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### 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

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).