

## SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE RETIREMENT OF PROF. WOLFGANG ZACH

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Sometimes a moment  
Stands out in time  
A new life discovered  
By a moment in rhyme

Everything changed by  
A single selection  
A turning point made  
In a moments alliteration  
A new life to continue  
Discovered in rhyme  
One moment that changed  
My life for all time

In that moment of time  
A difference was made  
My turning point reached  
A life's validity laid (taken from a poem by Robert John Meehan)

As I contemplate this personality, what is terribly fascinating is neither his intimidating size (which actually frightened me in my first encounter with him as his student) nor his voice which reminded me of my childhood experience of night masquarades in my village. As I contemplate this personality, what played on my mind like drumbeats of my village drummer or the penetrating sound of my father's flute with smiles spread over his wrinkled face is Prof. Zach's passion for postcolonial literature. When I first met him, I must confess, I was full of contempt for the Europeans who would be talking nonsense about African stories and postcolonial stuff they never understood, and might never understand, because they lived in glass houses, miles away from the village centres and harmattan fireplaces, which were the birthplaces of such stories. I entered my first class, with my epistemic hand gloves, ready to

land him a devastating, unforgettable blow on his white head if he dared talk rubbish about my African home. I made sure I sat in the front row of the class so that he could see my red eyes and pouts. He looked at me and with his natural, infectious warmth said, "Hello, you're from Nigeria!" I was taken aback! Transfixed! How come he knew I was from Nigeria? Then he went on, and on and on and on... Zach-like. He talked about Lagos, about Enugu, about Nsukka, about Chinua Achebe, about his experience with Nigerian taxi drivers, about Nigerians and their marvellous sense of time (very punctual). I was so impressed with his sense of humour, his details of every nook and cranny of my home state, and his remembrance of names like Prof. Donatus Nwoga and his dear wife and Prof. Obiechina. Before he finished I had lost my weaponry. I was completely disarmed by his knowledge of my native home. My eyes lost their red colour and brightened up! I could feel tears welling up! I was aware he knew that he had converted me. He could see he had won a friend. And he smiled or laughed, I'm not quite sure now what it was. Anyway, I could trust his knowledge of Africa, of my native country Nigeria, of my home state Enugu. I also saw how eager he was to learn more. I saw his child-like, almost 'Malala'-like curiosity to learn! From that first encounter, from that very moment, I made up my mind to work with him, to be his student.

Throughout my days with him as a student, Wolfgang never gave me the feeling that he knew it all. He was ready to listen, to ask questions, to correct me if I made mistakes in my analysis and placement of literary stuff in its historical context. Unlike many other scholars of Post-colonial literature, he tried to have first-hand information of the local setting of the stories, of the literary works.

He could talk about postcolonial literature because he allowed himself to be baptised in the muddy waters of its parents. This is what distinguishes Prof. Zach from the others. And this is why he sounds convincing! This is why he remains one of the few voices in postcolonial literature I want to listen to, one of the few voices I respect, one of the few voices that will continue to influence me in my literary journey and adventures!

So my dear Prof. Zach, quoting the beautiful poem of Joanna Fuchs, I say to you today:

If I could teach you, teacher,  
I'd teach you how much more  
you have accomplished  
than you think you have.

I'd show you the seeds you planted years ago  
that are coming into bloom.

I'd reveal to you the young minds  
that have expanded under your care,  
the hearts that are serving others  
because they had you as a role model.

If I could teach you, teacher,  
I'd show you the positive effect  
you have had on me and my life.

Your homework is  
to know your value to the world,  
to acknowledge it, to believe it.

Thank you, teacher!

Thanks Prof. Zach for making me what I am today! Thanks for converting me! I remain your  
literary disciple! Vielen Dank! Alles Liebe!

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