



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Obi Egbuna papers

1960-2014 [bulk 1966-1986]

Sc MG 944

Processed by Lauren Stark, July 2018.

Summary

Creator: Egbuna, Obi B.

Title: Obi Egbuna papers

Date: 1960-2014 [bulk 1966-1986]

Size: 2.62 linear feet (7 boxes)

Source: Gift of Bridget Egbuna, October 2017.

Abstract: The Obi Egbuna papers consist of the personal papers and manuscripts of this Nigerian novelist, short-story writer, and political activist.

Preferred citation: [Item], Obi Egbuna papers, Sc MG 944, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Lauren Stark, July 2018.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: Two CDs, "Nigeria Calling #526: Role of the Artist in a Cultural Revival" and "The Emperor of the Sea" by Obi Egbuna, as read by Dame Peggy Ashcroft, BBC Radio, 1972

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: One folder of loose photographs

Transferred to the Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division: one paperback

Creator History

Obi Egbuna was a Nigerian novelist, short-story writer, and political activist. He was born in Nigeria in 1938. In 1961, he moved to England to study law. His first novel, *Wind Versus Polygamy* (1964), was developed into a play and chosen to represent Britain at the First World Black Festival of Arts held in

Dakar, Senegal, in 1966. The play was then featured on BBC Radio and Television and repeated on the series, "Seven Selected Plays" where it was read by actress Peggy Ashcroft. BBC critic and producer James Mactaggart referred to Egbuna as "Africa's Gogol". Egbuna also became associated with controversy upon the publication of *Wind Versus Polygamy*. Critics were polarized by Egbuna's discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of polygamy.

Around the same time, Egbuna joined the Universal Colored People's Association (UCPA), an arm of the British Black Power movement, which marked his foray into the world of political activism. In the late 1960s, he visited the United States and met American leaders of the Black Power movement, including Elijah Mohammed, the leader of the Nation of Islam. Egbuna would soon become a leading figure in the movement in England. During this time of political activism, he was writing short stories, including *Daughters of the Sun and Other Stories* (1970); plays, such as *The Anthill* (1965); and articles for *The Sunday Times*, *The New Statesman*, and *Africa and the World*. Additionally, he was the editor of *The Voice of Africa*, a journal devoted to the Pan-African philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah, the former president of Ghana. In 1968, Egbuna wrote *The Murder of Nigeria: An Indictment*, which condemned the Ibo-Biafran War that left one million Nigerians dead. Like Nkrumah, he realized that a political program for Africans in the diaspora that ignored the African continent was useless.

In 1970, Egbuna was arrested for conspiring to kill police officers and held without bail for six months. While in prison, he wrote *Destroy This Temple: The Voice of Black Power in Britain* (1971), which discusses the horrors of slavery and the Ibo-Biafran War. At his trial, he was found guilty but given a suspended sentence.

After Egbuna's release from prison, around 1972, he returned to Nigeria where he became a director for state television and the director of the Writer's Workshop. He also continued writing, focusing on his observations of black culture in Britain and the United States in such publications as *The ABC of Black Power Thought* (1973), which was dedicated to Nkrumah, and *Diary of a Homeless Prodigal* (1976). He also published his second novel, *The Minister's Daughter* (1975) and another book of stories, *The Emperor of the Sea and Other Stories* (1976). The novel takes on a satirical tone in discussing corrupt elite factions and coups, while the stories examine polygamy and the poor living conditions of Africans in colonial Africa.

In 1976, Egbuna moved to the United States to attend the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, where he was named Fellow in Writing and received his master's degree. He completed his doctorate degree at Howard University in 1986, where he also taught and lectured from 1980–1986. While at Howard, he was influenced by individuals such as Julian Mayfield, Sterling Brown, and Eugenia Collier. Also in 1980, Egbuna published four new works, *Divinity: A Radio Play*, *The Madness of Didi*, *The Rape of Lysistrata*, and *Black Candle for Christmas*.

Egbuna suffered from acute leukemia and passed away on January 20, 2014.

Scope and Content Note

This collection includes personal papers and manuscripts of Obi Egbuna from 1960–2014, although the majority is from 1966–1986. It is arranged into four series: Personal and biographical, Academic career, Activism, and Writing. The Personal and biographical series includes such items such as personal correspondence, student membership cards, copies of his resume, and copies of his theses. The Academic career series consists of correspondence and teaching materials. Activism, the smallest series, is comprised of a few political posters and programs. The fourth series, Writing, the largest, contains copies of his published and unpublished work, both fiction and non-fiction.

Arrangement: Organized into four series: (1) Personal and biographical; (2) Academic career; (3) Activism; and (4) Writing.

Key Terms

Subjects

Authors, Nigerian

Political activists

Short stories, African (English)

Occupations

Dramatists

Names

Egbuna, Obi B.

Nkrumah, Kwame, 1909-1972

Container List

Personal and biographical 1960-2014

This series consists of personal and biographical papers of Obi Egbuna. The personal papers include membership cards to the Honourable Society of the Inner Temple, one of the four Inns of the court in London, in which participation is required for practicing law; a personal diary and notes; personal correspondence, including fan mail; copies of different incarnations of Egbuna's curriculum vitae; medical records, which include appointments and his own notes on his health; and eulogies written for his memorial service. The educational material covers his post-graduate education at the University of Iowa and Howard University. This material includes correspondence, mostly with University of Iowa faculty, potential doctoral programs, and fellowship programs; an "Honorary Fellow in Writing" certificate and transcript from the University of Iowa; papers and dissertation proposals, mostly written during his time at the University of Iowa; a copy of his MFA thesis, "Author's Diary: Impressions from Three Worlds" (1978); and a copy of his PhD dissertation, "The Dialectical Process in Modern African Literature: A Study in the Epistemology of Decolonization" (1986).

Arranged into two subseries, chronologically within each one: (1) General and (2) Education.

General

- b. 1 f. 1 Student membership cards ca. 1960-1962
- b. 1 f. 2 Diary and notes ca. 1966-1982
- b. 1 f. 3 Personal correspondence 1976-1993
- b. 1 f. 4 Curriculum vitae ca. 1980-1981
- b. 1 f. 5 Medical records 1996-2007
- b. 1 f. 6 Eulogies 2014

Education

- b. 1 f. 7 Correspondence 1976-1978
- b. 1 f. 8 University of Iowa fellow certificate and transcript 1976-1978
- b. 1 f. 9 MFA thesis, University of Iowa 1978
- b. 1 f. 10 Papers and proposals ca. 1976-1980
- b. 1 f. 11 PhD dissertation, Howard University ca. early 1980s-1986
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Includes drafts, edited versions, and final version.

Academic career 1980-2004

This series mostly contains material related to Egbuna's tenure at Howard University, when he was completing his doctorate and teaching in the departments of German and Russian Studies and African Studies and Research. It also includes other academic pursuits, such as conference participation. The series consists of correspondence, mostly with faculty and colleagues at Howard University, but also with potential employers; items related to speaking engagements, such as a flyer for a public reading, a folder from the Deuxieme Festival Mondial des Arts Negre Africains (1974), an invitation to the Convention of Nigerian Authors from Chinua Achebe (1981), a conference program for "Washington and Washington Writing: A Conference" (1986), and an invitation to speak at an African Heritage Literature Society event (1993); and teaching material used while at Howard University, such as syllabi, tests, and notes, for courses on Igbo, Literature of the Modern World, and Individual and Society.

Arranged alphabetically.

- b. 2 f. 3 Correspondence 1980-2004
- b. 2 f. 4 Speaking engagements 1974-1993
- b. 2 f. 5 Teaching material, Howard University 1980-1986

Activism 1970-1993

This small series contains memorabilia from events in which Egbuna participated, including a record album cover for *Songs of Revolution! The Tolpuddle Martyrs* (ca. 1970); a theater program and poster for *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1977); a poster for "Organize for Africa" (1983); and a program for the Malcolm X conference (1993). The Tolpuddle Martyrs were six farm workers in West Dorset who formed a trade union, which led to their arrest, in 1834; the album coincided with the yearly festival dedicated to the group. The image on this album cover includes a protest sign that says, "Free Obi Egbuna", presumably after his arrest in 1970. The program is for a University of Iowa production of *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1977) by Athol Fugard, written collaboratively with two South African actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona, in which Egbuna played the lead. The "Organize for Africa" poster, sponsored by the All-African People's Revolutionary Party, celebrates twenty-five years of African Liberation Day in 1983. Egbuna delivered the keynote introduction at the Malcolm X conference, which was held in Seattle in 1993.

Generally arranged chronologically.

- b. 2 f. 6-7 **Programs 1977-1993**
- b. 7 **Album cover and posters ca. 1970-1983**

Writing ca. 1966-2001

The largest series in this collection focuses on Egbuna's writings. The first subseries, General, includes correspondence, mostly with publishers but also with individuals and groups interested in producing his plays; publishing contracts; research material, such as newspaper clippings and journal articles, most likely used in his writing and teaching; and reviews. The second subseries, Articles and essays, mostly contains typescripts of essays, many of which are undated. It is unclear if all of these essays, aside from the one noted, were published. "The Scepter in Mount Pleasant" was a letter written on behalf of an unknown research team signed with the name "UZI"; letters to various newspapers are included, asking for the letter to be published. The two items listed in the third subseries, Book manuscripts, are drafts of unpublished books (one fictional and the other nonfictional), also undated. The fourth series, Plays, mostly consists of typescripts, with the exception of *Divinity*, which is a small reading guide published by Ernst Klett in Stuttgart with an introduction by Inge Uffelmann. *Didi's Mirror* is an adaptation of *The Madness of Didi*, written by Egbuna for the Howard University Theatre in 1983. "Onugbu: A Theory of Tragedy" consists of drafts and typescripts of this unpublished and undated play. *The Wind* is a playscript developed from his first novel. The fifth subseries, Stories, is comprised of typescripts of stories and story collections, with the exceptions of a shorter version of "A Black Candle for Christmas" that appeared in the *New Statesman* in its December 1971 issue, and "Blind Date", written for the July 1973 issue of *The Hoe*, which was the quarterly literary magazine of the Writers' Workshop in Enugu, Nigeria. Other typescripts, such as "Da Vinchi's Curtain" and "The Homosexual", were included in later story collections. "The Homosexual and Other Stories", an unpublished typescript, includes stories later included in *The Rape of Lysistrata*. "Rivers Can't Speak", probably unpublished, may have been written as a class assignment. The final subseries, Other, includes handwritten notes, single pages of typescript, and short essays that appear to express Egbuna's thoughts, responses, and critiques on various subjects.

Arranged into six subseries, alphabetically within each one: (1) General; (2) Articles and essays; (3) Book manuscripts; (4) Plays; (5) Stories; and (6) Other.

General

- b. 2 f. 8 **Correspondence 1968-2006**
- b. 3 f. 1
- b. 3 f. 2 **Publishing contracts 1972-1979**
- b. 3 f. 3 **Research material ca. 1966-2001**
- b. 3 f. 4 **Reviews 1966-1980**

Articles and essays

- b. 3 f. 5 **"Artistic Direction" ca. early 1990s**
- b. 3 f. 6 **"The CIA: Growing Menace in Nigeria (Special Report)" 1975 April 18**

Writing (cont.)

Articles and essays (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 7 *"'Contradictions' of the Black Power Ideology", Africa and the World (photocopies)* 1971 March
- b. 3 f. 8 "East Central State Writers' Workshop" ca. 1975-1976
- b. 3 f. 9 "Frankly Speaking" undated
- b. 3 f. 10 "How It All Began" ca. 1975-1976
- b. 3 f. 11 "Our National Religion" ca. 1975-1976
- b. 3 f. 12 "The Scepter in Mount Pleasant" 1993 April 25
- b. 3 f. 13 "The Second Assassination of Malcolm X" ca. 1992
- b. 3 f. 14 "What Is to Be Done?" undated

Book manuscripts

- b. 3 f. 15 "The Leprosy of Michael Jackson" undated
- b. 3 f. 16 "A Sphinx in Charcoal" undated

Plays

- b. 4 f. 1-2 *Didi's Mirror* 1983
- b. 4 f. 3 *Divinity: A Radio Play* 1980
- b. 4 f. 4-6 "Onugbu: A Theory of Tragedy" undated
- b. 4 f. 7 *The Wind* ca. 1966

Stories

- b. 5 f. 1-4 *Black Candle for Christmas* ca. 1970-1980
Includes handwritten original, ca. 1970; adapted version published in the *New Statesman*, vol. 82, #2127, December 24, 1971; and later reworked versions, ca. 1980.
- b. 5 f. 5 *"Blind Date", The Hoe, vol. 1, #1* 1973 July
- b. 5 f. 6 "Da Vinci's Curtain" ca. 1980
- b. 5 f. 7 *Daughters of the Sun* ca. 1970
- b. 5 f. 8 "Green Candle for Inosha Village" ca. 1980
- b. 5 f. 9 "The Homosexual and Other Stories" ca. 1970s
- b. 6 f. 1-2 Includes an early version of "The Homosexual".
- b. 6 f. 3-5 *The Rape of Lysistrata* ca. late 1970s-1980
- b. 6 f. 6 "Rivers Can't Speak" undated
- b. 6 f. 7 Other