

African Literature and the Role of the Nigerian Government College Umuahia

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Recommended Citation

Ochiagha, Terri. "African Literature and the Role of the Nigerian Government College Umuahia." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 9.3 (2007): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1223>>

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Volume 9 Issue 3 (September 2007) Article 2
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<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol9/iss3/2>>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 9.3 (2007)
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Abstract: Terri Ochiagha, in her paper "African Literature and the Role of the Nigerian Government College Umuahia," discusses how the college contributed towards nurturing the talent of some of the most relevant authors in African literary history. With the help of the testimonies of these authors in interviews, correspondence, essays, autobiographies, and with the aid of literary critics and scholars who realized the role the Umuahia College played in creating a literary elite, Ochiagha analyses this literary phenomenon and takes us on a journey through the school's literary ambience: its library and the novels which were later to prompt the authors' writing back to the Empire, the school magazine that first provided the alumni with a space in which to develop their writing and editing skills, the rising nationalistic fight for the creation of a legitimate university in Nigeria, the suppression of African history from the school curricula, and the literary works written by these authors in which their experience at the college is reflected. It all goes to prove how a school founded on tenets of the British system of elite schools went on to be the seedbed of some of the icons of African literature in English.

Terri OCHIAGHA**African Literature and the Role of the Nigerian Government College Umuahia**

When Robert Fisher, an Anglican pastor, founded in 1929 the boys-only boarding school Government College Umuahia under the Nigerian Colonial Government, he could not anticipate that in one generation it was going to nurture many a literary talent of African literature, such as Gabriel Okara, Ken Saro-Wiwa, I.N.C. Aniebo, Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike, Christopher Okigbo, Elechi Amadi, and Chike Momah. The objective of my paper is to present an insight into what could be termed a phenomenon in literary history and to analyse the ways in which the college and its literary ambience cultivated the gift which students at the school possessed and that is reflected in their literary production.

In 1927, the Colonial Government in Lagos decided to start three secondary schools in the interior modeled after the British elite schools Eton, Harrow, and Winchester. The Government College Umuahia in Eastern Nigeria was one of the three, the two others being the Government Colleges at Ibadan and Zaria. Classes started at Umuahia on 29 January 1929 and the school was opened with twenty-five students from all parts of Nigeria and Western Cameroon. A strong emphasis was placed on academic merit and in disregard of the economic background of the students, and more often than not, the students came from poor homes. According to Achebe: "In those days, we were children of poor men. There was no rich boy in Umuahia; there was only this strict competition" (Achebe qtd. in Wren 55-56). The college started as a teacher-training institution, but was turned a year later into a secondary school. The reasons for this "downgrade" are not clear. The Reverend Fisher headed the school until the start of World War II in 1939, upon which he returned to England on retirement and the school was closed for three years and used as a prisoner-of-war camp for the internment of German soldiers captured in Cameroon by British troops. During his tenure at Government College, Fisher emphasized the three pillars of development: academics, sports, and discipline. The school reopened in 1942 under a new British principal, E.C. Hicks (1939-1944), William Simpson (1944-1951), A.B. Cozens (1951-1955), and A.K. Wareham (1955-1961), year in which the first Nigerian, I.D. Erekosima, started his tenure (see Ibe <<http://gcuoba.org/index.htm>>). During the Simpson years, the school acquired its reputation of *primus inter paribus* and during this age the school produced many talents of Nigerian literature. In 1948, Umuahia had more entrants into the newly opened University College Ibadan than any other school; Chinua Achebe being the recipient of one of the three full college scholarships to the brightest students in the entire country. The school had to be closed again on 1967 as a result of the Civil War and it reopened in 1970. The school is still suffering from some of the damages during the this time; for example, admission went to the highest bidders instead of the highest academic scores. All the same, Umuahia has produced a host of national leaders, ministers, judges, educators, artists, sculptors, sportsmen, and other men of note including a younger generation of poets. Apart from the creative writers the college yielded, it has also produced writers in other fields; according to Ezenwa-Ohaeto, "Bede Okigbo, a cousin of Christopher Okigbo who became a notable agronomist, Chu Okongwu the economist, and Alexander Madiebo, an army general who wrote one of the most thrilling and captivating books on the Nigerian civil war" (31).

The school's motto, *in unum luceant* (May They Shine as One) can be said to be almost prophetic now that the school's academic feats can be assessed retrospectively. The motto is even more telling with regard to the philosophy of the institution and goes a long way in setting the ambience for the flow between English and African literature in the works of the alumni. Fisher's explanation of the school's coat-of-arms embodying the motto is as follows: "The horn came from the local market, the biggest horn we could get; the three brass tongues issuing from it represent the torch of learning, and it was mounted on local wood in our wood workshop. Yes, I think it is more attractive, and certainly more economical than shields or cups brought from England. And above the stage is our Crest, black and white torches intertwined, to show that here Black and White work together to raise the light of

learning high for the illumination of the people" (Fisher qtd. in Duckworth 24). When asked what the most memorable feature of the college would be with regard to their development as authors, Achebe and his colleagues always point towards their school library. Filled with more books than the boys could ever have dreamt of, it was not just the place to be whenever any of them got particularly bored at school. There was a regulation that enforced its use. However, many of the students came to read for pleasure. Momah, in *The Shining Ones: The School Days of Obinna Okoye*, his autobiographic account of his days at Umuahia, elaborates on the library: "Prep was a strictly regulated hour of study, in the Library, following immediately after the rest period. This was the hour for swotting up the books, or to do one's written assignment. Or, if one was so inclined, to take down one of the hundreds of books, fiction and non-fiction, housed in the Library. ... Sometimes I just sat and daydreamed, gazing in wonder at the impressive rows of books on the shelves; more books than I had ever seen assembled in one building. I dreamed that one day I could truly boast that I had read every one of them. I liked sometimes to idle the time away thumbing through the numerous colourful magazines, mostly British, which were displayed on the magazine racks" (81). He is not the only one to sing its praises, Achebe, possibly Umuahia's most famous alumnus, also pays homage to the beloved library: "In my secondary school where I had the good fortune of the fine library I have already paid tribute to I did indeed read, on my own, a few "African" novels by such writers as Rider Haggard and John Buchan. But I did not connect the Africa in those riveting adventure stories among savages even remotely with myself or my homeland. Perhaps I was too young. Perhaps I was yet to appropriate Africa from the remote, no man's land of the mind where my first English primer had placed it for me" (*My Home Under Imperial Fire* 31-32).

Among the canonical works that the alumni mention in various sources are the following titles: *King Solomon's Mines*, *Silas Marner*, *Treasure Island*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Prisoner of Zenda*, *Oliver Twist*, *Ivanhoe*, *David Copperfield*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, the novels of the empire, H. Rider Haggard's *She and Alan Quatermain*, and John Buchner's *Prester John* (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 27). Despite of Achebe's assertion that they did not do any postcolonial readings of these books at the time, it is curious to note that many of the works mentioned have undergone post-colonial scrutiny in later years. Achebe and Momah are not the only ones who trace their love of literature to its use. Both Gabriel Okara and Elechi Amadi are filled with gratitude whenever it is mentioned (Wren 80, 83). It is interesting to note that out of all the alumni mentioned in this paper, Amadi was the only one who after his days at Umuahia went no further in his pursuit of the arts and obtained a degree in physics, hence it can be said that he is the one where the results of his stay in the college are more evident: "His journey to literary stardom began at Government College, Umuahia, which had a very good library stocked with literary classics, and he and his colleagues were compelled to read novels. Hence, he became a voracious reader and, by the time he left school, he had read scores of novels, internalizing their forms and developing a critical sense of judgment. At a point, he felt challenged to write short stories just to entertain himself. Eventually, one of the plots of the short stories metamorphosed into his first novel, *The Concubine*. Some critics have classified the novel among those of cultural nationalism, but the author says he didn't set out to make it so. 'Definitely, I didn't want to write like an English man; I wanted to write like an Africa in a way that an African reading it would know that it was written by an African. If they call it cultural nationalism, then everybody has it,' he says. Having read a good number of literatures written by foreign authors about their people, he felt an urge to write about his own people, which made him situate the context of the story in the pre-colonial times. With a reminiscent visage, he recalls, 'That immediately eliminated the white man and his culture'" (Amadi qtd. in Akubuiro <<http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/literari/2007/oct/21/literari-21-10-2007-003.htm>>).

In 1945, the college's "Textbook Act" was issued banning the reading of textbooks during games and rest periods, much to the chagrin of some of the more zealous students. It had, however, an extremely beneficial effect, as reading literary works in the library was suggested as an alternative activ-

ity. Robert M. Wren quotes one of the master teachers, Alagoa: "During games times, that is, from five to six o'clock, nobody may be under a roof, nobody may read a text-book. If you are not put down for games, go on a stroll with a friend, chat, discuss. Or make your companion read a good book -- a novel, a book of poems or essays. Sit in the shade and have a pleasant one hour" (Alagoa qtd. in Wren 79). It has been half-seriously suggested that the incessant reading by the boys was also ascribed to the geographical position of the college: situated in the bush, not actually in Umuahia, but in nearby Umudike, the college was isolated from all distractions. Students were only allowed out of the premises on Saturdays and even then for a few hours only and they only went home for their vacations after each term. Whether this was true or not, Fisher believed that "there are lovely flowers that grow in the bush that you never see in a motor-high road ... I think that just because we are faraway in the Bush, we have been allowed to grow up in our own way, without being tended and mothered by too many careful authorities" (Fisher qtd. in Duckworth 22). But the library was not alone in wetting the voracious appetite for literature in the young students. According to Bernth Lindfors, school magazines were one of the first openings for aspiring writers. In 1933, Fisher, not to do things by halves, founded the Government College Umuahia school magazine in 1933 and named it *The Eastern Star* (later renamed *The Umuahian*). This is what he had to say of its creation: "*The Eastern Star* is the united magazine of five of the Secondary Schools east of the Niger: it is written exclusively for the Old Boys of the College with the avowed purpose of binding them together in one unity and fraternity and close alliance with their old schools, so that through them we can influence for good the whole of the Ibo and Efik country" (26). Lindfors, who was able to access and research several Nigerian school magazines, including rare issues of *The Umuahian*, discusses their function further: "The typical school annual consisted of a message from the headmaster; reports from head prefects in each house, dormitory, or 'block', accounts of the activities of school societies; detailed tallies of the wins and losses of every sports team; perhaps a chart showing how well the senior students had done in their terminal examinations; possibly an 'Old Boys' Column' applauding the achievement of recent alumni; and to fill out the remaining space -- an assortment of poems, stories, essays and jokes volunteered by students. It was customary for editors to preface the magazine with general comments on the school year, and more specific remarks on the heroic labours of the editorial board" (473).

At this point in time, the notion of a Nigerian writing a book was unheard of. However, the dream of authoring a published article/story happily could become a reality through *The Eastern Star*: "It was truly with the birth of a literary instinct that these magazines were primarily concerned. Although some may have been started to enhance the reputation of a school, they were all regarded as educational tools designed to provide students with literary satisfactions they could nowhere else experience" (Lindfors 478). School magazines also granted students the chance to express their increasingly nationalistic outlook. J.A. Ramsaran, in *The Times Educational Supplement*, went on to publish an article in which he deemed Nigerian school journals "the key to nationhood." Achebe assisted the Australian teacher, Charles Low, in editing *The Umuahian*. Apart from *The Umuahian*, each of the houses (dorms) of the college also had their own particular magazines, which they wrote out and then cyclostyled. Chukwuemeka Ike and Christopher Okigbo (who has been reported not to show any literary talent at the time (Alagoa qtd. in Wren 79) served as editors. Ike recalls: "I went to Government College Umuahia in January 1945 which provided an ideal environment for anyone with a flair for creative writing. The medium for publishing what you wrote existed in House magazines as well as the college magazine. Every House had a hand-written magazine published periodically; the college magazine was printed. I edited the magazine for my house and served on the editorial board of the college magazine. My first ever printed story -- "In Dreamland" -- appeared in the College magazine No.2 (1948-49)" (Ike qtd. in Oguzie 367). The fruits which were reaped from the school magazines extend even further: Ken Saro-Wiwa published his short story "Ave, Ave, Sathanas!" in *The Umuahian* in 1961 and included it later in his collection of short stories *Adaku and Other Stories* (Okome 179). In 1979, the eminent Old Boys of the college published *The Umuahian: A Golden Jubilee Publication* under the edi-

torship of Chinua Achebe, in which accounts and reminiscences of the college were recounted, among others by Achebe himself, Ike, and Momah (unfortunately, to date I was unable to locate this publication).

Apart from the magazines, students also posted news, protests, and news bulletins on the college's Assembly Hall notice board. In this sense, there is an interesting instance recounted by Ezenwa-Ohaeto: "Although the prefects maintained order, there were still rebels within the college who deviated from the norm especially in the reading of newspapers like the *West African Pilot* and the *Nigerian Spokesman* instead of the approved *Daily Times*. A.K. Sam Epelle was one such deviant and he formed the habit of summarising the war news from the radio set in his own fashion. Such activities did not militate against the academic work of the rebels" (32). In spite of its penchant for producing future leaders, the future was bleak indeed for the "boys." Apart from the impossibility of thinking of a future as literati, the only institution of higher learning in which they could gain access to further studies was Yaba Higher College, which, notwithstanding its high academic demands awarded its students with diplomas and not degrees. This was one of the concerns of Nigerian nationalists at the time. Momah also mentions this fact in his *The Shining Ones*: "Conventional wisdom in the country -- to the extent that we understood such matters then -- was that by deliberate policy, the British Colonial Office sought to stifle the budding intellectual aspirations of its Nigerian subjects and, thereby, prevent the growth of a potentially recalcitrant intelligentsia" (74). It is clear that Yaba Higher College was another tool of the colonial government to keep "uppity natives" in their places. James S. Coleman writes on this: "In the first place, educated Nigerians resented the inferiority implicit in the fact that only a Nigerian diploma was obtainable. This meant that university -- educated persons, in Nigeria and elsewhere, would look down upon graduates of these schools as a semi educated lesser breed. Second, admission to the two Nigerian was restricted ... third, those who were admitted had little or no freedom to choose their professions; they were usually assigned to courses according to government needs rather than according to their own preferences and aptitudes. Fourth, there was little visible evidence before World War II that completion of the courses would give graduates the status they felt higher education should bestow" (123) and the official policy toward the educated elite was that with a few exceptions "Africans were excluded from the various functional councils and boards appointed by the government to advise on specific problems" (Coleman 154). Therefore, the boys were exalted when the rumours of the creation of the University College, Ibadan, came true. Umuahia produced the highest number of students to be accepted at the college and, for example, Achebe was one of the three highest-scoring candidates, thus winning a total scholarship to the institution (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 33).

It is relevant to mention that Umuahia was a British Colonial school and most of the teachers (or masters as they were called) were white English. There were also Nigerian teachers, some of them students during the Fisher days, who had been lucky enough to gain access to university degrees in England. Some of the European teachers were sympathetic to their African students (and in Momah's *The Shining Ones* always end up being expelled or sent home by the Colonial Government) but most teachers did not falter in their expressions of contempt at the nationalistic efforts that were taking part in Nigeria at the time. Momah paints a great portrait of the two "types" of European teachers in *The Shining Ones*: "Whiteness did not, of course, guarantee excellence of teaching. It did not always bring with it that sensitivity to the feelings of a subject people, which, in spite of our relative immaturity, we occasionally exhibited. Quite the contrary, more often than not. There was a degree of paternalism, which we were not always able to put our fingers on, but which we often suspected was there" (80). The teachers who were most directly involved in nurturing the students' knowledge and love of the English language and literature were Adrian P.L. Slater, but who "would complain that he was 'sick and tired' of African stupidity" and make derisive references to the idea of 'renascent Africa'" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 27). He was inquisitorial in marking their English papers, going as far as subtracting points from a paper if the student in question had scored less than zero because of his mark deductions. He

also instigated reading and literary analysis by asking "students to read about a dozen novels on their own every term" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 28) and asking student to summarize the chapter of *Pinocchio* he read aloud to them once a week. It might seem that Slater was rather contemptuous of his African students, but in retrospective he was more than awed at their intelligence and potential. Wren describes: "Achebe had called on Slater a few days before my visit, when accepting an honorary degree from the University of Kent. Slater, retired from teaching, living in a pretty row house on the east side of Canterbury. He was a sprightly, enthusiastic man, paradoxically diffident. Slater brought out a copy of Achebe's *Arrow of God* to show me, remarking, 'I don't know if he was just being nice.' The inscription read, 'To the man who taught me respect for language.' Slater hadn't thought nearly for forty years before that he was doing anything remarkable. 'I don't think I appreciated what a lot they were. At the time I thought, Okay, I'll try this. Oh? They can do that! Very well, I'll try that. Oh, they can do that!? Now I can look back and say, For goodness sake, you had the nerve to ask them to see parallels -- or differences -- looking at, say the Chartists in England, or the federation of states into modern Germany, on the other hand, and the civil disturbances, and the multi-national issues in Nigeria on the other?' But I did, you know -- I was asking for perspectives on enormous issues. Achebe told me 'I remember you used a book on logic' and he was fourteen! I said 'So I did. I've got the book upstairs. I, now -- I wouldn't dare use it -- not even in my good classes.' He added, sounding a little awed, 'I could do it with this kids -- they weren't even Europeans. It was all outside their experience, and yet they took it. I boggle when I think of it'" (Wren 54; Slater qtd. in Wren 54). Slater's view indicates that in spite of the imperialist epithets he pronounced, the alumni did appreciate his relentlessness in assessing them as it undoubtedly gave them much of the language and literature that helped launch their literary careers offered.

Another of their English and literature teachers was Charles Low, an Oxford-trained Australian poet and playwright who was reputed to know *Paradise Lost* virtually from memory. His speed in reading novels was legendary, and he "read novels like *The Prisoner of Zenda* in a single hour-long 'prep' period" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 8). Low asked for his students' feedback and input on his own literary creations, like the play *White Flows the Latex, Ho!* and promoted the reading and writing of poetry, sharing many of his genial poems with his students. He also produced Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* to the delight of the students and his fellow faculty. There were literary competitions and prizes (Achebe once won a poetry prize) and, considering the strictness of the teachers when marking essays it was no surprise that to Ike that "An essay on the 'Eclipse of the Sun,' in which I scored 27 out of 30, was a great morale booster" (Ike qtd. in Oguzie 367). Poetry writing was also compulsory at Umuahia and Gabriel Okara, for example, believes this helped him immensely (Nnenyelike <<http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/how/2004/mar/16/how-mar16-001.htm>>). Not only were these teachers well-qualified, but what made their lessons and methods so successful, according to Achebe, was that: "It doesn't matter really what you teach; it is the spirit. I think that the best teachers in Ibadan, in Umuahia, seemed to be formed by that spirit. They weren't teaching us African literature. If we had relied on them to teach us how to become Africans we would never have got started. They taught us English literature; they taught us what they knew. But they had a passion, if you like, for whatever it was, and they conveyed it. And a good student could take off from there" (Achebe qtd. in Wren 66).

The reductionism of African history in the African and world school curricula has been widely discussed. However, there were exceptions, and it seems that one of the teachers at Umuahia instilled the students with pride in their history:

The subject was Ancient history; the teacher, Mr. Eagleton. Ancient History was my favourite subject. Mr. Eagleton was one of my favourite teachers ... I thrilled to the knowledge that the birth of civilisation took place, not only in the valleys of the Euphrates River in the Middle East, but also in the Nile Valley and Delta of ancient Egypt and *African Kingdom*. And, coming nearer home, Mr. Eagleton told us about the achievements of the ancient and illustrious West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, which flourished at about the time Europe was emerging from the Dark to the Middle Ages. In recounting these stories, Mr. Eagleton, himself a European did not exhibit any trace

of condescension in his voice, or his manner. Ancient History fascinated me. But the more recent period of History, or rather that part of the subject dealing with the colonial expansion of Britain in Africa, was dull and drab by comparison. Even at our tender ages and though much too cowed to express our feelings openly, there were several amongst my classmates who had what I can best describe as a sense of racial degradation as the colonial story, and the unspeakable horrors of the Slave Trade, unfolded. However, journeys of exploration and discovery, *per se*, were stirring. Mungo Park's "discovery" of the Niger, and David Livingstone's journeys to Southern and Central Africa, were the foremost among those stories. (Momah 134)

In Ezenwa-Ohaeto's biography of Achebe, and in the words of Momah, it is not difficult to identify this superb teacher as Mr. Ogle, who is said to have some traits in common with the literary Mr. Eagleton. In Momah's novel however, Europeans like Mr. Eagleton, were not allowed to thrive long in colonial Nigeria and the boys were aware of it: "There was general puzzlement as to reasons for Mr. Eagleton's departure, and an almost tangible sense of loss among the boys ...There was only a feeling that a good man was being let go by an unfriendly and reactionary authority: the British Colonial office ... Perhaps Mr. Eagleton had been a little too sympathetic to the national struggle for political self-determination and independence. Had he not almost given his life for "Freedom?" In extolling the achievements of ancient empires native to West Africa, he had given us some sense of our self-worth" (Momah 139). The boys also read William Francis Collier's *History of the British Empire* (1859), which if we believe the narrating voice of *The Shining Ones* was read "like a set book in Literature" (Momah 212). They however realized "not to put all our faith in the story of our people as recounted by those who propagated the notion that we had little or no history worth the telling" (Momah 225). How fitting that most of them would write Africa back into history! A Nigerian teacher, S.O. Biobaku (then S.O. Bisiriyun) was another great influence. He started teaching at Umuahia in 1947 and he was later on to become a renowned historian and university administrator. One of the countless rules and regulations at Umuahia was the banning of the use of the vernacular (the students, as I mentioned earlier came from all over the country and Western Cameroon and therefore had very different ethnic backgrounds). This rule, without doubt, enhanced the proficiency of the language by all and disobedience meant instant punishment. Achebe has mentioned that his first punishment at Umuahia was due to the disobedience of the "vernacular" rule (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 40). The staff of the college, and in turn the students, were staunch on the use of correct grammar, both oral and written. Coleman believes that "The Nigerian who acquired a knowledge of English had access to a vast new world of literature and of ideas, and his contact with it awakened new aspirations, quickened the urge toward emulation, and provided the notions and the medium of the expression of grievances" (114).

Considering the significance of the literary ambience of Umuahia in the lives of its eminent students, it is not surprising that some of them have decided to pay homage to it in their literary works. The first such work is *The Bottled Leopard* (1985) Ike, a novel that can be inscribed in the genre of the literary fantastic, and is set in Ndikelionwu, a village in southeastern Nigeria and in Government College Ahia (the name bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Ike's *alma mater*). Current students have also noticed this fact and as Ike himself admits "On a visit to my old school, Government College, Umuahia, in 1994, a Vice-Principal told me that they saw *The Bottled Leopard* as a novel on the college. The boys, therefore, read it with special interest" (334). Through the novel, we are informed on the rules and regulations of the college and its ambience, its famous inter-school cricket matches, and it is clear the principal, Mr. Williams is nicknamed "Dewar," just as the real Mr. Simpson was and for the same reasons! The author's notes at the end of the novel clearly indicate how little fictive these aspects of Government College Ahia were. In spite of all the extraordinary merits it had flaws according to Ike, who claims that in *The Bottled Leopard* his second objective was "to take a critical look at an educational system with a very high public rating but which appears designed to produce black English men rather than to help the pupils to grapple effectively with their societal problems" (Ike qtd. in Oguzie 370). It would be interesting to read this assertion simultaneously to that of Molly Mahood, who taught English at University College Ibadan when Amadi, Achebe, Okigbo, and Ike studied there, and whose views on this controversial matter are that

We were extraordinarily lucky in Ibadan really in the late '50's or even before. There was an extremely good secondary school tradition. We got the ream. Of course that meant that we were called elitists. Perhaps we were. But it did mean we could keep up a very high standard. We got the backing of London, holding the standard firm. The infrastructure for the schools, I think, all important ... Now there were very good schools who worded on building up their courses to the university . That's to say, they were, in English terms, going up to "A" levels. And this meant that they were attracting very good staff, both expatriate and Nigerian. They were nearly all boarding schools which had of course the disadvantage that , in theory, they took people away from their own environment - de-tribalized them. They thought of themselves as Nigerians ... literature was very good at de-tribalization, but it gave people a chance to be tribal in the sense of preserving and celebrating, as it were, their own tribal culture, and therefore they didn't need to do it to the same extent, in their own social life. (Mahood qtd. in Wren 23)

In 2003, Momah's *The Shining Ones: The Schooldays of Obinna Okoye* was published. This work, which Momah considers a fictionalized autobiography, is the first book that chronicles the life of the golden generation of authors I have been discussing here. It is a very fitting tribute to the college by a nostalgic and grateful alumnus. Its principal characters are easily identified and it gives us a magnificent biographic portrait of them. Life at Umuahia is faithfully chronicled and most, if not all, incidents described in the text have proved to be true when contrasted with the real evidence given by the alumni in several interviews granted to Ezenwa-Ohaeto and Wren. On the occasion of the launch of *The Shining Ones*, Achebe's enthusiastic reception of the book is evident in this review: "He was full of praises for his dear friend for doing their school a befitting honor. Professor Achebe like others before him talked about the lost glory of their Alma Mata [sic] and nature of discipline in their time. The Government College that is celebrated in Momah's book has virtually disappeared he said. The school like the country has fallen on hard times. The book written by Chike now serves as a memory bank for posterity to draw from. He also hoped the book would inspire others to write about their growing up experiences as teenagers. In closing he said 'our children will have a chance not only to read Tom Brown school days as we did, now they have the chance to read also the shining ones'" (Odutola <<http://www.thisdayonline.com/archive/2004/06/03/20040603art01.html>>). Of course, there is much more to the history of Umuahia than a brief recount of its literary environment in this paper. Indeed, the college is no longer what it was and its present condition is heartbreaking much to the dismay of its "old boys"; nevertheless, my point is that it has made literary history. With the help of the testimonies of the literary alumni in interviews, essays, biographies, and with the aid of the literary critics and scholars who realized the role that it played in creating a literary elite, its importance in literary history is evident. Its library and the English novels which were later to prompt the authors' writing back to the Empire, the school magazine that first provided the alumni with a space in which to develop their writing and editing skills, the rising nationalistic fight for the creation of a legitimate university in Nigeria, and the suppression of African history from the school curricula prove how a school founded on the tenets of British literary tradition went on to be the seedbed of some of the icons of African literature in English.

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