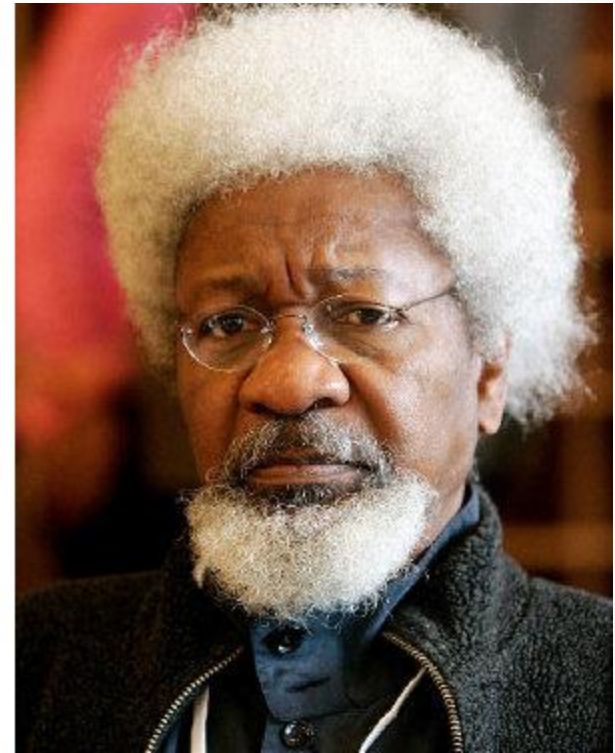


Telephone
Conversation
By
Wole Soyinka

WOLE SOYINKA

Wole Soyinka , a Nigerian poet was born in 1934.He was awarded Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986.He was the first African to be awarded in that category. He was described as one "who in a wide cultural perspective and with poetic overtones fashions the drama of existence".



About The Poem

1. The poem is a poetic satire on racism.
2. It is a telephone conversation between a White landlady and a prospective Black tenant.
3. Racial bias and colour prejudice of the landlady and controlled anger of the tenant has been highlighted.
4. The caller was happy with the location of the house and the rent, however he had to disclose that he was a black man so that he would not waste a journey.
5. The poem satirizes the hypocrisy of the white woman who is dumbstruck when she comes to know.

1. *“Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully”*

- The landlady seems foolish when she asks him to describe the colour of his skin. The caller feels insulted and being a victim of racial prejudice hits back by giving details of his skin. But the lady is unaware of the irony hangs up the phone.
 - “HOW DARK?” . . . I had not misheard . . . “ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK?” Button B. Button A. Stench Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak. Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered Omnibus squelching tar. It was real! Shamed By ill-mannered silence, surrender Pushed dumbfoundment to beg simplification. Considerate she was, varying the emphasis—
 - “ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?” Revelation came. “You mean—like plain or milk chocolate?”
- The satire on the good breeding and mannerisms of the lady is very striking and the retort of the caller id equally remarkable.

Contnd.

- ▣ Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wavelength adjusted,
I chose. “West African sepia”—and as an afterthought,
“Down in my passport.” Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. “WHAT’S THAT?” conceding,
“DON’T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.” “Like brunette.”
- ▣ “THAT’S DARK, ISN’T IT?” “Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused—
Foolishly, madam—by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black—One moment madam!”—sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears—“Madam,” I pleaded, “wouldn’t you rather
See for yourself?”

- He throws a plethora of colours and colour combinations towards the woman and mocks her.
- The poem is a bitter satire on the racial discrimination of the time and one of the most read and admired poems. He uses a lot of symbolism, similes, metaphors and irony.
- Also refer to Me , Too and I have a dream.