

We ask you to vote for Wole Soyinka (Nobel Laureate, 1986) in the coming election for Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

We believe that Soyinka would be an outstanding successor to Geoffrey Hill – someone capable of inspiring us with his published work, his vision of what literature is, and his way of talking about poetry. It would be especially invigorating to have a writer in this post who is able to bring an African and global perspective to the study and understanding of poetry in Oxford. We would also appreciate very deeply Soyinka’s ability to talk about poetry as a practising poet, dramatist, novelist, memoirist, and human rights activist.

Professor Soyinka has taught at Cornell, Emory, and the University of Lagos. He has been awarded Honorary Doctorates by the Universities of Leeds, Harvard and Princeton. He has received the Benson Medal from the Royal Society of Literature, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Lifetime Achievement, and the 2014 International Humanist Award. On becoming the first African writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, the Swedish Academy praised Soyinka for his ability “to synthesise a very rich heritage from his own country with literary legacies and traditions of European culture”, for his “genuine and impressive creativity as an artist, a master of language”, and for his commitment to exploring “problems of general and deep significance for man, modern or ancient”.

In addition to his literary credentials, Wole Soyinka has a track record in campaigning for human rights that puts him in a unique category. He was a powerful voice in the struggle for Nigeria’s independence from colonial rule, and has been a thorn in the side of a series of Nigerian dictators. Despite considerable risk to his personal safety, he has consistently spoken out against corruption and the abuse of power. Under the government of General Gowon he suffered two years solitary confinement. A later military ruler, General Sani Abacha, charged him with treason in 1997 and sentenced him to death in absentia. Soyinka's passion for justice has never dimmed. He recently joined his fellow Nigerians in street protests against the removal of fuel subsidies; and he has played a prominent role in the “bring back our girls” campaign for the government to rescue the 219 school children abducted from Chibok by Boko Haram insurgents.

Given his lifetime of campaigning, it is a great testament to the quality and impact of Soyinka’s writings that he is known first and foremost as an author, not an activist. Amongst Soyinka's best known works, which are read world-wide, are his volumes of poetry: *Idanre and Other Poems*, *Poems from Prison*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, and *Mandela's Earth*. His most famous plays include *The Lion and the Jewel* and *Death and The King's Horseman*; and he has written two novels, *The Interpreter* and *Season of Anomy*, as well as five highly acclaimed autobiographical works: *Aké*, *Isara*, *Ibadan*, *You Must Set off at Dawn*, and *The Man Died: Prison Notes*. Wole Soyinka's writings provide a vital and compelling insight into personal, social and political relations with global relevance. His work taps into a host of different mythic, poetic, and dramatic traditions – African and European – and dynamically re-routes the connections between them. As an essayist, the depth, range, and erudition of his thinking about culture have emerged in volumes such as *Art, Dialogue, and Outrage: Essays on Literature and Culture*, *The*

Burden of Memory, and *The Muse of Forgiveness*. In 2004, he was invited to deliver the BBC Reith Lectures, which he called *A Climate of Fear*.

Wole Soyinka's world stature is incontestable. As the first African elected to this post, his appointment would be an immense historical milestone for Oxford University. He is an inspirational speaker, whose fascinating lectures would attract large, attentive, international audiences. Please join us in voting for him as our next Professor of Poetry.

Jonathan Bate, Worcester College

Elleke Boehmer, Wolfson College

William Beinart, St Antony's College

Charles R. Conn, Balliol College

Sos Eltis, Brasenose College

Keith Gull, St Edmund Hall

Ken Macdonald, Wadham College

Jonathan Michie, Kellogg College

Ankhi Mukherjee, Wadham College

Lucy Newlyn, St Edmund Hall

Stephen Tuck, Pembroke College

Wes Williams, St Edmund Hall
