

When a Comet Drops from the Literary Firmament

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Sometimes only one person is missing and the whole world seems depopulated
Alphonse De Lamartine (1790-1869)

It is usually a difficult task to write a tribute for a late friend and mentor with tears still rolling down your cheeks. But let me summon courage to pen down these eternal lines for a great scholar who is so truly worthy of homage. To begin with the obvious: Professor David Roger Jowitt was a famed scholar of English studies for reasons that are perfectly clear. The first is his capacity to identify and popularize a particular variety known today as Nigerian English. As a matter of fact, one can say, with considerable justification, that Jowitt is the intellectual founding father of Nigerian English. The other is that his fame has spread, like the proverbial wild fire, because of his innumerable contributions in the area of English language and linguistics. He was very original and had turned his genius to highlighting some of the ways the Standard British English differed from other New Englishes.

Besides, Prof Jowitt was a humble scholar and his humility was both amazing and edifying, his sense of modesty compelling and challenging. He was a generous man with an accommodating disposition. I will never forget that afternoon in 2021 when he came back from the United Kingdom and gave me a set of 37 DVD players of Shakespeare's plays. We had a fruitful collaboration on the project **Shakespeare in Nigeria** (SIN). He was a passionate lover of literature, life and laughter. But humor was his proper sphere. I used to submit all my writings to his censure. He was naturally a scholar who needed not the spectacle of books to read languages and if you are a lover of books Prof. Jowitt's home provides you with the opportunity to run through all the fits of bedlam. Here a forest of books, there another mountain of anthologies, a heap of academic journals, his bed and even the floor is littered with books. It will be a daunting task to relive my life with him here.

Over and above all, Prof Jowitt was an ardent believer and a strong catholic. He knew that at death the human body is useless matter that can be cremated or buried under the earth and like Saint Monica once intoned "**Lay this body anywhere and take no trouble over it. One thing only do I ask of you, that you remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be**". Life is nothing! Prof. Jowitt's mighty body is now nothing but ash. My consolation is that he died as a true Christian. Christian hope does not promise successful days to the rich and the strong but resurrection and life to those who must exist in the shadows of death. Success is no name of God. Righteousness is. There are some people who bring a light so great to the world that even after they have gone the light still remains. Prof. Jowitt is one of such persons. He lived a righteous life and heaven will surely be his home. On earth his memory shall be worshipped for very many years to come. Good bye, my friend, teacher, colleague and mentor.