GOOD CITIZEN

The good citizen--  
He has his own work.  
He goes around lending a hand in the town's work  
He keeps his surroundings clean.

The good citizen--  
He controls his tongue, stops it from gossiping.  
He uses his hand, prevents human anger;  
It and his feet, so that things will go as they are wanted.

The good citizen--  
He grows, he looks for peace in the town,

He takes his wealth and seeks progress for the town.  
His name will be famous.

The good citizen--

He obeys the law of the land,  
Remembering, if there is peace, it brings well-being,  
But if there is strife, there is no harmony.

The good citizen--

If he gets lost, the town looks for him;  
If he dies, the town mourns him.  
"Goodness" is the name he is called.

Joseph Chukwu Maduekwe

#### OUR LAND

Our land abounds in wealth.  
God gave it various kinds of wealth.  
Both things obtained from the earth,  
And things taken from the forest.

Our land abounds in wealth.  
But have you seen the kite  
Before you say that women do not eat it?  
My father's wealth that is in the barn, is it wealth?

One can only know the taste of a woman's pumpkin in her sauce.  
If those who went to market have returned  
But your mother has not returned  
You will not agree that the market has closed.

It is true: The eye of the strong man respects his counterpart.  
But remember,  
What the chicken did in the dry season  
Comes out in the rainy season.

R. M. Ekechukwu

#### SECTION V. Elegies

## CRYING BAD LUCK

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.  
Do you not know the friend of everyone  
The brave man who does not talk about his friend behind his back  
One who acts when things are difficult?  
The thing that bites the dog to death is strong  
Onyemaechi son of Oiebara has died.

The good thing cannot be held in the hand. [doesn't last long]  
Is it not that when we carry the corpse of another person  
It is like carrying a dried out tree?

Onyemaechi, your god knows what happened to you  
Tears have filled your friends' eyes  
Why do you not hear our voice?  
Are things better there?

Show us the way to come, *we will come*  
If you are in a good place,  
Bad death will not strike us.

What were Nwaeke and Emerue, our fathers  
Who were there, doing, to allow  
Death to kill you in your youth?  
Were they asleep?  
Were they chasing rats when their houses were on fire?  
Nnamdi go and ask your god questions.

Nnamdi C. Okebara

### NOBLE KABRAL, 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 is dead.  
If one dies today, he will not die tomorrow!

Kabral 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 Kabral has hunted him down.

We are glad  
That the thing crying "pi!" has died.  
The thing you used your life sacrifice for

Perhaps, will be yours.  
In the near future.

Amilcar Kabral, 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