

Why I am in love with poetry:

A Speech Delivered by the Vice Chancellor of Godfrey Okoye University on the Occasion of Nigerian Students Poetry Prize Award Hosted by Godfrey Okoye University on 24 May 2018

Protocol

On behalf of the staff and students of Godfrey Okoye University, I welcome each of you to the Nigerian Students Poetry Prize Award organized by Poets in Nigeria and hosted by our beloved university, Godfrey Okoye University, popularly called God's Own University. I welcome you to a university, where the Vice Chancellor is an unabashed lover of poetry. I welcome you to the home of poetry in Nigeria. I welcome you to Godfrey Okoye University.

I have often asked myself why I love poetry more than any other colour of literary expressions. Also I have no slightest idea when I fell in love with it. All I know is that I am the product of a love affair between two fantastic lovers who got tied in a nuptial arrangement called marriage. This couple who happened to be my parents were great musicians and dancers. Poetry being the mother of music could have passed through them to me.

I love the musicality of poetry. I love its rhythm, soft and hard, slow and fast, simmering and thundering, sizzling and crackling, tapping and thudding. I love the sounds of its drums, gongs, flutes, rattles, guitars, pianos, organs, oboes, saxophones, violins, cellos, trumpets, accordions, mandolins, trombones, harps, bagpipes, bassoons and bells. I love its classical music, its rock, its blues, its jazz, its R&B and soul, its reggae, its country music. I love its lullabies and honks.

I love the smell of poetic words. I love its earthy smell like the smell of my village soil in the first rain. I love its grassy smell. I love its orange, rose, hyacinth, peppermint, hibiscus scent. I love its musty, moldy, heavy, burnt and smoky smells. I love its odour of chocolate, vanilla and almond. I love its smell of roasted yam, cashew and peanuts. I love its smells of fish and chicken barbecue. I love its biting smell of fresh pepper which my mother roasted to prepare abacha. And I have also grown even to love its nauseating lines and stench such as the smell of putrid carcass or excrement.

I love the taste of words of poetry. I love the sweetness of poetic diction. Poetic words transport you to unimaginable sweet things of the earth, wetting your tongue irresistibly. Poetic words can be very delicious. You feel like cutting them out of pages to devour them. I love most the changing tastes as you turn them with the tongue of your mind. Sometimes, you are lost in an ecstasy of indescribable sweetness. But poetic words can be bitter. They can be bitter pills too hard to swallow. Poetry does not always hide the truth in sweet capsules. It can offer the truth on a plate of unwashed bitter leaf or a cup of Swedish bitter.

I love the colours of poetic words. Poetry is indeed full of innumerable colours and indescribable colour combinations. Sometimes it splashes red on the landscape of human consciousness to reveal danger, horrors of wars and human catastrophes. Then it spreads its white arms to celebrate the purity of earthly things and human relations. You can also

see royalty majestically passing by in painted blue. Then you see fecundity celebrated in green fingers of love. And then you see the joy of yellow ravaged by impish fingers of dragons of dark natural forces. But poetic lines also reveal multiple colours and colour combinations when they catch intimacies beyond the communicative powers of unpoetic language.

I love the magic of words, the magic of poetic words. I love the sudden twists of meaning. I love the prophetic power of poetic diction. Poetry transports you to the realm of meaning where even the most ordinary word changes its appearance to unwrap a carnival of meanings. I love the ecstasy of new revelations as words emerge in a theatre of human communication dressed in dazzling fresh garments of meaning. I love the feeling of being aglow with fresh revelations of words. I love the magic of words.

I love the feel of words, their arousing caresses. Poetic words have the gentle fingers of an Italian lover. They caress every organ, visible and hidden. Sometimes they send shivers of indescribable feelings through your veins. They can soothe, agitate, nauseate, irritate or arouse.

I love the purity of poetic words. They can be very pure like new born babies. Poetic words are often conceived in a fecund mind detached from the world of banalities and trivialities. They emerge from such a mind pure and undefiled before they get soiled by sinful critics.

I love the adaptive power of words. Words are like stones rolling down the crevices of a hill and gathering sands of time in a frenzied head spin dance. Poetic words take the colours of human experience to evoke all forms of human emotions. I love the evocative power of words and their spins and adaptations. I love poetic words. I am in love with poetry.

Finally, let me thank all of you once more for coming to our university. I thank particularly the President of PIN and his team as well as members of the Local Organizing Committee led by Amaka Chime. I salute all those who promote poetry in our country. God bless you all.

Rev. Fr. Prof. Christian Anieke
Vice Chancellor