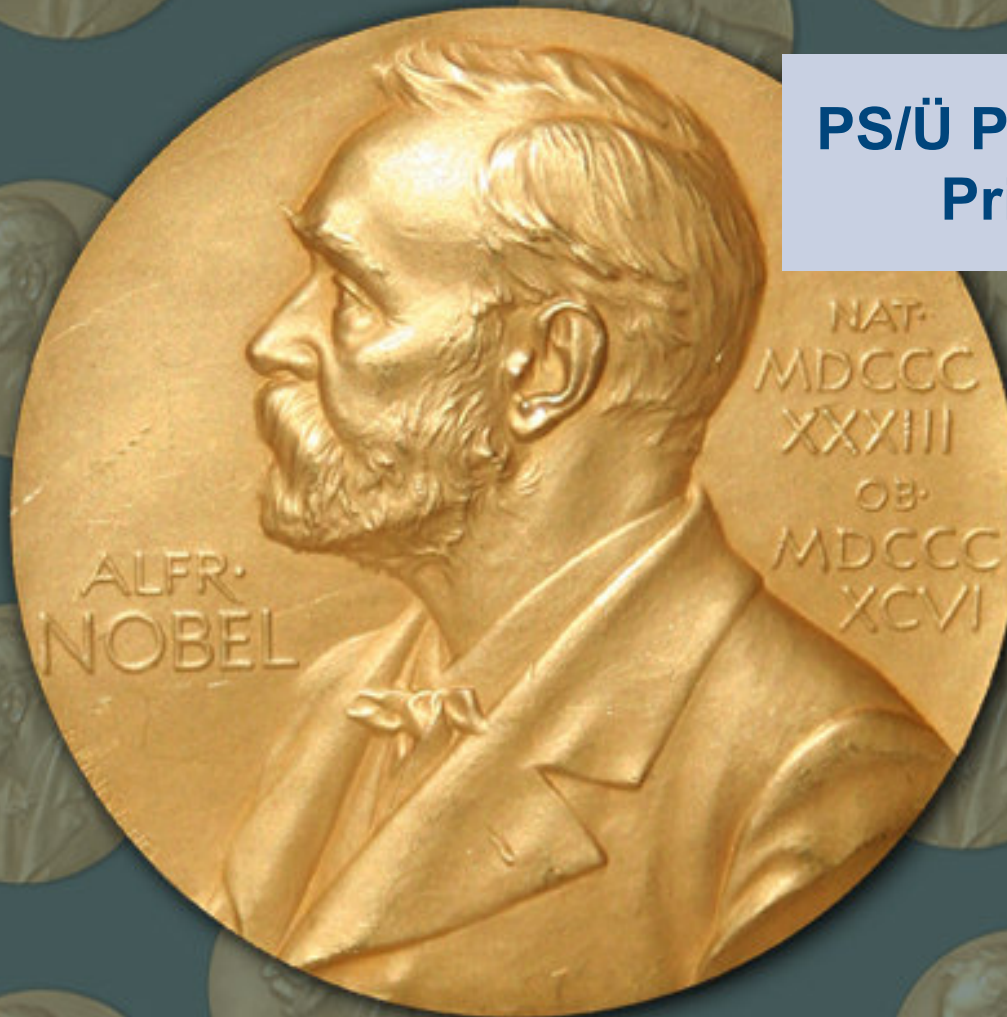


**PS/Ü Postcolonial Nobel  
Prize Laureates**



# PS/Ü Postcolonial Nobel Prize Laureates

## Session 6: The Colonies and the Cultural Cringe Modernism and Myth

**Prof. Dr. Nora A. Pleßke**

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Lehrstuhl für Englische Literaturwissenschaft

Time: Wed 12:00 – 14:00

Room: MG1/02.06

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Office Hours: Wed 16:00 – 17:00, U9, 202 (register via VC)



# Colonial / Postcolonial Literature





# The Colonies and the Cultural Cringe

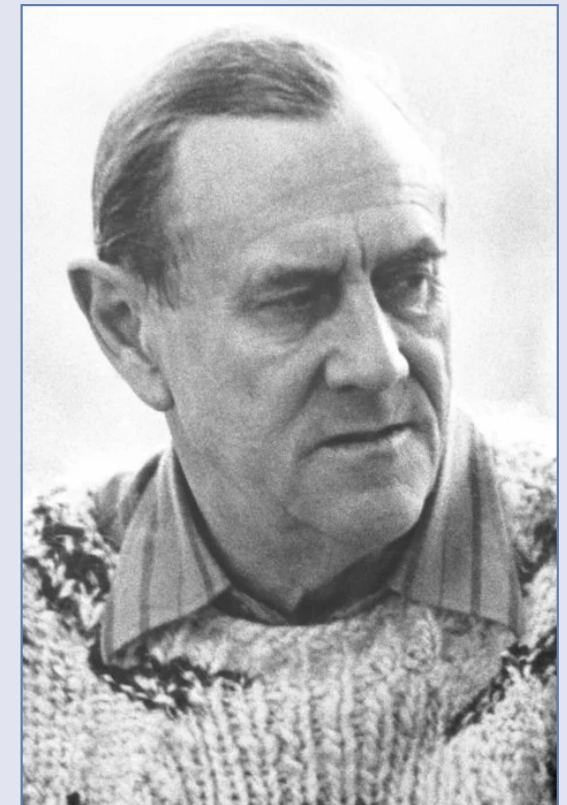
# Against the Cultural Cringe

“Brought up to believe in the maxim: Only the British can be right, I did accept this during the earlier part of my life. [...] All through the War in the Middle East there persisted a longing to return to the scenes of childhood, which is, after all, the purest well from which creative artists draws. [...] I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary [...]. [...] Above all I was determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism. [...] I began to see things for the first time.” (White 557-59)

Nobel Prize Lecture

## Patrick White (1912-1990)

- The Nobel Prize in Literature 1973
- Born: 28 May 1912, London, United Kingdom
- Died: 30 September 1990, Sydney, Australia
- Residence at the time of the award: Australia
- **Prize motivation:** “for an epic and psychological narrative art which has introduced a new continent into literature”
- Patrick White did not deliver a Nobel Lecture. The Banquet speech was read by M. Sidney Nolan.
- “Biographical” (1973)
- “The Prodigal Son” (1958)
- *Voss* (1957)





## Patrick White (1912-1990)

- “He became the first playwright to seriously challenge the strong traditions of Australian conventional theatre, and dignified and celebrated Australian vernacular by transforming it into a fertile, vigorous and imaginative stage language.” (Akerholt 217)
- “Patrick White (1912-90) winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973, is widely regarded as one of the major writers in English of the twentieth century. He wrote in nearly all the chief literary genres – eight plays, three books of poems as well as his twelve novels – but it is only in the novel that his reputation is likely to endure.” (Beston 247)
- “Voss is his masterpiece, containing the qualities that constitute his legacy to Australian literature – or, as he would have it, to Australian culture. It successfully fuses his historical interests and his religious concerns, and in drawing upon Australian myths it comes close to creating a myth of its own. It is written in a dignified style, is indeed one of the stylistic masterpieces of the English language, most striking in its sententious or cryptic observations [...].” (Beston 255)

## Critical Voices from the 20th Century

- “Its [our individuality] quintessence must lie in the realization of whatever things are distinctive in our environment and their sublimation in lore and idea, in culture. Australian culture is at present in a nebulous stage, because our writers have not come clearly to any such realization.” (Ingamells 200)
- “I do not wish to flog the obvious fact that a nation, or the idea of a nation, is inseparable from its literature, is incomplete. Australia without a literature remains a colony, no nation.” (Stephensen 186)
- “Social, literary and political commentators in Australia and Canada have, perhaps, shown an even greater obsession with the problem of national identity than those of most other emergent colonial or postcolonial nations.” (Lawson 167)



# Australianness

“A national literature is implied, will be recognizable by its treatment of local subjects, themes and landscapes. It will not be derivative, and the sign that it has grown to maturity will be its independence of foreign influences, and unself-conscious expression of its own place and identity.” (Kramer qtd. Schmidt 30)

- Normative: determines measure of value

# The Australianness of Australian Literature

“The cultural specificity, the Australian-ness, of Australian texts lives in the recurring principles of organization and selection ... Australian texts employ a particular language in that they draw on those myths, connotations and symbols which have currency in Australian culture; and they also reveal what formal preferences – the encouragement of certain genres, conventions, and modes of production – are exercised in that culture. In the patterning of such influences, then, we can see which meanings are most easily articulated which culture, which meanings are preferred by it, and which are seen to be the most significant for it.” (Turner qtd. Scheckter 2)

# Australian Literary History

“The development of Australian literature is the history on the one hand of the extension of European civilization to the south, and on the other the growth of an indigenous culture in Australia itself. There are three broad stages to be distinguished. The first was the colonial phase, extending from the beginnings to the mid and later nineteenth century, in which native writing was shaped mainly by overseas patterns. The second stage was the achievement of an independent and consciously ‘Australian’ literature in the 1880s and 1890s, a movement that extended beyond the turn of the century to the First World War. In the third phase, from the 1920s to the present, the two streams have come together, to produce a literature that is both distinctive and mature.”  
(Wilkes qtd. Schmidt 60)



## “Growth” and “Maturity”

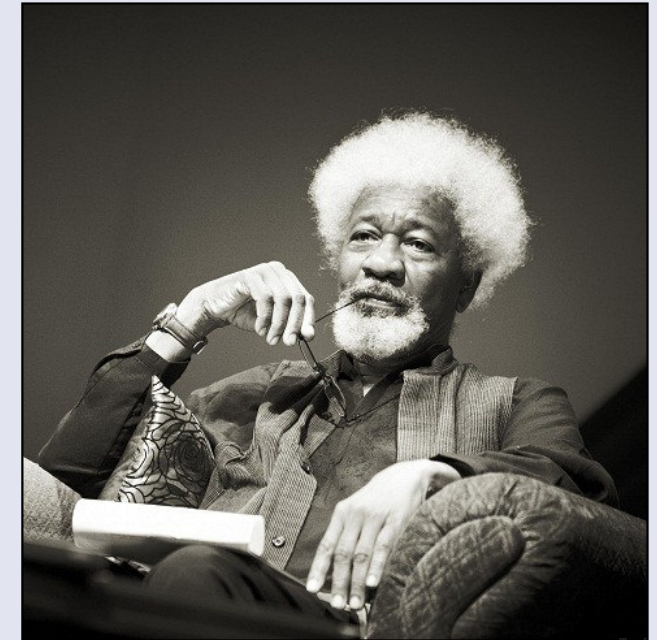
- Periodisation, development
  - 3-Phase-Model: transplantation, adaptation, maturity
  - “The idea of emergence assumes that national literary histories have a teleological course, that they develop over time. Australian Literature, it is said, achieved this development somewhere between Patrick White’s winning the Nobel Prize and the worldwide recognition accorded to writers of the next generation such as David Malouf, Tim Winton, and Peter Carey. In other words, the world began to notice Australian literature, when Australian literature was good enough.” (Birns and McNeer 1)
  - Birth and coming of age versus maturity and quality
  - Oriented not on literary but political developments
- Literature as sign of social development and civilising force



# Modernism and Myth

# Wole Soyinka (1934- )

- 1934 Born in Abeokuta, Western Nigeria (Yoruba)
- 1938-57 Grammar School, Government College and University Ibadan, Leeds University, broadcasts
- 1957-60 Script Reader at Royal Court Theatre, publishes first poems, directs play for independence celebrations
- 1961 Research Fellow at University Ibadan and Lecturer at University of Ife
- 1964 Founds Orisun Theatre
- 1967-70 Imprisoned and accused for spying for Biafra
- 1979-80 Visiting Professor, Yale University
- 1986 Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature and CFR
- 1990s Political exile, death sentence
- 1998 Woodruff Professor of the Arts, Emory University
- 1999 Returns to Nigeria





## Soyinka as a Writer

**Major Works:** *The Invention* (1957), *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), *Kongi's Harvest* (1964), *The Interpreters* (1964), *The Road* (1965), *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967), *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), *Opera Wonyosi* (1977), *Ake: The Years of Childhood* (1981), *Isara* (1990) *Mandela's Earth and Other Poems* (1989-90)

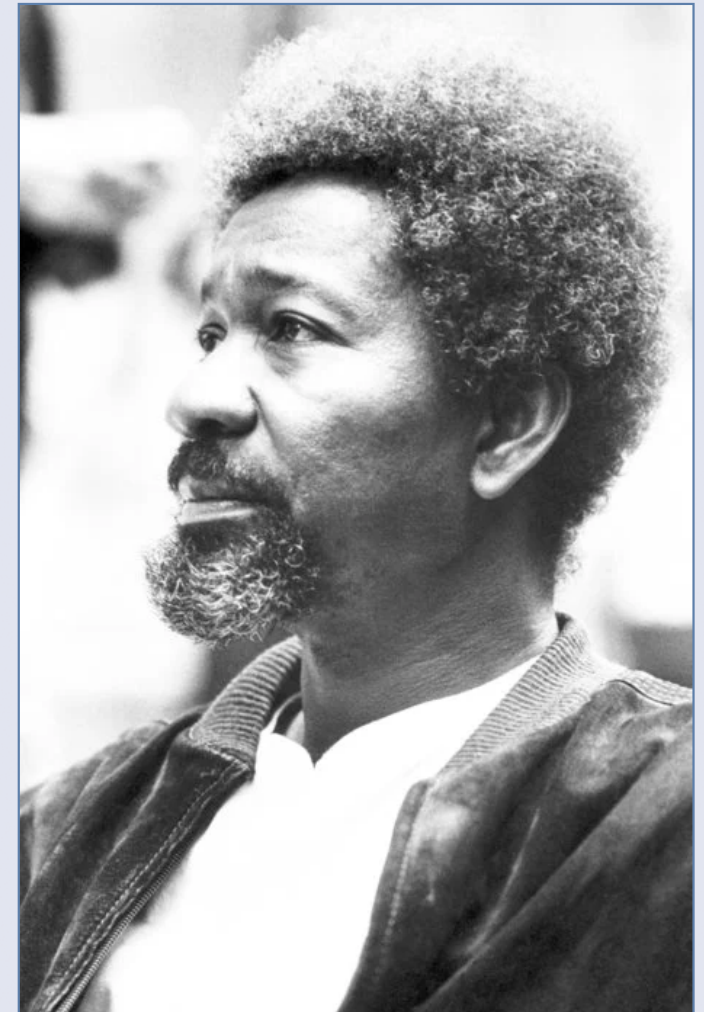
“Soyinka’s work finds its place at the very heart of this specific complex of historical and social factors, enacts the drama of ambiguity and the conflict of moral choices which confront the awakened consciousness in the contemporary African situation.” (Irele qtd. In Lindfors 149)

## Wole Soyinka as a Writer

- Writer and commitment to cause of justice – create a just and democratic society in post-colonial Africa
- Critical of British colonial policies, Apartheid, etc.
- In-between tradition (grandparents) and modernisation (parents), Yoruba cosmology and Christianity, Greek drama and ritual/tragedy, internationalism and diaspora

# Nobel Prize

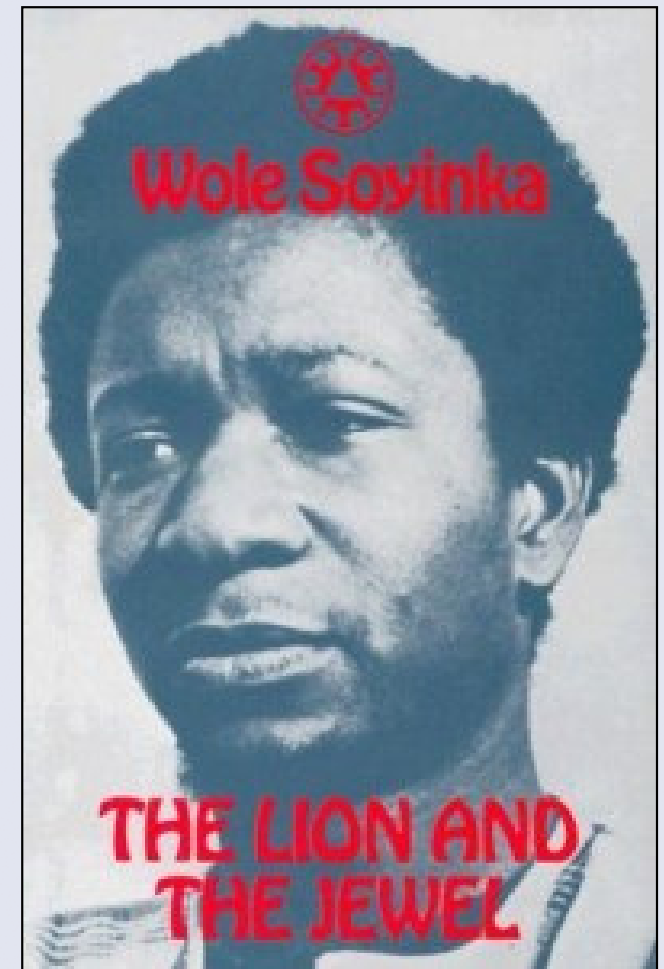
- The Nobel Prize in Literature 1986
- Residence at the time of the award: Nigeria
- Prize motivation: “who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence”
- “Press Release” (1986)
- “Nobel Prize Lecture” (1986)



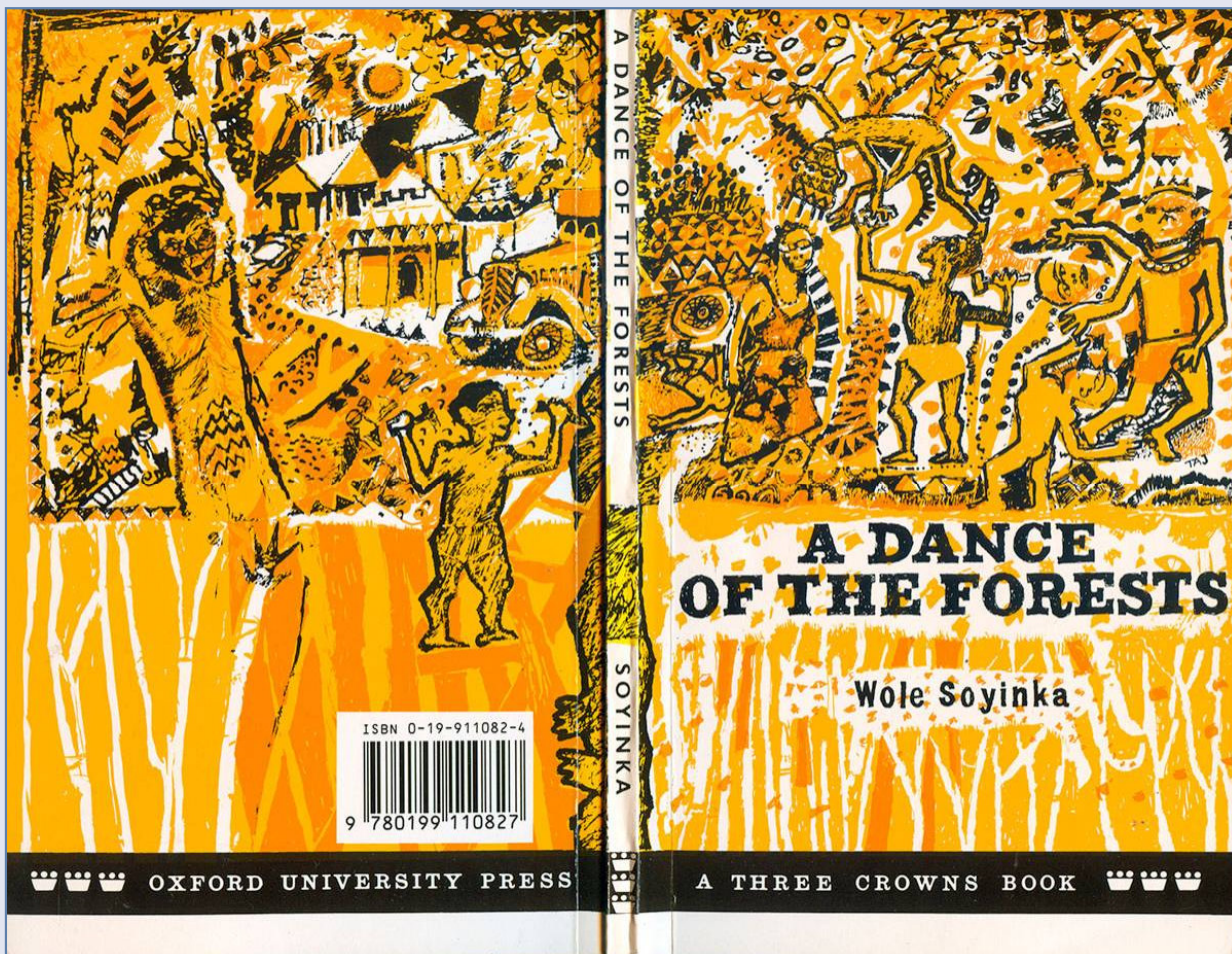


## *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959/1963)

- Modernity and Tradition (e.g. Lakunle/Baroka)
- Yoruba Masquerades (e.g. mime and dance)
- Humour and Satirical Wit (e.g. Lakunle/Sidi)
- Gender Questions (e.g. bride price, sex war)
- Yoruba Deities (e.g. Sango and Ogun)



## *A Dance of the Forests* (1960/1963)



- Structure
- Introduction
- Main Part
- Ending
- Content
- Acts and Scenes
- Setting
- Atmosphere
- Characters and Constellation
- Dialogues and Monologues
- Stage Directions
- Themes, Motifs
- Metaphors, Symbols



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