

Comparative Literature, Postcolonialism and the “African World” in Wole Soyinka’s Myth, Literature and the African World

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Abstract : Literature is generally understood as an aesthetic creation, an artistic object that relates to the history and sociocultural paradigms of a given era. Moreover, through it, we can dwell on the deepest reflections on the human condition. It can also be used to propagate projects of domination, as Edward Said points out in his book Culture and Imperialism, connecting narrative, history and land conquest. Having said that, the aim of this paper is to analyse how Wole Soyinka elaborated his main theoretical work, Myth, Literature and African World, a collection of essays published in 1976, by comparing the philosophical, ideological and aesthetic practices of African, diasporic and European writers from the point of view of the Yoruba tradition, to which he belongs. Moreover, Soyinka believes that (literary) art has an important function in the formation of a people, in the construction of its political identity and in cultural regeneration, especially after the independence. The author's critical endeavour is that of attempting to construct a past. For him, the "African World" is not a mere allegory of the continent, and to understand it in this way would be to perpetuate a colonialist vision that would deny the subjectivities that cross black cultures, history and bodies. For him, comparative literature can be used not to "equate" local African texts with the European canon; but rather to recognise that they have aesthetic value and socio-cultural importance. Looking at the local, the particular and specific to each culture is, according to Soyinka, appropriate for dealing with African cultures, as opposed to abstractions of dialectical materialism or capitalist nationalism. In view of this, in his essays, the author creates a possibility for artistic and social reflection beyond the logic of Western politics.

Keywords : comparative literature, African Literature, Literary Theory, Yoruba Mythology, Wole Soyinka, Afrodiaspora

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