**Wole Soyinka**  
*(Born July 13th, 1934)*

**Wole Soyinka**, in full Akinwande Olu Wole Soyinka, was born on July 13, 1934, in Abeokuta, Nigeria. A member of the Yoruba people, Soyinka attended Government College and University College in Ibadan before graduating in 1958 with a degree in English from the University of Leeds in England.

Upon his return to Nigeria, he founded an acting company and wrote his first important play, *A Dance of the Forests* (produced 1960; published 1963), for the Nigerian independence celebrations. The play satirizes the fledgling nation by stripping it of romantic legend and by showing that the present is no more a golden age than was the past.

He wrote several plays in a lighter vein, making fun of pompous, westernized schoolteachers in *The Lion and the Jewel* (first performed in Ibadan, 1959; published 1963) and mocking the clever preachers of upstart prayer-churches who grow fat on the credulity of their parishioners in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (performed 1960; published 1963) and *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973). But his more serious plays, such as *The Strong Breed* (1963), *Kongi’s Harvest* (opened the first Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, 1966; published 1967), *The Road* (1965), *From Zia, with Love* (1992), and even the parody *King Baabu* (performed 2001; published 2002), reveal his disregard for African authoritarian leadership and his disillusionment with Nigerian society as a whole.

Other notable plays include *Madmens and Specialists* (performed 1970; published 1971), *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975), and *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995). In these and Soyinka’s other dramas, western elements are skillfully fused with subject matter and dramatic techniques deeply rooted in Yoruba folklore and religion. Symbolism, flashback, and ingenious plotting contribute to a rich dramatic structure. His best works exhibit humour and fine poetic style as well as a gift for irony and satire and for accurately matching the language of his complex characters to their social position and moral qualities.

---

From 1960 to 1964, Soyinka was coeditor of Black Orpheus, an important literary journal. From 1960 onward, he taught literature and drama, and headed theatre groups at various Nigerian universities, including those of Ibadan, Ife, and Lagos.

Soyinka was the first black African to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. After winning the Nobel Prize, Soyinka also was sought after as a lecturer, and many of his lectures were published—notably the Reith Lectures of 2004, as Climate of Fear (2004).

Though he considered himself primarily a playwright, Soyinka also wrote novels—The Interpreters (1965) and Season of Anomy (1973)—and several volumes of poetry. The latter include Idanre, and Other Poems (1967) and Poems from Prison (1969, republished as A Shuttle in the Crypt, 1972), published together as Early Poems (1998); Mandela’s Earth and Other Poems (1988); and Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known (2002).

His verse is characterized by a precise command of language and a mastery of lyric, dramatic, and meditative poetic forms. He wrote a good deal of Poems from Prison while he was jailed in 1967–69 for speaking out against the war brought on by the attempted secession of Biafra from Nigeria. The Man Died (1972) is his prose account of his arrest and 22-month imprisonment. Soyinka’s principal critical work is Myth, Literature, and the African World (1976), a collection of essays in which he examines the role of the artist in the light of Yoruba mythology and symbolism. Art, Dialogue, and Outrage (1988) is a work on similar themes of art, culture, and society. He continued to address Africa’s ills and western responsibility in The Open Sore of a Continent (1996) and The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness (1999).


Soyinka has long been a proponent of Nigerian democracy. His decades of political activism included periods of imprisonment and exile, and he has founded, headed, or participated in several political groups, including the National Democratic Organization, the National Liberation Council of Nigeria, and Pro-National Conference Organizations (PRONACO). In 2010, Soyinka founded the Democratic Front for a People’s Federation and served as chairman of the party. ²

Selected Materials Available at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Works by the Author

Print Resources

1. Plays:

BA Call Number: 822 Soy C (E)

BA Call Number: 822 S7316f (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)

BA Call Number: 822 S7316k (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)

BA Call Number: 822 Soy K (Shadi Abdel Salam Collection -- B1)

BA Call Number: 822 S7316mad (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)

Also available as e-book at: http://dar.bibalex.org/webpages/mainpage.jsf?BibID=206294
2. Memoirs

BA Call Number: 820.9968 S7316a (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)

BA Call Number: 820.9968 S7316 (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)

BA Call Number: 820.9968 S7316i (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)
3. **Miscellaneous Works**

BA Call Number: BnF 350278 (B4 -- Closed Stacks -- BnF Collection)

BA Call Number: 896.09 S7316 1990 (E)

BA Call Number: 320.90669 Soy O (B2)

BA Call Number: BnF 343663 (B4 -- Closed Stacks -- BnF Collection)

BA Call Number: 896.333 Soy R (Shadi Abdel Salam Collection -- B1)

BA Call Number: 823 S7316s (F1 -- Closed Stacks -- Nobel Collection -- 1986)

4. **Books with a Foreword by the Author**

Call Number: 822.33 S481m (E)  
Also available as e-book at:  

Call Number: 822.33 S481 (E)  
Also available as e-book at:  
http://dar.bibalex.org/webpages/mainpage.jsf?BibID=147882
Electronic Resources

1. **Plays:**


2. **Poems:**

“Poems by Wole Soyinka”. *Chinese Poetry Library.*


3. **Memoirs**


4. **Articles:**


5. Lectures


Audiovisual Materials


**Works about the Author**

**Print Resources**

**Theses:**

BA Call Number: Thesis 42769 (B4 -- Closed Stacks)

**Electronic Resources**

1. **e-Books:**


2. **e-Theses**


3. Articles


4. Special Issues:


5. **Interviews**


Audiovisual Materials


“Conversations with History: Wole Soyinka”. Online video file. YouTube.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=wosbdri9dRc [accessed 13 Jul 2011]


Pt. 1: www_democracynow.org/2006/4/18/legendary_nigerian_writer_wole_soyinka_darfur
Pt. 2: www_democracynow.org/2006/4/19/legendary_nigerian_writer_wole_soyinka_on


Web Resources


“Wole Soyinka”. Stanford University. Stanford Presidential Lectures in the Humanities and Arts.
http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/soyinka/