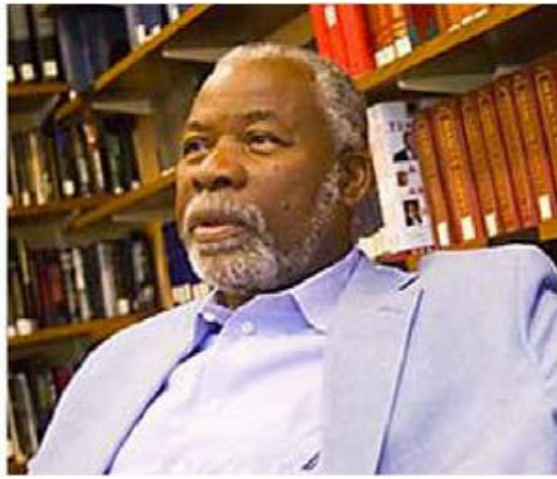


Hommage au Professeur Francis Abiola IRELE



Le Professeur Francis Abiola IRELE nous a quittés le 2 juillet 2017. Il avait 81 ans. Nombreux sont celles et ceux qui se souviendront avec émotion de cet intellectuel émérite. Docteur de l'Université de Paris (Sorbonne) en 1966, directeur du Département des langues vivantes et premier titulaire de la chaire de français à l'Université d'Ibadan, professeur de littérature, pédagogue, chercheur obstiné et fécond, auteur de nombreux ouvrages, il aura marqué de son empreinte des générations d'étudiants, de professeurs, de formateurs et d'universitaires qui ont eu l'honneur et le privilège de suivre ses cours ou d'assister à ses conférences.

Le Professeur Abiola Irele a constamment œuvré au rapprochement entre les gens, les peuples et les cultures. Il avait le sens du partage de ses connaissances immenses dans de nombreux domaines, de l'idée qu'il se faisait de la vie et des relations humaines. Véronique Tadjou nous rappelle qu'« il a consacré sa vie au renforcement des liens entre les littératures africaines anglophone et francophone. Il aimait la langue française, ses sonorités et la culture dont elle est le vecteur. »

Dans les années 80, lors des traditionnels 'Stages d'été' organisés au Village du Bénin (CIREL - Centre International de Recherche et d'Études de Langues), au Togo, dans le cadre de la formation continue des professeurs de français du Nigeria, du Ghana, de Sierra Leone, du Liberia, de Gambie, du Cap-Vert, de Guinée Bissau, d'Angola, du Mozambique, le Professeur Irele savait captiver son auditoire avide de mieux connaître les romanciers francophones et leurs œuvres. Lors des soirées avec les collègues, le Professeur Irele, toujours à la recherche d'un bon mot ou d'un trait d'esprit, animait avec passion les discussions, qui pouvaient se prolonger tard dans la nuit, sur des sujets divers et toujours dignes d'intérêt. Il nous revient en mémoire l'éternel débat sur le caractère plus ou moins 'synthétique' des langues française et anglaise. Un des participants lança la question suivante : « Existe-t-il en anglais l'équivalent de l'expression en usage en Afrique de l'Ouest *En tout cas, vraiment, là mon cher, ... ?* » Quelques secondes s'écoulèrent. Avec un large sourire, le Professeur Irele émit un seul mot *Honestly*. Preuve était faite que l'anglais pouvait signifier autant avec moins de signes !

« *Honestly* », deux mots viennent à l'esprit à l'évocation du nom du Professeur Abiola Irele : admiration et respect.

Prof Abiola Irele: Tribute to a departed Master Quill

Posted By: [Emeka Aniagolu](#) On: July 29, 2017 In: [Saturday Magazine](#)

On July 2, 2017, Professor Abiola Irele, a celebrated Nigerian academic, best known as the “doyen” of Africanist literary scholarship, passed away. He attended Nigeria’s premier university, University of Ibadan, from where he graduated with a bachelors’ degree in 1960. Following his graduation from Ibadan, he proceeded to Paris, France, to study the French language. He ended up with a Ph.D. in French from the University of Paris, Sorbonne, in 1966. He held successive teaching positions at the University of Ghana, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and the University of Ibadan, his alma mater.

In 1989, Professor Irele joined the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A, as a Professor of African, French and Comparative Literature. From the Ohio State University (OSU), Irele returned to Nigeria, where he took up the position of Provost at the newly established Kwara State University in Ilorin, Nigeria. Contemporaneously, he joined the faculty of Harvard University as a Visiting Professor of African and African American Studies and Romance Languages and Literatures, in the U.S.

Source: <http://thenationonlineng.net/prof-abiola-irele-tribute-departed-master-quill/>

Femi Ojo-Ade: A Tribute to Francis Abiola Irele

July 7th, 2017

A friend called to ask if it was true. I called another friend close to Prof and he confirmed it. Once again, Death the absolutist Terminator has struck down his quarry with the usual callousness and heartlessness.

Thoughts of past shared experiences came flying through my befuddled mind. They were few and far between, but doubtlessly of importance; for, they impacted my life no end. Memories. **Prof, number one, the very first Nigerian full Professor of French in a national university**, sent me a special invitation to his inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan.

Source: <http://www.ooduapathfinder.com/headline-stories/femi-ojo-ade-a-tribute-to-francis-abiola-irele/>

Tribute: On Abiola Irele

Resilient eminence are the two words that come to mind for me I as rush this short tribute for **Professor Abiola Irele, doyen of African literary and cultural theory and criticism, publisher of note, frontline academic editor, great teacher, category bending anthologist, and one of the deepest among Africanist thinkers.**

Adélékè Adéèkó is a Distinguished Professor at the Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

Source: <https://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2017/07/03/tribute-abiola-irele/>



Tributes to Abiola Irele by ALA Members

A Grateful Author Remembers

(for Abiola Irele, 1935 – 2017)

When Serendipity conspires with Fate, the result is almost invariably a combination of astonishment and eye-popping bewilderment. This observation provides a painfully perfect script for my own 'Irele narrative', especially with regard to my interactions with **this great scholar and generous enabler** in what has now turned out to be his last few weeks on earth.

[...]

There goes **Abiola Irele, the doer and enabler. Admirably cosmopolitan and inspiringly literate, Irele was a man and scholar constantly re-inventing himself and his ideas, an ageless humanist with an astounding combination of youthful energy and the seasoned wisdom that comes with age.** We will sorely miss his stupendous zest for life, his powerfully resonant voice, his infectious passion for music, wine, and enlightened company.

Niyi Osundare
Ibadan
July 6, 2017

Like many graduate students, I had only a vague understanding of my principal professor's standing within the field in which I hoped to earn a PhD. I was somewhat aware that he was supposed to be famous. But **his actual stature as a scholar in African literary studies began to come into focus only during a year I spent at the Sorbonne in Paris. Almost invariably, and whenever I introduced myself as a student from the University of Ibadan, one of the professors at the Sorbonne would inquire: "so, do you know Abiola Irele?" Professional doors would swing open once his name was mentioned.**

[...]

In summation, **for myself, and all those who benefited from your friendship, openness, and generosity, I simply say: thank you.**

Moradewun Adejunmobi,
University of California, Davis, ALA President 2015-2016

My first intellectual encounter with him was his two-part piece on négritude, and it bore all the hall marks of **his inimitable style** and every subsequent piece from **his magnificent oeuvre**. It was like reading, feeling and listening to a musical composition and performance; it could be heard and felt as much as read; **the substantive musicality of his work meant that every piece he wrote was worth listening to.**

[...]

The ancestors have welcomed Abiola Irele for the legacy that he gifted us, and in whose debt so many subsequent generations will gratefully share in his being part of us all.

Prof. Pablo Idahosa,
African Studies
International Development Studies Master
Founders College
York University
Toronto, Canada

A huge loss of a selfless intellectual, who saw far and deep! We must prove worthy of his encompassing legacy. Now, the bards will begin singing, for eternity, strains which will echo down the ages. **It is up to us and those whom we touch, in our various ways, to show that Abiola Francis Irele has NOT lived in vain.**

In the meantime, condolences, as we borrow Emile Dickinson's tongue to bid Abiola

"Pass to thy Rendezvous of Light,
Pangless except for us—
Who slowly for the Mystery
Which thou hast leaped across!"

Sopé Oyèláràn
Winston-Salem, NC

Homage to Abiola Irele from Véronique Tadjo

Abiola Irele knew how to build bridges between people. He dedicated his entire academic career to reinforcing the ties between Anglophone and Francophone African literature. He loved the French language, the sound of it and the culture behind it. He was a man of the world who famously eased the rift between Léopold Sédar Senghor and Wole Soyinka around the Négritude movement. He was a sophisticated literary critic whose ability to straddle different cultures did not prevent him from retaining a deep Yoruba identity.

Véronique Tadjo
July 2017

I first met Abiola Irele at an ALA meeting many years ago but became more acquainted with him when I participated in a NEH Summer Seminar on African literature which he organized at Ohio State University. **His intellectual depth, knowledge of African literature in English and French, was immediately apparent in his lectures and overall commentaries.** At subsequent ALA and ASA meetings, I had the pleasure of conversing with him and recognizing his inclusive Diasporic perspectives. My sincerest condolences to his family.

Joe McLaren
July 2017

Guardo un excelente recuerdo del Sr. Irele Abiola, a quien nunca conocí personalmente. **Cuando realizaba mi tesis doctoral sobre Amadou Hampâté Bâ le solicité informaciones vía correo electrónico, que generosamente me proporcionó y que me resultaron de gran ayuda. Nunca olvidaré su gesto.** Mi más sentido pésame a su familia y amigos.

Vicente Montes Nogales
Universidad de Oviedo

In Remembrance of Francis Abiola Irele

The bell tolled for our brother and colleague Abiola Irele and as we say in the African-American vernacular "Abiola got on up outta here." **He has left us but not before creating and depositing in our souls an extraordinary legacy of scholarship and intellectual achievement. Abiola was an exceptional scholar and thinker. And yet he never lost the human touch. He was indeed the professor's professor.**

[...]

"When Abiola speaks people listen." Abiola possessed a unique talent for imbibing his oral gifts with humor and wit. [...]

How we miss you Abiola! **We loved you so much and you will stay in our hearts.**

Debra S. Boyd
North Carolina Central University
Durham, NC
July 2017

Tribute to Professor Abiola Irele

This tribute is for Professor Abiola Irele, one of the finest scholars Nigeria, Africa and indeed the world ever produced. **His presence as a scholar and a person was inspiring, encouraging and reassuring.**

[...]

Professor Irele touched many lives positively. We will all miss him, especially his scholarship and his amiable disposition. I would like to celebrate him and his achievements with the poem below:

Abiola, the intellectual warrior son of Irele
Mira magista, renowned teacher, famous scholar
It is your accomplishment that calls forth this encomium
You sowed good seeds, nurtured them with care
And reaped a hundred fold, a thousand fold.
The one who bestrode traditions and cultures
And yet was as urbane and cosmopolitan as they come
Ever confident, relaxed, attentive, in every situation.
You traversed the land of the great and the small
But your pace did not slacken till the very end
Let committed disciples inherit your forest of books
Your tall tower of ideas and illustrious monuments
Disseminate the unfettered knowledge you bequeathed the world.
Let the initiated drink from your spring of knowledge
A legacy that will endure till the end of time
Our song soars with you as you rejoin revered ancestors
Ije awele. Go in grace and in peace.
A mighty tree has fallen down
And all the birds have scattered in the forest.

Akachi Ezeigbo, PhD, FNAL, FLSN, FESAN
Professor of English
Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo
P.M.B. 1010
Abakaliki
Ebonyi State

Source: <https://africanlit.org/ala-oral-history-project/commemorations/tributes-to-abiola-irele-by-ala-members/>

For FRANCIS ABIOLA IRELE – “Olohun-Iyo”, By Wole Soyinka

True, numbers diminish, but we are not thereby
Diminished. Memories rack, yet lift
Our spirits off the rack of remembrance. Be it
The echo of a harsh scrape, decades dimmed,
Of a street café chair, *rue des Ecoles*, puncturing
Pearly laughter, a head thrust sideways,
Quizzical in contestation – these hoarded trivia
Flit in and out of mind, unbidden, contesting
The tyranny of absence.

Earth revolves, nothing is resolved
The hours pass in spurts of sparse fulfillment.
We remain the thoughts we spin, and leave
Lingering over wine vapour, tobacco spirals
Around audacious faces – were we not
The Renaissance generation? Then, Gauloises,
Gitanes vied with filtered cigarillos – it was
That time when smoke-free lives were yet
Unborn. We littered *Presence Africaine* with stubs
And words of passion, moulders of identity.

Let no one grudge those you leave behind
These keepsakes. Some will speak Negritude,
Others Marxism and aspiring Communes. You were
The cosmopolitan, consummate, straddling proposition isles.
The Muses held you in thrall, deftly you skirted
Dogma traps. A lyric voice, suddenly in full flight
On a Donizetti aria – fittingly we named you
Olohun-Iyo – but next breath became a midwife, fixated
On parturition of a new nursery of creativity.

Why this sudden ‘Francis’, I once charged, intrigued.
It swam against the tide of black awakening. Your reply,
A dismissive shrug – *The name was stamped on me.*
All family history – I merely restored my full identity.
Some enigma lurked, but his was right of reticence.
I simply canonized St. Francis of the Muses,
For saint indeed he was – of letters – bore the stigmata
Invisibly, the scars of honour, earned in defence
Of hallowed space for unfettered intellect.

Freed of those sudden flares of latent scars –
The triumphal march of neo-barbarians at our gates –
You join the absent throng of griots, preceptors,
Their arms wide open to enfold you. Enter.
Suave medium of their grand accord – Damas,
Depestre, Okigbo, Aime Cesaire, Walcott, Sedar Senghor –
You made their lives your own. From rubble of the Tower
Of Babel, smoothed paving stones to float an isthmus – Black
Continent to island beaded Caribbean. You spun
A rainbow of insights over the waters of Dispersal.

Death kicks us in the groin. We cry Foul
An off-shore umpire looks the other way. Our protests
Merely swell the ocean of separation. Blithe spirit, who
Wove bright sashes round the peaks of lyric,
Plunged, pearl diver, to the ocean beds of thought, brought
Parnassus to Idanre, Montparnasse to Olumo – elegance
Of mind the sustaining cord of an unending quest –
Alas, *Aburo*, that you must set off, too soon for vain desire –
For that famed Diaspora of No Return.

July 20, 2017
Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate in Literature

Source: <https://opinion.premiumtimesng.com/2017/07/20/for-francis-abiola-irele-olohun-oyo-by-wole-soyinka/>