Vol. 1, No. 2; December (2025)
E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

The Palm-Oil with which Words are Eaten: Proverb as Facilitator and Propelling Incentive in Ephraim Eze Okwor's *A Riddle For The Gods*

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Abstract
In his book *The Medium is the Message*, Marshal McLuhan says that no single message is as important as the medium through which it is conveyed. Understanding a message is dependent on the manner, approach and how the message is disseminated. By this, the medium is the *sine qua non* of any communication. Based on the above understanding, this study examines how the author of *A Riddle for the God*s, Ephraim Eze Okwor, used proverb as facilitator and propelling incentive in narrating his story. The paper carries out an evaluation of the proverbs in use. African folklore, according to Asika (2009), has become part of what African literary artists weave in their works in order to give it a true touch of beauty and glamour. Building on the above premise, the paper analyzes the proverb as a means of communication. Proverb in this instance is not just a medium through which believable African stories are told in respectable manner but serves as facilitator and propelling incentive that the narration of a good and interesting story.
Keywords: Facilitator, incentive, riddle, proverb, folklore.

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E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

Introduction

The proverb is like a thick forest of meanings. It is difficult to specifically pin-point any definite meaning to it. This is the reason behind the many approaches to its definition. Ernest 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 Oko observes that proverbs occupy a commanding position in the rhetorical arsenal of African cultures. He further asserts 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 allusive and epigrammatically codified. Proverbs are no doubt, very important to every African writer and no writer writes in a vacuum and no work of art exists significantly in isolation of the society. In a bid to recreate a familiar and believable story or account for a given set of people, many African writers look inwards, deep into the oral traditions of the people which signifies the people's deep -rooted contact with art, culture and literature peculiar to them.

Overtime, this oral tradition serves as a means of showcasing their individual uniqueness, common goals, perception, way and outlook to life. Having this in mind, it is the responsibility of each writer to reflect these socio-cultural realities of his people not just for posterity sake, nor for the fact that it makes the writing truer to life and authentic but because the written work produced by the writer, becomes part of the larger society. 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. Proverbs play important roles in the lives of characters not just in literary works but in the larger society as George Onwudiwe 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 (Qtd. in Asika, 2012: 159).

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 Okwor under study.

The average Igbo society places much relevance on 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. They use it to heighten the suspense in their narratives. 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

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E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

> 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 understands 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.

Emenyonu is of the view 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. Proverb is the fabric 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 hearts. African literary artists often resort to the use of proverbs because of their capacity of distinguishing particular aspects of life experience and transmit truth and thus shape reality. No wonder Chinua Achebe gives a clarion call that children should be saved 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," Achebe is quoted to have advised African writers of children's books to exploit the infinite treasure of African Oral tradition. (Qtd. In Chakava, 1998: 1).

Wolfgang Mieder proposes the following definition for a proverb. To him, "a proverb is a short generally known thought, moral and traditional view in a metaphorical fixed and memorizable form and which is handed from generation to generation". (33) F.B.O. Akporobaro views proverb as a short popular saying of unknown authorship expressing general truth or superstition (55). J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada's thought strikes on the aesthetic principles of proverb in Igbo cultures, which he views as being the first and foremost speech ornaments. He defines Igbo proverb as: 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 states:

> 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). He equally cited Allan Dundes' observation on the 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 articulated it 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 bring them about. In the words of Nwachukwu Agbada "Proverbs serve no real purpose outside situations of speech-making. There is an automatic association between proverb utterance and circumstance of usage (33).

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For Archer Taylor, proverb has no succinct definition. So, he observes that 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" (9). This also agrees with Nkem Okoh's submission that, "proverbs essentially reflect the realities of the society that coins them. (124). Trahlad distinguishes proverbs from some other closely related types of sayings. He says that 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 (Quoted. In Igboke, 2015: 25).

These and more are among the several approaches and definitions of proverb by various scholars and critics. 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 and various writers have found proverbs as veritable tools to do a lot of things in their writings. These include justification of the actions of characters, critiquing bad ethical and immoral behaviours while advocating for right morals and virtues. Through proverbs, writers also express the wealth of philosophy, wisdom and perception of life as they affect and control their community.

Many African writers have used proverbs judiciously in their works. Examples of such writers include Flora Nwapa, Onuora Nzekwu, Elechi Amachi, Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, among others. Acknowledging the use of proverbs in Achebe' s works as well as those of some other Igbo writers, Rems Umeasiegbu states 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).

Achebe did a great job in projecting the Igbo cultural tradition through 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 creates certain areas and manifestations that made a particular set of people, his community great and distinguished from all others. He brings out a formidable documentation of vital moments and aspects of his culture in transition. With this, the generation yet unborn, in his community, will have a reason to thank him. 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. 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 discussed in details.

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E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

Proverb as 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 sets out to use proverbs in his novel. The proverbs he used are targeted at making communication easier. They are used as medium or instruments of communication. *Merrian Webster Dictionary* defines Medium 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 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, one's 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 the 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 through the process of feedback, which makes the sender know that he or she has not only got the message but understands it. This is when communication is said to have taken 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 feels like sending back a response. A message may be meaningful or meaningless depending on how it is sent; its medium and channel of transmission. This is 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 is like a square peg in a square hole and that is why they are able to communicate effectively.

A user of proverb who does that out of context is not only confusing his audience, but is making them to lose interest. Soit is the duty of the writer to ensure a proper coordination, arrangement and planning to be able to sustain the interest of his reading public. Ephraim Eze Okwor takes all these into consideration in writing *A Riddle for the Gods* so we would now explain how he uses proverb as a medium of effective communication in his novel. To do this, we would select a proverb and analyse it in line with the context in which they are used.

"It is unnecessary restraining a pregnant woman from keeping her legs ajar when she is destined to give birth to her child in the market place". (30)

Context: To understand this proverb very well one needs to read a little before and after it in the novel. With that, one would learn what led to the statement. Obiewulu, Adaku's second son is dead. Adaku thus,feels like stopping to see her husband. To her, there is no need for that since

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the baby that might come as a result of their being together may still die as the first and second have done. The author describes the situation thus:

> Not long after the death of Obiewulu, Adaku once viewed the favours of the gods with increasing dubiety. It was as if the gift of the gods were the type some mischievous elders gave to children. They lured them to their sides with such gifts and then flogged them senselessly. She no more cared for such gifts. She did not care anymore whether she got a child or not, and so, in spite of her pregnancy, she laboured in the farm as any energetic woman unburdened with her condition would. At times, Egbo would openly express his disapproval; "Adaku, I hope you remember that you are no longer one, or do you want to kill this one with your own hands?"

To this, Adaku retorted, "Do you want me to leave my work and starve for a child who would only come to renew my sorrow. No, my husband". This is a typical mark of hopelessness implying there is no need restraining a pregnant woman from keeping her legs ajar when she is destined to give birth to a child who will not survive, so, why would she allow the pregnancy to cost her, her job. This proverb came as a result of the experiences Adaku has had before. Had her children lived, she would have been more careful and mindful of the one in her womb at that moment.

The next proverb is on page 31

*"…She must realize that she could not burn her house because of the disturbances of rats"***.**

Context: After giving birth consistently to still-borns, Adaku decides not to meet with her husband again on anything involving conjugal relationship. Since none of the children lives, it is of no use to keep making babies that will not survive, she reasoned. Her husband, Egbo would not agree with this idea, so tries to do everything possible to see that he does not die a childless man. If his dream must come true, Adaku has to accept not to give-up her conjugal rights with her husband. She must come to bed with him. So, since it is becoming very difficult to persuade Adaku to submit, Egbo has to think of anything possible to make her submit. This is pertinent because she must be made to realise that she could not burn her house because of the disturbances of rats. If people begin to avoid what they should do because of the experiences they had before, then nothing would be achieved because he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day. A quitter never wins and a winner never quits.

Below is another proverb:

"She has made the mistake of fetching the type of firewood which people said would smile but not laugh" (46).

Context: This proverb is metaphorical. It is actually a personification. How can firewood smile or even laugh? Yet the fire Adaku was trying to ignite refuses to catch-up in spite of all the efforts she applied. Her efforts to have children who remained alive have always ended up in fiasco. It is this situation that warranted this statement/proverb. Having children is likened to making a fire. The firewood look dry and combustible but when they are finally put on fire, they refuse to catch fire; " they smile but do not laugh", This simply points to the fact that what Adaku has expected from the firewood that she fetched is not what she is seeing, thus, indicating a kind of total disappointment.

The next proverb is **"***You must remember that a rat that made its gateway in the village square faces imminent death" (55)*

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Context: In this proverb, Adaku is compared to a rat that has made its gateway into the village square which certainly would not escape being killed. This is on the basis of what Obiajulu sees as neglect of the only surviving boy, Obiechina. She is of the opinion that Adaku should minimize her stay in the farm to enable her take good care of the boy who is only left to the care for Onyenachi, the dog. The dog cannot bathe or suckle the child; so, Obiajulu does not see the reason why Adaku should take the issue of taking care of the child for granted. Another reason that prompted Obiajulu's proverb is that Egbo, Adaku's husband is late and it is not out of place to see the little Obiechina as the only thing still keeping Adaku's stay in Egbo's family, alive. So, if Adaku decides to maltreat the only son that gives her a right to stay in the family, she should get ready to face the negative outcome that the child's eventual death would generate. As the rat chooses to make her gateway in the village square, she should be ready to face the outcome of such stupid brazen action.

This leads us to another proverb that is used in the novel. It goes thus:

"I have been telling you this because if the fly is not advised, it will follow the corpse into the grave". (56)

Context: The situation is still within the same discussion going on between Obiajulu and Adaku. Obiajulu is still counseling Adaku to apply a little caution in the way that she works and the way that she also fails in taking good care of Obiechina. Obiajulu who has been Adaku's childhood friend has to talk to her as a good friend. She concludes her advice with this proverb hoping that her friend would listen and make good use of it.

In the proverb, Adaku is still likened to the stubborn fly that may join the corpse to the grave for failing to heed to good advice. By this, Obiajulu plays the role of the elder who must advise Adaku to restrain her from following the corpse to the grave.

Below is another proverb.

"No, not ever", he had vowed. "The buttocks learn wisdom from the sting of the agbusi ant" (59)

Context: To explain the above, it is important to take a deep look into an excerpt from the text, *A Riddle for the Gods* where the statement is made.

Udo was the elder brother of Adaku's mother. In fact, it was in his household that Adaku grew up and she only left his homestead when she married Egbo. Udo was a prosperous man and he was also generous. He had a large family, four wives and many children. Amoge was his last child.

Since the incident involving Amoge, Udo had become a shadow of a man. He had become devastatingly subjected to the hallow feeling of one who had been sapped of the very water of life. He became apathetic and went about his work without interest or desire. And he never ceased to rue the day he sent Amoge to Enyiduru to look after Adaku's child. He had resolved that he was never going to be troubled again with Adaku's affairs. *"No, not ever"…. "The buttocks learn from the sting of the agbusi ant" (59)*

The passage above says a lot about the proverb. Amoge, the last child of Udo who was given to Adaku to help her nurse her children, was maltreated and declared an osu by Amanuke, the family of Adaku's husband and the community in general. Since then, Udo became the ghost of his real self. When he sent Amoge to help Adaku, he did it in a good faith, just to help his young niece. Now, Adaku needs another help. Can he be of any use to render a helping hand again when the one done to her before had rather brought shame and disgrace to his entire life.

E-ISSN:3121-8539
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Egbo, Adaku's husband has been dead for over two years. He met his untimely and tragic end in the bush while going to check his traps. The custom of the people demands that any woman whose husband is late should be remarried by any chosen relative of the dead man. But here is Adaku staying this long without anybody saying anything about her. It was Chigbolu, Udo's younger brother that brought up this matter. Under normal circumstances, he shouldn't be the one to do so. It was Udo who is now afraid of what might befall him if he should render another helping hand to Adaku since the help he rendered earlier did not turn out well. It was this explanation that Udo thought about and ended up with the proverb – *"the buttocks learn wisdom from the sting of the agbusi ant".* He is not in a hurry to offer any kind of assistance to Adaku.

The next proverb goes thus:

"…but one could not outrun the wind of destiny. It caught you when you thought safest" (60).

Context: This still dwells on Amoge's situation. Her father, Udo had reminisced that even if the little Amoge had stayed in his house and not that of Adaku, that the wind might still have blown her to thralldom no matter where and how she stayed. The man is actually disturbed, not knowing whom to blame. His thought is that what befell Amoge should have been as a result of her destiny because destiny is hardly changed. On this premise, the writer gives the example of a farmer who was told by a diviner that he would be killed by a buffalo. On hearing this, his sons decided to stop him from going to farm. It happened one day that the man was sleeping in his hut only for a buffalo skull which was hung on the roof of the house to fall on him with the horn piercing into his forehead. He later died as a result of some complications from the accident. The man's efforts to protect himself from the adumbrations of the diviner do not work. This explains the proverb that one could not outrun the wind of destiny. It catches up with him when he thinks he is fortified; when he thinks himself safest.

A follow-up to the one above is another proverb that says something about the pronouncement of the gods. Nobody, has any right to counter it. This means that if the gods of the land have destined Amoge to go the way she has gone, no one can query them. The people used to accomplish it are just agents who facilitated the action.

The proverb says:

"The laws of the gods are infrangible. The clans' people must obey the gods as their ancestors did as one could not expect to find in the kid what was not found in the mother goat" (61).

Context: The above statement as reminisced by Udo seals Amoge, her daughter's fate and relieves him of more brooding and contemplation. No need for him to keep troubling himself if the gods of the land have said that Amoge's fate has to be the way it is. The clan's people are only obeying the gods of the land as their ancestors did. The gods are the final arbiter; the ancestors represent the mother goat while the clan's people represent the kid which must follow the dictates of the ancestors

If one's god says 'yes' or 'no', it cannot be changed and if the gods have said that Amoge's matter should be as it is, no one can say otherwise. This is Ola Rotimi's position in one of his plays, *The Gods are not to Blame.* When the gods say what will happen, it surely comes to pass.

The proverb goes thus:

"The people had been right. Amoge's personal god must have willed what befall her. One did not drink water if her chi had stored her share in a basket. (61).

The fore-going makes one conclude that all human beings are just like a chalk in the hands of the creator, whatever the creator chooses to write with the chalk, it does. According to the story, if

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E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710
the gods would want half of the whole community to be declared Osu, all the clan's people can do is to only concur. So, Amoge or any other person cannot be exonerated.
The next proverb still talks about issues concerning Adaku.
"…There is no trouble, my brother, but you know that whatever made the fowl to run about in the rain must be of a great concern to her". (64)
It is linked to the next proverb which will be discussed together with the one above.
"Yes, the toad does not run in the day time for nothing". (65)
Context: In the novel, Chigbolu, Udo's younger brother and Adaku's uncle paid an early morning visit to his elder brother, Udo to discuss Adaku's predicament. It is about two years she lost her husband and she is supposed to have remarried to any of her husband, Egbo's kinsmen as custom demanded.
The two proverbs above are used to show surprise at Udo's early morning visit. However, the matter under discourse calls for such a visit. Chigbolu is the fowl that is running in the rain and Adaku's situation is what calls for a great concern, not only to him but to Udo also, who used the second proverb to respond to the one from Chigbolu, his younger brother. Chigbolu is still likened to the toad running in the day time. Yes, Adaku's case calls for it. The two men ironed out the matter and concluded that they would speak to the Amanuke's family concerning their sister's case.

The next proverb goes thus:
"…a child's fingers are not scalded by the piece of hot yam it received from its mother" (77)
Context: Mothers are more experienced than their children and do guide them by giving them some assignments that may appear large and difficult to handle. This is not to punish but train them to accept and assume responsibilities. The presenter of the proverb here represents children while the gods or spirit of the ancestors that are being invoked or addressed represent the mother. The presenter of this proverb is in fact, the oldest man in the whole of Amakekwu and he is highly respected. He knows that the case at hand is not what can be handled with kid's glove. Adaku's case needs serious care, wit and spiritual intervention.
Another proverb the author uses in the novel goes thus:
Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch. The one that says the other should not perch, let its wing break. For he who hides his life and goes after those of others should not need protection of the gods (78).
Context: Egwudike (Ikeagwu) of Amakekwu clan is praying, invoking the gods and requesting what he would want to come to his people, He is asking for his people to accommodate and tolerate one another. The kite and eagle are species of birds and when there is a common understanding between them, they will live together without quarrels. If there is tolerance nobody will look for anything that will not favour the other. Even when there is any form of misunderstanding, it will be resolved amicably. When this common understanding is in place everyone will seek not only his welfare but for that of others.
As he prays, he still added another proverb. *"I am an ignorant child who only baths his abdomen" (78).* As he rightly puts it, it takes ignorance and immaturity to do things childishly. A mature and a man of knowledge cannot bath only his abdomen. He shows his humility before the gods of the land to assert that he is still an ignorant child who baths only his abdomen, before the gods irrespective of his old age. Desperate calls call for desperate remedy; delicate issues require delicate appeal. This, exactly is why the old man made all this long prayer before he could

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ISSN:3121-7710
introduce the delicate issue for discussion. The issue is the matter concerning Adaku and her refusal to remarry as the custom demanded. As an old man whose wealth of knowledge of proverbs is immeasurable, he adds yet other proverbs:

"When a kite hovers in the sky, it means that somewhere, a bush is burning. So it is with the dog, he runs without turning back when there is a call for a meal. That is why our elders say that when an owl hoots mournfully, then somewhere, a great man lies dying". (79)

Context: In line with the topic of this study which is "Medium as the Message: Proverb as a Medium of Communication". the proverbs above have a lot of meaning to convey. To start with, kites and burning bushes have things in common. When bushes are burned some animals, rodents, grasshoppers and even snakes that have been taking cover under those bushes try to escape. With this, the kite which hovers around can luckily prey on some of them. So, this is one of the reasons the kites hovers around burning bushes. The same way the kite values a burning bush is the way a dog values its meal and does not turn back whenever called for a meal. Just like we saw in the two proverbs above, a follow-up is the one that talks about the mournful hooting of the owl which inevitably signifies the death of a great man, things do not just happen. Something must cause something else to happen. All the above are pointers to the weight of the issue that the man intends to discuss.

Conclusion

Discussing proverb as a medium of communication in African literature is an engaging and inexhaustible topic. Each writer or proverb user can only manage the few proverbs that are within his command. The author of A *Riddle for the Gods* has played his own role by creatively using proverbs to clearly express the thoughts he has in the novel. The importance, relevance and functionality of African proverb cannot be overemphasized for avoiding the use of proverbs in the writing of African Literature is like cooking without salt. Obviously, it is a true idea that proverbs help African writers to create a genuine African side of the story and project their rich cultural heritage. A reader who is not acquainted with Igbo culture will be enriched after reading Ephraim Eze Okwor's *A Riddle for the Gods*. This is evidenced in the way the writer manipulated proverbs to achieve great artistic effects in the novel. This is clearly observed in the way the author portrayed the history, culture and tradition of the Obeagu people of Ebonyi State, Southeastern Nigeria, in the novel. From the fore-going, one can observe that proverbs in the works of some African writers do not occur by accident but are part of the writer's conscious effort to clothe the story with the realities of the oral tradition of their people and create a believable realistic story of the community that the writer writes about.

E-ISSN:3121-8539
ISSN:3121-7710

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