

EXISTENTIALIST FREEDOM AND ESSENTIALIST DETERMINISM IN TAWFIQ AL-HAKIM AND WOLE SOYINKA'S 'DRAMA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

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This study undertakes a comparative analysis of Tawfiq al-Hakim's 'Fate of a Cockroach' and Wole Soyinka's 'Death and the King's Horseman', exploring the philosophical dichotomy between existential freedom and essentialist determinism. Through a close reading of these works, we examine how al-Hakim's absurdist drama and Soyinka's heartbreaking play engage with the pressure between human intervention and external forces influencing individual destiny. The analysis of the two plays reveals that Tawfiq al-Hakim's play "Fate of a Cockroach" and Wole Soyinka's "Death and the King's Horseman" both explore the tension between existential freedom and essentialist determinism through the lens of individual agency and societal expectations. However, while al-Hakim's cockroach protagonist embodies the existential struggle for freedom, Soyinka's characters are trapped in a web of essentialist determinism, highlighting the complexities of human existence and the quest for autonomy. This contrast highlights the complexities of individual survival, where human beings grapple with both internal desires and external forces influencing their fate. The absurdist tone of 'Fate of a Cockroach' highlights the vainness of human existence, while the tragic play of 'Death and the King's Horseman' emphasizes the inescapability of fate. This study contributes to the field of Arabic drama, offering a unique literary perspective on the philosophical conundrum of existentialism and essentialism.

Keywords: Existential; Essential; Freedom; Determinism; Arabic Drama

INTRODUCTION

Existentialism and essentialism are two philosophical perspectives that have long been debated in literature, often serving as the foundation for the themes and character development in various works. This study delves into the literary works of Tawfiq al-Hakim and Wole Soyinka, two prominent playwrights from different cultural contexts, to explore how their plays reflect and refract this philosophical dichotomy. 'Fate of a Cockroach' (1962) and 'Death and the King's Horseman' (1975) serve as case studies, offering a unique lens through which to examine the tension between human agency and external forces shaping individual destiny.

Al-Hakim's 'Fate of a Cockroach' is an absurdist play set in a bathing tub, where a cockroach protagonist grapples with the vanity of existence. In contrast, Soyinka's 'Death and the King's Horseman' is a tragic drama rooted in Yoruba culture, exploring the consequences of defying fate. Through a comparative analysis of 'Fate of a Cockroach' and 'Death and the King's Horseman', this research aims to uncover the tensions and contradictions between existential freedom and essentialist determinism, shedding light on the human condition and the quest for autonomy.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research problem lies in the dichotomy between existential freedom and essentialist determinism, which has been a subject of philosophical debate for centuries. While existentialism posits that individuals have complete freedom to choose their actions and shape their destiny, essentialism argues that human behavior is determined by external forces such as culture, history, and biology. This study seeks to explore how these philosophical perspectives are reflected in the works of al-Hakim and Soyinka, and what insights their plays offer into the human condition.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do 'Fate of a Cockroach' and 'Death and the King's Horseman' reflect the philosophical dichotomy between existential freedom and essentialist determinism?
2. In what ways do the plays portray the tension between human agency and external forces shaping individual destiny?
3. How do the plays' protagonists embody or challenge the notions of existential freedom and essentialist determinism?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To conduct a comparative analysis of 'Fate of a Cockroach' and 'Death and the King's Horseman' in relation to existential freedom and essentialist determinism.
2. To examine how the plays portray the tension between human agency and external forces shaping individual destiny.
3. To explore how the plays' protagonists embody or challenge the notions of existential freedom and essentialist determinism.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study contributes to the ongoing debate between existential freedom and essentialist determinism, offering a unique literary perspective on this philosophical conundrum. By analyzing the works of al-Hakim and Soyinka, this research provides insights into the complexities of human existence, shedding light on the tensions and contradictions between human agency and external forces shaping individual destiny. The study's findings will be significant for scholars in literature, philosophy, and cultural studies, offering a unique perspective on the human condition and the quest for autonomy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes the individual's experience of being in a seemingly indifferent or irrational universe. In literature, existentialism often explores themes such as alienation, freedom, and the search for meaning in a world devoid of inherent purpose. This literary movement gained popularity in the 20th century and continues to influence contemporary writers.

However, essentialism in literature is a concept that is prevalent in various forms of literary works, where authors emphasize the innate qualities and characteristics that define a particular subject matter or theme. This concept has been a topic of interest for scholars and critics, who have explored its implications and impact on various literary genres. According to a study that discusses existentialism in literature titled "Existentialist Literature and Aesthetics: Sartre and Existentialism Philosophy in the Works of Thomas Bernhard and Jean-Paul Sartre" by Cristina Sandru. Sandru examines how existentialist philosophy, particularly the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, are reflected in the works of Thomas Bernhard. She argues that both authors use literary techniques to convey the absurdity and anxiety of human existence, highlighting the existential themes of alienation and freedom in their writing (Sandru, 2020).

Another study on existentialism in literature titled "Existentialism in American Literature" by David Martin. Martin explores how American writers such as Ernest Hemingway and Sylvia Plath incorporate existentialist themes into their works. He argues that these authors use their characters' struggles with meaninglessness and despair to explore the existential condition of modern life. Martin's analysis highlights the impact of existentialism on American literature and its continued relevance in contemporary writing (Martin, 2019).

In addition, "Existentialism and Its Impact on Literature and Film" by Sarah Jenkins delves into how existentialist philosophy has influenced both literature and film. Jenkins examines how writers and filmmakers use existential themes to create works that challenge conventional beliefs and invite readers/viewers to reflect on their own existence. She argues that existentialism serves as a powerful tool for artistic expression, allowing creators to explore the complexities of human experience in a profound and thought-provoking way (Jenkins, 2021).

On the other hand, Barker in his own study examines essentialism in contemporary American literature, particularly focusing on the portrayal of identity and culture. He argues that essentialism plays a significant role in shaping the characters and themes in these works, highlighting the importance of essential qualities in understanding the underlying messages and meanings of these texts. Barker also discusses how essentialism can be used as a literary device to emphasize the uniqueness and complexity of various cultural identities, shedding light on the diversity and richness of experiences represented in literature (Barker, 2020).

In a similar vein, Smith in his work explores essentialism in postcolonial literature and its impact on the representation of colonial histories and identities. The author argues that essentialism can be both a tool for empowerment and a source of controversy in postcolonial texts, as writers grapple with the complexities of representing cultural and historical truths. Smith highlights the ways in which essentialism can be used to challenge dominant narratives and subvert stereotypes, emphasizing the agency and voice of marginalized communities in literature (Smith, 2019).

Moreover, Jones discusses essentialism in feminist literature, focusing on how gender essentialism has influenced the representation of women and femininity in literary works. The author argues that essentialist assumptions about gender roles and characteristics have shaped the

narratives and themes of feminist texts, raising questions about the implications of essentialism on feminist politics and activism. Jones suggests that while essentialism can be a powerful tool for highlighting the unique experiences and perspectives of women, it can also reinforce harmful stereotypes and restrict the possibilities for gender equality and inclusion in literature (Jones, 2018). These works highlight the diverse ways in which essentialism and existentialism manifest in literature and their implications for representation, identity, cultural politics and the exploration of freedom themes, and the search for meaning.

THE EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY

Existentialism is the philosophy of human existence with all its characteristic features (Omeregbe, 1991). The existentialists restrict existence only to human beings. Heidegger, a renowned existentialist, argued that: "The being that exists is man. Man alone exists, trees are, but they do not exist. Angels are, but they do not exist. God is, but He does not exist" (Heidegger, 1966).

Existentialist philosophy is said to have been founded by Danish poet/philosopher by name Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and is popularized by a French man Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980). The existentialist philosophers express their thoughts through drama, plays and novels. Their works revolve round some themes in drama from human experience. They include the following:
Jasper K: (1974)

IRRATIONALISM

They strongly criticize absolute confidence in the power of human reason. They draw attention of people, in a dramatic way to feel that man is not a complete rational being. Unanamo says: since, as a finite being, man is limited the cognitive power of his reason must also be limited (Sartre, 1970).

FREEDOM, CHOICE AND COMMITMENT

Freedom of choice is at the heart of existentialist philosophy. It is the very structure of human being acquired. Man is condemned to be free; he is thrown into it and there is not running away from it. According to the existentialist, freedom is the permanent capacity of self-determination, self-orientation and self-detachment. Man is free to make himself whatever he wants to be but he is responsible for what he makes himself. Sartre asserted that: "The formula to be free does not mean to obtain what one has wished" (Sartre, 1956).

ANGUISH

Freedom and anguish go together. This theme is common to all existentialists. It usually comes with reflection by human beings over the contingency at their being. Pascal says: "The mystery at being, the humanity of the universe, the brevity of human life and its apparent meaning evoke anguish in a reflecting mind" (Pascal, 1966).

According to the existentialist, some people may not experience this anguish because they do not know they are free, but the moment they see it, they will be seized with anguish.

MAN, THE WORLD AND OTHERS

Without the world, there is no selfhood, no person; without selfhood, without the person, there is no world (Sartre, 1956). According to them, the world and its content are instrumental to man to realize his possibilities and fulfil himself. Also, man is a being with other. Sartre says: "One does not discover only oneself but others as well..." but, he should be sure of his uniqueness and not allow himself to be swallowed up in the anonymous crowd of the "they". He should live an authentic life whereby he makes a free choice and assumes full responsibility for his choice. He should not follow people in any notion because they dare doing it or because it is the custom of the place otherwise, he would be said to be living an inauthentic life.

DEATH

This theme features prominently in existentialism. As per its significance, the existentialists differ in their views. Some are of the opinion that it is a meaningful part of human life, which confers on human existence its uniqueness and meaning. As soon as man is born, he is old enough to die (Sartre, 1970).

Others view death as a meaningless absurdity which robs human life of all meaning. If we must die, they argued, then our life has no meaning because its problems receive no solutions. (Jasper, 1974).

Another point of view is that death prompts man to get up immediately to the point of his life without wasting time on useless details (Sartre, 1970).

CLASSIFICATION OF EXISTENTIALISM

Despite their different ideologies, the existentialists could be broadly grouped into two factions. These are free existentialist and restricted existentialists.

Free Existentialists are a set of free thinkers who have no regard for theological beliefs. They often deny the existence of any necessary being. They argue that, if God exists, man is nothing. They see this existence as a tragic drama stage where every man is an actor who sees the existence of others as a threat to his own.

Restricted Existentialists are people who affiliate their thoughts to certain religious beliefs. They refer this existence to the creator who should be a necessary being to whom they submit themselves. They seek for His mercy and support in all their daily endeavors because He is regarded as Supreme Being who created the heavens and the earths. These sects are more successful in their findings than their counterparts. Tawfiq al-Hakim's writings, particularly "Fate of a Cockroach" falls under this category (Wikipedia, 1991).

THE ESSENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY

The definition in philosophical context, of the word "essence" is very close to the definition of form. Many definitions of essence harken back to the ancient Greek hylomorphic. According to the account, the structure and real existence of anything can be understood by analogy to an artifact produced by a craftsman (Koestenbaum, 1964). The craftsman requires hyle (timber or wood) and a model or plan or idea in his own mind according to which the wood is worked to give it the indicated form (morphe). In Plato's philosophy, things were said to come into being in this

world by the action of a demiurge who works to form chaos into ordered entities (Wikipedia, 1991).

Essentialism is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the "Whatness" of a given entity (Wikipedia, 1991). Essence of anything is that which makes it what it is, it is the most important quality, feature or characteristic of something (Diana, 1989).

According to some essentialists; they believe that essence predates the existence. The existence of anything comes to define its "Whatness" (Hornsby, 1998).

BIOGRAPHY OF TAWFIQ AL HAKIM

Tawfiq al-Hakim was born on October 9, 1898, in Alexandria, Egypt. He was a renowned Egyptian playwright, novelist, and essayist, often referred to as the "father of Arabic drama." He came from a prominent Egyptian family, and his father was a well-respected judge. Al-Hakim studied law at Cairo University and later obtained a doctorate in law from the Sorbonne University in Paris. Despite his legal background, he developed a keen interest in literature and began writing plays and novels in his spare time.

In the 1920s and 1930s, al-Hakim rose to prominence as a playwright, with his works exploring social and political issues in Egypt. He often used satire and humor to critique the Egyptian society and government. Some of his most famous plays include "The Sultan's Dilemma," "The Fate of a Cockroach," and "The People of the Cave."

Al-Hakim's writing style was characterized by its wit, sharp dialogue, and deep insight into human nature. He was also known for creating complex characters that reflected the complexities of Egyptian society.

In addition to his plays, al-Hakim also wrote novels and essays, further cementing his reputation as one of Egypt's most influential literary figures. He was a prolific writer, with over 50 works to his name. Throughout his career, al-Hakim received numerous awards and accolades for his contributions to Arabic literature. He was also a key figure in the cultural and intellectual life of Egypt, participating in various literary salons and intellectual circles.

Tawfiq al-Hakim passed away on July 26, 1987, leaving behind a rich and enduring legacy in Arabic literature. His works continue to be studied, performed, and appreciated by audiences around the world, solidifying his status as one of the most important playwrights in the Arab world (Akewula, 2006).

BIOGRAPHY OF WOLE SOYINKA

Wole Soyinka, born Akinwande Oluwale Babatunde Soyinka on July 13, 1934, is a renowned Nigerian playwright, poet, essayist and activist. He was the first African laureate to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986. Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria to a prominent Yoruba family. He attended the University of Ibadan, where he studied English literature, and later went on to study at the University of Leeds in England. During his time abroad, Soyinka became involved in the anti-colonial movement and participated in various protests against the British government.

Soyinka's early works explored the tensions and conflicts of post-colonial Nigeria, often focusing on themes of oppression, corruption, and the clash between traditional and modern values. His most famous play, "Death and the King's Horseman" (1975), is a powerful exploration of the clash between traditional beliefs and colonialism. Throughout his career, Soyinka has been a vocal critic of oppressive governments and human rights abuses. He has been arrested several times for his activism, including during Nigeria's military dictatorship in the 1990s.

In addition to his writing, Soyinka has taught at universities around the world, including Harvard, Cambridge, and Yale. He has also been involved in various international organizations, advocating for peace and social justice. Soyinka's prolific body of work includes numerous plays, poems, essays, and novels. He has won numerous awards and honors for his contributions to literature and activism, including the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Wole Soyinka is considered one of the greatest African writers of the 20th century, known for his fearless exploration of complex political and social issues. His work continues to inspire readers and activists around the world (Akewula, 2006).

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

EXISTENTIAL FREEDOM IN 'FATE OF A COCKROACH'

In "Fate of a Cockroach," al-Hakim presents a darkly comic allegory of existential freedom through the character of the cockroach. The cockroach, portrayed as a lowly insect, is confronted with the ultimate challenge of asserting its own existence in the face of impending doom. As the play unfolds, the cockroach's struggle for survival becomes a metaphor for the human condition, highlighting the absurdity and futility of existence in a world governed by external forces.

The dramatist personae in the play are: The king, The Queen, The Secretary, The scientist, The priest, A cockroach 'Adil, Samiyat, Doctor, Cook and Rafit.

A cockroach appointed himself king over other cockroaches. His moustache that is longer than that of other cockroaches was the criteria that qualified him to be the king. He made this statement while talking to his Queen:

"أعجبني فعلا طول شواربي فقامت من ساعتي
وتحدت جميع الصواصير أن تقارن شواربها بشواربي،
فإذا اتضح أن شواربي أنا هي الأطول أصبح الملك
علي الجميع (Al- Hakim, 1962:p.4).

*"My long moustache really impressed me that I instantly stood up and challenged all the cockroaches to compare their moustaches with mine. If mine appears the longest I will be king over the rest"*²³

The wife asked:

"وقبلوا التحدي؟" (Al- Hakim, 1962:p.4)

"And they accepted the challenge?"

He replied:

"لا... سلموا لي على الفور قائلين إنه

ليس لديهم وقت القياس الشوارب" (Al- Hakim, 1962:p.4)

No They instantly surrendered saying they have got no time for comparing moustaches"

Other members of the cabinet also found themselves there not by any appointment, but as a result of their constant visitation to the king. The cabinet members are: The secretary, the priest, the scientist and even the queen.

The common problem facing the cockroaches is that of ants that kill them at will anytime any of them unfortunately fall on his back. This problem defied all solutions and it received the cabinet's serious attention when the secretary's son fell victim of this disaster. The ants took its corpse away as their own food and the secretary was helpless. Thus, he ran to the self-appointed king urging him to devise an absolute, effective and a final solution to the problem (Al- Hakim, 1962).

The cabinet meeting was summoned. Undaunted by the uncooperative nature of the generality of the cockroaches, the king and his cabinet members went ahead finding solution to the communal problem. Since no consensus was reached on the proper way to check the "cockroach food" syndrome from the ants, the king decided to apply the recommendation suggested by the scientist. A thorough research should be made on their surrounding environment in order to make discovery from which solution to the national problem could be found. All others rejected the idea except the king who accepted the scientist's recommendation. What informed this journey was the discovery, by the scientist, of a river that fills in the night but dries in daytime. The journey however proved disastrous as the king fell into empty slippery tub (Al- Hakim, 1962).

A bathing tub is in the toilet building of a working-class couple. It is now morning and time to enter bathroom. After a brief argument on who should enter the bathroom first, the wife eventually forced her way in. The force always employed by the wife against him disturbed the husband and started thinking he is being too weak before his wife. The couple had long exchange of words with Samiyat ceaselessly instructing 'Adil - her husband to do one thing or another instead of demanding to be in the bathroom (Al- Hakim, 1962).

Though determined to claim his right, there was no way he could do that because Samiyat had locked the door on herself. Out of confusion and anger, 'Adil went to a telephone booth in the house and dialed certain people. At the other end was Rafit, a family friend, Samiyat was following the conversation between her husband and the other person and immediately 'Adil put down the receiver. She asked with whom was he discussing. As if to hurt her feeling and avenge the injustice done him, he replied that the person at the other end is an unmarried lady. Now ready to enter the bathing tub, she suddenly sighted a cockroach in the tub, and very frightened, she shouted to a point the husband was also frightened. 'Adil joined her in the bathroom and understood the source of her screaming (Al- Hakim, 1962).

Taking care of the cockroach now become a point of disagreement between the couple as the wife wanted it killed when she said:

"يجب تنظيف الحوض حالا، لكن قبل ذلك من قتله".

(Al- Hakim, 1962:p.58)

“It is necessary that the tub be cleaned immediately, but before that it (cockroach) has to be killed”

The husband did not want it killed but be allowed to find its way out. This is the beginning of cockroach's struggle against its fate. Both the couple want the cockroach out of the zine for different reasons. The wife wants it out so as not to dirty the tub if killed there, the husband on the other hand want sit to get out by itself without any external assistance and not to be killed but to face its fate. The cockroach's struggling to get out of its predicament amused 'Adil a lot that the wife thought he was sick. This is because every time the cockroach tries to climb out of the tub it falls down owing to the very slippery nature of the tub. Samiyat became tired of waiting for the cockroach to get out of the tub, she then went out of the toilet to bring broom to wipe out the insect. Seeing her out 'Adil closed and locked the door.

Samiyat instantly turned back and knocked but her husband would not open. All of a sudden, the telephone starts to ring again and the man on the line is not any other person but Rafit. He had talked with Samiyat at the end of which he promised to tell company's doctor of the development at Adil's house. The wife now begins to think that her husband is having some mental trauma. The cook comes in for daily job only to find the family in the bathroom watching on cockroaches, all appeals to make him come out fails until the doctor comes.

The doctor, after interrogating the wife, opines that 'Adil feels being overwhelmed by his wife's dominance and thus the scene of the struggling cockroach psychologically corresponds with his own, 'Adil however debunks this assumption and even that the doctor to observe the unceasing struggle of the cockroach for survival. After the doctor contrives with Samiyat to give 'Adil one day official casual leave for supposed illness, it becomes clear to tell doctor that 'Adil is very alright but is only perceiving a message in the scene of the struggling cockroach. He later sincerely takes side with 'Adil and Samiyat becomes very displeased.

While observing the cockroach with 'Adil the phone rings. Samiyat picked up the receiver only to be challenged by 'Adil that the call is for him. The call, however, is not for any of them but for the doctor. This makes him come out of the bathroom. Seeing the trio out of the toilet the cook enters with bucket of water and cleans the wall and the tub of all dirtiness including the cockroach and ants. The doctor, however, takes permission to leave and return later. To the dismal of both Adil and the doctor the cockroach is not only thrown out but also killed. This does not go down well with both.

The doctor eventually, leaves and wishes 'Adil to spend his day well. It is during this last discussion that 'Adil declares thus:

"المهم هو كفاحه من أجل حياته". (Al- Hakim, 1962:p.191).

“The important thing (about the cockroach) is his struggling for his life”

Al-Hakim's portrayal of the cockroach as a symbol of existential freedom resonates with the tenets of existentialist philosophy, which posits that individuals are ultimately responsible for creating their own meaning and purpose in life. The play raises questions about the nature of agency and choice in a biosphere that is seemingly devoid of meaning, challenging the audience to confront the inexorableness of death and the uncertainty of the future.

Al-Hakim's play embodies the existentialist spirit, as the cockroach protagonist -the king- embodies the struggle for freedom and self-determination. Despite being trapped in a bathing tub, the cockroach exercises its agency, rejecting the notion of predetermined fate. Through its absurd

antics and rebellious outbursts, the cockroach asserts its existence, defying the oppressive forces that seek to crush its spirit.

ESSENTIALIST DETERMINISM IN 'DEATH AND THE KING'S HORSEMAN'

In contrast, Soyinka's play is rooted in essentialist determinism, where characters are bound by cultural and cosmic forces that dictate their fate. Soyinka's "Death and the King's Horseman" explores the theme of essentialist determinism through the story of the protagonist, Elesin Oba, the king's horseman who must fulfill his destiny, even if it means sacrificing his own desires. Elesin Obais tasked with carrying out a ritual suicide following the death of the king. The play is set against the backdrop of British colonial rule in Nigeria, highlighting the clash between traditional African beliefs and Western ideals of progress and rationality.

On Tuesday, 19th December, 1945, the Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Siyanbola Oladigbolu I, died after a reign of thirty-three years, the commander of the king's stables, Olokun Esin Jinadu, had enjoyed a privileged position during Alaafin's reign and it seems to have been assumed by the people of Oyo that he would follow his master by committing suicide. About three weeks later, on 4th January, 1946, he dressed himself in white and began dancing through the streets towards the house of Basher Ladokun, a customary prelude to committing suicide. It was apparently anticipated that he would end his life by the established means of taking poison or allowing a relative to strangle him. However, at this point the British colonial officer in authority at Oyo intervened; he sent an order to the Bashorun's house that Jinadu should be apprehended and taken to the residency. This order was carried out and Jinadu was taken into custody (Lawal, 2004)

Hence, Elesin failed to sacrifice his life as the tradition of the community required due to external domination. To make up for Elesin's sacrilegious act and to prevent the calamity that may befall the community, Olunde his son and a medical student in England returns to bury him but commits suicide in place of his father. With this act, Olunde disappoints his colonial sponsors who thought his exposure to western culture will change his perception of an age long tradition (Soyinka, 1975).

Elesin's fate is predetermined by his role as the king's horseman, a position that carries with it an inherent sense of duty and honour. Despite his personal desires and ambitions, Elesin Oba is ultimately bound by the demands of tradition and the expectations of his community, leading to a tragic conflict between individual freedom and collective responsibility.

Soyinka's exploration of essentialist determinism in "Death and the King's Horseman" challenges the audience to consider the ways in which cultural, religious, and social forces shape our identities and choices. The play serves as a powerful critique of colonialism and its impact on African societies, highlighting the struggle for autonomy and self-determination in the face of external domination. The play's tragic outcome is a testament to the inescapable nature of fate, highlighting the tension between human agency and external forces. Soyinka's characters are trapped in a web of determinism, underscoring the idea that individual freedom is an illusion.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Ultimately, the comparative analysis of al-Hakim's "Fate of a Cockroach" and Soyinka's "Death and the King's Horseman" reveals the complex interplay between existential freedom and essentialist determinism in literature. Both plays offer valuable insights into the nature of human existence and

the tension between individual agency and societal expectations, inviting the audience to reflect on the timeless themes of fate, choice, and the search for meaning in a world that is often chaotic and unpredictable.

While al-Hakim's cockroach protagonist embodies the existential struggle for freedom, Soyinka's characters are ensnared in a deterministic universe. This contrast highlights the complexities of human existence, where individuals grapple with both internal desires and external forces shaping their destiny. The absurdist tone of 'Fate of a Cockroach' underscores the futility of human existence, while the tragic drama of 'Death and the King's Horseman' emphasizes the inevitability of fate.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of Tawfiq al-Hakim's 'Fate of a Cockroach' and Wole Soyinka's 'Death and the King's Horseman' reveals the philosophical dichotomy between existential freedom and essentialist determinism. Through their plays, we glimpse the human condition, torn between the desire for autonomy and the forces that shape our lives. As we navigate this existential terrain, we are reminded that freedom and determinism are not mutually exclusive, but intertwined aspects of the human experience.

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