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# The Motif of Resurrection and Forms of Regeneration in the Novels of Wole Soyinka

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# The Motif of Resurrection and Forms of Regeneration in the Novels of Wole Soyinka

## **Abstract**

Soyinka has been interested for many years in states of being which in some way correspond to what he refers to in a seminal essay as the 'fourth stage' of existence. He suggests that there are four stages of human existence: 'The past is the ancestors', the present belongs to the living, and the future to the unborn. The deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws ... the fourth area of experience [is] the immeasurable gulf of transition." The fourth stage is that stage of existence which is neither ordinary human life, nor spirit existence, but somewhere between the two: the state of a man who represents a god or a spirit at a festival, for instance, or the state of a man who is passing between life and death in the process of dying or of arriving in this world. It is also the state of the gods as they make the perilous journey from heaven to earth, with Ogun clearing the way and fashioning the bridge — a myth on which Soyinka rests much of the weight of the argument about the nature of Yoruba tragedy which is the point of this essay.^ Priests, abiku children and some other special persons may be said to inhabit this fourth stage a great deal of the time, that is, they frequently pass beyond this living human existence to the area which is marginal to some other state of existence. The 'fourth stage' is, of its essence, marginal, a betwixt and between state of being. It is a stage of transition, a stage of disintegration and reintegration.

## Ces Plaisirs

I want someday to write a passage  
as poignant as that phrase:

'these pleasures,' she wrote,  
garlic-stinking vagabond  
ancient as the sphinx  
winking feline nods at passing fancies  
loving cats above all others  
and her mother/child the cherished Sido  
both of whom she would have eaten  
in a flash;

these pleasures: cactuses  
that blaze once a decade,  
the exhilarating loneliness  
of strutting naked round a stage  
in lime light, by shaded lamp  
across the thick blue pages  
over beach bleached sand  
through bloodfed fields  
disguised, among the dying  
charting every sigh  
from blushing adolescent thighs  
to layered silks supporting sagging flesh  
draped across a divan  
vain until the very end  
where even lust gives way to friendship  
and even friends die off  
but the mushrooms still thrust their gamey buttons through the earth  
if you just know where to look:

these pleasures, which we lightly call  
these pleasures, which we lightly  
call physical.

# Waiting:

Royal Academy, 12.II.88

We wander through The Age of Chivalry: walls full of busy, almond-eyed men,  
secure in their faith in their place in the world  
their faith that brought grain or acceptance of famine.

You wince and glance round for a seat –  
the plinth of a 12th century ironwork gate:  
sinuey swans curve through primitive forging.

We're stopped by a guard,  
directed to benches in room number five,  
'It's coming,' you murmur. Another false start. You rise up, restless.

I love the annunciations:  
the word or the dove or the angel  
whispering into her ear.

'She didn't even get a fuck,' you twist in pain,  
or anticipation of pain,  
or simply the wretched weight of waiting.

A man seeing you stroking your belly,  
makes space by a battered, wooden St. George  
slaying a demurely conceding dragon.

Your eyes have that distant, pupilless look  
of worn-out madonnas  
on church facades.

'There are no pregnant madonnas,' you say,  
'Can you think of a pregnant madonna?'  
Then you wince again, and scurry to sit

'This is it.' But it doesn't recur,  
and we're pressed to give up our places  
to two old ladies, tired, with less to anticipate.

'Let's go.' If it doesn't come today they'll induce it.  
This time tomorrow, today will be simply a story:  
'The day before you were born.'

As we hurry back through the manuscript room  
I notice on an intricate page, a tiny creature,  
etched in gold,

its dainty toe pointed, stepping, tentatively out of the frame...