

The Lion And The Jewel – Wole Soyinka



The Lion and the Jewel is one of Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka's most famous works. While it is a light and amusing comedy, it is also renowned for its complex themes and allegorical structure; it is also notable for its insights into Yoruba culture and traditions.

The Lion and The Jewel is one of the best-known plays by Africa's major dramatist, Wole Soyinka. It is set in the **Yoruba village of Ilunjinle**. The main characters are **Sidi (the Jewel)**, 'a true village belle' and Baroka (the Lion), the crafty and powerful Bale of the village, Lakunle, the young teacher, influenced by western ways, and Sadiku, the eldest of Baroka's wives. It chronicles how **Baroka, the lion**, fights with the modern Lakunle over the right to marry Sidi, the titular Jewel.

Significance of the Play : A lion is an animal which is revered because of its majestic movement and its title as the king of the jungle. It can hunt both the smaller and larger preys.

A jewel is a beautiful ornament worn around the neck. It complements women's beauty when they adorn it on their necks.

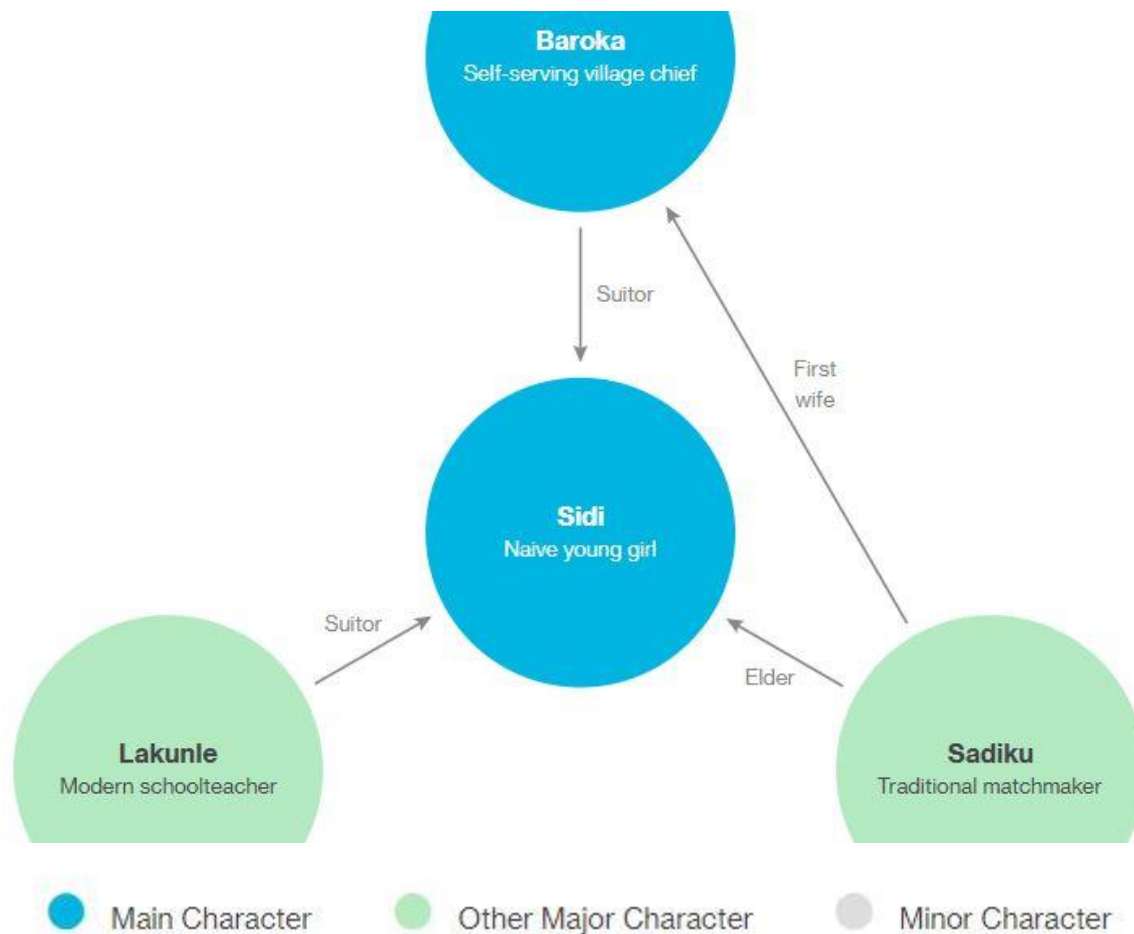
In the play, Baroka commands an aura of authority thus fitting the title of a lion. Sidi is the jewel of Ilunjinle because of her unrivalled beauty.

The play is a story of an elderly man 'hunting' a beautiful girl to diminish her rising influence in the village which is threatening his authoritative influence in the village.

Dramatis Personae:

The **three** main characters in *The Lion and the Jewel* are called Sidi, Lakunle and Baroka the Bale.

Each character has different thoughts about one another and each views the society in a different way.



Baroka (The Lion)

He is an elderly chief in his early sixties. He is the Bale of Ilunjinle, a village in Nigeria.

Baroka is a polygamist. When Sidi refuses Baroka's offer to be his next wife, Sadiku convinces her to accept Baroka's invitation for supper. Sidi joins the list of Baroka's wives replacing the youngest, Ailatu as Baroka's favourite wife. Sadiku leads the lot as the eldest wife of Baroka.

He is as cunning as a fox. Lakunle wonders what women see in Baroka. His eyes are small and always red with wine (drunkard). He figures the chief possesses some secret. Sidi's response to Sadiku that young women who attend Baroka's supper invitation end up as wives or concubines is a testament of Baroka's craftiness.

In another embodiment Baroka deceives Sadiku he is impotent. He knows well his wife is a gossipmonger. He warns her not to reveal the secret to anyone but Sadiku reveals it to Sidi. Sidi takes upon herself to mock Baroka's sterility by pretending she is repentant of not having agreed to Baroka's invitation for supper. Nonetheless, Sidi comes out of the place no longer the valued jewel of the village (no longer a virgin).

He is hungry for power. He resorts to bribing the white surveyor sent by the Ministry of Public Works. Baroka is afraid of what might ensue once the Ministry of Public Works builds a railroad along the village. He knows once the project begins (or is completed) his office will cease to exist.

Sidi is the first character that the audience meets. She is a very attractive woman, known as the village 'belle'. Her attractiveness influences her personality, by making her quite vain. An

example of her vanity is when she receives photos through of her that featured in a global magazine, taken by a western man. The photographs, also affect Sidi's perception of Baroka, by making her believe that she is a better person, judging by the picture size difference in the magazine. Sidi is heavily influenced by tradition, which is outlined more than once throughout the play. The opening scene shows how Lakunle offers to carry Sidi's load. Sidi refuses, because it is traditionally the woman that carries the load and if other people saw, then Sidi is afraid that people may start to shun or mock her.

In *The Lion and the Jewel* Sidi's character symbolizes the objectification of Nigeria. In the early 1900s Britain seized control of Nigeria through colonization. Britain ruled for 60 years before Nigeria won back its independence. As is common in decolonization, Nigeria struggled with self-identity after earning its freedom

Lakunle is the young schoolteacher in Ilujinle. He was educated in Lagos, presumably in a British school, which results in Lakunle's overblown sense of his grasp of English. He wishes to modernize the village and wants Sidi to marry him and be a "modern wife." In keeping with his values, Lakunle refuses to pay Sidi's bride price and instead tries to woo her with flowery language and biblical references. Lakunle speaks about village life and customs as though he finds them abhorrent, though he does seem to enjoy the village's dance performances.

Sadiku

Sadiku is the eldest wife of Baroka. She has remained faithful to Baroka for forty years despite Baroka's appetite for more wives and concubines. Sadiku is simple minded. Baroka uses her as a 'tool' to find women to satisfy his appetite for young girls who are 'fresh' and their blood is 'hot.' Lakunle rebukes Sadiku for accepting to be Baroka's messenger. She is also uneducated. This is seen when Lakunle rebukes her for allowing Sidi to head to Baroka's palace to mock him.

Summary : Morning Act I

The stage is set as the Nigerian Yoruba village of Ilujinle. At center stage is a schoolhouse, where children reciting their times tables can be heard through an open window. A beautiful young woman, Sidi, appears on stage with a pail of water balanced on her head. Immediately, the schoolmaster, Lakunle, rushes out to help her, warning that carrying heavy loads on her head will shorten her neck. He also chastises Sidi for walking around with her shoulders exposed. Sidi laughs and says that it shouldn't matter what she looks like because Lakunle has sworn to love her forever.

The conversation turns to Lakunle's longstanding marriage proposal. He has been begging Sidi to marry him, but she won't consider his proposal until he pays her bride-price, a tradition in their village. Lakunle, who has been educated in the capital and believes himself to be a modern man, refuses.

As they argue, a village girl runs in shouting for Sidi. She announces that the foreign man who had visited their village previously has returned. Through the confused conversation it's revealed that a foreigner stopped in their village when his car broke down. He took photographs of the villagers and returns now with the book he made of the photographs. The girl reports that a gorgeous photograph of Sidi has been used on the cover, which has made the Bale both proud and envious. A photograph of Baroka himself was included, but it made him look small and old, standing next to the village latrine. Sidi delights that she is "more important even than the Bale. / More famous than that panther of the trees."

Sidi calls excitedly to dance "the dance of the lost Traveler," in which they act out a retelling of the photographer's arrival. She casts Lakunle as the traveler himself. Drummers strike up a beat, and the dancers swirl around Lakunle, transporting the audience back in time to

witness the traveler's arrival. Although he had resisted playing along at the start, Lakunle quickly gets into the role, not even noticing when the Bale arrives. His presence breaks up the dance, with Lakunle the last to notice. Sidi excitedly rushes toward the village square to find the traveler himself. As she leaves, the Bale laments that it's been five months since he last took a wife.

Act II – Noon - Summary

Sidi appears on stage holding the photography book, engrossed in her own image. Lakunle follows behind carrying firewood. **Sadiku**, Baroka's first wife—an old woman with a shawl over her head—enters from the other side of the stage and greets Sidi, startling her out of her reverie. She wastes no time speaking the Bale's proposal: he would like to take Sidi as his wife. Lakunle rushes forward in protest, but Sidi silences him and laughs in Sadiku's face. Sidi continues praising her own beauty, stroking the photographs, bragging that she's far too beautiful for Baroka, whom she compares to "a leather piece."

Shocked at Sidi's disrespect toward the chief, Sadiku storms off but quickly circles back, saying that Baroka anticipated that Sidi might turn down his proposal but hopes that she will join him for dinner that evening anyway. Sidi claims to know all about Baroka's "little suppers," where beautiful women come to dine and end up "his wife or concubine."

Lakunle adds that they must call Baroka "the Fox" for something. Sadiku tries to defend the Bale against these "lies," but Lakunle won't stop. He says that Baroka wants everything his own way, which is why he refuses to modernize the village. He remembers hearing a story of prospectors trying to build a road near the village that would have created easy trade with Lagos, but Baroka paid them to move the road elsewhere.

The scene changes to Baroka's bedroom, where one of his wives, called "The Favorite," plucks his armpit hairs. Baroka gently criticizes his wife's method of hair plucking, complaining that she doesn't rub his armpit long enough before plucking and that her pull is too gentle. He says she shouldn't worry about hurting "the panther of the trees." When the favorite promises to improve, Baroka tells her not to bother. He'll have a new wife soon to take over this task.

Just then, Sadiku arrives. The favorite is dismissed, and Sadiku delivers the news that Sidi has refused Baroka's proposal. At first Baroka rages that a girl such as Sidi should be grateful to have the attention of such a manly man. He lists his recent physical accomplishments, such as log-tossing and leopard hunting, but then sinks to the bed.

Act III – Night Summary

Sadiku enters the village center with a statue of Baroka. She sets it down and bursts into laughter, taunting and mocking the statue, saying, "We scotched you." She dances and mocks, calling him a "fool" just like his father. Sidi enters and demands to know what Sadiku is up to. Sadiku gives a cryptic answer and calls for Sidi to join her in the "victory dance" because "every woman" has won today. When Sidi remains confused, Sadiku confides Baroka's secret. Sidi laughs and cheers alongside Sadiku, shouting,

Sidi stops her laughing and dancing long enough to propose playing a trick on Baroka. When she leaves, Sadiku mocks Lakunle for not being man enough to pay Sidi's bride-price. Lakunle retorts with a long list of modernizations, including banishing bride-prices, that he will bring to their village.

The scene changes to Baroka's bedroom, where he sits poised with a hired wrestler before a match. In the distance Sidi's voice can be heard. She comes closer and closer before startling everyone by walking right into the Bale's bedroom. At first Baroka greets her roughly, startled by her rude entrance, but he eventually warms to her presence. Sidi appears more nervous in the Bale's presence than she thought she would be, making boldly flirtatious remarks and then

cowering under his sharp remarks. When Sidi asks about his proposal, Baroka pretends not to know what she's talking about, which knocks Sidi's confidence. Eventually, Baroka admits that he did indeed ask for her hand in marriage and that Sidi is welcome to visit with him. He complains that he must hire new wrestlers whenever he learns how to best them, just as he must marry new wives whenever he learns to "tire" them.

As he talks, he and the wrestler engage in an arm-wrestling match at the table. Baroka tries to highlight some of his better qualities—his kindness to animals, his hunting prowess, and his frugality.

Changing the subject, Baroka pulls a strange-looking machine from beside his bed and shows it to Sidi. It's a stamp maker. Baroka continues, patting Sidi gently on the head. He says that until now, Sidi has done all her learning with Lakunle but that he has things to teach her, too. He claims that the old and new generations must learn from each other. Enraptured by Baroka's words, Sidi lays her head on his shoulder.

In the village square Lakunle and Sadiku wait for Sidi's return. Lakunle grows anxious, fearing that Baroka has killed Sidi, but Sadiku pays him no attention. Dancers and street performers arrive, making the scene somewhat chaotic. Sadiku teases that they must have heard the news about Baroka, and she reaches into Lakunle's pockets for money to pay them.

Sidi bursts onto the scene, sobbing, and throws herself to the ground. Shocked, Sadiku and Lakunle rush toward her, but Sidi warns them, "Get away from me. Do not touch me."

Sidi runs off stage, and Lakunle congratulates himself for finding another way around paying the bride-price. When Sidi returns, she's dressed for a wedding, her belongings in hand. Confused, Lakunle wonders why they must hurry. They can at least wait a day. Not listening, Sidi hands him the book of photographs, saying that she tried to destroy it but that her fingers were too weak. She invites him to her wedding, which confuses Lakunle. She is ready to marry Baroka.

Plot Structure:



Introduction

1 Lakunle flirts with Sidi in the village square.

Rising Action

2 Sidi admires her photographs and newfound power.

3 Sadiku reveals that Baroka has lost his manhood.

4 Sidi tries to mock Baroka but ends up ensnared.

Climax

5 Sidi admits that Baroka raped her.

Falling Action

6 Lakunle offers to marry Sidi despite her lost virginity.

Resolution

7 Sidi chooses Baroka over Lakunle.

Symbols - The Railroad

The railroad mentioned in "Noon" symbolizes modernization. The railroad would have connected Ilujinle to the bustling capital city of Lagos, allowing for trade, travel, and exposure to cosmopolitan ways of life. Baroka bribed the developers to move the railroad elsewhere, thus ensuring that his village maintains its traditional practices and mindsets. To many villagers, including Lakunle, it seems that Baroka rejects all forms modernization, but in reality he rejects modernization that he does not benefit from. This shows how the powerful manipulate their position whether they are embracing tradition or technology. One is not better than the other when corrupted by greed.

The Baroka Statue

The Baroka statue symbolizes masculinity. The statue was originally created for women, particularly Baroka's wives, to worship. Even Sidi calls Baroka "the living god among men." The statue highlights symbols of his masculinity, such as his muscles and large penis. After he claims to be impotent, however, Sadiku uses the imagery to further mock and shame him. She dances around the statue and cheers that she has "scotched" him, meaning that she has sucked the power from him. When Baroka "loses" his ability to perform sexually, he is viewed as less of a man to the village women.

Themes : Tradition versus Modernization

The village of Ilujinle is stuck in the past. The villagers adhere to traditional roles and beliefs despite the fact that larger cities, such as the capital of Lagos, have modernized. Lakunle represents the desire for modernization. He has been educated in a British school in Lagos and admires Western modern life, including railroads, "civilized" dining, and gender equality. In contrast, Baroka, the village Bale (chief), represents cultural tradition.

Both Baroka and Lakunle want to marry Sidi, but for different reasons. Lakunle hopes Sidi will be his marital equal. He wants a wife to "walk beside you in the street, / Side by side and arm in arm." He wants a European-style wife with "stretched" hair and "red paint on her lips," who kisses him passionately on the mouth. In short, Lakunle wants a wife who symbolizes his modernization, and as such, he refuses to pay Sidi's traditional bride-price. Baroka, on the other hand, wants to marry Sidi because she's beautiful and popular. At the end of the play Sidi, the "jewel" who symbolizes Nigeria's innate beauty, chooses Baroka over Lakunle.

Baroka represents traditional village control, and Lakunle represents British colonial control. In choosing Baroka, Soyinka appears to be making a clear argument for preserving cultural tradition..

Themes : Gender Roles, Marriage, and Power

In *Ilujinle* characters adhere to strict gender roles. Women are expected to fulfill domestic roles, and men work traditional jobs and make most of the decisions. The gender roles depicted in *The Lion and The Jewel* are representative of gender roles in Nigeria, particularly during the 1960s. On the surface it appears that Soyinka makes an argument for equality through modernization. Lakunle describes a modern marriage as one where the husband and wife are equal, walking side by side in the street.

In this way Lakunle's presentation of marriage differs little from Baroka's traditional view, which is purely functional and completely devoid of romance. In Baroka's view marriage is a contract that primarily benefits the man: he marries the wife of his choosing. She bears him children, maintains his house, grooms him, and cooks for him. The woman has very little agency—she remains subservient to the man, who makes most of the household decisions. Men are free to pursue education and jobs, but women are not.

Baroka represents traditional village culture, and Lakunle represents colonial culture. Postcolonial literature often deals with themes of mixed culture and otherness as decolonized people struggle to identify their culture. The push and pull between Baroka and Lakunle represents the dangers of forcing people to identify. Rather, Soyinka sends the message that to be powerful, people should be allowed to choose their own fate.

Themes : Trickery

African fables traditionally include an archetypal trickster character—one that bends or breaks rules to get what they want. Tricksters may use their wiles to survive dangerous situations or to impart a moral or lesson to audiences. Soyinka clearly presents Baroka as a trickster. He lies to Sadiku about his impotence, knowing his wife would spread the gossip, thus disarming Sidi and allowing him to make his advances on her. Sidi attempts to be a trickster when she travels to Baroka's house to shame him, hoping to expand the sense of power her photographs first introduced. Unfortunately, her attempted trickery results in her rape.

Sadiku wants to make a marital match between Sidi and Baroka to maintain her position of power among the wives and to ensure she isn't pulled back into the demeaning jobs (such as plucking armpit hairs) reserved for newer wives. Sadiku, not Baroka, should be called "The Fox."

Themes : Bride- Price:

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

Themes: 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?" Lakunle 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.

Themes : Corruption (Bribery)

When Baroka learns the Ministry of Public Works has sent a surveyor to establish whether a railroad can pass through Ilunjinle, 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.

Themes : 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, Lakunle 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.

Postcolonial Literature

The Lion and the Jewel presents characters which embody different possibilities of the postcolonial experience. Baroka demonstrates resistance, or the refusal of the postcolonial person to adopt or accept the practices of the colonizer. Lakunle demonstrates hybridism, or the incorporation of aspects of both the colonizing and colonized cultures.

Lakunle is clearly separated from his cultural traditions through his "strange speech," modern views, distaste for gender expectations, and British education. Lakunle's otherness separates him from other men and often makes him a laughingstock. Baroka, on the other hand, clings to traditions of his past because they give him a sense of power. The two men engage in different ways of pursuing Sidi, the village "jewel," for marriage: Baroka through force and Lakunle through romance.

The struggle for autonomy, or control over one's own decisions, is another common characteristic of postcolonial literature. Sidi's indecision about which man to marry or whether she wants to marry at all illustrates her struggle for self-rule. Sidi's struggle represents the larger struggle of postcolonial people, groups, or nations to establish themselves as autonomous beings in the wake of colonialism. Sadly, in the end, the decision is made for Sidi, taking away both her agency and her autonomy.

Nigerian Culture : Dance and Drums

The Lion and the Jewel is filled with rich examples of traditional Nigerian culture, particularly of Nigerian music and dance. Traditional Nigerian dance has many functions, particularly in tribal cultures. It can be used to tell historical or entertaining stories, to educate, to communicate with deities, and to mark important life events. Early in the play, the characters participate in "the dance of the lost traveler," seemingly in Bata style. Bata dancing comes from the Yoruba area of Nigeria (the same area where *The Lion and the Jewel* is set).

The dance is accompanied by three Bata drums: the *iya*, played by a master drummer; the *itotele*, a midsize drum that converses with the *iya*; and the *okonkolo*, a smaller drum that keeps rhythm. The dancers follow the rhythm and order set by the drummers, so there must be a strong sense of unity and communication among the performers.

Gender Roles and Marriage

At the time when *The Lion and the Jewel* was written, most Nigerian people continued to embrace the Western gender roles adopted during colonialism. In the colonial context of the mid-20th century, Nigerian women were viewed as subservient to men and were expected to fulfill domestic roles of housecleaning, child-rearing, and cooking. Men made most decisions and were considered politically more powerful. Whatever power a woman maintained was generally personal, within her own home. Audiences of the play see female power demonstrated in Sadiku's matchmaking—she has the power to change women's lives—and she appears to be the only wife who can keep her husband happy.

Because Nigeria is made up of so many distinct ethnic groups, approaches to institutions such as marriage vary. In many of Nigeria's cultures, marriages were traditionally more businesslike than romantic. Polygamy—marriage to more than one spouse—was and is common in every social class. Women were often betrothed at a very young age and had little expectation of love, affection, communication, or partnership from their husbands. There are some laws protecting women's rights, but societal expectation still favors restrictive gender roles. Despite many other social changes, most marriages still include a dowry payment, or bride-price.

Some important concepts of the play: