

Review of wole soyinka's book, death and a king's horseman



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Due to the obligation of serving as a new tribal member in third world environments, one would be expected to maintain the standards and beliefs of religion, politics, and family. Dedication to these new beliefs would cause stress and added pressure for one to strive for the satisfaction of the tribe and people. This could result in isolation and unhappiness.

In his play, *Death and a King's Horseman*, Wole Soyinka combines the Yoruba culture and a predominant western culture to express the clash between the two. In the Yoruban world, everything survives on ancient history and religion. The Yorubans beliefs are so strong that when Elesin was to follow his king to heaven, this was acceptable for the people to understand. From the Western perspective, it is hard for people to accept a ritual suicide as positive or helpful to the living.

Soyinka uses mystic elements to provide the reader with a sense of the African tradition. The religious traditions in Africa are to respect the king as ruler, so that the people would be protected of war, have organized politics and rather comfortable living conditions. With out a named king, the tribal members would fight over the succession of the kings position. This would cause anarchy within the community. It is mandatory for the king to be serious at all times. He must eat and sleep alone, and those who wish to see him must bow their heads in respect.

The kings Canadian immigrated son is appointed to be the successor after he passes on. His son realizes what chaos the people would experience if he refuses to accept the role as king. The people would never forgive him and he would rather be dead than deal with the guilt. His son also realizes the

sacrifices that go along with the role as king. He can no longer talk on the phone with his friends, walk to the store, listen to music, watch television, or sing songs. There would be scarcely any vehicles, with dirt potholed roads, and houses made from boards and canvas. His dreams of his family and Canada seem shattered. Having a decent job, riding the bus, wearing expensive clothes, and taking long showers would soon come to an abrupt end. There would be no more McDonalds or take out food. The harsh climate would be treacherous to his body and health and would take some time getting used to. He could no longer go to the doctor or dentist for annual check ups, nor receive any prescribed medicine when ill. The successor could not meet friends at the local pub for a beer and wings, laughing and joking while smoking cigarettes. Hard labour would be expected. Working long days in blistering heat, while barely dressed. Witnessing more dead carcasses of cattle in the fields than actual living. Listening to the problems of the tribal people would be ordinary. Having your hands and head spat on would be expected as a ritual of respect. In Canada, having your hands and head spat on would not only be an act of disrespect but assault as well.

Only few Canadians can imagine what it would be like to have your freedom banished from their life. The opportunities Canadians have are countless. Everyone is offered an education taught by trained professionals, existing in a comfortable atmosphere, that permits the eligibility of using sport and academic equipment. Everyone is entitled to seek employment.

Unemployment and financial aid is given to those who need it. Obtaining some source of income is absolutely crucial in order to maintain a happy and healthy lifestyle in Canada. In Canada, it is normal for infants to play with

toys in their playpen, for children to ride their bikes to the park, and for adults to save for a new car, house, boat or vacation. Canadians of all ages can join extra-curricular activities such as sports, arts, or music.

Comparing the Canadian culture to the African would oppositely drastic. Most Canadians have experienced the taste of chocolate, chips, or pop. In an African culture the necessity foods come from animals. Beef, chicken, eggs and milk. In Canada, people drink clean water, have access to flush toilets, warm showers and can launder their clothes using a machine. Africans only have access to infested rivers for a source of drinking water, which is also used for bathing and washing clothing. They have no flush toilets, and no warm showers. Canadians may choose a movie at the theatre for pleasure, while in Africa, dancing around a fire would be the only source of enjoyment. In Canada, people freely choose who they prefer to date, marry and have children with. Only two people can be married at the same time unless a divorce is settled. They can engage in sexual relations with out being married and have the opportunity to protect them selves. In Africa, people cannot chose who they date, marry or bore children with. The King is entitled to several wives and multiples of children. The lack of remedies for protection result in a vast spread of diseases. In most areas of Canada, people are protected from wildlife. They are not expected to hunt them for food. Africans are not protected from the wildlife and hunt with out dated or man- made weapons.

Most Canadians take the things they are offered for granted. No one can imagine the culture difference until they have experienced it them selves.

Once a Canadian realized the isolation from civilization they would be <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-wole-soyinkas-book-death-and-a-kings-horseman/>

ultimately grateful for what they have. If an African realized the freedom offered in Canada and experienced the difference they would never want to go back to Africa. Many Canadians take what they have for granted. When they are hungry they can make themselves a snack, when they are bored they can go to the library to read, when they are hot they turn up the air conditioning, and when they are cold they turn up the heat.

There are endless contrasts when comparing the two cultures. When the new successor arrives in Africa the shock would be drastic. Going from an uncivilized society to a civilized society back to an uncivilized society would be mentally and physically painful. Whether or not the new king believes in the legends of the tribal gods, he would have to change his views and beliefs in order to satisfy the people. Decisions toward war, peace and politics would be his obligation to make the appropriate choices. Should he make any erroneous decisions, the fear of being killed by another member to relieve him as king, is always on his mind.

The conflicts between cultures would cause extreme pressure for a king who has experienced both of the cultures. He would strive for satisfaction of the people but would be unhappy by the isolation of society.

Wole Soyinka, although relying on the predominant western culture, is able to sustain an African cultural world-view through his use of language, rhythms, and literary devices. The use of such allows the reader to be transferred to a foreign world to experience the clash and conflict of the evolving cultures.