
PROTOCOL

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the University of Lagos, the University of First Choice and the Nation’s Pride.

I am very delighted that we are celebrating one of our very own – Professor John Pepper Clark – today at the University of Lagos. Apart from his attainment of eighty years, although he is looking much younger, a very strong justification is that he was unarguably a very distinguished Professor of Literature, not only in the Department of English, University of Lagos, but also in Africa.

Professor J.P. Clark is a poet, playwright, journalist, translator and essayist. His literary career has been largely and indeed overwhelmingly focused on the expression of African tradition through the medium of the English Language. J.P. Clark has devoted all these years to accumulating, transcribing, adapting and translating the greatest of the epics of the Niger-Delta – Ozidi’s heroic tale. All of his works, with rare exceptions, are based on the manners, customs and imagery of the people and lands of Nigeria.

One of his critics refers to J.P. Clark as the most lyrical of the Nigerian poets. His poetry is said to celebrate the physical landscape of Africa. They also show the realities of the Nigerian situation and serve as prophecies not only about the Niger-Delta States but also Nigeria as a whole. As I hereby leave the subject-matter of his works to professionals, I must say that J.P. Clark epitomizes scholarship in general and literature in particular from age to age.

I cannot be more delighted to see also our very own Professor Wole Soyinka, the first Nobel Laureate of Literature in Africa. He has since the great award become a distinguished citizen of the entire world. I cannot see anyone more qualified to present today’s lecture other than Professor Wole Soyinka. In a similar way to Professor J.P. Clark, he was also a lecturer in the Department of English, University of Lagos. Both of them, along with others, were foundation scholars and professors that assisted us to make our very vibrant Department of
English, what it is today – obviously the leading Department of English in Nigeria.

How can I forget to salute Professor Ebun Clark, the wife of the celebrant? A distinguished Professor of Drama, she was Head of Department of English and the Director of Centre for Cultural Studies between 1983 and 1989. Thank you our very distinguished Professor Ebun Clark for standing by our celebrant over forty years.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I congratulate Professor J.P. Clark on the celebration of his 80th birthday. I am also very happy to note that the Delta State Government has donated an edifice to the Faculty of Arts named after Professor J.P. Clark. This building, alongside his works, will be an enduring legacy of his scholarship to generations yet unborn. May God in His infinite mercy keep you for us in very good health for many decades to come.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

Professor Rahamon A. Bello, FAEng
Dec. 12, 2013.