PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 SUMMARY

The status of Christopher Okigbo (1932-67) as the greatest Anglophonic, postcolonial, modernist African poet of the twentieth-century has been established beyond all reasonable doubt not only in two major studies of his works (Sunday Anozie, Creative Rhetoric: Christopher Okigbo, 1972, and Dubem Okafor, Dance of Death: Nigerian History and Christopher Okigbo’s Poetry, 1998) and two major collections of scholarly studies of them (Critical Perspectives on the Poetry of Christopher Okigbo, ed. Donatus Nwoga, 1983 and Critical Essays on Christopher Okigbo, ed. Uzoma Esonwanne, 2000) but in tributes paid to him in a collection of memorial tributes (Don’t Let Him Die: An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo) co-edited by Africa’s most outstanding novelist, Chinua Achebe (1978). Scores of other articles in journals, chapters in books, poetic tributes in magazines, published across the world, as well as doctoral and master’s dissertations or theses, continue to pay tribute to his significance and uniqueness in modern African letters. His major collection of poems, was listed as one of the most influential 100 African literary world of the twentieth-century. Most recently, in a text, Aestheticism and Modernism: Debating Twentieth Century, eds. Richard Danson Brown and Suman Gupta, published by the Open University of the UK and Routledge (2005), a chapter, devoted to his poetry effectively canonized him as one of the major pillars of twentieth-century modernism. Against this background, four American universities in the Greater Boston Area (Boston University, Harvard University, University of Massachusetts Boston and Wellesley College), has forged a unique collaboration to honor his legacy in an International Conference scheduled for September 20-24, 2007 and focusing on the ideals of the open society as reflected in his poetry. Recently a major online resource for the study of the poems, Concordance to Okigbo’s Poetry, (http://echeruo.syr.edu/biodata/echeruo_index.htm) was created by Michael J. C. Echeruo. Other online sources—keyword “Christopher Okigbo”—list over 13,500 references. Additionally, a major critical biography by Obi Nwakamma is in the offing. Also in the offing are an annotated critical edition of his complete works by Chukwuma Azuonye, and a critical study of the organic unity of the poems, The Quest for Fulfilment: Narrative and Dramatic Continuity in Okigbo’s Poetry, also by Chukwuma Azuonye.

2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 Name(person or organization)
Christopher Okigbo Foundation

2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage
Owner and custodian of the collection

2.3 Contact person(s)
(1) Ms Obiageli Okigbo,
(2) Mr Okechukwu Okuzu

2.4 Contact details
(1) President,
Christopher Okigbo Foundation
83 Chaussée de Boondael,
3 IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE

3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The Christopher Okigbo Collection

3.2 Description

The collection includes manuscripts (handwritten and typescript) of: previously published and unpublished poems, experimental writing, literary projects, sketches and doodles, correspondence of Christopher Okigbo, journals, manuscripts of his contemporary authors, travel documents, photographs, typescripts of interviews amongst others, dating from 1956 till his death in 1967.

Included among the papers are:

- Drafts/earlier versions of published poetry including: Dance of the Painted Maidens, Distances, Heavensgate, Path of Thunder: ‘Path of thunder clouds’
- Previously unpublished poetry in English and in Igbo including: Gbō nwata ijeke ebe [Gbō nwata, I jeko ebee?]…
- Templates for poetry collections including: Death of Water, Death of Fire [Chronological List of Poems], Path of Thunder by Christopher Okigbo [Table of Contents], Elegies of Thunder, 1965-1966 [List of sequences for a collection with that title]
- Interviews including: Transcript of interview with Christopher Okigbo and Vansertima
- Literary projects including: Future topics: Literature and Nationalism in Africa; Myth, Image and Symbol in Modern African Poetry [List of Contents], Negritude; Individual studies—Fiction (Achebe, Camara Laye, Peter Abrahams); Poetry (Senghor, Cesaire, U’Tamsi, Okara, Okigbo, Awonoor-Williams); Drama (Soyinka). Manuscript. Foolscap. Studies in African Literature/New African Writing, edited by Professor Maxwell and Ben Obumselu, Ibo Oral Traditions, Abstract. Christopher Okigbo. Ibadan, 1965: “My purpose is to investigate certain spoken arts of Ibos, their epigrams, funeral dirges, oracular responses, panegyrics, lyrics, masquerade songs, and various other chants connected with divine worship and with vegetation and fertility rites. Both inner and outer characteristics will be studied historically and critically. The aim throughout will be to ascertain whether these art-forms attain a condition of poetry, and to establish their status and significance within their culture context….”

- Correspondence including: Anozie, Sunday to Okigbo, London, 24 Feb. 1966. Black Orpheus for Okigbo’s Attention. 29 October 1965, Philip Harris, confidential to Peter Thomas mentioning Christopher, 8th May 1961, Miscellaneous Invitations from individuals and institutions for social events. November 1962-October 1965 (56 pieces)
- Documents (personal and official) including: Mbari, The African Writers and Artists Club, NW/48X Onireke Street, Ibadan, PMB 5162, Ibadan, Nigeria, Tel. 21167, 196466

*See attached inventory: “The Christopher Okigbo Collection” for more details

3.3 Provenance
The documentary heritage was inherited by Obiageli Okigbo as sole heir to the estate of Christopher Ifekandu Okigbo (deceased), on August 19, 2003. Obiageli Okigbo donated the said material to the Christopher Okigbo Foundation (COF) founded in Brussels, Belgium on July 7, 2005. The documentary heritage is privately owned by the COF.

3.4 Assessment of Physical state and condition
The Christopher Okigbo Collection is currently stored in a secure environment but unfortunately some pieces have been damaged seemingly by insects. For the most part, the manuscripts and typescripts are still legible and complete but urgent attention action has to be taken towards categorical restoration and preservation of these documents.

3.5 Referees;
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617-287-6797 (Telefax)
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Professor Chinua Achebe
Charles P. Stevenson Jnr Professor of Languages and Literature
Bard College
Annadale
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Professor Wole Soyinka
Playwright, Poet, Novelist, Political Activist
Nobel Prize Laureate in Literature
eniogun@aol.com

Mauro Rosi,
Spécialiste du Programme-Livre et Traduction
Division des Arts et de l’entreprise culturelle
4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Authenticity
The authenticity of these documents has been definitely and unequivocally established. They are a direct legacy from the late poet to his only child and sole heir, the applicant, Obiageli Okigbo. Held in trust (between the death of the poet in August 1967 and their formal inheritance) by the poet’s late elder brother, Dr. Pius Okigbo (a learned man of letters, distinguished connoisseur, and former Nigerian Ambassador to the EEC as well as former Economic Adviser to the Federal Government), the integrity of the papers were maintained before their transmission to the present legatee. No third party has been involved in the handling of the papers, except as witnesses, and there has been absolutely no chance of forgery, fakery, copying, replication, bogusness or hoaxing that could have affected the genuineness of the documents in any way.

4.2 World significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability
Against the foregoing background, the documents being nominated for the Memory of the World Register represent a much-awaited source of unique insights into hitherto unknown aspects of this outstanding poet’s life and art. They not only include original versions from his masterpiece-“Labyrinths” but also unpublished works, the highlight being some experimental poems in his mother tongue, Igbo. Taken together with the cache of correspondence, notes, drafts, jottings, and even doodles in the manuscripts, these papers bid fair to drastically change the canons of Okigbo’s poetry and by extension the canons of postcolonial African literature and even, on a larger scale, twentieth century modernist poetics. Clearly, these are “unique and irreplaceable” documents and there can be no doubt that “their disappearance or deterioration would constitute a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of humanity.”

4.3
There is clear evidence from the comprehensive list of the Okigbo Collection that they do indeed satisfy practically all the five criteria stipulated under section 4.2.5 of the General Guidelines:

1. Criterion 1 – Time: Several of these documents are powerfully evocative of their time, the dark years of the bloody crises (1962-1966) that exploded into the three-year long Nigerian civil war (1967-70), a period of significant social or cultural change in Nigeria, Africa, and indeed the world, in which the poet lost his life fighting for the freedom of the secessionist Republic of Biafra, in the firm belief that the massacre of Eastern Nigerians during the crises of 1966 constituted a major act of inhumanity. The drafts of the poet’s Anthem to Biafra (“Land of our Birth”) not only recapture the mood of the time and the basis of the poet’s sacrifice but also his fears, doubts and prophetic insights into the traumas destined to bring the Biafran dream to an unfulfilled end. Some of the materials in these document (like the poet’s experimental poetry in his mother tongue, Igbo) do indeed represent a new discovery, a very “first of its kind” that is destined not only to validate present day arguments for writing in African languages championed by Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, they also represent a major boon, boost and model for the development of modernist poetry in the Igbo language.

2. Criterion 2 – Place: Several of these documents were created in the short-lived Republic of Biafra, the name under which secessionist Eastern Nigeria asserted its sovereignty on May 30, 1967, following the ethnic cleansing of Eastern Nigerians in other parts of Nigeria in 1966. They do not only contain crucial information about the phenomenon of Biafra, it represents one of the rare artistic outcomes of that vanished phenomenon.
3. **Criterion 3 – People**: A novel of the early 1970’s by Ali Mazrui, The Trial of Christopher Okigbo, vilifies the poet by arraigning him for trial in the court of After-Africa for lavishing his enormous talents and sacrificing his precious life, which could have been put to better use, in a narrow ethnic conflict. These documents bid fair to offer a different picture. This is especially so with the drafts of the Anthems for Biafra which seem to capture the essence of the Biafran movement, transitions, calling attention to its significance for “the race” (the black race), the advances in the pursuit of the ideals of freedom which it represent, and the impact of key individuals or groups in the movement.

4. **Criterion 4 – Subject and theme**: The subject matter of several of these papers are crucial for a proper understanding of the finer nuances of Nigerian postcolonial history, politics and artistic development so far as they relate to the crisis of 1962-66, the emergence of Biafra in 1967, and the subsequent civil war of 1967-70.

5. **Criterion 5 – Form and style**: Reference has been made above to the Igbo poems discovered in these documents by distinguished professor of African languages and literatures at the University of Massachusetts at Boston, Chukwuma Azuonye. Azuonye writes: “His Igbo poems bear witness to a sensitive immersion into the poetics and social praxis of Igbo oral verse-making, and there is evidence in these poems that he was set on a path to transforming himself into an Igbo language minstrel of the written tradition.” In conclusion, he asserts. “This small repertoire of poems and poetical sketches rendered in the poet’s mother-tongue, Igbo, and experiment that puts paid to the ill-informed suspicions and accusations of his critics, especially the troika of the poetics of decolonization, Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980), who accuse him of abandoning his African heritage and pandering to Euro-American modernism. There is indeed clear evidence that, in their combination of the praxis of Igbo oral poetics and the compact suggestiveness of Japanese Haiku-verse, these poems will revolutionize the canons of written poetry in Igbo and, through translation, other African and world languages” (introduction to Elegy to Twilight and Other New Poems by Christopher Okigbo, a collection in progress, from the present documents).

4.4 **Issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management**

**Rarity**: Apart from a few letters and transcripts/audios of interviews in the archives of the former Transcription Center, recently acquired by the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, and transcripts/audios of interviews at the Schomburg Museum of Black culture in New York, the present collection of unpublished papers of Christopher Okigbo, do indeed, by its content or physical nature, represent a rare surviving example of its type or time. There is no other collection of papers of the same kind anywhere in the world.

**Integrity**: Unfortunately, these papers are but fragments out of what would have been a deluge of Okigbo papers, where it not for the vicissitudes of the Nigerian civil war and its aftermaths which have dealt a heavy blow on the physical integrity of the documents. To begin with, several documents were burnt to ashes at Enugu, in July 1967, when the poet’s hilltop residence was the victim of the first bombardment of the city by the Nigerian air force. Several of the surviving documents bear the marks of the fire, being partly damaged by the burning. After the death of the first custodian of the papers, Dr Pius Okigbo in 19xx, the documents were carelessly abandoned in a garage where several of them were damaged by termites. These two events have left scars on the documents which call for their urgent retrieval and measures to guard against their further deterioration.

**Threat**: In the light of the above vicissitudes which have affected the integrity of the documents, their survival is clearly in danger. So far what has been retrieved from the fire and the termites seems secure, but enormous vigilance be applied to maintain their future security.
5  LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1 and 5.2  Owner and Custodian of the documentary heritage

The custodian and owner are the Christopher Okigbo Foundation (« COF »).

The COF was established by virtue of a public deed signed by Notary Jean-Philippe Lagae in Brussels, Belgium, on 9 June 2005. The Foundation is validly registered in Belgium as a private foundation under registration number 874 900 804. Its registered office is at 83 Chaussée de Boondael, 1050 Brussels. The incorporation deed was filed with the Commercial Court of Brussels on 7 July 2005.

5.3  Legal Status

(a) The documentary heritage was contributed to the COF at the time when it was founded through a donation by Ms Obiageli Okigbo, sole heir to the late Christopher Okigbo. The documentary heritage is privately owned by the COF.

(b) The COF decides how the public may have access to the documentary heritage. As we understand it, the papers are currently being taken care of by an archivist. On completion of his work, the papers will be available for display in accordance with the procedures set forth by the COF.

(c) There is no legal restriction on access to the documentary heritage.

(d) At present the documentary heritage is not subject to copyright. The law firm White & Case is currently assessing the need for legal protection of the documentary heritage.

(e) The COF is legally responsible for the safekeeping of the documentary heritage. This responsibility lies with the board of directors of the COF, i.e. Obiageli Okigbo, Okechukwu Okuzu and Linda Okigbo.

6  MANAGEMENT PLAN

With regard to the question as to the existence of a plan which reflects the significance of the documentary heritage, with appropriate strategies to preserve and provide access to it, it seems necessary here to refer to the ongoing and proposed pilot studies of these documents by Dr. Chukwuma Azuonye, Professor of African Languages and Literatures at the University of Massachusetts Boston. In January 2006, Professor Azuonye visited Brussels and after a painstaking examination of the documents, produced a comprehensive list of the papers, in collaboration with the applicant, Obiageli Okigbo (see Attachment A). Meanwhile, he forwarded two research proposals, focusing on the papers, the first to the W. E. B. du Bois Center, for his sabbatical leave, from 2006 to June 2007 (Attachment B), the second to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas for the summer of 2007 (Attachment C). At the center of both projects is a plan to assess the archival value of the material and also ascertain, establish, and catalog the texts, and place them in their proper context within the canons of Okigbo scholarship. These planned pilot studies include a program of textual emendation focusing on the lacunae arising from damage by fire, of proper cataloguing and of digitalizing. Already, a critical edition of the new poems, co-edited with Obiageli Okigbo, is close to completion under the title Elegy of Twilight & Other New Poems by Christopher Okigbo. In response to one of his applications for work on the documents at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, Professor Azuonye has been already awarded an Andrew Mellon Fellowship. A similar fellowship to the W. E. B. DuBois Center is expected for his work at Harvard. His proposed work, expected to lead to a book, provisionally entitled Okigbo at Work, is expected to create worldwide access, for the scholarly community, to the wonderful world of these papers. In the meantime, the relocation of the documents from the village, Ojoto, in Nigeria (where they were damaged), to Brussels, is intended to guard against such damage and the present application is aimed at providing future security for the documents.
PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8/9 ASSESSMENT OF RISK/ PRESERVATION

8.1 The main foreseen threat to the collection is its fragile condition and the lack of funding dedicated to expertise preservation procedures.

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name)
Obiageli Okigbo .................................................................

(Signature)........................................ (Date) rev 6 November 2006.............