



The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka

Wole Soyinka

The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka Wole Soyinka

The Nobel Prize-winning African writer, Wole Soyinka, was imprisoned without trial by the federal authorities at the start of the Nigerian Civil War. Here he records his arrest and interrogation, the efforts made to incriminate him, and the searing mental effects of solitary confinement.

The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka Details

Date : Published November 1st 1988 by Noonday Press (first published 1972)

ISBN : 9780374521271

Author : Wole Soyinka

Format : Paperback 317 pages

Genre : Cultural, Africa, Nonfiction, Western Africa, Nigeria, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography, Literature, African Literature

 [Download The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka Wole Soyinka

From Reader Review The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka for online ebook

Ashraf Ali says

????? ???? ?? ???
?????? ???? ??? ?????? ???? ???????

Kamran Sehgal says

Soyinka's brilliant prison notes delve into the psychology of solitary confinement and the effects it has on the mind, body and soul. Soyinka's simple yearning for something to read is heartwarming coming from a fellow bookworm.

Some of my favourite parts are the rather bizarre moments of insanity that will run through a mind confined to itself; a 3-page rant about his hatred of oranges, a probing into ideas about time and infinity, and others. This book is not just for those interested in the events of Nigeria and its brutal civil war in the 60's but to those interested in the internal machinations of one of the greatest minds of the 20th century running wild in itself.

Henry Ozogula says

A magnificent memoir, stunning and intellectual. What one would expect from one of the greatest ever writers in the world. Yet with dollops of humour, somehow

Victor Chizi says

As a Nigerian I have observed that very few public figures write or talk about their experience or views on the Nigerian civil war (a.k.a Biafra war) and the tyranny of the military regime, a scar in the history of the nation and an indelible memory in the mind of some Nigerians.

The Man Died; Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka I think is a personal and political entanglement of Soyinka in pursuit of what he considered to be a just course for the nation as an activist on the verge of the civil war, and subsequently events prior to, during and after his arrest and imprisonment.

From a historical perspective, through the page of the book one travels back in time in the mind of Soyinka as he tried to make sense and act upon unfolding events in a nation on the brink of civil war.

Like a Philosopher, in the confines of his prison walls his mind is constantly riddled with matters of; Justice, Power(tyranny of the State), Divine Providence, etc.

"The act of being a prisoner is in itself not even a process but an instant metamorphosis" the instantaneous metamorphosis in the life of Soyinka is seen through the pages of the book.

I just love this quote from the book and I feel like sharing it. "THOSE WHO MAKE PEACEFUL CHANGE IMPOSSIBLE MAKE VIOLENT CHANGE INEVITABLE"

Above all, I think the book is really worth reading particularly for Nigerians given how informative, engaging and poetic it is.

Aziza Aouhassi says

Wole Soyinka.. The man died..

A rich experience of highly human level. You understand what kind of man is Soyinka through his struggling to maintain his humanity above all.

The book is an essay, poetry, a diary of a political prisoner, a man aiming wholly to liberty and freedom.. His struggle is of very noble humanity and it s worth reviving it and living it through the book!

Eric says

It is bizarre to think that a distinguished, world class literary pearl like Soyinka spent years clamped in gaol. But then again, so did other African literary giants like Kofi Awoonor (Ghana), Ngugi (Kenya), Jack Mapanje (Malawi) Mongani Wally Serote (SA) among others.

At least Soyinka's incarceration resulted in this extraordinary book, a work so brilliant that it necessarily invites all sorts of superlatives. The full range of Soyinka's literary talent and nous is explored in this work, with his patent intellectualism augmenting this memoir – a memoir that one can read over and over again with multiple rewards. Soyinka never hides his disgust and disdain for certain tendencies and personalities, and there are many instances here,

perhaps including the “damned casuistic functionaire”. The author's innate imagination and creativity is “gathered, stirred, skimmed and sieved” (to purloin his own expression here) during his travails behind the bars.

Soyinka has always been a cerebral, metaphorical poet and legions of pertinent examples abound in this work. Memorably, the hapless soul who emits “porcine sounds” whilst cleansing his throat/expectorating early every day: regurgitating mortar and slag and dung plaster...do you?”

Madeline says

The Man Died is an intimidating book, and an excellent one. I was most impressed by the sensory detail Soyinka records. His prison experience - I suspect the same is true for other prisoners, but I don't know - leaves him with nothing but sensory details to record. So it's extremely powerful, especially when he is fasting. (He goes a little crazy.) I've only read *Death and the King's Horseman* and some articles, so I can't really compare with his other work, but this was easily the most impressive thing I've read by Soyinka so far.

However, for someone who isn't a great student of history or somewhat lacking in dates and names and things, an annotated version of *The Man Died* would be much better reading. I definitely didn't catch all the allusions and I would have liked to. But there probably isn't an annotated version out yet.

Nathan says

A savage, stabbing inquiry, not into human nature proper, but into human nature viewed through the concave mirrors of solitary confinement and human evil, stretched and warped into horrible familiarity. Soyinka is hard to read, if you read him straight -- this book is most effective when you enter into its twisting, doubling corridors and let Soyinka transform your mind and introspection into a prison of your own. Like most great books, this one works on several levels: an indictment of political injustice, a psychological study of the prisoner, and (pardon the cliché) a metaphor for the human condition. Brilliant and haunting.

Abdulrasheed Yakubu says

good

Johannes says

The thing that sticks in my mind most about this book is this: In solitary confinement, living with the knowledge that he could be summarily executed at any moment, preserving his sanity by writing his thoughts down on toilet paper with homemade pens and ink, he devotes something like three typewritten pages to how much he hates oranges. This is totally peripheral to what is undoubtedly a great book, but that's what sticks in my mind. I definitely need to read more of his writing.

Lanre Ogundimu says

“The man dies in him who keeps quiet in the face of injustice.” That's my favorite quotation from this well documented piece which focuses on the prison experience of Wole Soyinka

TheAuntie says

forse dovrei leggerlo in lingua originale, in molti punti ho avuto la sensazione che la traduzione non centrasse molto il senso delle frasi... boh... dovrei ricorrere all'originale o ad un'altra versione per esserne

certa

jana says

?????? ????? ???????, ?? ??????. ?????? ??? ?????? ?? ??? ??????? ?????? ??? ?? ??????? ??????.
?? ??? ??????? ?????? ??????? ?? ?? ?????? ??? ?????? ?? ?????? ??????.
????? ?? ?? ??? ?????????? ??????? ?????? ?????? ?? ??? ?????? ????. ?? ??????? ????.

Johannes says

"The thing that sticks in my mind most about this book is this: In solitary confinement

Tom says

In introductory notes to Soyinka essay "Why Do I Fast?" in *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*, editor Phillip Lopate mentions this memoir. The essay, about S's experience fasting in protest of his imprisonment, was so good that I'm eager to read more by him.

Boaz says

the bracketing of existence is at its summit in this book. one of my best

Petrina says

"In the beginning there was Void. Nothing. And how does the mind grasp it? A waste? Desolation? Nothing is cheaply within grasp from what was. But as the fundamental nought, the positive, original nil? As the immeasurable drop into pre-thought, pre-existence, pre-essence? But then, the mind that will conceive this must empty inwards from a lifetime's frame of accumulated references, must plunge from the physical platform into the primordial abyss. Within which alas, lie the creative energies which 'abhor a vacuum' even more than Nature. The cycle must commence again.

Still, there being nothing worse to do, Pluto tried to discover tunnels even from the dead netherworld into deeper bowels of Void. at the best, it was mesmeric: the mind's normal functioning seized up, the day eased out in a gentle catalepsis. At worst it lay within the darkest ring of recreative energies, revolving on its axis, turning on its spoor in the gossamer dust of infinity . . .

Which existed and had always been--Life, that is, which God did say Let There Be. Why? For it had always been within his protean mind, within form that was not formed, motion that did not move, time and space which existed not, yet were all severally and wholly contained, rolled and moulded within that great amorphous origin, pulse, breath, androgynous source of matter and of essence. Until, suffering, I do not seek, I find--he delved within and ordered: let there Be! Tangibly, visibly, olfactorily, audibly . . .

What, then, what was this need to materialize in poor second-mould copy such merely outward

manifestations of the pure Idea! Why break the invisible chrysalis of essence, the one unassailable Truth. Truth, because there was no copy, no duplicate, no faulted cast, not even a bare projection from an alien mind of that pure idea? For there were no other minds. No faker. What was this need to turn materialist? Uncertainty? Ego? Narcissism? Reassurance? Loneliness, said the Holy Writ. A fear that thought was Nothing, and a fear of Nothing which could only be allayed by the thought made manifest.

When at first the pigeons came, Pluto held their arabesques of wing-bolts high in the air, burning as incandescent tracers long after their creators had departed. Yet, fearful for when the seasons might change and the pigeons migrate and come no more he moved at once to wean the mind from dependence on such fortuitous aesthetics. A stone lay on the ground, worn smooth and oval shaped, subtly creviced as if by human hands, faintly reminiscent of a shuttle. Inert, yet he imbued it with the tapestry of fates, of seasons, pierced to the core and crowded its infinite lethargy with infinite creativity, coming away from that stone with only its pure luminous essence. For finally the loops and arcs of the pigeons did disintegrate, the quicker for being witnessed being only an activity in Time. The feather designs did crumble and lose their formal rhythms, falling back to earth in showering sparkles. And it rendered the Crypt darker than before. Not to create or think is best. The pauses leave the Crypt a little darker than before. Creation is an admission of great loneliness. Turn the mind in a loom of cobwebs, rest the time-smoothed shuttle in its home of timelessness.

I need nothing. I seek nothing. I desire nothing.

Not even loneliness. A mess known as the world was created to cheat loneliness and the one pure essence. So witnesseth the Holy Writ, faking it a virtue."

*the sunflowers that grew outside of his window. Collecting the pollen to make a bar of gold.

*inventing mathematical formulas/mobiles/wind tunnel.

*the story behind "the man died"

". . . I denied recognition even to the presence of women in the streets as we drove through, denied that my body had made physical breach of the prison walls. Submitting at last to public pressure in this one respect, the graceless men might seek revenge in other ways for the one surrender. My outing therefore remained an ambiguous omen. I refused to take pleasure in the sensation of breathing a less restricted air.

Until the rains crashed through the barrier of insulation. An exhilarating storm, it penetrated all defences physical and mental, crushed the capsule to release the wild sweet scent of liberty. I gave into it, turning it to the strength of a thousand combative resolves that rushed out one after the other. Soaked to the skin, lashed by wind and rain as we fled through the long unprotected corridors of the hospital I was struck suddenly by the phenomena of these wild, free yet governed motions of the elements and us, and its contrast was that first death march into an artificial tomb. And, with the gaunt figure of Polyphemus racing far ahead of us, clutching his robes to him in a losing battle with the wind, I experienced a conviction as sharp and certain as the pessimist intuition of the turn of the year only, this time, in a positive revelation. It had to do with liberty but not with the gaining of it. It was a passionate affirmation of the free spirit, a knowledge that because of this love, my adversaries had lost the conflict. That it did not matter in the end for how long they manoeuvred to keep my body behind walls, they would not, ultimately, escape the fate of the defeated. At the hands of all who are allied and committed to the unfettered principle of life.

D says

All too real.

A letter to Compatriots...

The author of this letter is a professor in Greece, George Mangakis, a present a captive of fascist dictators.* I quote some passages from his letter to reinforce certain very simple truths of a prisoner's precarious existence in isolation. It seems to me that testimonies such as this should become a kind of chain-letter hung permanently on the leaden conscience of the world. To defeat, to uproot in entirety any concepts of and pretension to a mitigating base for inflicting atrocities on the human mind, it is essential that the extent of this unnatural strain be fully grasped. After that, there can be no pleases, no arguments. Each individual will make a simple act of choice -- do I say *yes* to this or *no*?

* George Mangakis is now at liberty.

"Among so many other things, the anguish of being in prison is also a deep need to communicate with one's fellow human beings. It is a need that suffocates one, at times.

Self-defence. That is why I write. That is how I manage to keep my mind under control. If I let it loose, unsupported by the frame of written thought, it goes wild. It takes strange sinister byways, and ends up by begetting monsters.

... we need somebody else's mind in order to keep on working terms with own own. We also need moments devoid of thought."

The man dies in a ll who keep silent in the face of tyranny.

George Mangakis writes:

"When a dictatorship is imposed upon your country, the very first thing you feel, the very first day, is humiliation. You are being deprived of the right to consider yourself worthy of responsibility for your own life and destiny. This feeling of humiliation grows day by day as a result of the oppressors' unceasing effort to force your mind to accept all the vulgarity which makes up the abortive mental world of dictators. You feel as if your reason and your human status were being deeply insulted every day. And then comes the attempt to impose on you, by fear, acceptance of their various barbarous actions--both those that you hear about and those that you actually see them commit against your fellow human beings. You begin to live with the daily humiliation of fear, and you begin to loathe yourself. And then, deeply wounded in your conscience as a citizen, you begin to feel a solidarity with the people to whom you belong. With a unique immediacy, you feel indivisibly bound to them and jointly responsible for their future fate."

In any people that submit willingly to the 'daily humiliation of fear,' the man dies. - 14 Dec 1971

The nation was humiliated by a treason promoted, sustained, and accentuated by forces that lacked purpose or ideology beyond self-perpetuation through organized terror, the failure to:

"acquire an extraordinary historic acuity of vision and see with total clarity that humiliated national are inevitably led either to a lethal decadence, a moral and spiritual withering, or to a passion for revenge, which results in bloodshed and upheaval." - Mangakis

A beginning must be made somewhere, so let it be made by us in the West.

David Astor on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising are very simply to the point:

"We must learn more of the fatal, fearful process of thought which makes people feel not only justified, but that they have a duty to destroy others. We cannot tell what may excite this process of mass psychology. Its next form may not be racial or religious but political (as has happened before in times of revolution or civil war..."

This book is not a textbook for survival but the private record of one survival. And perhaps at the least it will refresh the world conscience on the continuing existence of the thousands of souls held under perverted power whose survival necessitates the self-infusion of inhuman acts.

"Let us say simply that I disapprove of power prostitutes."

I hear a fresh wind coming up from beyond the boundaries of expediency.

Listen to what Adolfe Joffe wrote to Trotsky before his death by suicide. "Human life has meaning only to that degree and as long as it is lived in the service of humanity. For me humanity is infinite.

For me, justice is the first condition of humanity.

The mind is time -- and on that flash he rested now the problem of Infinity at last. The mind is the sole coefficient of time and space.

Aubrey says

All crimes must be investigated, peace time or war time.

Three days later, unable to accept any longer the dispensation of prison walls I began the letter to my political colleagues. I use this term in preference to the other, 'political comrades', to distinguish attitudes to situations of conflict, to distinguish those who on the one hand believe that prison—to quote this immediate situation—is some kind of hallowed ground in which an inmate must not only obey the laws of the administration but desist from any other involvement in the struggle that placed him there, conducting himself always in such a manner as would effect his early release. On the other, as comrades, those who acknowledge that prison is only a new stage from which the struggle must be waged, that prison, especially political prison is an artificial erection in more senses than one whose bluff must be called and whose impotence must be demonstrated.

Wole Soyinka was jailed 1967-69, given copyright of this work 1972, made Nobel Prize for Lit winner 1986. I can't think off the top of my head of any Nobel Prize for Lit winner, save for Kertész and Solzhenitsyn, who has a prison record, and of even fewer who have a work composed in prison to their name. However much of a supposed social justice bent people ascribe to the prize (maybe refutation of this reputation is what

motivated the committee to sacrifice credibility for further white boy pandering), I could use more black winners than I've gotten, and white Africans don't count. To all intents and purposes, survival of the fittest is a factor, as I imagine some of the more original nominations (Lessing, for one) were decided upon by simply outliving the hoards of the status quo, and based what I've seen in terms of the demographics, the biographies of potential luminaries must jump an increasing number of hoops the further from the center they get. There is no health insurance on earth that can combat two years of solitary confinement and guarantee one's critical faculties continue on the path projected under less violated circumstances, so if one of your fave potentials faces incarceration, don't assume they're off Soyinka's caliber when it comes to integrity of mind, body, and soul.

Another inmate further off stares with a face full of compassion. Damn you! Damn you and all like you! Offer nothing but hatred. Hate. The pure burning flame of hate to warm you through the damp and hone your spirit to a fine weapon for survival. Not pity for the victims fool but simply, no more victims! Else simply lay down and die!

[']What of all these intellectuals we hear so much about with all their pseudo-socialist jargon? We used to laugh at those phonies when I was with Nkrumah. So what happens when something anti-social happens and threatens to break up the nation. Why do we never hear them at the time of the event?'

'You won't ever hear them,' I said. 'They are enjoying the anguish of having to decide between two evils.'

Look up studies of the impact solitary confinement has on a human being. 99.9999% of the time someone says they are isolated or a loner or prefer to be alone or on the fringes or outside, this is not what they mean. They mean they are without those they consider to be of mutual esteem and worthy of camaraderie, and they do not count all those others who facilitate their access to food, shelter, sleep, clothing, emotional rapport, any means of material and mental and even spiritual well being one need not derive from someone they view as an equal, let alone as a superior. Had Soyinka not taken to fasting and tamping down the excess energy allotted to his faculties, I imagine his creative output would have suffered irredeemably without exterior reaffirmation, and we would not have the writer we have today. He's not the first to have written during and/or after a stint in prison, but unlike, say, Dostoevsky or Malory, people are less invested in critical wranglings with imprisonment, postcolonialism, dictatorship, antiblackness, and the construction of liberty written while directly impacted by such. I suppose distance renders the imprisonment less of an accusation of dehumanization and more of an event that, for whatever reason, happened and went on to shape a particular author's creative process, but is far more interesting, especially in my incarceration-happy nation and state, to consider the philosophy of the jailed, and what that necessarily means for those who are not.

*I sensed a vivid contradiction in all this, a contradiction in my being, in my human self-awareness and self-definition. In fact one might say that never until this moment did that self-definition become so clear as when I viewed these chains on my ankles. The definition was a negative one, I defined myself as a being for whom chains are **not**, as, finally, a human being. In so far as one may say that the human essence does at times possess a tangible quality, I may say that I tasted and felt this essence within the contradiction of that moment. It was nothing new; vicariously, by ideology or from racial memory, this contradiction may be felt, is felt, with vivid sufficiency to make passionate revolutionaries of the most cosseted life. Abstract, intellectual fetters are rejected just as passionately. But in the experience of the physical thing the individual does not stand alone, most especially a black man. I had felt it, it seemed to me, hundreds of years before, as I believe I did experience the triggering of a surely re-incarnated moment when at school I first encountered engravings of slave marches in history books.*

'I have been here months. Alone. I have no books, no occupation whatever. Do you think this is good for my health?'

He thumped my chest and chuckled. 'Ho, ho. You look very healthy to me.'

'But do you think it is right? Do you think it's human?[']

I believe Soyinka when he says this was written in jail, and as such accept the flittings between social commentary to metaphysical deconstructions to invocations of Greek gods and hallucinations of evil history makers and interjections by artists and history and everyone in between. There are also Crusoe-style passages regaling tales of mechanical ingenuity, as well as anthropological detailings of anthropomorphization of the cell courtyard with its geckos and praying mantises and cats, which coming at the tail end of a horripilating record of the complete and utter breakdown of sense and self, is not as vacuously entertaining as it could have been. As it stands, I would kill for a book of essays stemming from all the topics spawned by this work, as there are myriad starting points that, once expanded upon, would make for a treasure trove of critical thought processes centering on everything from the relationship of nation state to a people to arcane mathematics acting as a weapon against systematic degradation of both sides of humanity's dualism. Individual pieces probably exist already, as it's been a long time since 1972 and I can't be the only (aspiring) academic to have engaged with this work, but until I become an official participant, I'll have an easier time finding more accessible and nicely packaged works. Still, if anyone runs across a relevant gem, be sure to hit me up.

What was his name, that other Wurtenburg Professor, a compatriot of Frischlin, perhaps also his contemporary? The worthy doctor who in spite of his conviction of the superstitious, untenable injustice of witch trials nevertheless prepared over two hundred successful prosecutions of witches who were duly roasted at the stake. A dichotomy of conviction and responsibility justified by seeking, in the meantime, ways and means of weaning his medieval society from its barbaric ways? So now the role of the intellectual is reduced to simply that! What exactly is the evaluation we must place on your doctorate dissertations you boneless craniums whose tomes shall undoubtedly assail us titled with variations of 'the Social Anomy of 1966, its roots and consequences in the Nigerian Civil War, etc., etc., with special reference to the role of the imperialist commercial interest, etc., etc., Two hundred witches? Two thousand? Two hundred thousand? Two million? Twenty? In presentation volumes bound in silence?

*For the truly independent thinker it is always easy—and often relevant—to recall the artificiality, the cavalier arrogance, the exploit[at]ive motivations which went into the disposal of African peoples into nationalities. One overcomes the sense of humiliation which accompanies the recollection of such a genesis by establishing his essential identity as that which goes into creating the entity of a people. I cannot see that essence as part of the entity of boundaries. Judgment can only be applied to peoples, judgment that is, in its basic ethical sense can be applied only to peoples; loyalty, sacrifice, idealism, even ideologies are virtues which are nurture and exercised on behalf of peoples. And any exercise of self-decimation **solely** in defen[s]e of the inviolability of temporal demarcations called nations is a mindless travesty of idealism. Peoples are **not** temporal because they can be defined by infinite ideas. Boundaries cannot.*

This book is truly like nothing I've ever read, and the fact that it still manages to compare in terms of quality to other, more sedate and unconstrained fiction and non, academic and otherwise, genres is a marvel in and of itself. My hesitation to award the maximum number of stars lies in my own ignorance of the intricacies of the Nigerian Civil War, as well as a moment of anti-Asian sentiment that is out of place in a mind, that otherwise is well aware of the complexities of a colonial ghost which pits one non-white demographic against another. In any case, I still wish to see Soyinka become far more popular on the shelves of both GR

friends and none as befits his much lauded status, lest time passes by and the committee acts again out of misguided isolation and entertains their audience instead of enlightening them. There's enough concrete failure in the world as is without adding creative failure to the morass.

It is easy you know. If you see misery long enough you grow to despise it. So what was that about? What was it that came out of them? You don't know, you weren't within this sound chamber with them. The whole thing...it was like being tortured. It was hurting me and yet it was...I don't know. You people are the writers. If you can't...Strength, that was it. Strength. It had such strength you know. It gave me strength, even while it hurt me. I have never been through a night like that, never in my life.

To the pragmatists who like to point out—quite untruthfully by the way, but let that pass—that in spite of all General Gowon did win the war there is only one answer and it contains a warning: so did General Franco.

Emmanuel Mandela says

Wole Soyinka recount his incarceration by the Nigeria Government. The book exposes one to the viciousness of the military during that time. The only setback is the choice of words by Wole Soyinka. If you are not vast with grammar, you may have to read the book thrice to understand.
