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Narrative, Morality, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems: A Critical Review of 'Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)' By Chris Agbaedo

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical review of the article "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)" by Chris Agbedo, published in Business Day on July 27, 2025. The study examines the author's portrayal of Life Ọyịma as a bard, moral philosopher, and custodian of Ezikeọba oral tradition, whose balladic compositions function as repositories of communal memory, ethical instruction, and indigenous knowledge systems. Drawing on qualitative textual analysis, the review interrogates the thematic preoccupations of the article—particularly moral consciousness, social responsibility, and the dynamics of justice as expressed in selected songs such as Ngalanga, Abere, Ụzụza Aroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene. Anchored in a structuralism's theoretical framework, the paper further explores the structural and philosophical dimensions of the narratives, highlighting binary oppositions such as wisdom versus strength, innocence versus intent, and freedom versus responsibility, which underpin the moral architecture of the text. These oppositional structures are shown to reflect the broader Igbo worldview, where meaning is generated through relational contrasts and ethical balance. In addition, attention is given to Agbedo's distinctive stylistic approach, characterised by poetic language, metaphorical density, and performative prose that mirrors the bardic tradition it seeks to analyse. While this stylistic richness enhances the cultural authenticity and aesthetic appeal of the work, the review also considers its implications for analytical clarity and scholarly precision. Ultimately, the paper argues that Agbedo's article makes a significant contribution to the study of African oral literature by foregrounding the enduring relevance of indigenous epistemologies and the role of the bard as both a cultural historian and an ethical commentator, while also demonstrating how meaning is systematically constructed through underlying narrative structures.

Keywords: Oral literature, Igbo philosophy, Narrative structure, and Indigenous knowledge system.

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INTRODUCTION

African oral literature has long served as a vital medium through which communities encode history, transmit cultural values, and express philosophical thought. Within this tradition, the figure of the bard occupies a central position as both entertainer and cultural historian. The bard does not merely perform songs; rather, he interprets social realities and preserves collective memory through performance. This study engages with this tradition by critically reviewing Chris Agbedo's article, "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)", which presents Life Ọyịma as a significant oral artist whose ballads reflect the

philosophical and moral consciousness of Ezikeọba society.

The article by Chris Agbedo portrays Ọyịma as more than a musician; he is positioned as a cultural philosopher whose songs encode indigenous wisdom, ethical instruction, and social commentary. Through narrative performances such as Ngalanga, Abere, Uzụza Aroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene, the bard articulates themes that reflect core aspects of the Igbo worldview, including justice, responsibility, wisdom, and communal ethics. These narratives demonstrate how oral performance functions as a pedagogical tool within traditional African societies.

Scholars of oral tradition have consistently emphasised the cultural significance of oral forms in African societies. Finnegan (1970) observes that oral literature is not a primitive substitute for written texts but a complex and dynamic art form with its aesthetic and intellectual systems. Similarly, Okpewho (1992) argues that African oral performances are deeply embedded in social structures and serve as instruments for educating, entertaining, and moralising communities. In this regard, Ọyịma's ballads, as presented in Agbedo's article, can be situated within a broader tradition of oral artists who function as custodians of communal knowledge.

Furthermore, oral literature often transmits meaning through symbolic structures, repetition, and metaphorical language. Ong (1982) notes that oral cultures rely heavily on formulaic expression, rhythmic patterns, and narrative devices to preserve and communicate knowledge effectively. In Agbedo's portrayal of Ọyịma, similar stylistic features are evident, particularly in the use of proverbs, allegories, and mythic storytelling. These features reinforce the mnemonic and performative nature of oral discourse, ensuring that cultural values are both remembered and enacted.

This study is anchored in structuralism, a theoretical orientation that examines how underlying relational systems generate meaning rather than isolated elements. According to Lévi-Strauss (1963), human thought organises reality through binary oppositions such as life and death, nature and culture, or wisdom and foolishness. This framework is particularly relevant to the present study, as the narratives discussed in Agbedo's article are structured around oppositional categories such as wisdom versus strength, innocence versus intent, and freedom versus responsibility. These structural oppositions reveal the moral architecture of the Ezikeọba worldview as mediated through Ọyịma's performances.

Within this context, the bard's songs function as cultural texts that encode indigenous knowledge systems. For instance, Ngalanga reflects the triumph of intelligence over brute force, while Abere interrogates the dangers of pride and delayed decision-making. Ụzụza Aroke presents a moral philosophy of justice grounded in intention and innocence, while Kaparaba Sekurene dramatises the transformative role of social institutions, such as marriage, in shaping human behaviour. Collectively, these narratives illustrate how oral performance serves as a repository of ethical and philosophical reflection.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to critically engage with Agbedo's representation of Ọyịma's balladry as both artistic expression and philosophical discourse. By situating the article within established scholarly perspectives on oral literature and structuralist theory, this paper highlights the intersection between narrative form and cultural meaning. It further underscores the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping African intellectual traditions and moral consciousness.

Therefore, this paper argues that Agbedo's article presents Life Ọyịma as a symbolic embodiment of the bardic tradition, whose performances function as vehicles for moral instruction, philosophical reflection, and cultural preservation. Through a structuralist lens, the narratives embedded in the article reveal a coherent system of meaning grounded in binary oppositions that reflect the values and worldview of Ezikeọba society.

Summary of the Article

The article "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)" by Chris Agbedo presents a critical exploration of Life Ọyịma as a prominent oral artist whose performances embody the philosophical, moral, and cultural consciousness of Ezikeọba society. The article situates Ọyịma within the tradition of African oral literature, portraying him as a bard whose songs function not merely as entertainment but as vehicles for ethical reflection, communal instruction, and cultural preservation.

Central to the article is the argument that Ọyịma's ballads encode indigenous knowledge systems and Igbo philosophical thought. Through his performances, the bard reflects deeply rooted values such as justice, communal responsibility, wisdom, accountability, and moral balance. The article demonstrates that Ọyịma's art is inseparable from the social realities of his environment, as his songs respond to human behaviour, social conflict, and moral dilemmas in the community.

The article further highlights four major narrative songs attributed to Ọyịma, namely Ngalanga, Abere, Ụzụza Aroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene. Each of these songs carries distinct philosophical and moral messages. Ngalanga emphasises the superiority of intelligence and strategic thinking over physical strength, while Abere reflects on human pride, impatience, and the consequences of poor judgement. Ụzụza Aroke explores issues of justice, innocence, and moral responsibility, particularly in relation to intent and action. Kaparaba

Sekurene examines social transformation and the regulatory role of communal institutions in shaping human behaviour.

From an Igbo philosophical perspective, the article underscores the interconnectedness of individual actions and communal well-being. It reflects the belief that morality is not abstract but lived and socially enforced through storytelling, proverbs, and performance. The bard plays a didactic and corrective role, preserving and transmitting societal values across generations.

In addition, the article emphasises the moral dimension of Ọyịma's artistry, showing how his performances serve as a form of "moral therapy" for society. Through satire, metaphor, and allegory, he critiques social vices and reinforces ethical norms. This establishes him as a cultural custodian, using his art to connect tradition with contemporary social realities.

Overall, the article presents Life Ọyịma as a symbolic figure whose balladry reflects a structured worldview grounded in Igbo philosophy, moral reasoning, and communal ethics. His songs function as cultural texts that articulate societal values while also interrogating human behaviour through layered narrative forms.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF KEY WORDS

Oral Literature

Oral literature refers to verbal artistic expressions transmitted from one generation to another through performance, memory, and communal participation rather than written texts. It encompasses forms such as folktales, songs, proverbs, chants, and myths, which function as vehicles for preserving cultural identity and social values. In African societies, oral literature is not merely a form of entertainment but a repository of collective memory and indigenous knowledge systems.

Scholars have emphasised that oral literature operates within a performative context, where meaning is shaped not only by words but also by delivery, audience interaction, and cultural settings (Finnegan, 2012). More recent studies further highlight that oral traditions continue to evolve, adapting to contemporary realities while maintaining their cultural significance (Foley, 2016). Within the context of Life Ọyịma's balladry, oral literature serves as the medium through which philosophical ideas and moral lessons are communicated to the community.

Igbo Philosophy

Igbo philosophy represents the system of thought, values, and worldview that guide the social and moral life of the Igbo people. It is grounded in communalism, moral responsibility, and a deep respect for wisdom, balance, and social harmony. This philosophy holds that human actions are linked and that individual behaviour must benefit the community.

Recent scholarship has emphasised that African philosophical systems, including Igbo philosophy, are embedded in everyday practices, language, and oral traditions rather than in abstract theoretical formulations (Chimakonam, 2015). Concepts such as amamihe (wisdom), chi (personal destiny), and moral accountability are fundamental to Igbo thought. In Agbedo's article, these philosophical principles are reflected in Ọyịma's narratives, where wisdom is consistently privileged over brute force, and moral choices determine individual and communal outcomes.

Narrative Structure

Narrative structure refers to the organised framework through which a story is constructed, including its sequence of events, character roles, conflict, and resolution. In oral traditions, narrative structure often follows a patterned and formulaic design that enhances memorability and audience engagement. These structures are essential for transmitting cultural knowledge and reinforcing societal norms.

From a structuralist perspective, narratives are not random but are governed by underlying patterns, particularly binary oppositions that shape meaning (Barry, 2017). Contemporary studies also note that narrative structures in African oral traditions are deeply tied to performance and social function, serving both aesthetic and didactic purposes (Okuyade, 2018). In the case of Ọyịma's ballads, the narratives are structured around moral conflicts and their resolutions, reinforcing philosophical and ethical lessons.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge systems refer to the body of knowledge, beliefs, practices, and values developed by local communities through lived experience and transmitted across generations. Oral traditions, rituals, and cultural practices often encode these systems, making them central to identity formation and social organisation.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognised the importance of indigenous knowledge in understanding non-Western epistemologies and addressing contemporary social challenges (Battiste, 2018). Such knowledge systems emphasise relational thinking, moral responsibility, and harmony with the environment and the community. In Agbedo's article, Ọyịma's ballads function as repositories of indigenous knowledge, offering insights into justice, social behaviour, and ethical living within the Ezikeọba community.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on structuralism, a theoretical

approach that seeks to uncover the underlying structures that generate meaning within texts, myths, and cultural systems. Structuralism is based on the assumption that meaning is not inherent in individual elements of a text but is produced through relationships and patterns among those elements. In literary and cultural analysis, structuralism focuses on identifying recurring structures, codes, and systems that organise human thought and expression. The approach gained prominence through the works of scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, who applied structural analysis to myths and cultural practices, arguing that human cognition is universally structured through systems of relations rather than isolated meanings.

A central concept within structuralist theory is that of binary oppositions, which refers to the pairing of contrasting ideas that organise meaning in texts and cultural systems. According to Lévi-Strauss, human cultures often interpret reality through oppositional structures such as life/death, nature/culture, male/female, and good/evil. These oppositions are not merely linguistic devices but fundamental cognitive frameworks through which societies construct meaning. Similarly, Roland Barthes expands structuralist thought by emphasising that texts operate as systems of signs, where meaning emerges through difference and relational positioning rather than through fixed definitions.

Binary oppositions have also been widely discussed in modern literary theory as a way of understanding how texts produce ideological and moral meanings. Jonathan Culler explains that structuralist reading involves identifying deep structures that govern narrative meaning, often revealed through contrasting elements that shape interpretation. In the same vein, structuralist critics argue that these oppositions are not neutral; they reflect the cultural values and worldview of the society that produces them.

Within African literary discourse, structuralist approaches have been effectively applied to oral literature and indigenous narrative systems. Scholars such as Ato Quayson and Simon Gikandi have demonstrated that African texts, particularly oral performances, are structured around oppositional logic that reflects communal ethics, social order, and philosophical reasoning. These studies reinforce the relevance of structuralism in analysing African oral traditions, where meaning is often embedded in performance, symbolism, and narrative contrasts.

In relation to the article under review, structuralism provides a useful framework for interpreting the ideological and moral structure of Life Ọyịma's ballads as presented by Chris Agbedo. The songs attributed to Life Ọyịma: Ngalanga, Abere, ỤzụzaAroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene are constructed around clear binary oppositions that reflect Igbo philosophical thought and moral reasoning. For instance, Ngalanga presents the opposition between wisdom and physical strength, highlighting the superiority of intelligence in conflict resolution. Abere contrasts patience with pride and impulsiveness, demonstrating the moral consequences of poor judgement. Ụzụza Aroke explores justice through the opposition of innocence versus culpability, while Kaparaba Sekurene reflects tensions between individual freedom and communal responsibility.

Through these structural oppositions, the article reveals that Ọyịma's ballads are not random narrative performances but carefully organised systems of meaning that reflect the worldview of the Ezikeọba society. The structuralist framework therefore enables a more profound understanding of how meaning is generated in the text through patterns of contrast, reinforcing the idea that oral literature operates as a structured system of cultural knowledge and moral instruction.

Structuralism, Binary Oppositions, and the Production of Meaning

Structuralism offers a theoretical framework for explaining how meaning is organised through relationships among elements within a cultural text. Rather than interpreting a literary work solely as the expression of an author's intention or as a vehicle for moral instruction, structuralist analysis investigates the underlying systems of relationships through which the work becomes meaningful. In structural anthropology, Lévi-Strauss's approach directs attention to the structures underlying cultural practices, myths, and systems of thought, treating individual elements as meaningful in relation to a larger system rather than in isolation (Darnell, 1995; Maranda, 1972). This perspective is relevant to oral literature because songs and narratives can be examined not only for the messages they communicate but also for the patterns of contrast, association, and cultural classification through which those messages are constructed.

One important analytical concept associated with Lévi-Strauss's structuralism is the binary opposition. Binary oppositions refer to contrasting categories through which a cultural text may organise experience and establish relationships between ideas. Examples include justice and injustice, truth and deception, communal responsibility and individual self-interest, or social order and disorder. These oppositions are not simply pairs of morally contrasting concepts. Their structural significance lies in the relationships established between them, the cultural assumptions they express, and the ways they organise the meaning of narratives. Structuralism therefore moves beyond identifying contrasting values to investigate how such contrasts function within a broader system of signification. Research on structural anthropology and cultural semiotics similarly emphasises the importance of relational structures and the processes

through which signs acquire meaning within cultural systems (Maranda, 1972; Perusset, 2022).

The distinction between structuralist analysis and moral interpretation is particularly important in the study of Life Ọyịma's balladry. A general moral interpretation might conclude that a song condemns injustice, discourages selfish conduct, or encourages respect for communal values. Such conclusions may be legitimate, but they do not independently demonstrate how the song produces meaning through a structural pattern. A structuralist interpretation must identify the contrasting categories represented in the song, establish how they are connected to particular actions, characters, images, or social roles, and explain the significance of their relationship within the cultural context of the performance. For example, if a song contrasts communal responsibility with individual greed, the analysis should examine how the two positions are represented, what consequences are associated with each, and whether the narrative reinforces or complicates the distinction between collective obligation and personal interest. The analytical objective is not merely to identify the preferred moral position but to explain how the relationship between opposing categories organises the narrative representation of social experience.

This approach also requires attention to the fact that binary oppositions do not always function as fixed or symmetrical pairs. A narrative may privilege one term over another, expose contradictions within an apparently desirable value, or leave a conflict unresolved. Consequently, structuralist analysis should not assume that every opposition produces a simple division between positive and evil. Instead, it should investigate how a particular text establishes, negotiates, and potentially destabilises its oppositions. Darnell's (1995) historical examination of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism demonstrates the importance of understanding the theoretical assumptions underlying structural analysis, while Brown (1978) discusses the relationship between structural and dialectical approaches to opposing qualities. Together, these perspectives encourage a more nuanced analysis of the relationships through which cultural meaning is organised.

Applied to Ọyịma's oral balladry, structuralism can provide a framework for investigating how particular songs represent tensions between individual conduct and collective expectations, authority and criticism, or continuity and change. These categories, however, must remain analytical possibilities until they are supported by evidence from the songs. The titles *Ngalanga*, *Abere*, *Ụzụza Aroke*, and *Kaparaba Sekurene* do not, by themselves, establish the presence of any particular binary opposition. A defensible interpretation must draw on the documented lyrics, descriptions of performance, relevant cultural knowledge, or other textual evidence available for each song. Without such evidence, assigning a specific opposition to a song would risk imposing a theoretical pattern rather than demonstrating one.

The relationship between structure and cultural meaning is equally important when interpreting the ethical significance of oral performance. A structuralist reading does not exclude moral interpretation; rather, it asks how moral values are organised and made intelligible through relationships within a cultural text. Perusset (2022), in discussing the semiotic legacy of Saussure, Hjelmslev, and Barthes, explains the importance of examining how signs and cultural meanings are related. This provides a useful basis for distinguishing the moral content of a song from the structures through which that content is communicated. Accordingly, identifying a song's condemnation of injustice constitutes an interpretation of its moral position, whereas examining how the song contrasts legitimate and illegitimate authority, associates these positions with particular actions, and resolves or sustains their conflict constitutes a more explicitly structuralist inquiry.

The theoretical contribution of structuralism to the present study, therefore, lies in moving from the identification of moral themes to the analysis of the relationships that organise those themes. Moral criticism asks what values a song endorses or condemns; structuralist analysis asks how the song constructs meaning through patterned contrasts and culturally situated relationships. Applied carefully to Life Ọyịma's balladry, this distinction can deepen the interpretation of oral performance by showing how ethical expectations, communal identity, authority, and social order are represented through narrative structures. Such an approach strengthens the theoretical precision of the study while ensuring that claims about the songs remain grounded in textual evidence and the cultural context of their performance.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS / DISCUSSION

This section critically examines Chris Agbedo's "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)" by focusing on its narrative structure, Igbo philosophical grounding, moral and ethical dimensions, and stylistic features. The analysis is based on the idea that oral performances, especially in Africa, are not just random works of art but structured systems of meaning.

Narrative Structure

The article presents Life Ọyịma's ballads as interconnected narrative units that function within a broader oral performance tradition. Rather than existing as isolated songs, the narratives—Ngalanga, Abere, ỤzụzaAroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene—are structurally organised around conflict, resolution, and moral

consequences. This aligns with oral narrative patterns identified in African oral traditions, where storytelling often follows episodic structures embedded in communal performance contexts (Okpewho, 1992).

Each song follows a recognisable internal structure: a situational introduction, the emergence of conflict, and a moral or philosophical resolution. For example, Ngalanga constructs its narrative around the conflict between intellectual strategy and physical force, ultimately resolving in favour of wisdom. Similarly, Abere builds tension through the consequences of pride and impatience, reinforcing a moral closure that highlights the dangers of impulsive action. These narrative patterns reflect what Ong (1982) describes as the formulaic and mnemonic organisation of oral literature, where repetition and structure aid memory and performance.

A useful comparative perspective is offered by Ekevere and Idodo (2025), whose study of Nigerian cinema examines the relationship among plot development, thematic choices, cultural context, and audience. Although their subject is digital cinema rather than oral balladry, their discussion supports the broader point that narrative form is shaped by cultural conditions and the expectations of its audience. Applied cautiously here, this perspective directs attention to how the conflicts and resolutions in Ọyịma's songs organise cultural meanings; it does not, by itself, establish the meanings of the songs, which must be demonstrated through close textual analysis.

The article therefore positions Ọyịma's performances not merely as entertainment but as structured narrative systems that encode communal knowledge and ethical instruction.

Igbo Philosophical Thought

A central contribution of the article is its articulation of Igbo philosophical thought as expressed through Ọyịma's ballads. The narratives reflect a worldview deeply rooted in communalism, moral balance, and situational ethics. In Igbo philosophy, individual actions are always interpreted within the context of their impact on the community, a principle that is consistently reflected in the bard's performances.

The article shows that Ọyịma's songs embody key Igbo philosophical concepts such as justice (ikpeziriezi), moral accountability, and the interconnectedness of human existence. For instance, ỤzụzaAroke reflects a complex view of justice, where innocence and guilt are not only legal categories but also moral states shaped by intention and circumstance. This aligns with African philosophical perspectives that emphasise relational morality rather than absolute judgement (Wiredu, 1996).

Furthermore, the emphasis on wisdom over strength in Ngalanga reflects the Igbo valuation of intelligence (amamihe) as a guiding principle in conflict resolution. Through these narratives, the article demonstrates that Ọyịma's ballads function as philosophical texts that articulate indigenous systems of thought embedded within oral performance.

Moral and Ethical Lessons

The moral dimension of Ọyịma's artistry is a key focus of Agbedo's article. Each song serves as a medium for ethical instruction, reinforcing socially acceptable behaviour while discouraging deviance. This aligns with Finnegan's (1970) observation that African oral literature often performs didactic functions within society.

Abere foregrounds the consequences of pride and impatience, warning against impulsive decision-making. Ngalanga promotes the ethical superiority of intelligence and strategic thinking over brute force, suggesting that moral order is maintained through wisdom rather than aggression. Ụzụza Aroke engages with questions of justice and innocence, emphasising the importance of intention in moral judgement. Meanwhile, Kaparaba Sekurene reflects on social regulation and the consequences of personal actions within communal institutions such as marriage.

Collectively, these narratives function as what the article describes as a form of "moral therapy," where storytelling becomes a corrective mechanism for social behaviour. Through satire, symbolism, and allegory, Ọyịma's performances reinforce communal ethics and discourage antisocial conduct.

This interpretation also resonates with Ekevere and Oboho's (2025) discussion of contemporary Nigerian drama as a medium for social critique. Their study considers how dramatic works use devices such as satire, allegory, and symbolism to address injustice and accountability. While written drama and oral balladry are distinct forms, the comparison helps clarify how artistic performance may make social conduct available for public scrutiny. In Ọyịma's case, however, the claim that a song corrects or regulates behaviour should remain tied to the specific narrative evidence and cultural context presented in the article under review.

Stylistic Features

One of the most striking aspects of Chris Agbedo's "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)" is its rich and highly poetic language, which reflects both the aesthetic depth of oral tradition and the expressive creativity of the bardic figure it describes. The writer adopts a stylistic approach that mirrors the oral performance culture of Igbo society, thereby blurring the boundary between criticism and artistic representation.

The article is characterised by vivid imagery and figurative expressions that elevate the discussion of

Ọyịma's performances beyond mere analytical descriptions. Through metaphorical language, the writer captures the emotional and philosophical depth of the bard's songs, presenting them as living performances rather than static texts. This stylistic choice enhances the reader's appreciation of Ọyịma as a cultural voice whose artistry is deeply embedded in oral aesthetics.

Another prominent feature is the use of rhythmic and repetitive expressions, which reflect the structure of oral storytelling traditions. These repetitions emphasise key ideas and recreate the cadence of oral performance, allowing the written text to imitate spoken art. This aligns with the view of Walter J. Ong, who argues that oral-based expression relies heavily on rhythm, redundancy, and patterning to ensure meaning and retention.

Furthermore, the article makes effective use of proverbs and culturally embedded expressions that reflect Igbo linguistic artistry. These proverbial forms function as condensed wisdom, carrying philosophical meaning in compact symbolic language. This supports the idea that African oral expression is not only a way to communicate but also a way to think about and appreciate beauty (Finnegan, 1970).

Importantly, the writer's style itself reflects a "bardic tone," as the narrative voice occasionally shifts into a lyrical mode that mirrors the performance style of Life Ọyịma. This blending of scholarly analysis with poetic narration enhances the immersive quality of the article, making the reader experience, rather than merely read, the cultural world being described.

However, while the poetic richness of the article enhances its aesthetic appeal, it sometimes creates a dense interpretive texture that may require careful reading to fully extract analytical clarity. Despite these qualities, the stylistic beauty remains a major strength of the work, as it successfully embodies the very oral tradition it seeks to analyse.

EVALUATION OF THE ARTICLE

The article "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)" by Chris Agbedo stands out as a richly textured and intellectually engaging exploration of Life Ọyịma's balladry. One of its most remarkable strengths lies in the author's skilful use of language to mirror the very oral tradition he seeks to analyse. Through a blend of poetic expression, metaphorical density, and rhythmic prose, Agbedo succeeds in recreating the aesthetic atmosphere of bardic performance within a written scholarly format.

A major strength of the article is its effective use of rich linguistic and stylistic features to illuminate the depth of Ọyịma's artistry. The author employs evocative imagery and figurative language to present the bard not merely as a performer, but as a philosopher and custodian of indigenous knowledge. This stylistic approach enhances the reader's engagement and allows the analysis to resonate on both intellectual and emotional levels. By adopting a narrative voice that occasionally assumes a lyrical quality, Agbedo successfully bridges the gap between academic discourse and oral performance, thereby reinforcing the cultural authenticity of his subject.

In addition, the article demonstrates strong thematic organisation, particularly in its exploration of Igbo philosophical thought and moral consciousness. The discussion of songs such as Ngalanga, Abere, Ụzụza Aroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene is both insightful and culturally grounded, revealing how Ọyịma's ballads encode systems of meaning related to wisdom, justice, responsibility, and social order. This thematic depth contributes significantly to the article's scholarly value, as it foregrounds the relevance of indigenous knowledge systems in understanding African oral literature.

A related perspective appears in Ekevere, Agbonkonkon-Ogbeide, Omessah, and Onyari's (2025) analysis of Ola Rotimi's plays, which considers how literary representations bring cultural values, ethical constraints, and political realities into critical relation. Their focus is political leadership rather than oral tradition, so the study should not be treated as direct evidence about Ọyịma's ballads. It nevertheless provides a useful Nigerian literary comparison for the present paper's broader argument that artistic narratives can reflect social values while also questioning conduct and authority.

However, despite these strengths, the article is not without its limitations. The same poetic and metaphor-rich style that enhances its aesthetic appeal occasionally leads to excessive elaboration and repetition. The article reiterates certain ideas in multiple forms, which, while stylistically effective, can reduce analytical precision and make the argument appear less concise. In some instances, the density of figurative language may obscure clarity, requiring the reader to disentangle layers of meaning before arriving at the core argument.

Furthermore, the article tends to prioritise expressive narration over critical distance, which is expected in rigorous academic writing. While the immersive style is commendable, a more balanced integration of analytical commentary and stylistic expression would improve the overall clarity and scholarly sharpness of the work. This would allow the insights presented to be more directly accessible without diminishing the aesthetic richness of the text.

Overall, the article makes a significant contribution to the study of African oral literature, particularly in its portrayal of Life Ọyịma as a figure who embodies the intersection of art, philosophy, and cultural memory. Agbedo's use of rich linguistic features effectively captures the essence of bardic tradition, even though it occasionally compromises analytical clarity. Still, the article is a useful and thought-provoking piece that shows how oral performance can be a way to think about philosophy and teach morals.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically reviewed "Life Ọyịma: Bard of Ezikeọba, Balladeer of Broken Silences (II)" by Chris Agbedo, with particular attention to its narrative structure, philosophical depth, moral orientation, and stylistic expression. The analysis has shown that the article successfully presents Life Ọyịma as more than a performer but as a cultural intellectual whose balladry embodies the ethical and philosophical foundations of Ezikeọba society.

Through a structured examination of key narratives such as Ngalanga, Abere, Ụzụza Aroke, and Kaparaba Sekurene, the study demonstrates that the article foregrounds the role of oral performance as a medium for transmitting indigenous knowledge and moral values. These songs reveal a coherent system of thought grounded in Igbo philosophy, where wisdom, justice, responsibility, and communal balance are central. By applying a structuralist perspective, the paper further establishes that meaning in the article is constructed through binary oppositions, which reflect the moral and ideological framework of the society under study.

In addition, the review highlights the distinctive stylistic approach adopted by Agbedo, characterised by poetic language, metaphorical richness, and a performative narrative voice. This stylistic choice enhances the cultural authenticity of the work and mirrors the bardic tradition it seeks to analyse. However, the study also notes that the density of figurative language and occasional repetition can limit analytical clarity, suggesting the need for a more balanced integration of aesthetic expression and critical precision.

Overall, the article makes a significant contribution to the study of African oral literature by demonstrating how oral narratives function as repositories of cultural memory, philosophical reflection, and moral instruction. It reinforces the enduring relevance of indigenous knowledge systems in contemporary literary discourse and affirms the bard's role as both a cultural historian and an ethical commentator. Despite minor stylistic limitations, the work remains a valuable and insightful exploration of the intersection between narrative, morality, and philosophy in African oral tradition.

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