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.

DEATH

J. Tagbo Nzeako

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. Chukwuemeke Oblenyem

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.]  

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;  
Hell! I fear you.
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 Obiennyem

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

NJQKU: 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

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 D. 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.

THE MOUNTAIN

T. U. Ubesie

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 palmnut 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 palm nuts 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.

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 the uncowards 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.
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 Ogbeete 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 Obiencyem

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

17
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.

Nnamdi C. Okebaro

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 Maduokwe

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:

20
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 needies,
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.

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 garri, 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. Ubosie

THE OIL PALM

If you enter the country of the Igbo
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 Igbo 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?

25
Is it the basket used to gather rubbish?
Is it the palm frond used to build houses?

Is it the palmnut 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

26
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

Hell! 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

27
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. Okebari
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.”

A WOMAN’S LIFE

T. U. Ubesie

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 Igboz 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 women 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
32
Who wants to marry her
She humbly 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 ụlọ gbe ụna 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, ise!
Let bad things depart, ise!
Let good things come to us, ise!
Let bad things leave us, ise!
Wealth and plenty, and children, ise!
Good people and friends, ise!

The kite will perch, ise!
The eagle will perch, ise!
The one that goes and perches, then refuses
The other a chance to perch, ise!
Let its wing not break, rather
Let it fly and never perch, ise!

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

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 failing,
Mediocre people are few.

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.

DEATH

Death is life!
Life everlasting—
Both in hellfire and in shade. [Job: 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,

37
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!

THE WORLD AS I SEE IT

Chidi Emenike

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 O. 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 mosquitoes
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.

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 haa 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.

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

47
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. Olebara

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.

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

52
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 IGBOD 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?
You 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 Gibraltor 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. Olebara

54
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

58
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 Olebara 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. Olebara

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 "pia!" 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