

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SOME MODERN IGBO PHILOSOPHICAL AND  
SATIRICAL POEMS**

*Nnyigide, Nkoli Mercy*  
*Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies*  
*Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*  
*nkolimercy@gmail.com*

**Abstract**

*In recent times it has been observed that some students show little or no interest in the study of the modern Igbo poetry. While some find it difficult to identify and appreciate poetic elements in some modern Igbo poems, others complain that the figurative language and other poetic devices in some poems, especially in some philosophical and satirical poems, are not easily understood. Also, some students say that they do not like poetry because they find it obscure. Besides, some readers think that poetry is purely meant for pleasure and entertainment. Consequently, some readers are no longer motivated to dig deep and understand the major idea or theme of a particular poem. On the part of the modern Igbo literary analysts, though they have contributed immensely in the appreciation of some modern Igbo poems, it is obvious that they have not really done much in analyzing some modern Igbo poems through various literary theories. This study therefore aspires to examine and appreciate some modern Igbo philosophical and satirical poems in Uche Bu Afa and Akpa Uche respectively and to expose some meanings and poetic elements that are embedded in them. This is intended to alleviate some difficulties readers encounter while studying the modern Igbo poetry. The study adopts the literary theory of formalism also known as new criticism to analyze selected poems. This approach will help to generate new findings and add meaningfully to the existing knowledge. Some related literatures are reviewed to widen the researcher's horizon. Most of the data collected from library works are also interpreted and analyzed. From the study, it is revealed that some principles of formalism are reflected in the selected poems. Also formalism focuses on the literariness of a literary text. Therefore, it is hoped that the study would rekindle and revive the interest of readers, students, teachers, and critics in studying and appreciating the modern Igbo poetry.*

## Introduction

Poetry is among the three major literary genres. It is the art of writing stories, experiences, poems and thoughts into verse. Nwadike (2003: 72) defines poetry as creative work characterised by artistic language, wonderfully structured, which is full of philosophical and emotional impact. Poetry gives poets the opportunity to express their views, ideas, experiences and feelings to the readers. There is a clear difference between literary artists especially poets and non-artists. A poet sees what an ordinary eye cannot see and feels what an ordinary man cannot feel and thus creates his own words and presents his feelings and experiences in a way that would arouse the feelings and emotions of the readers. Professional poets use the art of poetry to serve the society by putting into literary forms, the values, beliefs and feelings of the society. Their aim is to instruct and educate. Therefore, poetry is now a course of study because it teaches and makes people aware of the world around them. For instance, the Igbo poetry is characterized with the Igbo world view or philosophy, consciousness, norms, ethics, etc. Therefore by studying it, people get adequate cultural and ethical orientation from it.

It has been observed that some Igbo poets write on different issues and subjects. A poem can be satirical, philosophical, historical or didactic as said earlier. At this juncture, it will be wise to explain the keywords, Philosophy and Satire, based on the context they are used in this study. These terms have been aptly defined by Wehmier (2005). According to him, 'philosophy' is "a set of beliefs or an attitude to life that guides somebody's behaviour". To him, 'satire' is, "a way of criticizing a person, an idea or an institution in which you use humour to show their faults or weakness..." (1296). From the above definition it can be seen that some poets employ satire as a tool for criticizing a person, an idea or an institution or government; thereby using humour to show their faults or weaknesses. In some modern Igbo satirical poems, there is evidence of irony, sarcasm and ridicule. Besides, some modern Igbo poets do employ satire in their poems in order to criticize faults.

One may wonder and ask the link between poetry and philosophy or what makes a poem philosophical or satirical? Going by Wehmier's definition above, one can see that there is a close relationship between poetry and philosophy. For instance, Africans and the Igbo in particular have sets of beliefs, norms, ideas, ethics, etc. that guide their behaviours and activities. So, these norms, beliefs, ethics, ideas, etc. are raw materials in the hands of poets. This is true because the poets are influenced by these beliefs. Obviously, some modern Igbo poets have the ability to express and project the Igbo world views and philosophy in their poems based on the theory of innate ideas as held by rationalist philosophers. In philosophical poems, there is evidence of the poet's or society's beliefs and attitudes toward life. Also, philosophical poems have the ability to subject a reader to critical thinking, reasoning and reflection. On the other hand, in satirical poems, there is evidence of irony, sarcasm and ridicule. Poets employ satire to criticize faults. Besides, a satirical poem could be philosophical because a reader needs philosophical reflection and thinking to be able to interpret and analyze the poem.

Unlike other literary genres – fiction and drama, it was observed that some readers pay less attention to poetry. They complain about the artistic and figurative use of language by poets. So, they are not motivated to find out the meaning or theme of a particular poem. Peck and Coyle (1995: 12) observe thus, "There are a lot of people who read poetry frequently and derive a great deal of pleasure from it, but there are far more who find it difficult to read and hard to

understand". Kriszner *et al* (2003: 505) highlight some reasons why some readers encounter difficulties as they study poetry thus, "Part of the problem is that poetry has many guises: a poem may be short or long, accessible or obscure, it may express a mood or tell a story; it may conform to a familiar poetic form ...". Nwadike (2006: iv) observes that the reason why some readers do not show reasonable interest in the study of poetry is that they do not understand poetry and how to interpret it.

Besides, in his observation, Akporobaaro (2008: xx) states:

Writing about poetry is a skill that has to be learnt through both practice and much experience. Most students, not only in Nigeria but everywhere, find it difficult to know what to say when confronted with a question in poetry appreciation. One source of the difficulty is that ... poetry does not offer universally valid facts and approaches.

In recent times, it has been observed that the invention of modern technologies and other social media have contributed negatively to the study of poetry. Akporobaro (2008:603) agrees that "in the wake of the modern TV, videos, pop music, novels and film, and mobile telephones, poetry has lost its social and cultural relevance". It is very clear that some people especially the youths presently derive much pleasure in some social media and mobile telephones than in the study of poetry.

On the other hand, it was observed that reading and understanding of the meaning and message of any given poem require a reasonable degree of attention and concentration. Ferguson *et al* (1996: lxi) argues that "...the most satisfying reading—of a poem involves a simultaneous engagement of eye and ear: the eye attentive not only to the meaning of words, but to their grouping and spacing as lines on a page, the ear attuned to the grouping and spacing of sounds."

Similarly, Beaty *et al* (2002: 810) remark:

Poetry reading is not just an intellectual and bookish activity; it is about feeling. Reading poetry well means responding to it ... if you read poetry accurately, and with attention to detail, you will almost certainly respond – or learn how to respond – to it on an emotional level. Reading poetry involves conscious articulation through language...

In writing of poems, a poet can deliberately deviate from the general or universal style of writing. So a reader is expected to read attentively and accurately to enable him/her understand the words chosen by the poet. Besides, reading and understanding of poetry call for constant practice. Kriszner *et al* (20003: 510), say, "Certainly, reading poetry often requires hard work and concentration. Because it is compressed, poetry often omits exposition and explanation, consequently, readers must be willing to take the time to read closely to interpret ideas and supply missing connections". Obviously, for a reader to read, understand and interpret a poem accurately, he/she is expected to consider some things like: the speaker in the poem, the tone or rhythm of the poem, the syntax or word order and other poetic elements in the poem.

In addition, some readers also find it difficult to identify or discover the theme of a given poem. But Kriszner *et al* (2003: 512) suggest, “In order to discover the theme of a poem, readers look at its form, voice, language, images, allusions, sounds all of its individual elements”. This shows that the theme of a poem is not usually on the surface. Therefore, a reader ought to read a poem many times and interpret some of the elements pointed out above to enable him/her understand the theme of the poem.

Conclusively, despite the misconception some readers have for poetry, Beaty *et al* (2002: 811) remark:

Poems, perhaps even more than other texts, can sharpen your reading skills because they tend to be so compact, so fully dependent on concise expressions of feelings. In poems, ideas and feelings are packed tightly into just a few lines... poems often show us the very process of putting feelings into a language that can be shared with others... poetry can be intellectual too, explaining and exploring ideas, ...

From the above opinion, it could be seen that the study of poetry could help to sharpen and improve one’s reading skills. In this study therefore, I examine and interpret three satirical poems in *Uche bu Afa* – “Obodo m”, “Osisi nwere Uji” and “Ohia Ero” and three philosophical poems in *Akpa Uche* – “Akwukwọ ọrụ ego”, “Ugbọ” and “O dị nọọ ka m buru nnunụ”. The poems are selected based on the extensive use of figurative language and poetic devices their poets employ in them. These are kinds of poems that scare readers and students away. It is hoped that through the analysis, readers and students will begin to see the study and appreciation of poems as an interesting exercise. Besides, the formalist literary theory is chosen and applied in analyzing the selected poems among other literary theories. Why formalist theory? The choice is made in line with the view of many literary scholars who believe that appreciation or evaluation of poems using the theory helps to expose and unveil the entire form of a given poem. Also, the theory is adopted because it has been observed that it allows readers as well as analysts to analyze a literary piece with complete objectivity. Besides, formalism concentrates on the form of a literary text as it is and analyzes how the literary techniques like symbols, simile, metaphor, rhythm, etc. employed by the poet have contributed in projecting the aesthetic value of the poem. In other words, formalism focuses on literariness of a literary text. That is, it does not give any reader or analyst room to divert his/her attention from the poem itself as allowed in other literary theories. Some literary analysts and critics have made good attempt in analyzing some modern Igbo poems through this theory. Uzochukwu (1990:50) adopted the formalist approach in interpreting some poems in *Nka Okwu*.

### **On formalist literary theory.**

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Many scholars have made reasonable effort in defining and explaining the concept of formalism. According to Abrams (2005: 107):

Formalism views literature primarily as a specialized use of language and proposes a fundamental opposition between the literary (or poetical) use of language and the ordinary, “practical” use of language ... The linguistics of literature differs from the linguistics of practical discourse, because its laws are oriented toward producing the distinctive features that formalists call literariness.

Similarly, Dobie (2009: 35) observes that the language of literature is different from ordinary language because it deviates from the expected, using all the devices an author has the power to manipulate to make what is familiar seem strange and unfamiliar.... Jakobson (as cited in Abrams, (2005) observes that “the object of study in literary science is not literature but “literariness”, that is, what makes a given work a literary work. Besides, According to DiYanni (2002: 2078) “For a formalist, the central meaning of a literary work is discovered through a detailed analysis of the work’s formal elements rather than be going outside the work to consider other issues, whether biographical, historical, psychological, social, political or ideological...” From the above views, it can be seen that the linguistics of literature projects and contributes to the literariness of a literary work. Also, it is very obvious that that formalism concentrates solely on the form of a literary work and ignores some aspects of literature like the biographical and historical context of a work. Formalism focuses on the literary elements of a work in order to determine its meaning

Furthermore, Rice and Waugh (2001: 43) are of the same view that formalism centres not so much on literature but literariness, that which makes a given text literary. They also observe that formalism focuses on the functioning of literary devices rather than on content. Some literary analysts and critics have made good attempt in analyzing some modern Igbo poems through this theory. Uzochukwu (1990:50) adopted the formalist approach in interpreting some poems in *Nka Okwu*.

### **Few preliminary notes on Igbo poetry**

Some literary scholars have researched on Igbo poetry. Their aim is to enhance the development and growth of the literary genre. Here some works of different literary scholars in this area of study are reviewed, so as to determine the extent to which they have explored it and to show how the present study differs from their works.

Ugonna (1982: 23) examines the extent to which the Igbo poetry has grown. He argues that “a thorough examination of Igbo poetical works will reveal that Igbo poetry has grown not only in quantity but also in quality and with the growth of Igbo poetry standard Igbo is being firmly rooted”. From the above observation, it is revealed that the growth of Igbo poetry will help in the promotion of standard Igbo.

In his own contribution, Uzochukwu (1982) highlights some problems facing the appreciation of the Igbo oral poetry, classifies the Igbo poetry and examines how the features associated with poetry are manifested in the Igbo poetry. Ikwubuzo (2001: 217) analyses how some Igbo poets address through their poems some conditions that can help to achieve unity and

sustainable development in a nation. He stresses, “For national unity and sustainable development to be achieved in Nigeria, there is no alternative to peace and harmony as a necessary conditions”. Obviously, peace and harmony are indisputable conditions that can encourage unity and development in any nation. Based on the effort of some Africans in promoting and projecting the African culture and identity, Ikwubuzo (2006) analyzes one of Chukwezi’s poems and observes:

Chukwezi’s allegiance to Igbo culture, his advocacy for its preservation and his belief in the dignity and potentiality of the black race do not find expression only in his dramatic works but also in his poetic creativity. His literary expression depicts him as an uncompromising Africanist who believes that the African heritage should be guarded rather than deformed or distorted by the influence of an alien culture.

The above observation shows that there are African poets who are really proud of African culture and identity and express it through their literary works. In addition, Ikwubuzo (2007: 55) makes a brief appraisal of the growth of written Igbo poetry in terms of extant texts, the factors that have contributed to the growth as well as the factors that militate against it. He also considers how the study of Igbo poetry has fared and suggests some steps that can be taken to sustain the growth of written Igbo poetry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He recommends among other, that “Igbo literary studies should be made compulsory and the teaching of Igbo poetry should start from the Nursery school so that interest in poetry can be developed in time”.

Nwokoye (2012: 154) analyzes some poetic devices in some Igbo poems. She points out that, “... learning the elements and poetic tools used to build a poem will help to understand and analyse poems”. Furthermore, Nnyigide (2012) identifies some philosophical and satirical elements in some Igbo poems. She observes that some poets employ satire in the poetic works to ridicule some societal ills, with the intension of correcting them. In addition, Nnyigide (2013) observes that some Igbo poems can be used as tools to promote national unity, identity, security and social stability.

### **Formalistic interpretation of selected philosophical poems in *Akpa Uche*.**

#### **“Akwukwọ Orụ Ego”**

##### **Form**

The poem is a philosophical poem. It consists of only one stanza and thirteen verses. It was presented in the first person point of view. The central idea in the poem is that money is the major cause of peoples’ problem in the world. But a close reading and analysis of the following expressions:

M jide ihe a n’aka  
O na-akụ pekepeke  
O na-aghokwa ifufe  
Nwa mpempe akwukwọ efu!

reveal the feelings and philosophy of the poet toward the currency note, as well as the real theme of the poem which simply shows that it has no reasonable value. To the poet, it does not worth leading people to all sorts of crime and shameful acts they engage in because of money. In other words, he does not have any regard for money.

There is evidence of tension and ambiguity in the poem. The diction of lines ten to thirteen is opposed to that of lines one to nine. That is, the negative influence of money on different individuals who are enslaved to it is opposed to the attitude of the poet about it. Based on the issue of ambiguity, the poet presented the poem in a way it could be opened to more than a unified interpretation.

### **Diction**

The use of personification: the currency note was extensively personified to show that many people are enslaving to it. The language of lines one to seven reveals the extent to which the people who have been negatively influenced by more can go. The following expressions:

Ihe na-alanye mmadu n'ikwu udo  
Ihe nwanyi soro ju di ya  
Were gbasowe di amoosu  
Ihe lagara onyeisi na ngwuro ohi  
O bughị ya mere ndi Ndià ji ere umu ha?  
Ookwa ya kwanyere ukọ Chukwu na mkporo

seem to show that one can commit suicide because of money; a woman can abandon her husband for an outcast because of money; money can push the blind and lame to steal, Indians do sell their children because of money, the major cause of problem in the world today is money and a clergyman can be imprisoned because of money.

### **Allusion**

The poet made reference to India to reveal that the Indians can go to the extent of selling their children because of money, in other words, they still engage in slave trade.

### **Rhetorical questions**

The poem is rich in rhetorical questions. The poet employed some rhetorical questions in lines five to nine of the poem to show that the feelings he has for money is very contrary to the feelings other people have for it. The rhetorical questions also helped to arouse the feelings of the reader.

### **Repetition**

The poet repeated some words like "Ihe" and "ookwaya" for the purpose of emphasis. The poet also employed some words like: "pekepeke", "ifufe", "mpempe" and "efu" simply to disclose his feelings and philosophy toward the currency note. "Pekepeke" – an idiophone describing the fluttering of a naira note in one's hand. "o na-aghokwa ifufe" – is an idiomatic expression; showing how the currency note vanishes so easily in someone's hand. For example, when one uses ₦1,000 note buy an item worth of ₦20, he/she would not know when the rest of

the note is exhausted. “Mpempe” means little. “Efu” was used emphatically in the poem. It means simply – as in  
Nwa mpempe akwukwo efu!  
It is simply a little piece of paper.

### **Unity**

The poet’s choice of words really helped to project the meaning of the poem. Above all, all the elements of the poem worked together and contributed positively to the understanding of the poem.

### **“Ugbo”**

#### **Form/Content**

The poem is a philosophical poem. It consists of two stanzas. Each stanza contains seven verses. It is presented in the second first point of view. This really helped to arouse the emotions of the reader. There is the evidence of tension and ambiguity in the poem. The title of the poem is opposed to the content of the poem. Literally, “Ugbo” (ship) is a means of transportation. But it was used in the poem to symbolize death. Also the poet presented the poem in such a way that it could be given more than a single interpretations.

The following lines:

Ka m kelee gi  
Ekele ikpe azu  
Ebe mmadu niile ga-agafe uzọ a;

clearly reveal the philosophy of the poet towards death, as well as the real theme of the poem. The above lines show that the poet is not afraid of death. The real theme of the poem is that death is inevitable.

#### **Diction**

The poet enriched the poem with some poetic elements like: symbol- the poet employed symbol. For example, the title of the poem; “Ugbo” symbolises death, personification- the poet employed personification in lines one to two:

Uwa nta na-alakwuru nke ukwu  
Ahu na-alaghachi n’ebe o si

to show the transportation to death. Also, the use of “ahu” in line two of the poem shows an element of synecdoche. The poet used the flesh to represent the entire human body. In lines three and four of the poem:

Onye nwe ukwu ewerela ukwu ya

Onye nwe aka ewerela aka ya

the poet employed parallelism to reveal the mortality of man. Besides, the poet employed some rhetorical questions in the following expressions:

M ga-esi ańaa gafee gi  
N'atughị nguzo?  
Ebe o bu ụzọ dijiri oha?

to shows that he hopes to be prepared at all time since death is inevitable.  
The poet also employed allusion in lines thirteen and fourteen thus;

N'ihı na ụgbọ nke buuru  
Hananayas na-eche Safajira.

The reference in the above lines is to the biblical couple – Ananias and Saphira, who sold a piece of land but hid part of the proceeds contrary to expectations. However, the following lines depict that the poet has positive attitude toward death, hence he appreciates it and consoles those that mourn thus;

Ka m kelee gi  
Ekele ikpe azu  
Ebe mmadu niile ga-agafe ụzọ a  
Ma gi onye na-ebe akwa  
Hichaa anya mmiri n'anya...

Obviously, the poet is not afraid of death. He sees death as a necessary end. The poet's philosophy about death is similar to that of Emenike in his poem titled "Onwu" in *Akpa Uche*.

### Unity

There is coherence and unity among all the elements in the poem. The elements especially the diction worked together to project the meaning of the poem.

### “O di nọọ ka m buru nnunu”

#### Form/Content

The poem consists of three stanzas. Stanzas one and two contain eight verses each, while stanza three contains twelve verses, that is, a total of twenty-eight verses. The verses of the poem are short. It is a philosophical poem. The poem is presented in the first person point of view. A close reading of the poem reveals that the real theme of the poem is the essence of freedom. The poet was really overwhelmed by the kind of freedom the birds of the air enjoy. Probably, he was no longer comfortable with the kind of restrictions and sufferings some men undergo. This propelled him to use the three stanzas of the poem to admire and appreciate deeply the kind of freedom birds enjoy. To him he would have loved to be a bird. In other words man deserves the

kind of freedom birds enjoy. The poet used the picture, life and existence of birds to express his feelings and philosophy. He believes so much in freedom. The title and verse one of the poem reveal the poet's philosophy thus; "Ọ dịnọọ ka m buru nnunu" (I wish I were a bird). Besides, the poet made extensive use of rhythm in the poem. All the stanzas of the poem are rhythmic. However, there is evidence of ambiguity in the poem. The poet presented the poem in a way that it could be given different interpretations.

### **Diction**

The poet enriched the poem with some poetic elements like: imagery- the poem is so rich in imagery. The poet's diction created some mental pictures and special effects in the mind of the reader. The poet's diction has the ability of subjecting a reader to an unending admiration of birds. Personification- the poet employed personification in the following expressions:

E feghariwa mgbe anyaanwu dara,  
A laba ulo, hie ura.

The above expressions reveal that birds also retire to their nests at the end of each day activities as men do. Ideophone- the use of an idiophone – "pararam" in verse seven of the poem shows the kind of sound the wings of a bird makes as it flies. Symbol- the use of "ulo" in verse twenty four of the poem symbolizes the nest of birds. Idiomatic expression-the following idiomatic expressions:

Nne na nna eghegi onu  
Onye o bula na uche ya huru

No parental interference.

Everyone is with his conscience show that the birds do not entertain parental interference, rather every one advises itself. Proverbial expression- the following proverbial expression on verse twenty-eight of the poem:

Onye ma nzu, o kaanka  
The wise shall live long  
shows that the wise lives longer.

Besides, the following expressions helped to project the meaning of the poem, as well as the feelings and the philosophy of the poet:

O dịnọọka m buru nnunu  
Ruo nwa nku, efe n'elu  
Chiboo n'ezigbo ututu  
Ahaa m onu, bido ukwe

I wish I were a bird  
Grow my little wings and fly  
Very early in the morning

I will open my mouth and start to sing

Osisì o bụla anya anyị hụrụ  
O buruhaa ogbe, anyị nwe

Any tree our eye sees  
If it has fruit, it is ours  
Anyị anọghị n'imefu okpogho  
Sị anyị ji ya gbawa ụgbọ

We do not waste money  
On transportation.

Anyị anọghị n'ìkwù ego isi  
We do not pay tax.

The above verses reveal that birds enjoy freedom so much. Unlike man, they enjoy freedom of speech, movement, life, etc. they neither till the ground nor sow. But they are always satisfied. They depend solely on fruits for their daily living. In other words, they do not labour or spend money on food and transportation. They do not also pay tax as men do. Obviously, all these attributes of birds made the poet to desire or long to be like them. In addition, the use of these words- “òbasi” and “nne” in verses five and six of the poem reveal the two most important beings in a man’s life. Also the use of “Ọnicha” and “Aba” in verses thirteen and fourteen of the poem show the two major commercial cities in Igboland.

### **Unity**

In fact, the poet’s diction and all the elements he employed really worked together to enhance and project the meaning and message of the poem. In other words, there is a clear coherence among all the elements of the poem.

### **Formalistic interpretation of some satirical poems in *Uche bu afa*:**

#### **“Osisì nwere uji”**

#### **Form/Content**

The poem is satirical. The title of the poem has an in-depth meaning. The poem is neatly divided into three stanzas. Stanza one serves as introduction, stanza two-body while stanza three serves as the climax and resolution. It has four stanzas and 29 verses. The verses are short. The poem contains run-on-lines. It is presented in the second person point of view. The poet satirises some negative attitudes of human beings. In stanza one and two, the poet used the symbol of tree (that has a hole within) to represent the nature and characteristics of people that exist in the world today. The poem revealed that the physical attributes of an individual does not give the real picture of that individual. Physically, people appear to be good, holy, neat, smart, kind, lovely, gentle, etc. but when you get closer to them, you see a different thing. Only very few

may be really good. Some are really bad. In stanza three and four, the poet said that appearance is deceitful. People possess terrible characters. The quality they exhibit physically or in public is totally different from what they are. It is only a closer contact with an individual that can reveal the kind person he/she is to you. What the poet disclosed in the poem is exactly what could be seen among some Christians today. Nowadays, some Christians compromise a lot. They imitate compromise and pretend a lot in order to attract one favour or the other. But when you get closer to them, you would be totally discouraged by their behaviour. These are the people the Holy Bible refers to as wolves in sheep clothing.

In considering the following lines:

E rute n'obodo  
Osisì gbọrọ kasaa na ya.  
Mechaa igidigba na igidigba  
Akwukwọ dịcha ha n'elu  
Dịchakwa ópóópó na ópóòpò  
Na-ejicha ghurị ghurị  
Ka ihe dị n'ọdọ mmiri

Ma a garuo ha nso  
Lewe ahụ ha n'otu n'otu  
A ga-achọputa na  
Ole na ole bụ ndị ji ahụ  
Imilikiti ndị ọzọ nwere uji.

The central theme of the poem may seem to be the characteristics of trees. But a close reading of the poem suggests that the real theme of the poem is that appearances can sometimes be misleading. The poet used the symbol of “osisi nwere uji” – a tree that has a hole, to describe some inward and outward characteristics of individuals to exist in the world today. Obviously, the theme of “Osisì nwere uji” is similar to the theme of Robinson's “Richard Cory” as interpreted formalistically by Dobbie, (2012).

### **Diction**

The poem is rich in tension, imagery, symbols, repetition, lexical matching. These elements in the poem worked together to project its beauty and meaning. For example, there is evidence of tension between the title of the poem and its meaning, in the second and the third stanzas of the poem. The diction in the second stanza is opposed to the diction of the third stanza. The use of these expressions-“igidigba na igidigba”, “opoo na opoo” “Na ejicha ghurị ghurị ka ihe dị n'ọdọ mmiri in stanza two suggest a very healthy condition. But the expressions in stanza three of the poem: “imilikiti ndị ọzọ nwere uji”, “ahụhụ, agwọ, oke na akpị”, “tuchara ọnụ, biri na ha” suggest very bad or deteriorating condition. The above expressions are really contradictory.

Besides, the poet employed some words like “igidigba”, “opoo” and ghurị ghurị ka ihe dị n'ọdọ mmiri” to create some imaginary and mental pictures in the minds of the reader. In other words, the poem is so rich in imagery. Also, there is evidence of symbols in the poem. For example, the poet employed “okpo”, “ọji”, “akpu”, “ukpi” and “nkwu” to represent some sacred and economic trees in the Igbo land. And they also symbolize some good qualities in an

individual while “Ahụhụ”, “agwọ”, “oke” and “akpị”, represent some dangerous creatures which also symbolize some negative traits in an individual.

The following idiomatic and proverbial expressions:

Agwọ dị iche, awọrọ ya dị iche  
Ngwere niile, mmakpu mmakpu  
Amaghị nke afọ na-arụ  
Ma ọ bụ mgbe ikuku kuoro  
Ka e ji ahụ ike ọkukọ

really point to the fact that appearance is usually misleading. Furthermore, the use of lexical matching in lines four and five shows that the trees are numerous. There is evidence of ambiguity in the poem. The poem is subject to more than a single interpretations.

### **Unity**

In fact, the poet’s diction, his use of imagery, symbols, idiomatic and proverbial expressions enhanced the understanding and the meaning of the poem.

### **“Ohia Ero”**

#### **Form/Content**

The poem has an in-depth meaning. It consists of three stanzas and nineteen verses. Stanza one serves as the introduction, while stanza two and three serve as exposition and resolution. Through the use of some rhetorical questions in stanza two, the poet expresses his observations and feelings. Stanza three x-rays some challenges or difficulties one may encounter as he/she struggles to actualize his /her dream or destiny. The verses are short. The poem contains run-on-lines. It is presented in the second person point of view. The following lines of the poem reveal the real meaning and theme of the poem:

Ma ebe isi okwu di  
Abughi na ohia bu so ero  
Kama o bu na a bia n'igho ha,  
Ha ga-erukwo aka?  
O bu onye o bu la biara Ighoro  
Ga-enwe ike ighotapu  
Ma o bughi ihe akụ ilu  
Na-ada n'onu ka o na-ato.

The above lines reveal that there are certain challenges or stepping stones to one’s destiny. A close reading of the above lines suggests that the real theme of the poem is that no perfect or good gift comes so easily. In other words, one has to bear the cross in order to get the crown. That is, in line with the proverbial expression in lines fourteen and fifteen which states that the taste of the bitter kola is not in the chewing, it is obvious that one must toil in order to achieve what he/she wants. Besides, the expression in lines eighteen and nineteen shows the

supremacy of God over man. He is the only one that perfects one's destiny. And apart from Him no man can achieve any reasonable thing on earth.

### **Diction**

The poem is so rich in imagery, symbols, hyperbole, repetition and lexical matching. From the poem, one could see that "ohia ero" symbolizes treasures while "onya", "ogwu", "agwo" and "akpi" symbolize hindrances, challenges, stepping stones, threats, difficulties, fears, anxieties, etc. an individual may encounter as he/she struggles to survive. The use of hyperbole in lines sixteen and seventeen explains the degree of challenges one may face in life. Also, the poet also employed exaggeration to heighten the feelings and reactions of the reader. There is evidence of imagery in the poem. The diction of stanza one and line sixteen and seventeen was used by the poet to create a special mental pictures and effects in the mind of the reader.

The repetition of "elu ero", "ala ero" and lexical matching – "a gaa n'aka nri ero", "a gaa n'aka ekpe ero" in lines three and four of the poem were for the purpose of emphasis.

The poet also employed tension and ambiguity in the poem. The diction of stanza one is opposed to that of stanzas two and three. The poet really presented the poem in a way that it could be opened to more than a unified interpretation.

### **Unity**

Obviously, there is coherence among all the elements of the poem. The elements really worked together to project and enhance the uniqueness, literariness and the meaning of the poem.

### **"OBODO M"**

#### **Form/Content**

The poem is a satirical poem. It has one stanza and 16 verses. The verses are short except verse three and 13. It contains run-on-lines. It is presented in the second person point of view. Probably, the poet was referring to some ugly events in the country. He condemns some negative attitudes like pride, negligence, arrogance, excessiveness, etc that are usually exhibited by some leaders as stated in verses one to eight, the poet condemned pride and excessiveness which are common among some Nigerian leaders today. For instance, some leaders in the country are too proud and extravagant. They waste the public funds on their personal projects that are not really beneficial to the poor masses. Instead of paying maximum attention to the basic needs of the citizens, they offer huge financial, material and security assistance to other countries, whereas there is high rate of insecurity in the country. Again, in the country today, many citizens live in abject poverty; most qualified youths are unemployed, etc. But some of the leaders use some of the resources in the country to build their personal companies abroad, thereby empowering other countries that are far better than Nigeria materially. The major problem in the country today as pointed out by the poet is that some leaders have neglected the basic needs of the masses that require urgent attention. They fail to understand that charity begins at home as stated in verse nine and ten. They compete with some leaders of other countries that are well developed and established. But in verse thirteen and fourteen of the poem, the poet says; "N'ihì na okokporo gbanahuchaa ntụ ụtụ, Ọ maghị dīrị na-eche ya." This shows that the right thing must be done. Otherwise, the situation would become worse as stated in verse seven and eight. The following lines reveal the central idea of the poem.

A na-azotagodu ala ụlọ  
Wee gaa zowa nke ezi  
Onye ụlọ ya na-agba oku  
Agaghi ejee na-achụ oke  
N'ihì na okokporo gbanahụchaa ntụ ụtutu  
Ọ maghi òrì na-eche ya.

The central theme of the poem may appear to revolve around the popular saying that “charity begins at home”. However, a close reading of the poem suggests that the real theme of the poem is that everyone must face the consequences of his/her actions.

### **Diction**

The language is particularly rich in figurative expressions. The figurative expressions in the poem reveal a society/country in the led are neglected, the leaders are arrogant, proud and extravagant, the basic needs of the citizens are not considered, etc. The poet made extensive use of imagery and symbols. The following expressions: “nwa aturu ga-epu mpi” “onye mkpumpku”, “onye tara” and okokporo, are used create a special mental picture in the mind of a reader. Besides, repetition of “onye” and “onye tara ahu” show that things are going on strangely in the society/country which the poet is not comfortable with. However, there is evidence of ambiguity in the poem. The figurative devices employed in the poem could as well be used to satirize an individual for his/her excesses. Besides, there is evidence of tension between the title of the poem and the diction. From the title, “Obodo m”, a reader expects to see good report about the poet’s country. Contrarily, the poet probably used the figurative devices in the poem to satirize the excesses, arrogant and extravagant non-challant attitudes of the leaders of his country. Also lines nine to 12 reveal that there is tension between the expectations of the citizens and the attitudes of the leaders, thus:

A na-azotagodu ala udo  
Wee gaa zowa nke ezi  
Onye ụlọ ya na-agba oku  
Agaghi ejee na-achụ oke

From the above lines, it could be seen that the popular saying “that charity begins at home”. Besides, some of the elements of the poem are paradoxical for example lines 1 – 2, 7 – 8 and 13 – 14

Nwa aturu ga-epu mpi  
Ekwo dikwa ya arọ  
Onye tara ahu amaghi na ya tara,  
Odudu ga-ara ya ahu  
N'ihì na okokporo gbanahụchaa ntụ ụtutu  
Ọ maghi òrì na-eche ya

The above lines show that one must face the consequences of his/her excesses.

### **Unity**

Obviously all the elements in the poem really worked together to project its beauty and meaning. Also, there is coherence between the figurative expressions in the poem. Besides, there is no indication in the poem that the citizens reacted or revolted to the excesses of the leaders. Therefore it would be a mistake to interpret the poem outside its form.

### **Concluding remarks.**

From the study it is possible to conclude that:

1. Formalism focuses on literariness of a literary text.
2. Modern Igbo poems could be appreciated successfully by application of literary theories.
3. Some literary analysts have not really utilized some literary theories in appreciating some modern Igbo poems.
4. Formalism provides readers with a way to understand and enjoy a work for its own inherent value as a piece of literary art.
5. Some poets employ tension and ambiguity intentionally in their works so as to project their literary styles.
6. Formalism ignores certain aspects of literature like the author's background, the context of the work, etc,
7. Unlike the linguistics of practical discourse, the linguistics of literature contributes and projects the literariness of a literary work.
8. A close reading of a literary text makes a reader to excel in adopting the theory of formalism.
9. Formalism focuses on literariness of a literary text.
10. Formalist theory discounts or ignores certain aspects of literature like the name of the author, life and historical background, formalism provides readers with a way to understand and enjoy a work for its own inherent value as a piece of literary art, some poets employ tension and ambiguity deliberately in their works so as to enhance their literary style, etc

From the discussions, analyses, interpretations and findings above, one could see and agree with that the study of poetry is a wonderful discipline that should not be neglected or taken for granted. It is educative and informative. Some poems have many moral lessons and experiences to share. In fact poetry is beauty. The figurative, artistic, creative and imaginative use of language by poets helps to sharpen the creative ability and reading skills of readers. Besides, from the study, it could be seen that appreciation of Igbo poems through a literary theory helps to generate new ideas and makes the study of poetry more interesting. However, it is hoped that this study would be of great significant to readers, students, teachers, literary critics and scholars. It would help to clear the doubts and misconception some readers have about poetry, especially the modern Igbo poetry. The study would also go a long way in reviving the interest of people studying the modern Igbo poetry. Therefore, the study recommends that the study of the modern Igbo poetry in schools and colleges should be given maximum attention. It should receive equal attention that is given to the study of the modern Igbo prose and drama.

Teachers should adopt better techniques in the teaching the modern Igbo poetry. Above all, readers, students, teachers and critics should acquire good knowledge of the Igbo language and literary theories so as to enable them understand and interpret the figurative language and other elements of poetry employed in a poem effectively.

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