

Tess Osonye Onwueme Biographical Statement

“Internationally renowned for her award-winning plays, Dr. Tess Onwueme is the literary soul-mate of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong’o. She is the first African woman dramatist to break into their ranks, so that What Mama Said, Tell it to Women, Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen, The Missing Face, The Desert Encroaches and the Reign of Wazobia become staples of international college and university curricular in the 21st century.” -Professor Sonja Darlington (2002)

Tess Onwueme is a multiple award-winning author and eminent *University Professor of Global Letters* at the University of Wisconsin, USA. Her prestigious literary awards/honors include the Fonlon-Nichols award (2009), the *Phyllis Wheatley/Nwapa award for distinguished black writers* (2008), the Martin Luther King/Rosa Parks/Chavez Distinguished Authors Award (1989/90), the African Distinguished Authors Award (1988), and the extraordinary four-time prize of the *Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Award* in drama, among others. In 2007 the US State Department appointed her to the State Department Public Diplomacy Speaker/Specialist Program for North, East and West India with the mandate to *make friends for America*. In October 2014, she received the rare commendation with *Declaration of a Proclamation* in her honor by members of the Wisconsin State Senate/Legislature and the University of Wisconsin to mark the *Tess Onwueme Archival Collection* at the University of Wisconsin. The 2009 *Tess International Conference*, which was exclusively devoted to Tess Onwueme’s creative work, followed the prestigious Fonlon-Nichols award to her in Vermont, USA, in 2009. Her plays have featured in international academic and public stages in India, Sudan, Canada, the USA, the UK, Europe, the Caribbean, and throughout Africa. Summing up the author’s contributions to World Literature/Drama, Dr. Kanika Batra notes that *“Onwueme’s creative works continue to influence and generate significant interest around the world, as they are widely produced/staged, studied, taught, and written about in scholarly books, dissertations, theses, book chapters, journal articles, and international media. Onwueme’s works have a wide range of social, political, historical, cultural and environmental concerns of the masses in the global community today, with emphasis on women, youth in continental Africa and the Diaspora”* (2009).

“Tess Onwueme is one of the greatest living authors. We proudly present Onwueme’s play Shakara as a powerful drama with resonant topical enactment of the chronic problems of global poverty, hunger, inequality, of class and gender, unemployment and joblessness provoking youth apathy and violence ravaging the world.” -Sanal Edamaruku, producer and President of the International Khatakali Centre in New Delhi, India; the play was performed in both Hindi and English (2010)

“Among her literary soul-mates are Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Toni Morrison, August Wilson, Ama ata Aidoo, Samuel Beckett, Derek Walcott, John Pepper Clark, Albert Camus, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, George Bernard Shaw, Athol Fugard, Alex la Guma, Mariama Ba, and Sembene Ousmane.” -Poet-Laureate & Prof. Eugene Redmond (1993)

“Among her acclaimed works is Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen...Through the voices of women, in Shakara and her other plays, Onwueme draws out universal themes of conflict...Described as the “Ibsen of her culture,” the playwright who dares to raise new issues, Onwueme uses the dramatic form to express an optimism for the future, for change and challenge to the repressive powers over people’s lives...” -Nina Adams on the 2004/2005 BBC World Drama Service production/broadcast of Onwueme’s drama

“Onwueme’s plays not only bring the range and beauty of Nigerian culture to an international audience, they also create artistic bridges crucial to the development of a multicultural educational environment.” -Prof. K. Kendall, Chair of Theatre, Smith College, MA (2001)

“Tess Onwueme is a political dramatist, for power affects every aspect of society. With remarkable strides Onwueme consolidates her position among the leading dramatists from Africa.” -Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1997)

“Tess Onwueme’s dramas are very much universal plays for an international audience as they speak to basic human rights of nationality, age, gender, or race” -Daniella Gioseffi (1990)

“Tess Onwueme's What Mama Said is a spellbinding theatre work! It is written as if Dr. Onwueme is composing a symphonic work... Along with her other masterwork, The Missing Face [this drama] places Tess Onwueme in the ranks of Wole Soyinka, Athol Fugard, and Derek Walcott.” -Woodie King, Jr. Director of the New Federal Theatre, New York City