

## **The Lion and the Jewel**

### **Major Themes**

#### **Clash and disagreement**

The play presents a clash between an octogenarian chief of the village and a young teacher. It is an amusing play where Soyinka has presented a young man who adheres to all the vulgarity and superficiality of the Western world and thus he appears as a caricature of a modern human being. Baroka represents Soyinka's mouthpiece so, he loved the traditional culture of his country. Soyinka's love was not the result of uncritical patriotism or romantic nostalgia; it was based on sound knowledge and deep understanding of the elements in Nigerian heritage, which have permanent values. He was full aware of the strongpoints in the Nigerian tradition. The conviction that there is a point at which all the basic values, truth, beauty, goodness, love, freedom, tranquility converge and come together one way or another.

#### **Youth and the problem of self**

In this play, Soyinka manages to expose societal mistakes focusing on youth and the problem of selfdefinition. He concentrates on the theme of perception of society and the exercise of power over young people like Lakunle as the madman of Ilujinle, Sidi as the jewel of Ilujinle and Baroka the representative of power. The play is a challenge to show and criticize the figuration of Africa through European conventions of dramatic representation. Soyinka tries to reprise Western Drama in African dress. Also, the play is usually presented as a conflict between the traditional values of an African village.

#### **Women's role in the society: Polygamy and wife wooing girls to the husband**

Hence, Soyinka portrays the customs and traditions in his Yoruba country. It is new to the reader. The Polygamous society gives importance to the Bale, for example: It allows him to marry as many girls as he wants. He just uses them for his pleasure and after the arrival of the new favourite, he sends the last favourite to an outhouse. In our society, we represent this as the society that never gives respect to woman as Lakunle says "they are used to pounds the yam or bends all the day to plant the millet ...to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub, to bring forth children by

the gross" (The Lion and the Jewel, 7,9). The researcher would fully stress that the characters can be classified in two groups: Baroka, Sadiku, and Sidi represent the traditional African values, whereas Lakunle stands for modern European especially British-values of life. So, Lakunle is infatuated with Sidi. When Sidi is passing through the corridor near the school, Lakunle has the opportunity to see her and begins to express his appreciation of her beauty. As he sees her carrying a pot of water on her head, he feels anxious for her and advises her: I have told you not to carry loads- on your head. But you are as stubborn as an illiterate goat. It is bad for your spine. and it shortens your neck, so that very soon you will have no neck at all. Do you wish to look squashed like my pupil's drawings. (Collected Plays 2, The Lion and the Jewel, 4) He taunts her by saying that "only spiders/ carry loads the way you do" (4). He advises her to cover up her chest and thus discourage the unemployed of the village. Thus, Lakunle offers his desire to marry Sidi by his initial infatuation. That is the reason why when she asks for her pail that he has snatched from her, he puts the condition: "not till you swear to marry me" (7). He explains to Sidi why he wants to marry her. In his own view, he thinks her to be a smart girl who can understand and support him in his struggle for life: [takes her hand, instantly soulful] "Sidi, a man must prepare to fight alone. But it helps if he has a woman. To stand by him a woman who can understand...like you" (7). Lakunle believes in the modern concept of love, so he tries to court the village belle. Finally, result will be in marriage. Unfortunately, the crux of the problem still exists. Although Lakunle is an African by birth, he has Europeanised himself by his modern education and contact with the alien culture. In his new concept, there is no polygamy and monogamy is a modern phenomenon. Hence, Sidi believes in the traditional African values of life including the conventions of marriage. She also does not believe in the European concept of "love marriage". She expects him to buy her by giving her bride price:

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 will you must first be paid Aha, now you turn away. But I tell you Lakunle, I must have The full bridge-price will you make me A laughing stock? Well, do as you please But Sidi will not make herself A cheap bowel for the village spit. (8) Lakunle does not subscribe to the traditional African customs of marriage. Therefore, he does not want to pay the bride price that resembles buying a piece of property. Ignorant girl, can you not understand? To

pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall. You,,d my chattel, me My property No, Sidi! (Very tenderly). (9) Again, for Sidi, she sticks to the tradition in marriage. The traditional society will cast aspersion on her sexual purity They will say I was no virgin. That I was forced to sell my shame And marry you without a price. (8) Hence, Lakunle and Sidi are different in the purpose of marriage and lifestyle. He wishes to marry her for moral companionship than for the traditional purpose of procreation.

On the contrary, he wants to marry her to be "a life companion", "a friend in need, and an equal partner in my race of life". But Sidi doesn't agree with him. She believes in the traditional values of life. She considers childbearing as a second part of matrimony.

Sidi, thus, does not explore any appreciation for Lakunle's modern European ways of love or marriage. For Soyinka, Yoruba is a perfect way for him because it reconnects him with his native culture and at the same time provides an alternative construct to the Western concept of tragedy. Soyinka's goal is to bring the tragic hero to a high level of self-awareness. Actually, his culture gives him a great source of inspiration. He expresses his belief in a moral order of the Yoruba. These elements are derived from the Yoruba cosmology. The Yoruba cosmology is the structure of the world that comprises from three worlds of the unborn, of the living, and of the ancestors that can co-exist and communicate through a principle of transformation. The Yoruba worldview considers that good and evil coexist naturally in a dual unity that makes the balance and harmony possible. The play deals with the theme of love from the conflicting perspectives of "tradition and progress". In this regard, this paper looks at the idea of conflict between cultures through highlighting the idea of homelessness in the eyes of Nigerian playwright. It is a theatrical inquiry into what it means to the nation and to a local place. This part shows, what is a human, what does it mean to be a person, or a citizen? The answer will be clear if the social justice and ethics are the core elements of any study of conflict between cultures. Thus, this study requests and responds to the urgent question how can one ethically resolve the conflict between the different cultures? In the *Lion and the Jewel*, there is a challenge from Lakunle for rapid change and ambition but the other one Baroka with his danger manage to dominate. Lakunle suffers from the traditional society and at the same time has inner conflict because at the end of the play, he embraces the thought that since

Sidi is not a virgin, therefore, he cannot be asked to pay bride price for her. Therefore, he revolves around a vicious circle. But I obey my books "man takes the fallen woman by hand" And ever after they live happily. Moreover, I will admit It solves the problem of her brideprice too. (Collected Plays 2, The Lion and the Jewel, 61).

One main issue that can be shown in the play "The Lion and the Jewel is that this society is a polygamous one. In Nigeria, marrying multiple wives is legal and it is a prominent feature of traditional life. Soyinka, in his play, portrays the African Polygamous society. Falola (2001) indicates, regarding Polygamy, that "...the function of the family as an economic unit of production, especially for those in agrarian production, a large family provides the labour necessary for the maintenance and growth of the business" (56) and he adds more, that the tradition allows widow inheritance, in which a man marries the widow of a deceased brother. This practice ensures that "the woman and her children remain under the economic and social care of the family" (58). The successor of dead Bale or chief of the area, sometimes; marries the last and favourite wife of the dead Bale, as his first wife. According to the custom, the first wife of the Bale becomes the senior and receives all honours in the family. Also, according to tradition, a Bale can have as much as wives he can, but he has to follow some conditions like, treating all equally, distributing resources equally to all wives and children, avoid discrimination among wives and children (59).

Thus, in the case of Baroka, he is the Bale of the village and has many wives. His Harem is full with his number of wives from Sadiku to his favourite wife Ailatu. At the age of sixty-two, his desire for more girls has not left him. Maclean (1964) calls the play a "Nigerian bedroom Farce" for its convention of polygamy". (51) (After seeing Sidi's pictures in a glossary magazine, he desires to have her and expresses his wish to his first wife, Sadiku to woo that young girl for him. According to the customs of the village, the first wife has to persuade the girls to marry her husband as a kind of her duty to ensure her husband's happiness. In this regard, Kumar (2011), "by this act, the society emphasizes that wives have to obey and do furnish all sorts of his desire. It is settled in the minds of the women in the society" (5).