

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

ANALYSES OF SELECTED IGBO RITUAL POETRY

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Abstract

The study surveys Igbo ritual poem with focus on its socio-cultural importance in Igbo man's life. Ritual poems in their nature come into being from the cultural events which they help to make whole as well as to invigorate. The set people whose events and accompanying ritual poems ritual are selected for the study are: the diviners, hunters, marriage ceremony, masquerade cult, warlords, traditional worshipers, and wrestlers. The objective of the research is to draw people's attention to this neglected aspect of Igbo ritual-literary genre. It advocates for its restoration and preservation for posterity to prevent it from going into extinction. The area of the study is on the Oral Literature and in Igbo ritual poems in particular. Archetypal is adopted as the literary theory for data analysis, so as to expose the nature as well as the background of the poems for easy understanding. The data for the research work are sourced through observation, initiation, as well as library. At the end of the analysis, findings revealed that ritual poems are performed to attract favour from the benevolent spirits as well as to cast away some evil spirit from harming the performer. The benevolent spirits the performers of ritual poems focus their attention on are primordial deities such as God, land, water, mountain, sun, moon, Amad??ha among others and gods or deities ancestors and charm which are human creatures in one hand, and evil spirits and its associates like ?gbanje, witches among others. The ritual poems are dramatic in its nature. The study would be of great value to the general public, mostly to students and researchers with keen interest in the study of Igbo ritual poems.

Keywords: Igbo man's life, Ritual poem, Socio-cultural importance, Restoration and Preservation of cultural events.

Introduction

Traditional societies have some organized cultural events that take them to their roots. Amongst such cultural events are rituals that sustain and support their worldview. Igbo people in their traditional society have some cultural events that they identified their roots in. It is these events and rituals that sustain the Igbo worldview is focus of this study. Some of these cultural events that take people to their roots have ritual poems as its accompaniments. Ritual poems also known as chant stand out in the cultural events of the people that perform and observe it from the point of view of prayer formula. The poems are performed with both verbal recitations along with performance. These types of poems could be seen amongst the socio-cultural groups and vocations rooted in ritual practices in the form of divination chant, hunting chant, marriage chant, masquerade chant, war chant, worship or ritual chant and wrestling chant.

It is believed that the words or lines in the poem have magical power that could attract favour from benevolence forces, as well as casting away some evil forces from bringing harmful

effects to the performer. The words or lines in the poem are repeated over and over again along with ritual item for its performances. This is as a result of the belief that those words and lines in the ritual poem are source of power because the poem is directed towards benevolence forces or spirits like God, land, water, mountain, sun, moon, *Amadi?ha*, whose names vary from community to community in Igbo, gods, and ancestors. It is also performed to cast away some evil spirits like *?gbanje*, witches among others as it concerns the Igbo man's worldviews of evil forces, for which the ritual poems are performed to bring under control.

The dramatic nature of ritual poems adds to their aesthetics which go a long way to portray the degree of exercise of faith in the people's believe system. As performing poems they have some ritual items which help to add colour to their poetic-dramatic effect, as well as making their understanding to be a bit easier irrespective of it exoteric nature. Equally important in an aspect of the ritual poems' performance is the thick body paintings- the make-up that appear to bring the image of unseen closer. Hence the combination of the audio and visual effects in the ritual poems' performance makes the study of ritual poem to be interesting. The study would be of great value to the general public, mostly to students and researchers with keen interest in the study of Igbo ritual poems.

Review of Related Literature

Archetypal Theory

“Archetypal Theory” also known as “The Collective Unconscious” is a literary theory propounded by a Swiss Citizen called Carl Jung, who spent his life between the year 1875-1961. The theory concerns itself in finding out symbols, images, characters that have universal outlook in socio-cultural, religious, political and economic setting, which reflect in art and literature of the people. Kennedy and Gioia (2007:1520-1521) say in line with this that in a more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal, which they call the personal unconscious. It this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and it is not a personal acquisition rather it is inborn. This deeper layer is also referred to as the “collective unconscious.” The term “collective” comes in play because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal, which quite different to the personal psyche. This is as a result of its contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. Hence, it is in other words identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psyche substrate of a supra personal nature which is present in every human being.

Psychic existence can be recognized only by the presence of contents that are capable of consciousness. We can therefore speak of an unconscious only in so far as we are able to demonstrate its contents. The contents of the personal unconscious are chiefly the feeling-toned complexes, as they are called; they constitute the personal and private side of psychic life. The contents of the collective unconscious, on the other hand, are known as archetypes. For our purposes this term it is apposite and helpful, because it tells us that so far as the collective unconscious contents are concerned, we are dealing with “archaic or say-

primordial types.” It is these universal images that have existed since remotest times are represented in the work of art. Another way of looking at the archetypal is what Lévy-Bruhl calls “representations collectives,” which denotes the symbolic figures in the primitive view of the world that could easily be applied to unconscious contents as well, since it means practically the same thing. Primitive tribal lore is concerned with archetypes that have been modified in a special way. They are no longer contents of the unconscious, but have already been changed into conscious formulae taught according to tradition, generally in the form of esoteric teaching. This is a typical means of expressing the transmission of collective contents originally derived from the unconscious.

Another well-known expression of the archetypes is myth and fairy tale. Also in this place we are dealing with forms that have received a specific stamp and have been handed down through long periods of time. The term "archetype" thus applies only indirectly to the "representations collectives," since it designates only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience. In this sense there is a considerable difference between the archetype and the historical formula that has evolved. Especially on the higher levels of esoteric teaching the archetypes appear in a form that reveals quite unmistakably the critical and evaluating influence of conscious elaboration. Their immediate manifestation, as we encounter it in dreams and visions, is much more individual, less understandable, and more naive than in myths, for example. The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear.

In line with this Dobie (2012:63) says that archetypes may have originated in the unchanging situations of human beings, such as the rotating seasons or the mysteries of death, they are not intentionally created or culturally acquired. Instead, they come to us instinctually as impulses and knowledge, hidden somewhere in our biological, psychological, and social natures. As critic John Sanford explained it, archetypes "form the basis for instinctive unlearned behavior patterns common to all mankind and assert themselves in certain typical ways." In literature we recognize them and respond to them again and again in new characters or situations that have the same essential forms we have met before and have always known. The connection with archetypes, help in re-creating the basic patterns or types that are already in our unconscious, making us to respond to them just as someone halfway around the world from us might. Archetypes appear in our dreams, religious rituals, as well as in our art and literature. They are media for the telling of our myths, which, according to Jung, are the "natural and indispensable intermediate stage between unconscious and conscious cognition." By becoming conscious of what is generally unconscious, we integrate our lives and formulate answers for things that are unknowable, such as why we exist, why we suffer, and how we are to live. By uniting the conscious and unconscious, archetypes make us whole and complete.

Poetry

This is one of the genres of literature that deals mostly in the expression of emotions and feelings in a strong manner, using words in verse, stanza waving into the language in an artistic manner, in order to please the sense of emotions. It brings out its aesthetics through the manipulation of sound, rhythm, rhyme and imagery. Many people and authors have made efforts at contributing to the definition of the term poem or poetry, one of them is Okoye (1996:4) says that poetry is a piece of writing where deep feeling or experience is expressed in a beautiful language. It is a piece of writing that is more elevated and nobler in style and language than prose. The author goes further to say, "It is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling recollected in tranquility and the most philosophical of all writings which has truth as their main objective." Nwachukwu-Agbada (2009:5) says "Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds. The music invoked from men's heart by the age in which they live. It is an entertaining art form rooted in word game, its provinces is life in its totality".

From the above definitions of poetry, it is observed that its definition is hard to come by as it covers vast area of human endeavours where individual authors and fields go on to define it according to their personalities and circumstances surrounding them. However, from all indications, one could see the meeting point of the most poetry definitions in the expression of strong emotional feeling, composed in the best word order in artistic and aesthetic manner. The researcher sees poem to be the expression of emotions in the best word order, through the artistic use of language.

Ritual Poem

Ritual poem is the nucleus of every traditional rites and events. It is a word or group of words which bring out the meaning in the traditional events which rely on it to draw its spiritual strength. It is a word or group of words strictly shrouded on conventional and traditional way of the people's life. The conventional ways of the people's life is adhered to in the performance of ritual poems, hence it is performed as reenactment of the ways their owners used to perform it in order to sanctify events. It is also use to destroy the evil scheme of evil men and evil spirits on the way to people's progress. The performer of the ritual poem takes into consideration some of the conventional ways in the life of people such as time, place, condition as well as the spirits the poems are address. It should be performed in accordance with the set of rules which the performers have to keep as guides. Ritual poem is performed to attract one favour or the other in their hands of benevolence spirit. It is mostly observed in traditional events in form prayer over cola, invocation, divination, and all other form of prayers in the life of the people.

Nwadike (2003:87) says that ritual poetry is the poems by which God is worshipped and is used in calling on our ancestors in the spiritual world. These types of poems could be in form of prayer, invocation, sacrifices, divination, administering of herbs, making libation and breaking of kolanut among others. The author further says, "Chant is a form of poetry. It is a word or group of words repeated over and over again. It is believed by the performer to have

magical power that could effect change in an affair as desired by him/her.” In the same thought frame, Sinclair (1992:184) says “Chant is a word or group of words that are repeated over and over again, a religious song or prayer that is sung only a few notes.” Akporobaro (2006:53) in his own view says that chants are forms of poetry which are chanted towards the purpose of bringing about a desired state of affairs. The words being chanted may be believed to have some magical power, or may be recited along with the performance of a ritual that is believed to have some magical power. The performer's wish may be to procure a cure for an illness, to overcome an enemy, and to achieve success in some endeavours. Sharing more light to what is expected of ritual poems. Iwu (2002:602) says that (music) ritual poem is usually used to invoke spirits during religious ceremonies and in worship. The author goes on to say that all aspects of Igbo life are surrounded by music, of which disease and death are rich in rituals poems. From the above definitions of ritual poems, it is observed that as a form of poetry, chant has to do with ritual performance along the word or words being repeated over and over. It is ritualistic in nature, with a sole purpose to bring a state of affair according to the wish of the performer of the poems. Usually it is done on some occasions along with ritual performances.

Having reviewed the above authors and their works, the researcher hereby attest that the authors and their works reviewed in this study are all good in their respective context, however none of the authors and their works is in the position to replace this research work. This is because none of the authors and their studies focused on Igbo ritual poems from the revivalist and restoration perspective. It is on this note that the researcher embarks on the study in order to bridge this knowledge gap. Hence the study is seeking for a space in the corpus of literature of this nature.

Occasions of Ritual Poems' Performance

Ritual poems are mostly featured on occasions and events. Irrespective of its position as the nucleus of every traditional rites and events, it cannot be performed outside the occasion, time, and place it is supposed to be performed. They are at the centre of traditional rites and events because they give meaning to traditional events by reinvigorating the spiritual forces controlling the events. The time, occasion, and place of performance of ritual poems should reflect the traditional way of the people's life. At any point in time ritual poem is performed in one Igbo traditional event or the other, it is performed to attract one favour or the other in their hands of unseen forces including the favour of safe arrival of the dead to the land of the spirit- to rest in peace. Igbo ritual poems are mostly observed in traditional events in form prayer over cola, invocation, divination, and all other form of prayers which the people so much banked on.

In Igbo Land, the events which revolve around divination, hunting preparation, marriage rites, masquerade outing, war preparation, worship or ritual observance and wrestling among others are major occasion that are rich in Igbo ritual poems. This is as a result of the ritualistic importance of the poems in the above mentioned occasions. The emergence of the Igbo ritual poems in the above occasions is not for mere entertainment. As a poem with

performance along with the word or words that are repeated over and over, ritual poem stands out amongst other form of poems because of the belief in the magical powers in the words which appear to make the words to be repeated. The act of repeating the words in the poem brings the idea of accumulation of more forces or consciousness for effecting changes in the performer's state of affairs. The desired result for performing the ritual poems in some occasions come from the combination of the poems and the performances.

The magical powers in the ritual poems in most of the occasions in Igbo land come from the forces of unseen realities such as God, gods, deities, ancestors, charms etc. These unseen realities are called in the ritual poems according to their hierarchies in the scheme of things. Ritual poem is performed in occasions to express the emotional feeling of the people in the society in both the state of joy and sadness. Nwachukwu (2003:11) in support of this, says that the biggest and most effective protective shield or cordon of Igbo lineage is to have great ancestors. The living therefore, continually cultivate their goodwill and benevolence through libations, religious rituals, chants, invocations, ceremonies and good conduct that maintain communication and connection between the land of humans and sphere of spirits and deities. Also in (p:162-3) the author observes that ritual poem are used in Igbo man's life to mark their yearly ceremonies, rituals, sacrifices of atonement or reparation. And when things go right, the powers have been benevolent and something has been done to cultivate their goodwill. The people want to maintain this equilibrium, and consequently there are festivals of thanksgiving, rituals and sacrifices of thanksgiving, rituals and ceremonies of commemoration.

The aesthetics of ritual poems could be observed when its performance turns out to be an occasion of music making in Igbo man's life such dance-gestures and procession which add to music along with the make-up that help to bring time and space in order to express ideas, emotions, actions or attitudes. This is performed in voice or instruments, especially during life-rites, as each of the cultural activities are accompanied by significant poetic expressions which not only beautify the occasion but also perpetuate it.

The exoteric and mysterious nature of ritual poem is one of the factors that make it to be exclusive of the chief priest and cult members. However during initiation rites, the initiates would perform the poems along with the chief priest or the elders that are initiating them, in order to be fully participated in the initiation processes. And it is the sole responsibility of the chief priest or the eldest among the gathering to perform the ritual poems before the people. Hence it is not performed by every person and could not be performed everywhere, except on the occasion such poems are observed. This is as a result the belief in the ability of spirits to possess object or influence life and phenomena in the land of humans which is central to Igbo religions, rituals, several acts and ceremonies which they play active roles in. This belief in the ability of spirits to possess object or influence life and phenomena manifested in the events more concrete form the ritual poems amongst the Igbo people.

Divination Ritual Poem

The life of Igbo man is full of mysteries, with which the diviner's service is sought for solutions. The divination ritual poem comes up from the exoteric song-like words the diviner is uttering on the processes of divination. It is the artistic composition or expression by the diviner in the course of divining the cause of his client's problem. Iwu (2002:586-7) states that diviner is consulted to ascertain the wishes of deities, spirits of the deceased relatives and gods. The diviner plays a vital role at birth to determine the incarnate spirit of a new born baby. In the divination chant seen among the native doctors on the process of their first divination of the day, they would bring all the symbols for ritual performance like bell, gong, rattle, kolanut, wine among others, with which libation is poured to the divination deity – *Agw?*. To give the diviners clear vision on the day's divination. As in:

Divination Ritual Poem

*Chukwu ? b?amma ekelee m g?
An?onye emeghi ihe ma ihe emeghi ya
Agw? na-ekpughe ihe ezoro ezo
Ekele ka m jiri b?a.
? na-ab? emeghee ?z? e meghee ?n?
? b?taa b? ah?a Ori
Ka m na-ekwu maka ya
Na-ar?? unu ka ?z? m ghere oghe
Ka ? b?r? ihe unu ziri m
N'?gb? afa ka m ga-ekwu
Afa b? ihe zoro ezo mmad? amagh?
Bikonu ekwelanu
Ka m gbaa afa as?.*

Translation

-Merciful God I greet you
-Land holder of moral justices
-god of vision that unearths the mystery
-I have come with greetings
-When the door opens, the mouth is opened
-It is today that is *Orie* market day
-That I am talking about
-I am beseeching you for open doors
-That it would be what you told me
-In the divination that I would say
-Divination is mystery to mankind
-Please don't allow
-Me to divine falsely. ? wanze (2011)

The images, and figures in the above poem are God, earth goddess which the diviner seeks their assistance before he or she sets out to engage in the divination for the day. The diviner is seeking for clear vision from the unseen force of which helps the diviner to discharge his/her duty without hindrance.

Hunting Ritual Poem

Life of hunters is surrounded with dangers and difficulties in the course of hunting. This situation calls for divine protection which the hunters observe in form of prayers. Nneke (2012:33) observes that hunters pray for protection, plenty harvest, and to save them from unforeseen circumstances in the forest in the course of hunting. The hunter performs the poem during the preparation to set off to their hunting expeditions. Many a time such poems and its performances would take place before their gods or charms. The hunters' ritual poem could be seen in:

Hunting Ritual Poem

Eke kere?wa

Translation

-God that created the world

<i>Chukwuoke m na Ikenga m</i>	- My creator and <i>Ikenga</i> (god of fortune)
<i>Otinanya af?uzo ?gw?</i>	- <i>Otinanya af?uzo</i> the charm
<i>M?ji awa ?h?anta</i>	-I use in going into the forest for hunting
<i>An?n?ebe oke osisi d?n'?h?a</i>	- <i>An?n?ebe</i> the great tree in the forest
<i>? b?nd? m ka m na-ar??</i>	-I am asking for my life
<i>Akachaa a kasaa</i>	-Proposition and disposition
<i>B? na izu agagh?aga</i>	-Makes unsmooth conference
<i>? b? eje ana b? isi ije</i>	-It is to go and to return is the main thing in a journey
<i>? b? nchedo ka m na-ar??</i>	-It is protection that I am asking for
<i>M? baa n'?h?a ka m gbuo an?</i>	-For me to kill games when I enter into the forest
<i>Maka na ugwu di nta.</i>	-For the hunter's prestige
<i>B? an? o gburu</i>	-Is the game he killed. Agbata (2019)

The images, and figures in the above poem are God, god of fortune, charm, asking them for protection, and bountiful hunting harvest. This is because the hunter is honoured by the games he has killed.

Marriage Ritual Poem

The socio-cultural importance of marriage rites amongst Igbo, as a means of procreation, and to maintain the growth in population of Igbo race, could be observed from all inclusiveness support of every well meaning Igbo man in the marriage rites. Ogugua (2007:42) states that marriage in Igbo is both an event, and an institution meant for procreation. Marriage demands a lot of preparation from the person marrying, and the community because marriage is not an individual affair. He further opines in (p:43) that marriage involves the dead, living, and not-yet-born. Marriage is at the centre of existence and hub around which social relationship revolve. Marriage ritual poem plays vital role in Igbo communities, as it is performed to seal the marriage contract. On such an occasion the marriage ritual poem is performed with wine and kolanuts as the symbol of unity to the parties, and prayers would be offered like this:

Marriage Ritual Poem

Nd?be any?any?ga-ad?nu o.
I see!
Eke kere ?wa b?aa noyere any?
N'emume nke a any?ji ejiko
? m?any?ab?? nd?a kwek?r? tara
? onwe ha d?ka di na nwunye.
I see!
Ala obodo any?b?aa sonyere any?
Taa nu ?j?a any?ji agozi al?mal? a
marriage
N'otu ma any?taa ya n'ibe. I see!
Al?mdi na nwunye unu ga-ab? ngozi.

Translation

-Our people we shall live.
-Amen!
- God the Creator come and be with us
-In this rite use to join
-These two children of ours that agreed
-To marry each other as husband and wife.
-Amen!
-Land of our community, come and join us
-Eat the kolanut we use in blessing this
-In whole while we eat it in lobes. Amen!
-Your marriage will be a blessing.

I see!

-Amen!

? kaf? (2013)

The message in the above poem or prayer is God's guidance, and blessings to be with the couple. God's blessing in the poem includes protecting the marriage from breaking, increase their love, fertility and all round fruitfulness.

Masquerade Ritual Poem

Masquerade is very crucial in the cultural life Igbo people. It has multipurpose functions in Igbo land, where it represents various symbols as a link between the living and the dead. Masquerade's outing or display amongst Igbo people is so important that it calls for series of sacrifices for divine protection, and guidance for successful performance. Ogonna (2008:458) says, "The masking tradition has modes of activities which sometimes are dialogue with the audience, sometimes a theatrical presentation juxtaposed with some ritual events". In line with this, Okodo (2009:258) explains, that it is by the masquerade that the dead and living come together. It is by the masquerade that the dead reinforces their spirit in the living to enable continuity of the life of Igbo people. In view of this, Aniako (2002:319) states that mask followers and escorts, ritual and medicine specialists, all constitute the totality of the masking event and experience. Masquerade ritual poem or prayer is performed, before the actual outing from the waiting room, in order to secure protection from both spiritual and human forces. This is done, in order to put up a good performance. The masquerade ritual poem is performed thus:

Masquerade Ritual Poem

Eke kere ?wa

N? n'elu ele ala anya

Chukwu oke m maara

Ka m siri b?a ?wa a

? da oke al?s?mara akpata biri

Oli gbom gbo igwe na nd?? ch?biri

*Anyaf?l?ugo oke ?gw? m ji eje ala
return*

Ije a m na-aga d?unu n'aka

Ekwela nu ka akpachagb? o m n'?k?

Nke ? ga-eji wee j?gb? m n'oyi

Biko nu ar?ze ma unu

Biko nu ar?ze ma unu.

(2014)

Translation

-God that created the world

-Stays above looking at the earth

-God my creator that knows

-How I came into this world

-? da the great deity that lives on the platform

-*Oligbomgbo* king and his household

-*Anyaf?l?ugo* great charm with which I go and

-My journeys are in your hands

-Don't allow the bag to heat me to death

-Nor allow it to freeze me to death

-Please if not for your sake

-Please if not for your sake. ? bad?edwu

The outstanding images, and figures in the above poem are God, personal god, gods, and charm, asking them for protection, and successful masquerade outing.

War Ritual Poem

War has assumed very high place in life of Igbo people to the extent that it appears to become

second nature of the people. This near inevitability of war, which cut across towns, communities, and villages, and groups make the courting help from the spiritual forces for waging of war in the form of war ritual poem to become necessary. Nwadike (2003:64) states that Igbo is known for waging varieties of wars, both communal, village, and family wars. Azuonye (2002:436) in support of this, stresses that the preparation for war, began early in the childhood, which included harsh Spartan exercises in warfare, culminating in a series of ordeals which formed part of the rituals of initiation. The war as instrument for achieving peace in the hands of the war lords, calls for divine assistance and protection from God, gods, ancestors, charms among others. Whenever there is war to engage in by the army of the community, war ritual poem is performed to prepare the soldiers before the war deity of the community. It is performed, and observed as one of the rituals for winning the war, which goes a long way to boost the warriors' morale as they go to the war front as in:

War Ritual Poem

Eke kere?wa
Ala obodo any?enye m unu ?j?
Obodo any?ab?gh?nke e ji agha mara.
Any?anagh?agwa ?m?any?ha jee agha
Ma ebe ? b?na agha esesuola
N'ihina anagh?akpa ?gw? akpa
Mmakpuegbuaw? na Etigbus?aw?
? gw?o bodo any?ji ebu agha
B?a nu duru ?m?any?gaa agha l?ta
Ha ga-aga agha n'ihina nke a emeghi
Any?agbaa?s? n'obodo a
N'ala a e liri nna nnaany?ha.
(2013)

Translation

-God that created the world
-Land of our community I give you kolanut
-Our town is not known for war
-We are not asking our children to go to war
-But hence the war has broken
-For there is no agreement in war
-Mmakpuegbuaw? and Etigbus?aw?
-The charm our community used to wage war
-Come and lead our children to war and come back
-They would go to war for without it
-We would run away from this town
-In this land where our ancestors were buried. Udeal?

The major images, and figures in the above ritual poem are God, earth goddess, charm, asking them for protection and victory over their enemies who are bent to invade their community. It also stresses that even when they are not known as warriors, their failure to engage in the war would result to abandoning the land where their ancestors are buried.

Worship or Ritual Poem

The worship of God, gods, and some other spiritual forces is common place amongst Igbo. Every aspect of Igbo life from sun rise to sun set is punctuated with chains of rituals observances, in which ritual poems play vital roles in the course of the worship or events. Ogugua (2005:69) argues that it is irrational, and impossible to divorce religion from life, because to be is to be religious. In support of this, Odimegwu (2008:67) states, that religion was a traditional practice, and system, tied to the family, and the clan or community, and handed over to them from generation to generation.

The author goes further to say, "Our gods or goddess are the gods, and goddesses our

ancestors worshipped, and taught us to worship.” The act of worship amongst Igbo is seen and taken to be a means of restoring life forces, order, and peace in the society, which cut across to both spirit to man, and man to man relationship. Worship poems are performed towards God, gods or deities in prayers to mark seasons in the year. It is also, performed for thanksgiving for the favour done to the person or persons by the God, gods or deities with which they use to express their joy for such favour rendered to them. As in:

Worship or Ritual Poem

*Chukwu ? biama Ezechiteoke
Onye kere igwe kee ala
Onye bi n'elu were ala
Mere ebe mgbakwas??kw?
Chukwu maara onye ? ga-eke
Ma onye ? ga-eke amagh?ya
Ogbo ogu onye aka ya d??cha
? b? ekele ka any?ji b?a
Chi af? ?z? efoola
Any?wee b?a ka any?
R??ta nchedo n'aka g?
Ka any?wee bie af? a
Any?banyere nke ?ma.*

Translation

-God almighty, the merciful one
-The creator of heaven and earth
-He that lives in heaven and uses earth
-As His foot rest
-God who knows whom He will create
-But he whom He will create does not know Him
-The saviour of the righteous
-We have come with greetitng
-The dawn of the new year is here again
-We have come in order to
-Ask for protection from your hands
-For us to live in this year
-We entered well. Nnekwe (2018)

God is at centre of the messages in the above worship poem, with which protection is sought for by the worshippers in order to live a fulfilled and fruitful life in the year.

Wrestling Ritual Poem

Wrestling plays vital roles in Igbo man's life. It serves the purpose of both entertainment, and as a test of manhood. Wrestling is often contested amongst communities, and villages which often serve as an alternative to fight when used to resolve conflicts. Onyekaonwu (1980), Odunke Artists (1983), Achebe (1984), and Nwadike (2003) give the Igbo concept of wrestling prominent position to in their works to support the above view. Amongst the youths from the neighbouring communities, and villages around ? *mabala*Area, wrestling serves as alternative to fight, as the people would go back to their village peacefully after the wrestling contest. The wrestling chant is performed, by the wrestler or his native doctor in order to win in the wrestling contest, to avoid the shame he would bring to his personality, and his community:

Wrestling Ritual Poem

*Eke kere ?wa
Chukwu oke m
Nnanna m Okeke, ? kaf?, Chib??gw?
? b? mgbaka m na-akwado
M? wee na-ar?? unu*

Translation

-God the creator of the world
-God my Creator
-My grandfather *Okeke? kaf?Chib??gw?*
-It is wrestling I am preparing for
-Therefore I ask you

<i>Ka ihere ghara ime m</i>	-That I will not be humiliated
<i>Na mgba a m na-eje</i>	-In this wrestling I am going
<i>Az? eruala ?gw? mgba m</i>	-Az?eruala my wrestling charm
<i>M? ji eje ala</i>	-I use in going and returning
<i>Ijere mgba n '? m?ar? merie</i>	-You went for wrestling at ? m?ar? and won
<i>Ijee mgba n'Akp?n?n?</i>	-You went wrestling at Akp?n?n?
<i>Turu ugo l?ta</i>	-And returned with victory
<i>Ekwela nu ka nke a d?iche</i>	-Don't allow this one to be different
<i>Meenu ka ah? kee m ?k?</i>	-Make me to be agile
<i>Tubenu m ugo n'isi</i>	-Install the eagle feather on my head
<i>N'ihina ugochara acha</i>	-For a bright eagle
<i>Anagh?echuechu</i>	-Does not get dull
<i>Biko nu ar?ze ma unu.</i>	-Please I am asking you. Nneke (2014)

In the above poem, God, personal god, ancestors and charm are the major images in the poem is directed to by asking them for successful wrestling contest in order not to bring shame to the wrestler and his community.

Recommendation

The writer thereby urge the scholars of Igbo studies of language, literature, and culture to embark on more research studies in every aspect of Igbo life where ritual poems are performed. The occasions recommended for further study includes, naming rites, title taking rites, funeral rites of men and women of high profile in the society, to name but a few. This would help to collect and preserve the poems along with the occasions of their observance to the upcoming generation.

Conclusion

In this discourse, ritual poems which cut across the occasions such as divination, hunting, marriage, masquerade, war, wrestling and worship is analyzed with regard to their occasions of performance and the reason for performing the ritual poems in the society. Ritual poem in its nature come along in occasion where it is performed to give socio-divine and emotional energy to the performers. Hence it is believed that ritual poems are seen to be means of attracting favours from benevolent forces, as well as casting and averting the harmful effects of evil forces from attacking man in his life struggles. Ritual poems also help to expose some technical language associated with some ritual events like divination, hunting, marriage rites, masquerading, war, wrestling, worship among others. They also help to know the names of gods or deities in relation with a particular ritual event.

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