Daybreak
and the sweat fragrance of dreams retreat
leaving slim remembrances of the night
trailing the crowded hours of daylight.

The times
crowd the travelling sun with new faces.
Yet, deep in the mind live experiences
too grown for passing seasons to erase.

THEY DO NOT WEAR MASKS

They do not wear masks like their
predecessors whose images they burnt.
In the morning, they drive to parade­grounds and overlook the suspicious.

They do not act with calculation, like
the former lords, whose motives they
read. At night they send feelers to hearths
and measure the depths of human endurance.

They do not believe in tales, like
the witch-hunters whose foreign accounts
they know. They only ask, which is kinder:
death by hanging or the firing squad?
SENTRIES OF IRON

Sentries of iron survive the rush of water on water; canoe paddlers grow muscles stronger than trunks from which paddles are carved.

The rivers float trunks on tides that never seem to ebb. The men leave homesteads and grazing fields to build camps on floating trunks.

And the smoke of home-coming sacrifices serve to bleach the totem figures, smearing the sacred drums in a godless dance.

Oh, do not hang loosely about in the bright sunshine draught for here rainstorms are known in the sneeze of the Harmattan.

"... the villages and streets sing hopes of a new year amidst tall drinks and food..."

It is a familiar tale, retold every passing year: that deep in the sea live the water-god and strange spirits and men should steer their dugouts home, whatever the tide.

* * * *

Okogbule Wonodi is a well-known Nigerian poet whose poems have appeared in various anthologies and journals. Two volumes of his poems have been published - Icheke and Other Poems (Nari, 1964) and Dusts of Exile (Ife and California, 1971). Until recently, he was a Lecturer in African Literature and Poet-in-Residence at the International Writing Program of the University of Iowa. He holds a Master's degree in English and Creative Writing from Iowa (1966).