

The Lion and the Jewel

Themes

1. Bride Price

Lankule, the young African man who has embraced western culture considers the traditional customs in his village as barbaric and savage.

Even though he loves Sidi, he doesn't want to pay the bride price. He tells Sidi that paying the dowry is the same as buying a heifer off the market stall. It translates to owning Sidi for she'll no longer be a life companion but a property to him.

However, Sidi is adamant that he has to pay the dowry. She insists she doesn't want to become the talk in the village. "But I tell you Lankule, I must have the full bride-price. Will you make me a laughing-stock...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."

After Baroka succeeds in 'sleeping' with Sidi, Lankule jumps at the opportunity. She's no longer a virgin therefore he doesn't have to pay the bride price.

Polygamy

At the age of sixty-two, Baroka has many wives and countless concubines under his pocket. While we don't know how many wives Baroka has, it is apparent from Sidi's response to Sadiku that he has many wives. When Sadiku convinces Sidi to be Baroka's next wife, Sidi refuses. Subsequently, she asks Sidi to attend Baroka's personal invitation to his supper meal. Sidi reminds Sadiku of a fact concerning Baroka: "Can you deny that every woman who has sapped with him one night becomes his wife or concubine the next?" Lankule supports Sidi's response by stating there is a reason Baroka is called a cunning fox.

The mere mention of Sadiku as the eldest wife of Baroka and Ailatu as the youngest wife builds the evidence Baroka is a polygamist. Sidi becomes Baroka's latest wife earning the title of 'Favourite' which was entitled to Ailatu.

Modernity vs. Tradition

There is a conflict between the people of Illunjire village who have accepted western culture (modern life) versus those who want to stick with the village's traditional practices.

Lankule symbolizes the villagers who have embraced modern life. He wants to modernize his village by introducing machines and the modern-way of life. The presence of a school in the village is a testament of a village becoming modernized.

While Sidi has learnt some English vocabularies from Lankule such as barbaric and savage, she still prefers the traditional life she is used to. She loathes kissing which she terms as unclean. She tells Lankule that he should go to the places where women understand his modern plans and tell them of his plans, not her.

While Baroka recognizes the benefits of embracing modernity in his village, he fights against it knowing the ramifications it will have on him. He fears his office might be replaced with a higher office. The fact he owns a stamping machine shows he values modernity to some extent.

While some people consider modernity as a blessing, there are people who don't embrace it for various reasons. Some villagers like Lankule desire a modern way-of-life, the reason he wants Illunjire to be a replica of Lagos, the capital city of Nigeria.

Corruption (Bribery)

When Baroka learns the Ministry of Public Works has sent a surveyor to establish whether a railroad can pass through Illunjire, he bribes the surveyor. They (Baroka and surveyor) a story which he delivers to his superiors that the land is not fit for a railway line to pass through.

Beauty

The playwright has portrayed how beauty can threaten the status of an authoritative figure. Sidi's beauty has spread beyond the village. This was made possible by the Lagos man who captured Sidi's beauty in different poses. Her images were published in a magazine fulfilling the stranger's promise to Sidi that the magazine will announce her beauty to the world. Baroka, jealous of Sidi's rising influence plans how he will silence her by deflowering her.

In another scenario, Lankule dashes out of the class when he notices Sidi through the classroom's window carrying a bucket of water. Two of his pupils, aged eleven, make a buzzing noise at Sidi, clapping their hands across the mouth. The attitude of the pupils depict the unmistakable beauty of Sidi.

Illiteracy

Sadiku represents the many villagers who are illiterate - they can't read or write. Sadiku's illiteracy is manifested when Lankule rebukes her when she supports Sidi's idea of going to Baroka's palace to mock his sterility. He tells her, "This is my plan, you withered face and I shall start by teaching you. From now you shall attend my school and take your place with twelve-year olds. For though you're nearly seventy, your mind is simple and informed. Have you no shame that at your age, you neither read nor write nor think?"

Structure of the Play

The play is divided into three parts: morning, afternoon and evening.

1. Morning

Lankule is teaching arithmetic times when he notices Sidi through the classroom's window carrying a pail of water on her head. He rushes out of the class and to the opposite side. He offers to help Sidi lower the bucket but Sidi refuses. He seizes it but some water spills on him.

Lankule tells Sidi that she must stop carrying heavy loads on her head. The effect is her neck will shrink which he likens to squashed drawings of his pupils. He also complains of Sidi's traditional way of wearing that exposes her shoulders and outline of her breasts.

Sidi has had enough of Lankule that she asks if she can take the pail. However, Lankule refuses asking her to first marry her. Sidi replies she has no problem with that. She can marry him on any day as long as he pays the bride price. Lankule refuses but Sidi insists she won't become the laughingstock in the village.

Lankule offers the reason he can't pay the bride price which he likens to buying a heifer off the market stalls. He describes to Sidi the married life of civilized people. He kisses her but Sidi is repelled by that behaviour terming it as unclean.

As they are talking, they hear a crowd of youth and drummers. Sidi demands Lankule to give her the bucket or else the people will jeer at her.

The girls feed Sidi with information about the lost traveller - A man from another world who speaks in a foreign accent. Sidi enquires if the stranger has returned with the magazine he had promised; a magazine that will announce Sidi's beauty to the world.

The girls tell her the Lagos man returned with the book (magazine) and her images appear on the cover and middle leaves (pages) of the book. She learns the Bale of

the village (Baroka) also appears somewhere in the book but shares his image with the village's latrine.

They dance the dance of the Lost Traveller. Sidi assigns the young people a role to play in the dance that will retell how the Lagos man got lost and found himself in the village of Illunjire. Lankule acts as the Stranger while Sidi acts as the beautiful young woman.

The stranger was traveling somewhere when his car broke down. He restarted it but it failed. He climbed out of the car, checked the tyres and climbed in. He ignited the engine but the car didn't give in. He picked up his camera and helmet and took a swig from his flask of whisky before putting it into his pocket. He began the trek to find a nearby village.

He heard a girl singing somewhere from the bush. He shook his head, drank his whisky again convinced he was suffering from sun-stroke. He threw the empty bottle. He heard a scream and torrents of abusive words. He tiptoed to where the female's voice was coming from. What he saw made him unhitch his camera. Not focusing where he was stepping on as he tried to find a good position to take several pictures of the girl who was bathing in a pool of water; he plunged into the water. The young woman screamed and ran to the village with a part of her cloth covering her. The stranger followed a little later wringing out the water from his clothes. Sidi returned with the villagers who hauled the stranger off to the town centre.

Baroka, the chief of Illunjire sympathized with the stranger. He besieged the villagers not to kill him. He ordered dry clothes for him and a feast in his honour. He captured several pictures of the party and Sidi who was dancing.

Noon

Sidi is engrossed in the pictures of herself in the magazine. Following behind is Lankule who's carrying a bundle of firewood for Sidi. Sadiku meets them on the road leading to and from the town centre.

Sadiku asks Sidi to be Baroka's wife. Sidi asks Sadiku why Baroka is requesting for her hand after her images are published in the magazine. Why didn't he ask her to be his wife before her beauty was exposed to the world? Since she has refused to become Baroka's wife, Sadiku requests her to accept Baroka's personal invitation at his homestead for an evening meal (supper). Sidi tells Sadiku that she wasn't born the previous day. She knows Baroka's tricks.

It is at this point Lankule reveals to Sidi the other side of Baroka. She narrates how Baroka foiled the Public Works attempt to build a railway line through Illunjire.

Baroka is lying on the bed while his life wife, Ailatu is pulling out the hairs from his armpit. She asks Baroka how she's fairing on the task. Baroka tells her she's being over-gentle with the pull. She tells him she will improve but Baroka tells her she shouldn't bother about it because he intends to marry another young woman. Ailatu becomes angry. She plucks the hairs violently. Baroka orders her out of the room when Sadiku enters.

Baroka asks if she's brought a balm because of the pain he's feeling under his armpit. Sadiku tells him that Sidi has refused both of his proposals. She considers him old and she can't sap with married men. Baroka is astonished to be called old. He recounts to Sadiku his youth life and how brave and strong he was. Nevertheless, he reveals to Sadiku a secret he hopes she won't disclose to anybody. He tells her his manhood is no longer functioning. Sadiku can't believe it. Baroka warns her not to tell anybody.

Night

Sidi is standing by the classroom window, admiring her images on the magazine. She watches Sadiku in astonishment who is oblivious of her presence. Sadiku places a curved figure of the Bale in front of the 'Odun' tree. She dances around the tree, chanting "Take warning, my masters we'll scotch you in the end."

Sidi enquires why she is behaving as an insane person. Sadiku reveals to Sidi the secret. Sidi leaps in the air, happy to hear the good news. She exclaims, "We won! We won! Hurray for womankind!" They don't recognize Lankule who has joined their presence. They dance around the tree chanting "Take warning, my masters we'll scotch you in the end."

Sidi mentions to Sadiku that she wants to pay Baroka a visit. Her intention is to poke fun at Baroka's impotency. Lankule pleads with her not to go but Sidi tells her as long as she doesn't reveal to Baroka of the secret, she can go and ridicule Baroka.

She finds Baroka wrestling with his left man (warrior/bodyguard). Baroka asks her why she has arrived at his bedroom unannounced. She replies she didn't find anybody at the entrance to his bedroom. Baroka laments at this intrusion.

After the wrestling match, Sidi pretends she's repentant for the words she uttered – Baroka is old and she can't sap with married men. She makes fun of Baroka indirectly. She tells him that maybe the man who wants to marry her can't sire

children. She says to him, "Maybe the children are plagued with shyness and refuse to come into the world."

Baroka reveals to Sidi a stamping machine he owns. He tells Sidi the stamps will contain her images which will announce to the world her beauty. Baroka groans how people talk ill of him and how his office task is tiresome. Sidi leans on Baroka's shoulder.

Lankule wonders why Sidi is late. It is in the evening and Sidi hasn't returned. He thinks something bad must have happened to her.

Sidi who has been running throws herself to the ground against the tree and sobs violently. Sadiku kneels besides her and asks her what the problem is. She pushes her away. She also tells Lankule not to touch her. She tells Sadiku that Baroka had lied to her.

Suddenly, she leaves. Lankule requests Sadiku to find out where she has gone. She returns with the news Sidi is packing her things and oiling herself as a bride does before her wedding.

Sidi, accompanied by a crowd and musicians hands Lankule the magazine that contains her images. Sidi reveals to Lankule she is heading to Baroka's place. Sidi requests Sadiku to bless her.

Did Baroka pay the bride price in the play "The Lion and the Jewel"?

Answer:

Baroka didn't pay the bride price. Lankule wanted to marry Sidi without paying the bride price. However, Sidi told him that she didn't want to be a laughingstock (to be laughed) in the village. People would say she wasn't a virgin.

After Baroka deflowered/defiled Sidi, Lankule jumped at the opportunity. Since Sidi wasn't virgin, there was need for him to pay the dowry.

Thus, Baroka never paid the bride price because Sidi was no longer a virgin.

What is the significance of marriage in the play "The Lion and the Jewel"?

Answer:

In the play, Lankule symbolizes western or modern culture while Baroka symbolizes the traditional way-of-life. When Sidi accepts to be married to Baroka, it signifies that tradition is preferred to modern culture. Through the play, the playwright shows that even though modern life has crept in the village of Illunjire, the villagers distaste the modern life preferring their tradition.

Another thing to consider is through the marriage, Baroka not only asserts his authority as a powerful person (chief) but also proves that old men are wiser than younger men and women. Baroka managed to silence Sidi's ever-increasing popularity. He felt she was threatening his influence in the village. As a crafty person, he managed to accomplish his mission of silencing Sidi's increasing influence in the village.

What is the importance of the bride price in *The Lion and Jewel*?

Answer:

Lankule wanted to marry Sidi without paying the bride prize. However, Sidi said that she won't accept to become a laughingstock in the village that she was married without the dowry having been paid because she wasn't a virgin.

In the play, the playwright has highlighted the reason why the bride price is highly regarded in the village. A girl whose bride price has been paid is a testament that she's a virgin. Thus, the importance of bride price in the Illunjire village is to signify that a girl is a virgin. She hasn't been defiled or deflowered.

How was Lakunle's true love for Sidi proved after her return from Baroka's house?

Answer:

Lankule loves Sidi but isn't willing to pay the bride price. He thinks it's barbaric since it would be like buying her thus becoming his property.

When Lankule learns that Sidi has been deflowered, first of all, he becomes angry before a thought pops up in his mind. He won't have to pay a bride price. This acts as a proof Lankule loves Sidi. Again, he thinks Sidi wants to get married to him very soon. He wonders why she's in a hurry only to learn she's heading to Baroka's house.

What does the Odan tree symbolize?

Answer:

It symbolizes authority. It is a place where social services are located e.g. schools and the market. A chief's office is usually situated at such a spot.

When Sidi, Lankule and other young people were acting the coming of the stranger to the village, Baroka was sitting near the Odan tree signifying his authoritative location.