

Lion and the jewel

Linguistics, English



Lecturer Essay # Lion and the Jewel The Nigerian Wole Soyinka is among the most talented worldwide. In 1986, Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for his achievements in literature. In most of his works, Soyinka has focused on society, tradition, culture and modernism, fusing these with the politics around the African continent. In his play *The Lion and the Jewel*, the conflict between tradition and modernism is well captured. The play mainly centers on the relationship between Sidi, a beautiful young African girl from the village and Lakunle, a young school teacher. Through the characters of this play, Soyinka illustrates the clash between African culture and Western civilization.

First, the play illustrates how African culture and western civilization differ when it comes to marriage and family life. In particular, Soyinka's play shows how the two differ on matters of child bearing. In the play, Sidi represents the traditional African culture while Lakunle represents the western civilization. Lakunle does not view child bearing as an important aspect of marriage. In his words, he says that he is not after a wife " To bring forth children by the gross...." (Soyinka, 9). Sidi reacts to this by saying to him: " Heaven forgive you!" (Soyinka, 9). Clearly, Soyinka shows that African and western cultures have differing views on child bearing.

Secondly, the issue of bride price and its role is another area where the two clash. In the play, Sidi insists that Lakunle pays her bride price before marrying her. Failure to do this will make her a laughing stock. She tells him that she will marry him " But my bride-price must first be paid..." (Soyinka, 8). On the contrary, Lakunle, who embraces the western cultures, argues that paying bride price is an old custom, and terms it as " a savage custom,

barbaric, out-dated " (Soyinka, 8). Lakunle is of the view that bride price is a humiliation to women and this amounts to buying women like commodities. Lakunle is thus left to choose between a traditional marriage where pride price is paid and a civilized one.

Thirdly, Soyinka shows how the African society embraced polygamy, unlike the western culture where monogamy was the order of the day. In the play, Baroka, the king of Ilujinle, has many wives. Sadiku, the eldest wife, is in fact comfortable Baroka bringing in another wife. She woos Sidi to get married to Baroka, promising her that Baroka will not take another wife after her.

Soyinka shows that unlike western cultures, polygamy is accepted in the African culture and is even supported by women. One might expect women to be on the forefront campaigning against this practice. In the end, Sidi marries Baroka, illustrating how the African culture dominates the western civilization.

Finally, the play illustrates the resistance to western civilization by the African cultures. Although certain elements of the western culture might be beneficial, Soyinka shows that those who hold onto tradition will resist such changes. For instance, Baroka, being the king, is shown to be a custodian of tradition. When the Public Works attempt to construct a railway line in Ilujinle, Baroka resists this. He even bribed the surveyor with money and chicken, making him to abandon the project.

Throughout the play, Soyinka successfully highlights the key areas where tradition and western civilization clash. Although there are those in the African continent who might want to embrace western cultures, they meet resistance from those who value African traditions. In the end, the Sidi's

surrender to Baroka signifies that African culture wins over the European cultures.

Works Cited

Soyinka, Wole. (1974), " Collected Plays 2", Oxford University Press. London