

**The Quester in Disguise in Soyinka's Works:
A Study of the Recurring Theme of
Regeneration and Healing.**

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Abstract:

Wole Soyinka's works, fiction, plays and poems are bound together by a persistent theme that appears in almost all of them despite variations of plot, character and setting. This is the theme of regeneration and healing which finds expression through multifarious motifs and symbols, dominant of these being the Quest. Almost all the protagonists of Soyinka appear to be on a quest the aim or the result of which is a heightening of consciousness, a spiritual renewal at the individual or communal level. Renewal is also brought about by a Sacrifice or a Communion Meal two rituals that Soyinka has repeatedly made use of. All this gives to Soyinka's works a deeply religious dimension. One could attribute this to his Yoruba heritage as well as to the deep hold that Christianity has on his imagination despite his renouncing it as a religion.

The figure of Christ is evoked in many of his works as the archetype of Sacrifice/Saviour/Healer and also conflated with the dying and risen gods of the Fertility Cults and Vegetation Ceremonies. In all this Soyinka manifests his strong mythopoeic sensibility that delights in tracing and blending analogous myths of renewal from different cultures.

His firm grounding in Western Literature has certainly contributed to this. It is clear from a close study of his works that the medieval romance of the Waste Land exerted a powerful influence on his imagination. Scattered in them we find mention or evocation of the Holy Grail and more than a suggestion of a Waste Land in need of fertilizing values. Soyinka's study of the Mystery Religions to which African Cultures bear deep affinity must have revealed to him the meaning of the Grail and the Quest for it -- a meaning that acquired Christian incrustation in the romances.

The Grail as Cornucopia, a horn of plenty, as an alchemical symbol of transformation, as the phoenix that rises from its own ashes, as the Cup of the Mystic Meal, as a renewing initiatory experience, would naturally become a rich and polyvalent symbol in Soyinka's writings. An exegesis of his works in the light of these facts shows the persistence of his themes and their consonance with the ideals that inspire his literary expression and act as the basis for his social commitment.

Keywords: Fiction/ poem/ quest/ literature/ Soyinka's writings.

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