

Obituary Tribute to Ossie Onuora Enekwe

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The sad news of the passing on of Professor Osmond Onuora Enekwe turned the atmosphere of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka eerie on the morning of 29th April 2010. His death at the University of Nigeria's Teaching Hospital, Ituku-Ozalla, was a rude shock to the university community for not many heard that he was even sick. Ossie Enekwe's departure was not only painful to the University of Nigeria community; it was a big loss to the theatre industry and scholarship, a big loss to the Nigerian Press and the Association of Nigeria Authors (ANA).

Ossie Enekwe will be remembered for many good things. He was an excellent theatre director, an all-round scholar, a short story writer, poet, novelist, guitarist and a song star. He was the organizing secretary that saw the birth of the Association of Nigerian Authors of which he rose to become the Vice-President. He was once the editor of the *Greenfield Review*; he was both editor and editor emeritus of *Okike: An African Journal of New Writing* founded by Chinua Achebe in 1971. Prof Enekwe founded the Oak Theatre and Comedy Squad of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He transformed the *Nkpokiti* Dance of Umunze and the Adamma Masquerade Drama of Ngwo. He founded and chaired the University of Nigeria *Transroutes* until his death. In fact, Ossie Enekwe was a pacesetter in many things too numerous to list here.

Enekwe, who obtained his Bachelor's degree at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, an M.F.A. in Writing, MPhil and PhD in Theatre from the University of Columbia, made enormous contributions to the literary world and theatre scholarship. His poems and short stories have appeared in notable anthologies, including *African Rhapsody*, *New Poets of West Africa*, *An Anthology of Contemporary African Poetry*, *Parnassus of World Poets*, *Pages in the Wind*, *Poesie d' Afrique*, *An Sad du Sahara*, etc. His

published literary works include *Broken Pots*, (poems); *Marching to Kilimanjaro* (poems); *The Last Battle and Other Stories*; *Come Thunder* (novel). Many of his poems and short stories have been translated into many languages, including French, Serbian, Hungarian, Italian Spanish etc. He has published many scholarly articles and books such as *Theories of Dance in Nigeria*, but his landmark scholarly work is *Igbo Masks: The Oneness of Ritual and Theatre*, which has unraveled many salient and hidden features of theatre practice. The book is recognized by UNESCO as a major contribution to cultural studies.

Ossie Enekwe was, indeed, a practical man of the stage. He was both an actor and director. His drama productions attest to his amazing creative imagination and directorial procedure informed by attention to details. His directing credits include Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo's *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi*; Wole Soyinka's *Trials of Brother Jero*, James Ene Henshaw's *The Jewel of the Shrine*; Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*; Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* and his own *Dance of Restoration*, etc.

For over thirty years, Ossie Enekwe taught drama, creative writing, African and African-American literature at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and in many institutions of learning in the United States of America, including Columbia University, New York; City University of New York; Farleigh Dickenson University New Jersey, etc.

Apart from his literary, editorial, and scholarly contributions, Enekwe was a columnist for *The Punch Newspaper* for many years; he was coordinator and head of Dramatic Arts at the University of Nigeria as well as the Director of Institute of African Studies of the same institution.

The late Professor Enekwe was a quintessence of godliness. He was honest, transparent and a conscionable fellow. His commitment to a healthy moral life can be attested to by his students and his colleagues. Professor Dapo Adelugba calls him "a gentle leader of men". For P.J Ezeh, he was "a polymath of a professor". According to Obi Nnakamma, Enekwe was committed to the University of Nigeria "to the point of idolatry". John Friedman notes that Enekwe's smile was "contagious and a reflection of his soul". Ruby Mills states that the joy of Enekwe's music makes "the days brighter and nights full of laughter". Rev Fr. Professor Akwanya says that "the humdrum did not really appeal to him: things had to have points of appeal". Chinua Achebe describes Ossie Enkwe after his death as a "warm, kind and a generous quiet soul... scholar portrait whose humanity deserves to be encapsulated and preserved for posterity to bear witness".

One remarkable thing about Ossie Enekwe was that he never compromised standards while he waded through the political mine-field that

is the University of Nigeria. He touched many lives in positive ways and has groomed many scholars and artists who are known all over the world. Don Ostrom of the United States in his tribute to the demised scholar says that “indeed, of all the people I have personally known, there was nobody I have admired more than Osmond Enekwe”. Osmond has a depth of character that is amazing. He has a good voice and was as handsome in behaviour as he was physically. The world will miss this literary icon, this intellectual octopus, and moral crusader.

But,
Come Thunder And
Broken Pots
Ossie is Marching to Kilimanjaro
Where Gentle Birds Trail in the mines
For The Last Battle
And A Dance of Restoration
Adieu.