

**Annotation of Lokangaka Losambe's "Death, Power and Cultural Translation in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 42.1 (2007), pp. 21-30.**

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Lokangaka Losambe's article offers a close reading of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975), a play set in the Yoruba city of Oyo during the Second World War. Pointing out the limitations of previous explorations of this work, the critic argues that the play cannot be fully understood by focusing solely on its use of Yoruba metaphysical elements. As an alternative, he proposes to perform an analysis that acknowledges the central role occupied by the interaction between culture and power in Soyinka's text. More precisely, Losambe posits that death can be viewed as a site of power contestation, featuring negotiations not only between the coloniser and the colonised, but also between the essentialist and syncretic approaches to Yoruba culture.

Drawing intermittently on theoretical statements by Achille Mbembe, Frantz Fanon and Mikhail Bakhtin, the author conducts a well-structured examination of *Death and the King's Horseman*. He suggests that some of the protagonists' responses to pre-colonial Yoruba practices associated with death provide key insights into the way these characters position themselves in relation to tradition and authority in the colonial context of the play. Crucial to the article's main argument is the interpretation assigned to the refusal expressed by Elesin, the king's horseman of the title, to commit the ritual suicide that he is expected to perform to ensure both the deceased monarch's smooth passage into the afterlife and the safety of his community. After a detailed investigation, Losambe concludes that Elesin at once resists Yoruba cultural essentialism and promotes adaptability and regeneration as strategies of

resistance against colonialism.

By virtue of its text-based approach, this essay is primarily intended for those with a specific interest in Wole Soyinka's works. However, considering that some of the subject matters discussed in the article – that is, power, culture and syncretism – are major concepts in the field of postcolonial studies, this piece may also provide stimulating reading for literary scholars in this wider area of research.