

THREE POEMS

By

OKOGBULE WONODI

MEMORIES

*(for Uche & Edykobs,
remembering nights at Umuaka.)*

Daybreak
and the sweat fragrance of dreams retreat
leaving slim remembrances of the night
trailing the crowded hours of daylight.

The times
crowd the travelling sun with new faces.
Yet, deep in the mind live experiences
too grown for passing seasons to erase.

THEY DO NOT WEAR MASKS

They do not wear masks like their
predecessors whose images they burnt.
In the morning, they drive to parade-
grounds and overlook the suspicious.

They do not act with calculation, like
the former lords, whose motives they
read. At night they send feelers to hearths
and measure the depths of human endurance.

They do not believe in tales, like
the witch-hunters whose foreign accounts
they know. They only ask, which is kinder:
death by hanging or the firing squad?

SENTRIES OF IRON

Sentries of iron survive the rush
of water on water; canoe paddlers
grow muscles stronger than trunks
from which paddles are carved.

The rivers float trunks on tides
that never seem to ebb. The men
leave homesteads and grazing fields
to build camps on floating trunks.

And the smoke of home-coming
sacrifices serve to bleach the
totem figures, smearing the
sacred drums in a godless dance.

Oh, do not hang loosely about
in the bright sunshine draught
for here rainstorms are known
in the sneeze of the Harmattan.

*". . . the villages and streets
sing hopes of a new year amidst
tall drinks and food . . ."*

It is a familiar tale,
retold every passing year:
that deep in the sea
live the water-god and strange spirits
and men should steer their dugouts
home, whatever the tide.

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Okogbule Wonodi is a well-known Nigerian poet whose poems have appeared in various anthologies and journals. Two volumes of his poems have been published - *Icheke and Other Poems* (Nari, 1964) and *Dusts of Exile (Ife and California, 1971)*. Until recently, he was a Lecturer in African Literature and Poet-in-Residence at the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa. He holds a Master's degree in English and Creative Writing from Iowa (1966).