

Clash of Cultures in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

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Abstract: Africa's most renowned dramatist, Wole Soyinka, was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature in 1986. Nobel Prize in Writing winner Wole Soyinka marked the beginning of Nigerian literature. One of Nigeria's greatest writers, Soyinka, has been dubbed the "Bringer of Light to African Literatures." Since 1986, Nigerian students have enthusiastically taken to studying Nigerian literature, and institutions around the country have established departments of Nigerian literature. Various authors from various fields have had their work published. With their accomplishments and finalist status in national and international literary competitions, several of these writers have contributed significantly to the richness and diversity of Nigerian writing. *The Lion and the Jewel*, a drama by Wole Soyinka, is set in Ilunjunle, a Yoruba hamlet in West Africa. Published by Oxford University Press, this book was released in 1963. This paper is a small way to show how his play *The Lion and the Jewel* is full of cultural conflict, ribald comedy, and love. The old culture, which is represented by the people of Ilunjunle, is shown by Baroka, Sidi, and the rest, and the new culture, which is shown by Lakunle, who is educated and a schoolteacher by profession and is influenced by western ways.

Keywords: Wole Soyinka, Africa, Nigerian literature, Lion, Nigeria, Bringer of light

INTRODUCTION

The Lion and the Jewel, a drama written by Wole Soyinka, is set in the Yoruba town of Ilunjunle in West Africa, and it is based on a true story. The Oxford University Press released it in 1963, and it is still in print today. Culture wars, ribald comedy, and love are all in the play *The Lion and the Jewel*, which is about the people of Ilunjunle, who aren't very educated and are led by Baroka, Sidi, and the rest. Lakunle, on the other hand, is very educated and has been influenced by western ways.

There have been several comments about the clash between tradition and modernity in this play, in which tradition triumphs over modernity as a result of Sidi's final deed. Now, since the play symbolises a fight between old and modern methods of doing things, who do you think will win? This is a question that cannot be answered easily. Assuming that he is referring to Sidi as the prize, we may conclude that she has been won by Baroka. As a result, it may appear that triumph belongs to the ancient ways of life and then to the older ideals that he symbolises.

Faced with Difficulties

However, there are some difficulties; the first is that Lakunle is not a very compelling embodiment of current views. There is evidence that he misunderstands and believes to be real some of the texts he reads. He is incorrect, for example, in asserting that women's brains are smaller than men's. Then he is enthralled by the most rudimentary features of contemporary life, such as nightclubs, ballrooms, dancing, and so on. He's full of half-baked contemporary ideals, which he uses to justify refusing to pay Sidi the bride price.

Baroka, the village leader of Ilujinle for sixty-two years, opposes development because he feels it diminishes the variety of ways in which people live and that he and Lakunle should learn from each other. Baroka is desperate to marry Sidi, thus the love triangle of Sidi, Lakunle, and Baroka begins, culminating in Sidi's submission to Baroka. It's amazing to think that a young guy loses to an older man in the game of love, and that in the end, Sidi accepts Baroka, not Lakunle, as her spouse.

Traditional Bride Price

Lakunle, the teacher at the school, is in the middle of instructing a class on the times table when Sidi walks by with a pot containing water on her head. His outfit consists of an English suit that is worn and rumped, and which is slightly too small to him. With a knot that is tucked below his waistcoat, he is dressed for the occasion. Even his shoes are Blanco-white, which contrasts with the loose slacks he's wearing. 'I warned you not to carry burdens on your head,' he retorts, adding that her neck will be shortened as a result. Using the material around her breasts, he also encourages her not to expose that much of her cleavage, which she does. She believes it was too difficult for her to participate in the survey. When Lakunle is chastised by Sidi, who claims that the community believes he is ignorant, Lakunle asserts that he is not easily influenced by taunts. Lakunle also makes fun of her by claiming that her intelligence is inferior than his. He claims that it is clearly stated in his books.

Lakunle adores Western culture and strives to replicate it, often with humorously ineffective results. Soyinka portrays him as sloppy in both acts and speech. He loves Sidi, but he hasn't married her because she wants him to pay the conventional bride price, which he refuses to do:

I have told you, and I say it again I shall marry you today, next week

Or any day you name.

But my bride-price must first be paid....

But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have

The full bride-price. Will you make me

A laughing-stock? Well, do as you please

But Sidi will not make herself

A cheap bowl for the village spit....

They will say I was no virgin

That I was forced to sell my shame

And marry you without a price. (Collected Plays2,

The Lion and the Jewel, 8)

In Sidi's words, she doesn't care if he loves her. Lakunle refuses to pay Sidi's bride-price because he believes it is an uncivilised, ridiculous ritual. Eventually, we learn this:

Ignorant girl, can you not understand?

To pay the price would be

To buy a heifer off the market stall.

You'd be my chattel, my mere property. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 8)

Sidi informs him that if she does so, she would be taunted at by the public, who will claim that she is not a virgin. He goes on to say how much he loves her and how he wants to treat her 'exactly like the Lagos couples I've seen'. Sidi is completely unconcerned. Aside from that, she informs him that she despises the Western tradition of kissing him. Moreover, she informs him that failing to pay her marriage price is unkind and miserly.

Sidi feels uncomfortable with Lakunle's ideals, particularly on the role of women and the responsibilities of a wife. The vocabulary he employs, which is pulled from his "ragged books" (mostly the *Bible* and the dictionary), contributes to this feeling of unease. She is bothered by the contempt with which he is viewed by the rest of the people, including the younger children. In addition, she despises his miserliness, which she views to be "cheating," "mean," and "miserly."

Monogamy vs. Polygamy

Lakunle is full with contradictions that may anger Sidi. He despises Baroka's habits and powers, but secretly envies them. In one address, he wishes he had the Bale's numerous wives. Polygamy is an established custom in a backward civilization, whereas monogamy is new. Lakunle contradicts himself here by attempting to support modernism while retaining his local identity and expectations. Even towards the end of the play, when he enthusiastically adopts the idea that since Sidi is no longer a virgin, he cannot be expected to pay a bride price for her:

But I obey my books.

“Man takes the fallen woman by the hand.”

And ever after they live happily.

Moreover, I will admit

It solves the problem of her bride-price. (*The Lion and the Jewel*, 61)

Sidi does not reject Lakunle like she'd been in love with Baroka from beginning. Sidi initially refuses Baroka's marriage proposal, only to be swayed by the newspaper presented to the village by a European photographer. Sidi's passion is evident in her reactions to the newspaper and the photos inside:

Have you seen these?

Have you seen these images of me wrought by the man from the capital city
Have you felt the gloss?

Smoother by far than the parrot's breast.

Tradition Vs Modernity

Baroka, the village's head, adheres to his Yoruba traditional values, but his position is under threat from the impact of Western culture. We find that the issue that has been troubling him during the play's first act is his seeming impotence, a secret that he shares with his head wife. We eventually find, however, that Sidi's claimed impotence was nothing more than a brilliant scheme to get him to come to his castle in the first place.

When Lakunle is offered with numerous opportunities to show off his powers throughout the narrative, he constantly fails to take advantage of Baroka's attributes of cunning and discernment as well as his power. That Sidi chose to marry Baroka shows the playwright's conviction that Baroka is a better guy and that his sentiments are more true and deserving of a marriage.

Winning Traits

On Baroka's part, we observe that he possesses some traits of cunning that enable him to capture Sidi's affections, qualities that are not present in Lakunle. She has been unable to accept Lakunle from the beginning, and she has been constant in her expression of disdain for this heartless individual to the very end. When she gets seduced by Baroka, on the other hand, she resolves to pick one single guy with whom she will allow herself to come into contact in the future, and that one man will be Baroka, who has already touched her sufficiently. The Bale impresses her with his wrestling prowess; he pretends to be unaware of the marriage proposal and says that Sadiku is constantly attempting to set up matchmaking opportunities for him. Furthermore, he deftly appeals to her attachment to the ancient village customs, while also praising her depth and insight as a result of this. He flatters her by mentioning the possibility of having her image on stamps, and during the conversation, he speaks to Sidi in a soothing tone and with the most charming sincerity, while also emphasising the obligations of the village leader. It is clear that Lakunle lacks this capacity, and as a result Sidi is unable to rely on him for his dependability as well as his pragmatism.

Polygamous Society - An Important Aspect of Traditional Life

Soyinka's drama depicts the polygamous civilization of Africa, which he created. A common part of traditional life in Nigeria is the practise of marrying numerous wives, which is legal and encouraged by the government. Lofts and brides are the primary indicators of a person's wealth. It is widely acknowledged that the elderly gentleman is marrying the young ladies. Like an element of economic production, the family plays a role in polygamy if two persons are married to each other. If you're running an agricultural business, having a large family can help you keep things running smoothly and grow your business. A man can inherit from a deceased brother's widow by marrying her, as long as the custom permits for widow inheritance. Thus, the mother and her children are always covered by the financial and social safety net of the household. Many Bale or chiefs in the area choose to remarry their deceased spouse's last and most adored wife as their first wife. Tradition dictates that the first wife of Bale is raised to the rank of senior and given full access to the household's resources and privileges.

Traditionally, a Bale can have as many wives as he wants, but he must adhere to certain rules and regulations, including as treating all women and children equally, dividing resources equally among all wives and children, and abstaining from prejudice among wives and children. Baroka, the village's Bale, is married to a number of different women. His harem is already overflowing with ladies, ranging from Sadiku to Ailatu, who is his most recent favourite wife. Even at the age of sixty-two, he still has a strong yearning for more female companionship. Because of the norm of polygamy, the play is referred to be a Nigerian bedroom farce. Having seen Sidi's lovely photographs in a glossy magazine, he is determined to get her on that night, and he conveys his intention to his first wife Sadiku, who agrees to court that young lady on his behalf. Because it is the norm of the community that the first wife has the responsibility of persuading and forcing the females to marry her husband, it is also her responsibility to assure his happiness. By enacting this law, the society stresses that wives are expected to obey their husbands and to provide him with anything he desires. It has been entrenched in the brains of women throughout society.

Adding Wives through the First Wife - Complex Kinship Relations

Sadiku is the former figure of the tradition's leadership team. As the head woman of a household in a polygamous society, she takes great pride in her position. Another custom in the community dictates that the last wife of the Bale becomes principal wife to the next Bale, which she mentions when she is courting Sidi for Baroka.

Surprise of the day: The succession's successor, who is very certainly the deceased Bale's son, might end up as the spouse of his step-mother. It is not considered a severe issue in society when a lady becomes the wife of both her father and her son. Sadiku is an example of a habit that is common in the community.

They claim that she was the youngest of Okiki's wives before becoming the senior wife to Baroka. This means that she married her father before becoming the bride of her step-son, as is customary at the time of Okiki's death. It is the king's job, according to the Yoruba, to look

after the youngest wife and children of the preceding sovereign and her children. This practise is referred known as "isupo" among the Yoruba.

Old African culture triumphs against modernization

According to *The Lion and the Jewel*, Baroka's win over the foreign-educated parvenu or "upstarts" was seen as a winning of ancient Africa over foreign-educated upstarts. Although African dynamism has been shown, it is also true that the old rulers have shown themselves to be arrogant, and powerful. However, the way Soyinka presents Baroka isn't really acceptable to people who want to romanticise ancient African kings like Baroka. His use of foreign phrases and notions shows that he is not your ordinary conservative; he has made some significant modifications. It is estimated that stamp collectors from all around the world spend millions of dollars each year buying stamps from small African countries. There's no surprising that the Bale sees stamp sales as a major source of income in this scenario.

Baroka and Lakunle

Soyinka has developed two protagonists, Baroka and Lakunle, who really are meant to be complementary to each other, and his arguments throughout the play is centred on the juxtaposition of the two characters' personalities. Despite the fact that Soyinka is dealing in relative terms rather than absolute terms, the nature of Baroka is presented in a significantly more positive light than that of the character of Lakunle. A grey area has been drawn into our consciousness by the author, who now dares us to analyse the situation properly and distinguish between numerous shades of grey. He doesn't want us to: "sit back and separate the black from the white at a quick glance".

In conclusion, we can conclude that this play is not in favour of reckless advancement and false imitation of so-called Western customs; at the same time, it is not in favour of just remaining still. It provides us with something to think about and debate, just like any excellent fiction.

Some critics said that Wole Soyinka's novel *The Lion and the Jewel* was a reactive (that is, backward-looking) response to these issues. Soyinka is a writer who does not feel that "development" is always a positive thing in society. As a simple example, he agrees with Baroka's assessment that modern roadways are "morbidly dangerous." As for Baroka, he, too, has professed his confidence in the following statements: "the old must flow into the new". To the claim that *The Lion and the Jewel* is a reactive play, one critic responded: "one of the first duties of the comedian is the exploding of cliché. It had become a cliché to say that the new was better than the old. In Wole Soyinka's book, *The Lion and the Jewel*, he didn't want to use that same old thing.

Conclusion

Thus, the main theme of this storey is the rapid modernization of Africa and the rapid evangelization of the people. As a result, there has been a split between traditionalists and modernists. Traditionalists want to undo the changes that were made in the name of progress because they have a vested interest or because they don't like the results of progress. Education and traditional beliefs also don't get along very well at the same time. The educated people

want to share their knowledge with the tribal people in order to make them more modern. It then turns out that the tribal people don't want to get an education because they don't think it will help them in their day-to-day lives.

Another major issue is the subjugation of women as mere objects of desire, which is explored in depth. For one long period of time, they were seen as assets that can be bought, sold, or amassed via accumulation. As a result of this, even modern Lakunle falls victim to it, by first carefully looking on Sidi as she has a lower intelligence, and then by yearning to married her once she has broken her chastity as there is no money required in such a situation.

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