

MEDIUM AS THE MESSAGE: PROVERB AS A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION IN EPHRAIM EZE OKWOR'S *A RIDDLE FOR THE GODS*

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Abstract

Marshal McLuhan, the Canadian Communicator in the 1960s, says in his book *The Medium is the Message*, that no single message is as important as the medium through which it is conveyed. Understanding a message is dependent on the manner, the approach, the how that the message is disseminated. By this, the medium is the sine qua non of any communication. Based on the above principle, this work will examine the proverbs extracted from Ephraim Okwor's *A Riddle for the Gods* as medium of communication. So this work will do an objective examination of the proverbs in use. African folklore, according to Asika (2009), has become part and parcel of what literary African artists weave in their works in order to give it a true touch of beauty and glamour; something African and very close to their hearts. Building on the above premise, this work will analyse the proverb as a means of communication. Proverb in this instance is not just the metaphorical oil with which the Igbo eat words but the literally palm-oil with which good, genuine, believable African stories are told and in respectable manner. The work studies proverbs as a medium of communication. Since medium is the message, this work examines how the author of *A Riddle for the Gods*, was able to present his proverbs to be able to communicate effectively and accordingly.

Key words: Communication, Medium, Riddle, Proverb, Folklore

Introduction

The definition of proverb is like a thick forest. It is difficult to specifically pin-point and definite location in it. This is the reason behind the many approaches to the definition of proverb. In Cicero's opinion, "A people with no knowledge of the past will suffer collective intellectual amnesia groping blindly in the past and future without guide". It is based on this that the definition of proverb is the wisdom of many and the wit of one, is suitable for adoption. More so, it is the reason for the adoption of the text, *A Riddle for the Gods* by Ephraim Eze Okwor, to open the eyes of the reader through his medium of communication, "the Proverb". Emenyonu sees proverb as the most important resource of a speaker as it serves to emphasize and deepen the force of what is said. In the pages of literature, the proverb must retain its traditional function without which it is meaningless in a context. It must thus be appropriate, accurate, purposeful and forceful (*Studies in Nigeria Novel*: 6). Nkem Okoh (2008) observes that proverbs occupy a commanding position in the rhetorical arsenal of African cultures. He says further that in virtually every African society, proverbs constitute a dominant device, whether in everyday conversation or more serious, formal talks. To him, proverbs mean "a pithy saying that expresses some fundamental truth of human life experience, even if such truism is abstract". (123-125). The language of a proverb is of an allusive epigrammatic codified and above all graphic in nature. To achieve the objective of this work, proverbs are no doubt, very important to every African writer and no writer writes in a vacuum and no work of art can exist significantly in isolation of the society. In a bid to recreate a familiar and believable story or account of a given set of people, many African writers have tended to look inwards, deep in the oral traditions of the people which signifies the people's deep and rooted contact with art, culture and literature peculiar to them and which overtime has served as a means of showcasing their individual uniqueness, common goals, perception, way and outlook to life. This may differ from one tradition to another from one society to the other. Having this in mind, it is the responsibility of each writer to reflect this socio-cultural realities of his people, not just for posterity sake, nor for the fact that it makes the writing more true to life and authentic but because the written work produced by the writer is part of the larger society, an extension of their socio-cultural milieu... It is in this regard that many African writers incorporate a lot of folklore materials and other cultural artifacts in their works which proverb is one of them. Proverb

plays an important role in the writing and lives of characters not just in literary works but in their ordering of society at large as Onwudiwe George posits:

To use proverbs is to economize words and yet make a pungent point. The Igbo people hold anyone that uses proverbs and uses them correctly in oral speech as a good orator. He is also seen as a true son of Igbo land and as well as a scholar. Correct and frequent use of proverbs serve as a security device hence; proverbs are veritable ingredients in communication, especially in Igbo (159) (Asika 2012).

The quotation above places much emphasis on the use of proverb in the Igbo community which coincides with the setting of the work of Ephraim Eze Okwo under study. The average Igbo society places much relevance to proverb, myth, songs, dances and all other elements of folklore. Proverb has become an effective tool and technique with which African writers store and weave ideas and thematic concerns; higher the suspense. This is so because the tool that the writer uses is word made possible by language. This is as Nkem Okoh observes:

Reading Achebe's portrayal of Igbo society immediately reveals the lubricating role of proverbs in African speech. There is no doubt that considerable scholarly attention has been given to African writer's use of their oral literatures, particularly their proverbs. Even if anyone not familiar with the working of the language in the traditional African society, some sensitive reading of Achebe's early novels promptly reveals the prevalence and beauty of such palm oil of speech in a traditional Igbo community (125).

We are in a digital age, no doubt, but the need to study proverbs, their roles and functions in African literary works from varying degrees, perspectives and dimensions is increasingly becoming very important. The artist who understand and uses proverbs well whether orally or in literature is always seen not just as an "orator" or, "a maker who entertains" to 'instruct' but as a moral consciousness of his society, a custodian of the totality of the belief of his people, a diviner, a preserver and an agent of change and transformation.

Emenyonu says that proverb has become Africa's distinct contribution to the art of the novel (1991). This shows the value which the African writers place on proverbs and folklore in general. This, somebody sees as part and parcel of what African literary artists weave into their work in order to give it a true touch of beauty and glamour; something African and very close to their heart. African literary artists often resort to the use of proverbs because of their capacity of distinguishing particular aspects of life experience transmit truth alive and thus shape reality to shape the interest of the users. No wonder then did Achebe, the ring leader in this instance, gave a clarion call to save children from what he termed "the beautiful packaged poison" imported into the continent in form of children story books. In Francis Okoh's article, "The Impact of Oral Tradition on Contemporary Children Fiction of Nigeria". *Nigerian Literature Today: A Journal of Contemporary Nigerian Writing*: No 1: 2010, Achebe advises African writers for children to exploit the infinite treasury of African Oral tradition. (Chakava, 1998).

As earlier said, it is pretty difficult to define proverb. That is why we likened it to a thick forest where one finds it difficult to pin-point anything. So, to make further attempt in defining proverb, we go thus: Wolfgang Mieder (2004), has proposed the following definition, "A proverb is a short generally known thought, moral and traditional view in a metaphorical fixed and memorable form and which is handed from generation to generation".

F.B.O. Akporobaro (2004) views proverb as :A short popular saying of unknown authorship expressing general truth or superstition (55).

J.O.J. Nwachukwu's thought about the aesthetic principles of proverb in Igbo cultures, which he views as being the first and foremost speech ornaments, defines Igbo proverb thus: "The Igbo proverb is any utterance which enjoys some traditional and social currency, and which is meant to beautify discourse and to advance a user's point of view (5). He went further to cite Donatus Nwoga's observation on the way one could draw a meaning from Igbo proverbs. He stated:

One of the important observations about the Igbo proverb in Nwoga's essay is that proverbs have three meanings: The literal, the philosophical and the contextual" (19). (The Igbo proverb). He equally cited Allan Dundes' observation on texture of a proverb. Dundes stated

that “a discussion of a proverb without mention of what the proverb evokes is as fruitless as studying literacy allusions without knowing to what the allusions allude (263).

The meaning of a proverb is very important. This is why Raymond Firth in his article articulated thus: The essential thing about a proverb is its meaning and by this is to be understood not merely a bald and literal translation into the accustomed tongue, nor even a free version of what the words are intended to convey. The meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given full account of the accompanying social situation –the reason for its use, its effect and its significance in speech. (*The Igbo Proverb*, 31).

Proverbs do not just come; something brings them about. In the words of J.O.J, “Proverbs serve no real purpose outside situations of speech-making. There is an automatic association between proverb utterance and circumstance of usage (33-Igbo Pro).

For Archer Taylor, the Germanic paremiologist, proverb has no succinct definition – different strokes for different folks. Proverb is situation, culture and context based. This is why Van Dyck says that “Proverbs do not come out of the absence of a situation” (32) and Umeasiegbu says that “an outsider cannot tell the people whose lore he is studying what a proverb is” (*Palm Oil*: 9).

This also agrees with Nkem Okoh’s submission that, “proverbs essentially reflect the realities of the society that coins them. (*Preface to Oral Lit*: 124).

Proverb is a genre of folklore which in the words of Archer Taylor, has “no succinct definition”. It is not a mere statement or utterance, not even entertainment nor a set of certain phenomena but serves various purposes. One of such is as a medium of communication. Roger Abraham views proverb as being capable to handle problems in various ways. Achebe says it is a lubricant which can even serve the purpose of eating words.

Norrick created a table of distinctive features of proverbs from idioms, clichés etcetera. Trahlad distinguishes proverbs from some other closely related types of sayings. He says “true proverbs must further be distinguished from other types of proverbial speech; example, proverbial phrases, wellerism, maxims, quotations”. Zolfaghari, an American, proposed the following:

A proverb is a short sentence, which is well known and at times rhythmic experience, comprising simile, metaphor or irony which is well known among people for its fluent wording, variety of expression, simplicity, expansiveness and generality and is used either with or without change. (Igboke 2015).

This is what makes proverb as an element of folklore, vital and enduring in our African society, even in the contemporary age.

These and more are among the several approaches and definitions of proverb by various scholars and critics in their publications. One central characteristic of proverb found in all the above is the idea that proverbs are short and terse in nature and are embodiment of in-depth wisdom and philosophy about life which were handed down from one generation to the other.

Various writers have found proverbs as veritable tools to do a lot of things. These include justification of the actions of characters, critiquing bad ethical and immoral behaviours while advocating for right morals and virtues. Writers also through proverbs try to express the wealth of philosophy, wisdom and perception of life as they affect and control their community. Since these virtues are passed down from ancestors they go a long way to shape the life style and behavior of every society. This also throws light to what the future will look like as these philosophies will still continue to affect life. So, one may see this working in a triangular form – from ancestors – to the present people who will no doubt, pass same to the future generation. It is through this measure that made African writers to succeed in giving their works a touch of African beauty; through these, they have been able to enhance the plot of their stories, sharpen their purposes and communicate effectively. Critics like Bernth Lindfors have done some critical analysis of Chinua Achebe’s use of proverbs.

Use of proverbs can never be exhausted as almost every African writer tries to show in his/her work except a very insignificant few, like Cyprian Ekwensi and Obi Egbuna. So these users communicate their thoughts and reflect even their unspoken messages to the outside world. Examples of such writers include Flora Nwapa, Onuora Nzekwu, Elechi Amachi, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, among

others. Ephraim Eze Okwo's use of proverbs among other genres of folklore makes his works unique. This is seen in the uniqueness of the African beauty and true touch of grandeur of Africa as reflected in his community, his people's way of life, part of the crucial role which literature performs in the society. It is the afore-mentioned that made Rems Umeasiegbu in acknowledgement of the incorporation of proverbs in Achebe's works as well as those of some other Igbo writers to state thus:

Several Igbo novelists have utilized proverbs in their literary works. With the possible exception of Obi Egbuna and Cyprian Ekwensi, there is no Igbo novelist who has not used some proverbs in his writing. The most consistent and thorough in this regard is, of course, Chinua Achebe. He, more than any other writer, has placed Igbo folklore, especially the proverb, on a functional literary perspective. His international reputation rests partly on his ability to utilize and recreate successfully the folklore of his people in all his works...Many critics ignore completely in their assessments of literary works from Igbo land, the use of folklore in the literary works, (13).

FRANCIS Okoh's article titled "The Impact of Oral Tradition on Contemporary Children Fiction Of Nigeria", where Achebe advised that the writers as well as parents should guard against what he termed "The beautiful packaged poison", imported into the continent in form of children story books was corroborated by Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundee. Both explain better in their seminal paper titled "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore".

Like other forms of folklore, proverbs may serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. A parent may well use a proverb to direct a child's action or thought, but by using a proverb, the parental imperative is externalized and removed somewhat from the individual parent. This guilt or responsibility for directing the child is projected on to the anonymous past, the anonymous folk. A child knows that proverb used by the scolding parent was not made up by the parent. It is as proverb from the cultural past whose voice speaks truth in traditional terms. It is 'one', the "Elders", or the "they" in "they say", who direct...(70). The above can only be possible if Achebe's advice on children Fiction is adhered to because children who depend on imported stories may not even understand what Africa Proverbs in talking about.

Achebe has done a great job in projecting the Igbo cultural tradition via the African folklore, this is why he made the world to understand that African did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans. Ephraim Eze Okwor did not only recreate a typical Igbo society, but was able to create certain areas and manifestations that made a particular set of people, his community great and distinguished from all others. He was able to bring out a formidable documentation of vital moments and aspects of his culture in transition. With this, the generation yet unborn will have a lot to thank him for. His work is very believable and recreates a day to day life of the people governed by communal life, belief in deities and gods. On the process of creating his stories he made abundant use of proverbs. It is the role of proverbs as a medium to communication that this work is set out to do. Ephraim Eze Okwor's *A Riddle for The Gods*, which the researcher sees as a compendium of African Proverbs, containing about one hundred pieces of African proverbs, shall now be treated in details, to analyze and buttress.

Proverbs as a medium of communication in Ephraim Eze Okwor's *A Riddle For The Gods*.

Ephraim Eze Okwor did not sound like someone throwing aimless punches as he set out to do his work in this novel. He did not throw empty and aimless punches in his use of proverbs. He meant business and he showed it. The proverbs he used were targeted at making communication. They were used as medium of communication.

Webster's Dictionary defines Medium (plural Media), as a particular form or system of communication; the materials or methods used by an artist; a substance regarded as the means of transmission; a channel or system of communication, information or entertainment.

Communication, on the other hand is the act or process of using words, sounds, signs of behavior to express or exchange information, one's ideas, thoughts, feelings, etcetera, to someone else.

It is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior.

Medium of communication then, is the form or system; the method, means or channel of transmitting words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to express or exchange information, ones ideas, thoughts or feelings to someone else. In our context, proverb is that channel, that means or system of transmitting the writer's thoughts, ideas, feelings to reading public.

Tony Obilade says that medium is how a message is sent. This can be through verbal or written. The message which must be meaningful moves from one person to another. Each receiver passes the message back or part of it through a feedback to make the sender know that he or she does not only get the message but understand it. This is when communication takes place. The sender at one time becomes a receiver at another time. That means in communication, especially human communication, there is no permanent sender (source) or receiver. In essence, communication takes place when there is a meaningful message which moves from one person to another through a medium or channel and the receiver must get back to the sender to let him or her know that he did not only get his or her message but understood it and feeds like messaging back.

Message may be meaningful or meaningless depending on how it is sent; its medium and channel of transmission. This why we look at the study as "the medium is or as the message". So, how a message is delivered or transmitted is very vital in the communication of the message. The "how" goes a long way to tell the level of the understanding that the message sent, carries. This is exactly what is playing out in the proverbs understudy; each of them was like a square peg in a square hole and that is why they were able to communication effectively.

These explanations are important and necessary to show how the task before a writer looks like. A user of proverb who does that out of context is not only confusing his audience, he is making them to lose interest. That is why it is the responsibility of a writer to ensure that he has all his or her round pegs in round holes. So, having seen what task it is that lies before him, it is now his duty to ensure a proper coordination, arrangement and planning to be able to sustain the interest of his reading public. Ephraim Eze Okwor took all these into consideration before he set out to work. At this juncture, we shall start the work proper by considering the proverbs in the text understudy, *A Riddle for the Gods* to explain how they functioned significantly to put the novel in a proper disposition.

..... *There was nothing he could do or what was the sense in struggling to eat one's food with soup when such had been poured into a basket* (11)

Context: Egbo and Adaku have just lost Chukwuemeka, their first son in spite of every attempt made to secure the child's health. When the child started showing some symptoms of ill health, Egbo made consultations, met some diviners; procured herbs and all that was recommended for the child to heal. But he lost the son. He had carried out all the sacrifices and done even much more but gradually he had begun to attend to all these with increasing skepticism because of what one of the diviners that he visited had told him. The diviner had said:

"Egbo... what I see about you and your wife calls for heavy sacrifices to the gods. I see a tunnel of long stretching darkness beyond which there is neither dawn nor twilight. I see a row of children with abbreviated lives. I see tears, sadness and woes. Your child's condition is only a herald of bad times ahead... (10).

Having heard that, Egbo was disarmed and totally discouraged. He actually went ahead to carry out the sacrifices to the gods which he had been told that would serve as divine bulwark that he required. But he had already lost confidence in all. He has seen Emeka (as Chukwuemeka was sometimes called) as a hopeless case which has no remedy. He concluded by saying if it was the decision of the gods that the boy would die, there was nothing that he, Egbo, could do. At this point then he asked what the sense was in struggling to eat one's food with soup when such had been poured into a basket. It is the situation on ground that prompted this proverb.

And it depicts a situation of hopelessness and helplessness. The above was communication through the medium of orality being put down in a written form.

The second proverb to be considered is the one which came from the feeling in Adaku's mind when her second son, Obiewulu fell off his maid, Amoge's hands. Amoge is the little daughter of Adaku's mother's brother, Udo. She was brought to assist Adaku in taking care of Obiewulu, Adaku's second son. One day Obiewulu fell off Amoge's hands as she tried to catch a bird. The fall was a bad one. She had tripped over an obstacle in a corner which she did not notice in her rush and enthusiasm to catch the bird, and the child was flung afar when Amoge fell flat. Adaku heard the noise and came rushing after she had called out but Amoge in her consternation had not heard, or heard, but could not answer. She picked up her son to cuddle him to her bosom but he stood petrified! Obiewulu head danced like a bird standing on a thin blade of grass. He had broken his neck. The hopeless situation gave Adaku much worry and concern it is natural for children to fall off the hands of their care-takers; how would this be different or is there anything that the gods know which Adaku does not. That was exactly when this proverb came to mind to give a voice to what Adaku has in her mind. She felt completely disconsolate. "she was thinking that perhaps she was destined to continuously crack the luscious kernel only for the fowl to take" (14).

Adaku had lost Chukwuemeka; now Obiewulu. Why does it appear as if she is only to labour in vain? Why should she give birth only to bury the child in a matter of months? The proverb paints the picture of a disappointed person; one who has seen something that should give him joy and high hope. Alas, as he is about to grab and enjoy it, it is taken away from him. The manner in which the proverb was presented gives the reader a lot of concern: something to move him to show pity for Adaku. This is called catharsis.

Yes, there would not, or would rain beat the glowing faggot while the elder was around?

CONTEXT: Adaku is still disturbed and troubled in her mind. She is still in a big consternation, making her feelings known to her chi. Likening herself to the "glowing faggot", she made to ask if her chi represented by the elders now, would watch her being beaten by the rain while they are around. Adaku is torn apart here, overwhelmed with fear and dissolution, she presents her case to her chi, not forcefully, anyway, but as someone who is dispirited coaxingly brings her case to her guardian angel in this metaphorical manner.

Her mind is loaded with many unutterable questions and the much she could possibly present was "or would rain beat the glowing faggot while the elder was around". It is not expected that the elder would be around to watch the glowing faggot to be beaten by the rain.

Another example is found on page 19.

But of course the death that would rid the puppy of its life would not allow it to perceive the smell of excrement {19}

It is followed closely with another which says:

For the rub soot into the eyes of the mind they would want to fall into the pit of death {19}

CONTEXT: these two will be treated conjointly. EGBO, Adaku's husband is wondering and pondering after the impending death of Obiewulu, his second son. In a dispirited situation, he couldn't find an answer to what is happening to him and his family. Losing another child after the two years of losing the first one is not a child's play. He is still wondering where the problem could be coming from. Yes he sees Amobe just as an agent but definitely not the root cause of this mishap. Egbo's thought:

The thought of having another dead child in two years set his body on pampitation, and to imagine that he had taken much trouble to ward off this calamity: at least he could not be blamed, neither would any. His wife? No one would have Adaku to carry her child with one hand and attend to her chores with the other. He did not know what he was doing sending for Amoge...

But there could have been another angle to the problem! He could have for instance, bought a dog which played with his child while Adaku was engaged in other things. He blamed himself for not having thought of that earlier. But of course the death that would rid the puppy of its life

will not allow it to perceive the smell of excrement, for the gods rub soot into the eyes of the man they would want to fall into the pit of death...but even if such a dog had been bought, who was sure that it would have stayed with Obiewulu. And worst still would such a dog not one day have gone mad and bitten the child to death? It might even be that things have been destined that way, so that as the man pulled forward by his genitals, he had to follow his tormentors..19/20.

This very long quotation is meant to express what Egbo has in mind, who to and who not to blame for the calamity that befell him. Should he blame Amoge whom he called "*the devils own child*", his wife Adaku or even himself for failing to buy a dog in place of Amoge. The dog would have been playing with the child while Adaku did the house chores. In spite of all these, he returns his chi seeing himself as the little puppy that has been destined to die, death would not allow him {the puppy} to perceive the smell of excrement. A similar proverb is the one that says that when death wants to kill a man it first of all makes him deaf, his ears get blocked. So, that death that wanted to kill him removed his thinking cap, first so that he would not think of getting a dog in place of Amoge. It is a known thing that the local dog fancies feeding on excrement. It is a delicacy to the dog and anything that takes the smell of excrement from the dog must be a serious one. He sees the situation as being orchestrated by the gods, hence they rub soot into his eyes so that he would fall into the pit of death. Since that is already their desire for him. This is clearly stated in his thought when he expressed the thought that the dog if he had bought one would have possibly become mad one day and bite the child to death. So, to him, might be that things had been destined that way. This is another proverb of helplessness where an individual has to abandon himself to fate since he has no capacity, like Okonkwo of *things fall apart* to fight his destiny nor change it.

We shall consider yet another example:

Surely the presence of the mother hen scares away from her eggs the dog with the itching mouth {20}

CONTEXT: no proverb without a message the question is how the message is carried it is a normal thing for people to have guardian angels. There are usual small gods or deity that people get initiated into mostly for protection. A saying goes that "*there is no vacuum in space*". No body sits on the fence; there must be something that he/she is looking up to for protection. Another thing is the presence of death ancestors. Africans don't believe in total death only transition. So, the dead ancestors are not termed dead per se; they are alive even when dead. They have to keep an eye on the living, protecting and shielding them from various evils so, Egbo believes that the watchful eye of his ancestors and the Nkpiririka god, with whom he established spiritual ties even before he was born would not allow him to continue suffering. They are the mother hen to him whose presence scares away from her eggs {himself}, the dogs {devastating attackers} with the itching mouth. He believes also that his personal gods and that of his wife would forbid every misfortune trailing their part. Hear him:

No, he thought his dead ancestors and the Nkpiririka god with whom he establishes spiritual ties before he was born would not allow him to continue to suffer this way. Surely, the presence of the mother hen scare away from her eggs the dogs with itching mouth. Moreover his personal god and that of his wife would forbid misfortune trailing their path. Afterward ones personal gods was supposed to fight for his personal welfare {20}.

With this proverb the reader can come to the realization that the eyes of his ancestors are glaringly watching him or her to ward off any intruding evil that may face him/her. he/she is not alone and should not behave as if he/she were an orphan.

The next proverb is :

An unfortunate man in the morning might become fortunate in the evening. Or does one criticize the day when the sun has not set?{21}.

CONTEXT: egbo had left his home very early to ojimma village to village aniebunwa, the great medicine man just to see if his very sick child could be healed. Amuchukwu has gone there the previous day for the same mission. He was still on his way when Amuchukwu came running after him. *Amuchukwu* began Egbo fearfully, “*it has ended?*” yes answered Amuchukwu sadly and sympathetically he died after you had left... this is the conversation between Egbo and Amuchukwu who had come to inform Egbo about Obiewulus death. Egbo shook his head miserably and followed Amuchukwu home.” *It has happened*” he thought unhappily, but am not going to cry like a woman before he thought out that proverb, he had said “*it might that things will eventually right themselves*” so, the proverb is a sign of consolation hope and expectation that the situation on ground might reverse itself the boy might come back to life, after all, an unfortunate man in the morning might become fortunate in the evening. He asked why he should criticize the day when the sun has not set. But this proverb is deeper than one could think, this could be something else that egbo has in mind before putting up this proverb, after all, he has been told about the death of the boy or child. It is possible that he is referring to his wife and himself since they are still young and may still gave birth to the one that will live. This is my thinking because I don’t know how else to explain that you don’t criticize the day when the sun has not set, when the hope of resurrecting the dead child is very slim.

We will yet sample another proverb.

But perhaps, it was better she resigned herself to fate or had her father not often said that ones chi, personal god, set the pace and one merely followed {29}.

CONTEXT: this concerns Adaku bemoaning her fate and misfortune. The series of calamity flowing to her direction are becoming enormous and unbearable. what had she done that could not be forgiven her. Is she the only person that must have committed such offense. while should the gods line up tragedies for her. this concern is not for Egbo, Adakus husband alone. just that each person has time to be brood over his or her fate. It is Adakus thought. This particular one is after the death of Obiewulu. Adaku is grossly troubled and had even which to die but death has refused to come . Adaku, in this instance has abandon herself to fate since it is quite obvious that she cannot decide for her personal gods who had already set the pace and she has no option than to follow it. It is quite painful but she cant say no. her thought

she had not gone into an unduly preoccupation in bemoaning the internal blows dealt her by the cruel hands of fate... but the thought of her child who had so remorselessly been removed from and Amoge who had been consigned to thralldom was more than she could bear, her life had become a torturous one and she doubted if she was going to live it out. She had on times without numbers attempted bringing her miserable life into a merciful end, but it was useless. She had even sent silent prayers to the gods beseeching them to take her life but her prayers had remained unanswered perhaps the gods were not eager to welcome her to their domain. She was having more than her fair share of the world troubles{29}.

The above and more explained the place of the proverbs in question since Adakus destiny is not determined by her, she has to take whatever she get it could not be otherwise or she would ruin her life to death!

The one that closely looks like the above is :

...it was useless behaving erratically in her grave, for if the ikoro is to be each time the lizard fell then every village square would be replete with broken ikoro {29}

CONTEXT: Adaku is passing through tragic situations to the point that she had desired to die severally but death could not come. So a suggestion was that she should resign herself to fate because what she is going through may not be in a haste to release her . so, she should just wait for even worst fate and calamities. She should prepare her mind for such since it seems as if her personal gods is involved; as such, this may be a life lasting thing. So the proverb is advising that she should not keep brooding over every mishap that comes her way because she would get fed up with mishap she is just at the starting point.

Conclusion

Discussing proverb as a theme in African literature is inexhaustible. Each writer or problem user can only manage as he has the ability. Proverb is like a big river which cannot be exhausted. Writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Wole Soyinka, Akachi Adimora Ezigbo, Chinua Achebe and a host of other African writers have done wonderfully well as far as African proverb usage is concerned. The author of the *riddle for the gods* has played his own role too, but these are still many rivers to cross. The importance, relevance and functionality of African proverb are like the word of God which is new every morning. Some African writers has tried not to use African proverbs and the beauty in the proverbs are lacking in the works. Avoiding African proverbs in the writing of African is like cooking without salt. Obviously, it is a true idea that proverbs helps African writers to create a genuine African side of the story and project their rich cultural heritage to the fore counts of the Europeans who once acted as lords over African culture and presented a distorted and bias view of African as people without culture at least a culture worth extolling and critically attention. Proverb does more than is mentioned here and that is the reason behind this paper which studied the use proverb in Ephraim Eze Okwors *A riddle for the gods* the paper pointed out that proverbs in the text were not just used for fun of it. Not just to recreate a believable and genuine African story but to exhibit the medium through which the proverbs were used to be able to pass the targeted message to the targeted audience. To show how the proverbs were presented and how the oral blended with the written medium to communicate efficiently. A study of this novel has shown successfully the writer is integrating proverbs in his novel just like Achebe.

A reader who is not acquitted with Igbo culture will be enriched after reading the novel used in this research. This is clear because of the way the author arranged the history, culture and tradition of the Obiagu people of Ishielu local govt area of Ebonyi state.

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