

WOLE SOYINKA

Born July 13, 1934, Wole Soyinka was educated in Ibadan, Nigeria, and Leeds, England, where he obtained an Honours degree in Literature. Essentially a playwright, Soyinka is also recognized as a prolific essayist, poet, novelist and theatre director. He writes mainly in English, but his works are distinguished by their exploration of "the African world view, and are steeped in Yoruba mythology, imagery and dramatic idioms". His satiric pen, directed at the leadership iniquities on his continent and inhuman conduct among peoples has also produced powerful works.

A Human Rights activist who declares that human liberty is his abiding religion, Wole Soyinka has endured incarceration at the hands of repressive regimes, has been placed on trial on trumped-up charges of treason and undergone spells of political exile. His prison experience during Nigeria's Civil War is recounted in *THE MAN DIED*. In numerous plays, poetry, essays, and the occasional novels, he continues to expose the plight of millions under repressive rule, neglect and marginalization. His work with a number of non-governmental and United Nations agencies, including UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Commission, has placed him at the forefront of those who speak to the world on behalf of the voiceless.

Wole Soyinka's childhood autobiography, *AKE: The Years of Childhood*, deemed 'a classic of childhood biography anywhere in the world', and a companion piece, *ISARA: A Voyage Around Essay*, narrate much of his early life. *IBADAN, The Penkelemes Years* deals with adolescence and political initiation, while his 2006 Memoirs, *YOU MUST SET FORTH AT DAWN* has been described as 'an epic narrative of the human spirit, and a compendium of Nigerian history.' Among his plays, *DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN* has been described as 'a classic of tragic drama in any age'. Other plays include *THE STRONG BREED*, *THE LION AND THE JEWEL*, *A DANCE OF THE FORESTS*, *THE ROAD*, *A PLAY OF GIANTS* and *BEATIFICATION OF AREA BOY*. His adaptation of Euripedes' classic, *THE BACCHAE*, was performed by the English National Theatre as *THE BACCHAE OF EURIPEDES*. Other adaptations include Brecht's *THREEPENNY OPERA*, re-titled *OPERA WONYOSI*, Jean Genet's *THE BLACKS* and *KING BAABU*, from Alfred Jarry's *UBU ROI*.

His poetry has been published under the titles of *IDANRE AND OTHER POEMS*, *POEMS FROM PRISON*, *A SHUTTLE IN THE CRYPT*,

MANDELA'S EARTH AND OTHER POEMS and *SAMARKAND AND OTHER MARKETS I HAVE KNOWN*. Critical works include: *MYTH, LITERATURE*

AND THE AFRICAN WORLD and *ART, DIALOGUE AND OUTRAGE*. The themes of politics, memory, and social reconciliation are examined in two other volumes: *THE*

OPEN SORE OF A CONTINENT and *THE BURDEN OF MEMORY, MUSE OF FORGIVENESS*. In May 2004, he delivered the BBC Reith Memorial lectures on the theme *CLIMATE OF FEAR*, now published under the same title.

Wole Soyinka has been honoured with doctorates by universities the world over. These include the Universities of Leeds, Manchester, Sheffield, Edinburgh – U.K; Yale, Harvard, Emory, Nevada, Morehouse - U.S.A.; Toronto, Alberta - Canada; Paul Valéry, Montpellier, Sorbonne - France; Bayreuth, Germany; Cape Town - South Africa; Havana - Cuba; Turin, Bologna – Italy; The European University - Hungary .

He is Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom, Académie Universelle des Cultures, France, the Academy of Arts and Letters, Germany, The American Academy of Arts and Science, the Pan-African Writers Association, Association of Nigerian Authors, Member of the Scholars' Council, Library of Congress, USA, Member of the Governing Council of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt. He is past President of the International Parliament of Writers.

Among his literary honours and artistic recognitions, Wole Soyinka has received the Enrico Mattei Award for the Humanities, the Leopold Sedar Senghor Award for the Arts, the John Whiting Literary Prize, the Benson Medal of the Royal Society for Literature, the Premio Grinzane Cavour, The Premio Letterario Internazionale Mondello, Italy, the UNESCO Medal for the Arts.

In 1985, he became the first writer of African descent to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, '86.

Wole Soyinka is currently Senior Fellow of the Black Mountain Institute at the University of Nevada, Fellow of the Dubois Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, President's Professor at Loyola Marymount University, USA and Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He is married, with children.

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