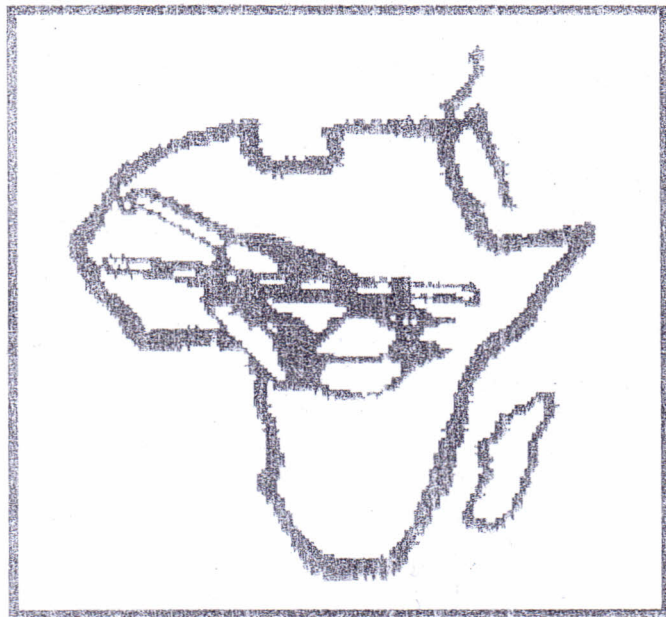


ABIBISEM

JOURNAL OF AFRICAN CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION

*A Publication of the Department of History
University of Cape Coast, Ghana*



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CONTRIBUTORS

1. Albert Oikelome is of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Nigeria
2. Yasu'o Mizobe is of the School of Global Japanese Studies, Meiji University, Tokyo, Japan
3. David Imbua is of the History & International Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria
4. Richard Cudjoe is of Department of Classics and Philosophy, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
5. David Aworawo is of the Department of History, University of Lagos, Nigeria
6. K. Adu-Boahen is of the Department of History, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
7. Sheriff Folarin is of the Department of International Relations and Strategic Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State of Nigeria
8. Felicia Ohwovoriole is of the Department of English, University of Lagos, Nigeria

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GOODWILL MESSAGE

It is a great pleasure for me to send this goodwill message to the Editorial Board of the *ABIBISEM* in particular and to the members of academic staff of the Department of History of our University in general for this noble achievement.

I am particularly happy to do this because the maiden edition of this journal – *ABIBISEM* is coming up at this time in the history of our University, when efforts are being made to consolidate scholarship in the university. It is worthy of note that the department is putting up its journal for the first time since it came into existence. I therefore congratulate the members of staff of the department as well as members of the Editorial Board for their relentless effort in ensuring the birth of this journal – *ABIBISEM*. I have no doubt that the journal will be of immense value to both staff and students of tertiary institutions all over the world.

Please accept my hearty congratulations and my sincere best wishes for the sustenance of the journal.

Prof Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang
Vice Chancellor
University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Laudation in Mournful Observance

Ohwovoriole, Felicia

Abstract

This study examines eulogistic aspects of dirges of the Urhobo. The people are found in Niger Delta Province of Nigeria. The praise poem is well developed among many African societies unlike in Urhobo where it is not notably developed. However, it appears to be evolved alongside funeral ceremonies. Eulogy is performed to extol the heroic or noble deeds of a deceased. It deals with his or her outstanding characteristics. It is not only a catalogue of conventional attributes; it gives an insight into the social cultural experiences of the community of the subject. Through its constituent elements the praise poem fuses imaginative inventiveness with historicity. In various guises eulogy has no rigid metrical scheme but it has a poetical language organised so as to create impressions and fulfil functions of poetic rhythm. Urhobo dirges, as shown in this study concentrate more on the complimentary elements of oral poetry. The theoretical framework of this study hinges on the sociology of art forms as developed by Malinowski who articulates a socio-functionalist view of oral literary forms. He stresses that literary creations are not entirely for pure aesthetic entertainment; rather they have a great role in the social organization and style of the people.

Introduction

Eulogy or poem in praise of the dead may also apply to the living. It is given in recognition of the subject's outstanding or estimable characteristics. The most prominent citizens in a community acquire the largest collections of epithets. These epithets allude, often in condensed, witty and oblique style, to the subject's achievements, sayings or qualities. (Karen Barber 1991:13) Eulogy is not only a catalogue of conventional attributes; it also aims at giving an assessment of the subject that is consistent with reality. Unfavourable physical qualities that a deceased had are not attributed to him and these are overlooked, for the praise poem is biased towards praise. For example, no praise chanter would ever compose on the blindness of a man rather his gait and height will be used to compose his praise poem. If what made a deceased formidable is his violence, greed or intemperance, these qualities will feature prominently in his acclamation. But even these insulting epithets are regarded as marks of distinction and a source of pride. Writing about oriki Ulli Beier (1966:14) says:

Oriki is a poetic phrase that is used to describe or praise a god or a person. Every Yoruba has his own oriki, which he accumulates in the course of his life. The oriki may be sung

by professional bards or played by drummers. At the entrance gate of every palace a set of drummers are placed, who announce visitors to the king by playing their oriki. A drummer must know the praise names of every family in the town. On certain feast days, they go about the streets, addressing each passer-by with his oriki. The man thus praised owes the drummers a small sum of money. The most poetic of the oriki are the oriki of the Yoruba deities, the orisha. The orisha are intermediaries between Olorun Olodumare (the supreme god) and man. The supreme God is absolute and therefore, incomprehensible, and cannot be worshiped directly. The orisha is usually an ancestor, a hero king, or the founder of a city who personifies some aspects of the diviner. Each orisha is allied to some forces of nature and uses certain colours and materials that are congenial to him.

The eulogy is like the ode in that it presents a singular subject for admiration and like an epic in that it records historical events. However, the ode inclines towards philosophical reflection and an epic purports to be "historical" records. The eulogy therefore combines some of the qualities of both the ode and the epic. Eulogy possesses the qualities that distinguish poetry from prose in that it is more evocative more emotive and more memorable. These qualities are achieved by the use of imagery reinforced by repetition. In various guises eulogy has no rigid metrical scheme but it has a poetical language organised so as to create impressions and fulfil functions of poetic rhythm, which is a free one.

Various types of repetitions abound in eulogy. There is also the use of imagery, which is descriptive and evocative in that it stimulates the imagination and stirs the emotion. Allusions are frequently expressed through similes and metaphors, allegory and parable, enigmatic sayings, proverbs and archaic words. These poetic devices lend richness to the contextual meanings of the praise poems. There is frequent reference to the ancestor of a deceased during the delivery of eulogy. These references are symbolic. Apart from personal praise the praise of the town, which the deceased comes from, is mentioned.

In traditional society, man has to struggle against forces of nature for survival. It is a heroic world of threats from warring tribes, disease, and forces of darkness. It is a world that called for bravery, combatant qualities, a world that was of constant challenge. Those who are able to overcome the challenges and live to a ripe old age are venerated. The same applies to individuals who through valour are able to achieve some feats. Songs of praise are created in their honour and at death too. Expressions of praise are found all over Africa and personal or nicknames are essentially praise-

names, which are always flattering; they may be in criticism of a person or a deceased. These names may be short sentences commemorative of notable actions and events in his life. A man may receive praises from his parents and from members of his family in general as well as from his companions. The praises may be spontaneous tributes from his colleagues at social gatherings.

In some traditional societies any one who killed a lion, a leopard or a tiger is conferred with a title and praise names. Eulogy includes the whole personality of a deceased, his life, achievements, aspirations and total history. The effect which praise is said to have on the subject can be seen in Babalola(1966:27) assertion:

It is traditionally believed that the correct performance of oriki in honour of a progenitor gladdens the progenitor in the world of spirits and induces him to shower blessings on his offspring on earth. The reciting or chanting of the appropriate oriki in honour of the ancestors of a particular family causes members of that family who hear the performance to feel very proud of their pedigree, and if they are then away from home, they also feel exceedingly homesick.

Apart from being the king's counsellors, traditional chiefs as a body can influence opinion in any Nigerian clan. In many Nigerian polities, being a chief is an elitist position and such a titled person has many privileges. He is given precedence over the untitled people in public contributions. He sits in a special place during communal meetings and relinquishes his seat only to the king.

Functions of Eulogy

According to Finnegan (1970) the use of 'praise names' is nearly universal and the social functions for panegyric include publicizing new status or achievements, preserving accepted versions of history and serving as an encouragement to emulation or achievement. Eulogy makes available historical documents especially, thus serving as a source of oral tradition for the historians and for the purpose of dialectical continuity. One of the most acknowledged uses of oral literature is in recording the rules. The eulogist is usually concerned with examining the cycle of life of the deceased, which the average citizen is recognized by society to cover, as he moves from life to death. The last stage in the journey of life is death.

Amongst the Urhobo *Ovworon* or the eldest daughter of a deceased usually plays the role of the eulogist. She is duty bound to remember the father's praise names, the victories and the admirable qualities of the dead

and his ancestors. She is to recite these in lengthy high-sounding verse on funeral occasions:

Ekuerharen

Olorogun
Ikebe r'ide
Erharen r'ogboro j'ola
Omo r'oklpl r'ogbor obevewen
Erharen r'ogbo'ovwiere
Erharen r'ogbor'ame

The Devouring Fire

Great chief
Large hips
Fire that consumes yet illuminates
Son of Okpole that tames poverty
Fire that devours hunger
Fire that consumes laziness
Fire that consumes water

A eulogist has scope to recast her words, recombine them and add new words by borrowing from other people's praises and adapting them and sometimes composing fresh ones. The Urhobo adulator is similar to the South Africa *Imbongi*. Nelson Mabuna (C. Sanders and M. Damane 1974:8-9) describes the praise composition as inspirational:

Some people think perhaps an Imbongi sits down and studies. That is not the thing: its an inspiration. When you see something, you know it is like a preacher in the church when he preaches the gospel, you feel touched, then you feel like saying some words yourself you know that's an inspiration. It's nothing else and it can be nothing else. You can judge a recitation done by school. I mean by a school child. Something that he has learnt and he'll recite. But singing, you know, praise for a chief or anything it's an inspiration.

It could be argued that the real composers of eulogy cannot be established, for as soon as the poems are composed they become the property of the whole community. The same piece of composition can assume various forms and contents as it travels from mouth to mouth. This perhaps gives room for improvisation and creativity. On composition, T.P.Coffin (1950:3) writes:

Any composition travelling from mouth to mouth, from generation to generation, from country to country is bound to suffer from certain amount of verbal corruption and degeneration.

It cannot be said that a rigid linear path is followed in composition. The reason for this is due to human memory and the variations in performance, the occasion, the poor memory and other human errors that may set in. Individual praise poetry is often composed on the spur-of-the-moment. The reciter has to follow her intuition in eulogising the deceased. She has to do this by following a standard she has imbibed from other eulogists. M. Parry (1953:3) on composition of the heroic poetry amongst the Serb Croatian states that:

In composing, the poet will do no more than put together for his needs phrases which he has often heard or used himself and which, grouping themselves in accordance with a fixed pattern of thought, come naturally to make the sentence and the verse.

The composer does not operate as a modern day creative writer. She rather relies on the existing materials, what she heard others say before her. While improvisation is possible for the composition of individual praise poems the same cannot be said in lineage praise poem. Working amongst the Somalian, Andrzejewski and Lewis (1964:45-46) remark:

They (the poets) learn long poems by heart and some have repertoire which are too great to be exhausted even by several evening of continuous recitation. Moreover, some of them are endowed with such powers of memory that they can learn a poem by heart after hearing it only once, which is quite astonishing, even allowing for the fact that poems are chanted very slowly and important lines are sometimes repeated. The reciters are not only capable of acquiring a wide repertoire but can store it in their memories for many years sometimes for their life time.

The composition of individual eulogy is influenced by his good deeds and his achievements, which give him a respectable personality in the community. In this eulogy the deceased is seen as a generous man and an embodiment of virtue in Ughelli. Thus, the eulogist in a composition for him during his funeral eulogises:

Omo r'Ughene

Omo r'Ughene

Omo r'Oghwoghwa

Omo r'Inere
Omo r'Evwesoso
Omo r'Ahwaide
Omo r'Arhovwode
Omo r'Adague
Omo r'Useh
Oruese
Oro yan ve eheri

Offspring of Ughelli

Offspring of Ughene
Offspring of Oghwoghwa
Offspring of Inere
Offspring of Evwesoso
Offspring of Ahwaide
Offspring of Arhovwode
Offspring of Adague
Offspring of Useh
The generous one
He that walks regally

Also in another eulogy the reciter has this to verbalize:

Odeghe

Odeghe
Olorogun
Abovworovworo
Odjudju k'opia
Abo r'oghwefe
Ore vwiere v'agbara r'oro
Eter'ivwovwo
Aro r'onie iviee
Eni r'oyan v'eheri
Oma ghwo ghwo
Or'vwire avwo ga

Odeghe

Odeghe
Great chief
Velvety hands
Hands that yield wealth
One born with a golden stool
Sea that cannot be impeded

Eyes that have never seen tears
Elephant that moves with dignity
Supreme body
One born to be adored

In this piece, the dint of hard work, perseverance, and a tendency to be the main source of income for colleagues and relations give Odeghe an admirable quality. He earns a number of epithets that are incorporated into this eulogy. This poem as could be seen is full of metaphors and allegory. Odeghe is not only presented as an object of admiration but also deemed to have performed useful service in providing food for members of the community, a service that truly earned him praise. In addition, he is linked to his forbears.

In the course of composition, the poet may have problem in recollecting verbatim the eulogy in her repertoire, which she or anyone else had performed in the past. In that case, she improvises and by so doing re-composes a new poem for each occasion of performance. To succeed in this area, the poet uses existing tradition and verbal elements such as stories, verbal formulae, clichés, wise sayings and proverbs to create and to express new thoughts. In some lines, a phrase is repeated twice or thrice:

Buluku

Eni r'oyan v' eheri
Eni r'oyan v' eheri
Eni r'oghwor'igo
Eni r'oghwor'igo

Buluku

Elephant that walks with dignity
Elephant that walks with dignity
Elephant that destroys farmlands
Elephant that destroys farmlands

The need by the poet for fluency and uninterrupted delivery throughout a lengthy performance makes the formulaic style both necessary and suitable. The availability of a store of ready-made diction already tailored to suit this purpose makes the composition of eulogy fresh and down to earth. By manipulating these ready-made phrases from the store of her diction and epithets, a eulogist can reconstruct a praise poem that is apt to the funeral occasion and unique to the audience. To convince others that the composition of oral poetry is not memorised, A.B. Lord (1970:56) affirms:

Since...he (the poet) has not memorised his song we must conclude either that he is a phenomenal virtuoso or that he has a special technique of composition outside our own field of experience...the answer of course lies in ...the special technique of composition which makes rapid composing in performance possible.

These formulaic phrases are always repeated as other reciters use them regularly. Thus it is possible for a eulogist to compose during performance through her reliance on old styles and themes. The eulogist cannot be said to be "merely juggling with set phrases" as she is not bound to them; she merely employs them because they are useful and serve the needs of the moment. She is free to adjust them when she wishes, ensuring that no two performances are the same.

Form and Performance

Performance creates the proper mood or imaginary backdrop against which a particular eulogy is recited, sung, chanted or mimed. Drumming or blowing of the trumpet is sometimes used as an accompaniment to the chanting of praise. Dancing is not expected to take place during recitation. There is an appropriate time for audience to interject. Cook (1956:5) describes the recitation of Swazi praise poems in South Africa (*Izibongo*) thus:

The praise were not recited in an ordinary voice but were called out at the top of their voice in as rapid a manner as possible indeed, so rapidly are these *Izibongo* called out that from habit those who know them are unable to say them slowly and to write them down entails countless repetitions. Anyone who is not thoroughly familiar with an *Izibongo* cannot possibly understand it the first time he hears it.

There is a whole range of difference in the manner of composition and the issue of performance. Paredes (1964:6) perhaps exaggerates the difference between the two when he concludes that:

Folk literature is always a vehicle for the performer who supplies a feeling of immediacy of passion and power through his own performance....In folk poetry, not only does the performer have the task of bringing the part assigned him to temporary life, but he can recreate the text at will. In the end, it is the performer who is the poet for the brief moment that he performs.

Without performance eulogy has no means of existence. Performance is mostly carried out in an open place or the funeral palour and

the sympathisers are free to leave and arrive as they please. The purpose of the performance is to present the audience with qualities to admire and there is consequently a tendency to maximize praise and minimize criticism. The eulogist may mention weaknesses that the audience can condone such as high handedness, obstinacy, but otherwise she overlooks faults.

Rycroft in his study of Zulu eulogistic recitation observes that the significant tones, normally difficult to discern because of the overlay of down drift intonation, are clearly discernible in praise-poem recitation when this down drift intonation is eliminated. Cook (1956:5) In the eulogy for a deceased the *Iyasere* of Ughelli is extolled:

Iyasere

Iyasere mi yeruwe
Orovwo kpayen ovie
Amakri, amakri
Atane k'erue
Oro ru'iruo omose ghen'ota
Avwe Olorogun muen ghen nuwee
Erin vuovo r'oghwo
Or'osuen Ehovworen

Iyasere

Iyasere I salute
Second in rank to the king
Amakri Amakri
One who always keeps a pledge
He who obeys without complaints
None is made a chief without you
The only fish in a pot of soup
Presenter of chiefs

Lines 6 and 8 of the above eulogy are allusions to the roles played by an *Iyasere*. The contents of this performance are in support of Eileen Kriege's (1950:11) view that:

Praises are an important instrument in the educational system. Not only do they act as incentive to and reward for socially approved actions, but their recital is a reminder to all present what qualities and conduct are considered praise worthy.

The recitation of the genealogy of past kings during the funeral of a deceased king educates all those present during the funeral ceremony on the background of the kings. The genealogy of the kings of Ughelli clan is

traceable to the founder of the clan and thence to their ancestor *Ohwohwa*. During royal funeral ceremonies, an example of such genealogy chanted by the clan historian is shown in the recital on Ejenavi that traces roots to over ten generations:

Ese r'Ejenavi

Ajuwe Ahwaide vwie Arhovwode
Ajuwe Arhovwode vwie Adague
Ajuwe Adague vwie Useh
Ajuwe Useh vwie Akporoba
Ajuwe Akporoba vwie Esejuvwevwo
Ajuwe Esejuvwevwo vwie Oghoghovwe
Ajuwe Oghoghovwe vwie Idjesa
Ajuwe Idjesa vwie Oharisi
Ajuwe Oharisi vwie Okogbe
Ajuwe Okogbe vwie Ejenavi
Ubiaro r'ese r'avware nune
Yer'ese emo ide

Ejenavi's Ancestry

King Ahwaide brought forth Arhovwode
King Arhovwode brought forth Adague
King Adague brought forth Useh
King Useh brought forth Akporoba
King Akporoba brought forth Esejuvwevwo
King Esejuvwevwo brought forth Oghoghovwe
King Oghoghovwe brought forth Idjesa
King Idjesa brought forth Oharisi
King Idjesa brought forth Okogbe
King Okogbe brought forth Ejenavi
The eye of our ancestors
Salute our ancestor

Again, musical as well as verbal elements play a part in the performance of eulogies. In many African societies, there are minstrels who recount the deeds of past kings whenever the living king appears in public. There are also royal horn blowers specially appointed as part of the ruler's formal entourage.

During a Chief's funeral occasion, these horn blowers provide notes of the horn (usually an elephant's tusk) which can be heard as actual words, praising the deceased chief and his predecessors and commemorating the glorious victories of the past. Such performances are an essential part of the funeral process and in between the blowing of the horn the performer may

also verbalize laudatory remarks about the deceased's ancestry, prosperity, generosity, courage, kindness and political influence. This aspect of Urhobo dirge, it should be emphasised, concentrates more on the complimentary elements of oral poetry. Praise names often form the basis of eulogy. The physical characteristics used in praising the deceased are those, which distinguish him from other people epitomised in 'Soft Hands':

Abovworovworo

Omo r'ovie Ughene
Abovworovworo
Abo roghw' efe
Omo re Akporoba
Omo re Adague
Ore vwiere ve agbara r'oro
Eter'ivwovwo
Aro ro nie viee
Eni ro yan ve eheri
Oma ghwo ghwo
Mi ye ru we

Soft Hands

Great prince of Ughelli
Soft hands
Hands that yield wealth
Offspring of Akporoba
Offspring of Adague
One born with a golden stool
Sea that cannot be impeded
Eyes that have never seen tears
Elephant that moves with dignity
Body full of life
I greet you

The deceased is often traced to his kin who were renowned for certain qualities and admonitory or entreative statements may be addressed to him. A eulogist is expected to have an excellent memory, for she has to memorize the praises of her late father, the praises of all his ancestors as well so that during the lying in state of the deceased, she recites the praises in a continuous stream. References are often made to historical or mythological events. In spite of the hyperbolic descriptions in Urhobo eulogy, realism is achieved through the shared literary imaginativeness that shapes the praise.

Eulogy possesses the qualities that distinguish poetry from praise in all literatures. Poetry has a greater richness and a greater concentration. It is more evocative, more emotive and more memorable. These qualities are achieved by the use of imagery, reinforced by the preponderance of kinship terms, multiple references to the subject, fluidity of structure, and repetition in various terms, rhyme, alliteration, assonance, parallelism and so on.

Nominalizations occur in many eulogies. For example in the eulogy of Chief Feludu of Ughelli clan, we have his portrait sketched out through this device:

Okposio

Olorogun

Orovw'egba

Oruese

Oro vw'udidi

Okposio

Oro vw'emu l'emo r'Ughene

Or'asa mare chee

Oro vw'igbo r'iroba uje

Oro yan v'eheri

Torrential rain

High Chief

The mighty one

The generous one

He that is glorious

Torrential rain

He that provides food for children of Ughelli

He that cannot be toppled

Owner of twenty rubber plantations

He that walks majestically

Nominalisations contribute immensely to the characterizing praise function of eulogy because they are used in describing and defining the subject. Another feature of eulogy is the predominant use of kinship terminologies that link the subject to his relations and forbears. These terms are mostly offspring, father, grandmother, grandfather and mother.

What is important in each case is that the kinship terminologies are used to link the subject to his forbears and to things that are significant in the society. Apart from kinship terminologies, the deceased may be referred to by several different kinds of names as exemplified above.

One observes there is a phenomenon of interlacing or parenthesis that occurs when the deceased is being variously defined. It consists of the interlacing of the sentences, proverbial or idiomatic expressions, and even of nominal phrases. Allusions or oblique references are made to historical and mythological events. The details of the incidents are however omitted during delivery. The audience most probably knows omitted details and people within the culture are usually familiar with such details. Especially frequent are comparisons of the deceased person praised to an animal or series of animals as in the following in which a deceased is compared to the elephant:

Ichihin r'eni

Eee eni o o o
Eee eni o o o
Avware k'eni o o
Avware k'eni
Eee eni o o o
Eee eni o o o
Avware ke eni o o o
Ichihin r'eni be vughe
Eee eni o o o
Eee eni o o o
Ose r'avware ke eni
Eni ghworì igo
Eee eni o o o
Eee eni o o o
Ose r'avware k'ni o o
Ichirin re eni uzo da d'ame
Eee eni o o o
Eee eni o o o
Avwre k'eni
Ibaba k'eni
Eee eni o o o
Eee eni o o o

The Footmarks of the Elephant

Oh elephant
Oh elephant
We are like an elephant
We are like an elephant
Oh elephant
Oh elephant
We are like an elephant
Elephant's footmarks must be distinct

Oh elephant
 Oh elephant
 Elephant that destroys woods
 Oh elephant
 Oh elephant
 Our father is like an elephant
 The antelope drinks from the footmarks of the elephant
 Oh elephant
 Oh elephant
 We are like an elephant
 Father is like an elephant
 Oh elephant
 Oh elephant

For the deceased a lion, or an elephant may convey his strength. The actions and qualities of the deceased may be almost completely conveyed in metaphorical terms, only the animals to which the deceased is implicitly compared being depicted in action. In many African cultures, the elephant is a symbol of strength and might. It is of great social value especially its tusk that bestows honour on its possessor. Comparisons to natural phenomena are also frequent; the deceased may also be likened to a storm, a rock, a downpour of rain and so on.

Word and stanza order, is indeed sometimes varied from recitation to recitation, but stress is laid on eulogizing the deceased in accepted values and drawing mourners' attention to the deceased's achievements. This serves as an encouragement to others to emulate the deceased's achievements. Some deceased are praised with a whole string of names as in "Ariyo":

Ariyo

Ariyo amr'aghogho
Om'ovie Ajuwe
Adiohwara gbudje
Ikebe ide
Idolo roro
Uphoro r'ugo
Adjudju k'opia
Oroghw' uwevwin yan
Orie ivwrighe

Ariyo

Ariyo one sees and rejoices
 Offspring of a great king

One who dances where others toil
Soft hands
Large hips
Vast wealth
Eagle's feathers
Your fan is your cutlass
Mover of a house
Liquidator of enemies

A deceased may also be referred to by the name of his clan's symbol or other animals such as crocodile, lion or elephant. Much of the eulogy is thus built up on a sustained metaphor, almost allegorical, about the animal that represents the deceased. The inclusion of these colourful epithets adds both grandeur and imagery to the poetry.

Omiragua

Adihwara gbudje
Abovworovworo
Orovwo'su
Osio r'igbo
Uphprp r'ugo
Adjalakpo r'ode
Olorogun r'ovwe kemu kemu
Or'ovwar te out
Abo r'ophie
Oshare v'udu
Uloho
Erhre r'ola ikobi
Or'okper iraghwo t'ose t'oni
Abadi r'asa ahwaan
Ekpu r'idolo
Otota emo r'Ughene
Omiovwon v'otu r'emo
Ohore ivie je ben
Upho r'otota k'agbraran
Atan'eru
Oyibo r'avware
Oravwo ch'oja
Mi yru we, mi ye ru we

Man of Great Means

Olorogun
One that dances where others toil

Velvety hands
Possessor of osu
Showers of riches
The eagle's feather
The mighty lion
Olorogun that is all possessing
He that cares for all
Hands that have never toiled
Man of great heart
The iroko tree
Fire that rages in the farmland
Hero of both paternal and maternal lineage
The uncross able sea
Sack of money
Spokesman with a rumbling voice
One whose word is his bond
Our own imperial envoy
He that is our retaliator
I salute you, I salute you.

This eulogy has an opening and an ending. The opening addresses *Olorogun* and the middle is a series of praise epithets and the dirge ends with a salutation. To bring out the positive values of the chief, the adulator uses hyperbole and a series of similes, personification, metaphors and other images. Analogues are used which render the language poetically figurative. Here parallels are drawn between the deceased and a raging fire on one hand and a vast ocean on the other. Both are images of destruction, in this context.

Metaphors and vivid similes occur in this dirge. One of the most striking aspects of the metaphorical language is the ascription of human characteristics, thoughts and emotions to animals, birds and natural phenomena. In line 20, the deceased's voice is compared to that of rumbling thunder. In lines 6 and 7, we have the deceased is described as an eagle and a lion. Titled men wear beads as seen in line 19, and dress gorgeously when attending ceremonies or festival mainly to project their wealth. The term "yielding hands" in line 3 has to do with how easy wealth comes to the subject who seems to have the Midas touch. In line 5, the eagle's feather is an important and rare commodity just like the mighty *iroko* tree of line 12. The sack of money in line 15 refers to his immense wealth. A poor man will not have as much money. As a spokesman of his people, he had a clear and loud voice and he must have been an orator with reference to lines 16 and 18.

There are also allusions in attributive names. Many of these attributive names are compound words whose meaning may be obscure to the ordinary listener. In lines 4 to 23, we have hyperbole. Line 14 is an allusion to Chief Buluku of Oteri. He was much respected and adored by the Ughelli people. At the time of his death, he was second to the *Ovie*, and history has it that nobody could harm the *Ovie* when he was alive. An attempt to overcome his might was likened to crossing an ocean on foot, which is an impossible feat. Some eulogists in performance introduce humorous words through the use of macaronic, songs into which foreign words and expressions are introduced verse.

Nominalisations occur in great number in this dirge. These are used in describing and defining the subject. The eulogist omits the details of oblique references during performance. Comparisons of the deceased to animals are conveyed by referring to the deceased as a lion and an eagle in lines 5, 6, and 21. Comparisons to natural phenomena are also highlighted in lines 11, 12 and 18.

From the above discourse, eulogy has a rich poetic texture. It is a verbal salute to a deceased, which entails giving a character sketch of the subject. Such a recitation contains information about the physical appearance and the past deeds of the subject and one observes that though the wording of attributes differs from eulogist to eulogist, the "kernel of the subject matter" of the eulogy is the same in the repertoire of all the performers.

Note

The recitation texts used in this paper are from fieldwork done in Ughelli, Delta State of Nigeria and were originally used as part of a thesis by F. Ohwovoriele, "Urhobo Dirges: Poetic Forms and Social Functions" University of Lagos, 2004.

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