

A Powerful Blend Of Satire, Songs And Dances In Wole Soyinka's Play "The Lion And The Jewel"

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Abstract: In Soyinka's own remarks 'Satire in the theatre is a weapon not yet fully exploited among the contemporary dramatists of Nigeria, fertile though the social and political scene is for well aimed barbs by the sharp, observant eye'.¹ Here Soyinka makes satire a premise to expose the disparities between appearances and underlying realities as well as entertainment. Though Soyinka used satire in many of his plays like Kongi's harvest, Madmen and the specialists, A dance of the forests, these plays emulate the political scene of the contemporary Nigeria. The Lion and the Jewel is a satirical comedy with music, dance and songs. It treats serious issues in a generally light –hearted manner, content to over-simplify and to leave some issues unresolved in order to provide a pleasurable and offensive experience. Soyinka operates primarily in a satiric mode and he sometimes incorporates traditional myths and rituals to heighten the satire. His humour is sometimes lighthearted but often poignant and bitter. He has satirized in his plays the attitude of new rulers who have become dictators, intellectuals who cow-tow to their rulers and megalomaniacs in African states in general.

Keywords: Satire, myth, Yoruba, bride-price, marriage, conflict, dances, songs.

The play is set in Ilujinle, an imaginary Yoruba village, and it presents the conflict between the Bale, Baroka, and the village school teacher, Lakunle, over the village beauty, Sidi. The play *The lion and the jewel* represents a dialogue with the European tradition of comedy and of plays about impotence from Terence's *Eunuch* to Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and William Wycherly's *The country wife*.² Soyinka basically is a Yoruba and often he says, a religious occasion is celebrated with music and dancing and this produces a performance tradition which may be called African Festival Theatre. They provide a useful background to this play. Another performance tradition is the preserve of companies of professionals or semi professionals – the Yoruba Masque theatre. This has been clearly described by Joel Adedeji who identifies one of the destined genres as the revue - masque. The revues are usually based on subjects of topical interest and easily display the comic spirit of the Yoruba; but there is more emphasis on the dramatic action than on the working out of the plot.

Wole Soyinka intends to compare the old and the new order in Nigerian society. He brilliantly presents the conflict

of the new order with the old over social customs such as marriage; and the struggle between progress and tradition. The new order in society is represented by the village school teacher, Lakunle, who opposes vehemently the practices of the old order as represented by Baroka, Bale of Ilujinle. For instance, Lakunle does not like to see a girl going about half-naked and detests the idea of bride price in marriage. He believes in modern marriage – as he says to Sidi the girl he loves, 'Be a modern wife'. He has wonderful plans to modernize their village Ilujinle and offer the inhabitants better amenities. As Sidi says to him, 'You really mean to turn the whole world upside down.'

On the other hand Baroka, the chief of the village and representative of the old order, would not even allow a rail track to pass through or near Ilujinle in case his society might be influenced by modern inventions and civilization; he was 'sworn against our progresses'. Soyinka presents these two orders in dreadful conflict but emphasizes the hold of the old traditions on the people.

The theme of the play is to attempt an attack on those in canvas shoes, the half – baked and half-educated, who have little awareness on their own community and only a very superficial knowledge of Europe. It is a drama not on conflict, not only between protagonists, but between progress and tradition, differing views on the role of women, the sexes and intellect versus cunning. Overruling all these is the issue of status which ultimately drives the story to its conclusion. The result is a lively piece interspersed with music, dance and mime as a device for providing back story. The main theme of the story tells us of a sexual rivalry between the progression but arrogant teacher Lakunle, and the aging village chief Baroka, the symbol of tradition and the object of their attention being a simple village girl, Sidi – the jewel in the title.

The play opens in the morning on the edge of the market square outside the school building during school hours. We can see Sidi entering, dressed in traditional fashion, with her shoulders bare and carrying a pail of water on her head. The market in a Yoruba town is usually situated in front of the 'Afin' or palace and the 'oba' or 'baale' or 'the bale' can easily watch his people assembling there. The Yoruba are a great trading people and their markets are crowded, colourful and hectic. Dan Izevbaye considers the market a microcosm: it contains all the variety and diversity of the larger world. He cites the following saying as a proof "Oja L' aiye, Orun n'ile" (The world is a market, heaven is home)³

Shortly before the play begins, Ilujinle has been visited by a photographer who has taken pictures of the village, its chief and particularly of Sidi, a very pretty young woman. In the opening sequence, Sidi is countered by Lakunle, the village school master, but, when the photographer arrives with copies of the magazine featuring side, Bale Baroka decides that he and no one else will possess 'the jewel of Ilujinle'. Lakunle interrupts the argument at intervals to beseech Sidi not to accept Baroka's proposition, calling her sweet names, 'My Ruth, my Rachel, Esther, and Bathsheba'. Meanwhile Sadiku continues to argue on Baroka's behalf. Sidi is satisfied that she has become famous in Lagos and 'beyond the seas' and considers it beneath her to marry somebody from the village.

Compare my image and your lord's- An age of difference!

Sadiku tells Sidi that Baroka has invited her to supper at his house, which Sidi also ridicules, remembering that he is called the Fox.

Every woman who has supped with him one night becomes his wife or concubine the next. (CP II 182)

Lakunle recalls the reactionary craftiness of Baroka when he refused to let the railway be built through the village. A mime of this is done on the stage.

In the next scene Baroka is revealed with his current favorite. Sadiku returns to tell Baroka about Sidi's refusal of both his offers because he was too old. Baroka, in a fury, recalls some of his feats and sexual competency. Baroka then reveals to Sadiku that his manhood ended near a week ago and that he had thought that Sidi might revive him. He pledges Sadiku to secrecy, and the scene ends with Baroka at ease with her: 'beyond a doubt... queen of them all'.

At night in the village centre Sidi is found standing by the schoolroom window gazing at her pictures. Sadiku appears, unveils a carved figure of the Bale and bursts into ribald

laughter. The old woman rejoices for her victory over the Bale- 'I ate him up! Race of mighty lions, we always consumes you.' She then reveals Baroka's secret to Sidi, and also to Lakunle. Sidi is very intrigued and goes off to supper with Baroka in order to 'mock the devil'. Sadiku supports her, but Lakunle tries in vain to advise against her. Lakunle and Sadiku argue: she taunts him about his reforming ways saying it is only a way of avoiding the bride price.

When the scene changes we notice that Sidi goes to Baroka's palace and tries to engage him in conversation while he is busy with a wrestling match. Their talk is full of insinuations and innuendoes. He finishes with the wrestler and he and Sidi talk together. He reveals his plan to print the stamps, which he makes with his own machine, with Sidi's image. He tells her about the old ways and how 'the old must flow into the new'; it is obvious that Sidi has fallen for his tricks. The scene breaks off abruptly to show Lakunle and Sadiku waiting for Sidi. The wrestler passes on his way home, which seems suggestive. Mummies enter and dance in mockery of Baroka, having been tipped off by Sadiku to do so.

Sidi enters violently and confesses to Lakunle that she is no more a virgin, and that Baroka has swindled her. Lakunle assures her that he will still marry her, but as she is no longer a virgin there does no question of bride price have to be paid. Sidi rushes off mysteriously. Lakunle and Sadiku are met by a singing group. Sidi appears gorgeously dressed holding a bundle in one hand, and in the other the famous magazine, which she hands to Lakunle. It is then revealed that the impending marriage ceremony is between Sidi and baroka, and that Lakunle is ditched. The play ends with singing and dancing before the wedding. The old order would appear to have triumphed over the new.

Through his eldest wife Sadiku, the Bale invites Sidi to dinner. When she refuses the invitation and makes a disparaging comment about the bale's age he sets another, more devious plan in motion. He lies to Sadiku that he has become impotent, knowing that she will pass this on to Sidi and anticipating that Sidi's impudence will draw her to his bedroom – the lion's den. The plan works and, once he has a chance to talk to Sidi alone, he croons her so subtly and plays on her vanity so effectively that he is able to seduce her when Lakunle hears what has happened he declares that he is still prepared to marry Sidi, but she will have nothing to do with him. She has, she says.

'felt the strength, The perpetual youthful zest, Of the panther of the trees – (p-163)

And is happy to marry the sixty two years old chief the play ends with Sadiku 'The mother of brides' invoking the fertile gods and lakunle clearing a space among the dancers for a new 'Madonna'.

Soyinka displays much wit and humour when we hear Baroka reproach Lakunle in such jovial way. He addresses Lakunle: 'A kowe. Teacher wa.a Mista Lakunle', and goes on to mimic him. Proverbial and moralistic sayings abound these and these add much force to the humour of the play. Sadiku says 'The hour of victory is not time for any women to die'. Baroka says to sidi:

' - - - as we say

The woman gets lost in the woods one day and every wood deity dies the next'

The activities of the morning, noon and night are so well linked that the trend of the story is unhampered. There is complexity in the way the plot of *The lion and the jewel* is handled, the way various techniques are used to fill in the background and the way the audience is sometimes left in suspense. But the story itself is straight forward and can be simply told and in this, the play resembles Soyinka's 'African drama'. The play is written in both poetry and prose, a characteristic of Wole Soyinka, where the poetry is original and of the highest merit. The mixture of these two elements adds more force to the originality of his technique. He uses folk music, in the loose sense of 'the music of the people' or popular music' from a variety of sources. On the songs sung at the end of the play, Segun Osiboye comments: these are two of many Yoruba songs for celebrating marriages. They are part of a village catalog to all including children, and part of the ever-changing body of popular music.

"Mo te' ni. Mo te' ni.

Mo te' ni. Mo te' ni.

Sun mo mi. we mo mi

Sun mo mi. fa mo mi

Yorabi Lo m'eyi tio le d'omo.....

(My net is spread, my net is spread come close to me, wrap yourself around me only god knows which moment makes the child)⁴

Soyinka displays much wit and humour, and the audience is kept roaring with laughter, we hear Baroka reproach Lakunle in such a jovial way. He addresses Lakunle: 'Akowe. Teacher wa. Mista Lakunle,' and goes on to mimic him:

Guru morin guru morin ngh-hn! That is all we get from 'alakowe'. You call at his house hoping the sends for beer, but all you get is Guru morin. Will guru morin wet my throat?⁵

Festivities are common throughout Nigeria, and vary according to tribal tradition. In *The Lion and the Jewel* Baroka refers to the festival of rain, in which prayers and sacrifices are given to the god of rain, to ensure plenty of it. Traditionally when a man wants inspiration he calls on his dead ancestors and invokes their spirits. This is seen in *The Lion and the Jewel*. The Yoruba believe that dead ancestors can answer prayers and grant requests; this is one of the functions of ancestor worship. Male wrestling is one of the traditional sports of the Yoruba. Sometimes it is on an organized basis, with one clear or village against another. Strong young men go out to test their skill, with youngsters singing and clapping to encourage them. Baroka engages in single-handed wrestling.

Baroka, the image of Ilujinle as a compost of heap is one which reverberates, indeed it draws attention to a concept which recurs again and again in Soyinka's work and which has become a feature of his view of life. This is summed up in a line from requiem. Rust is ripeness, which suggests that in evidence of decay is to be found maturity and fruitfulness. He describes himself as a 'seven-horned devil of strength'.⁶ he has a huge harem: is given to misuse of authority and corruption: and is wily. Hearing that Sidi has rejected his offer, he pretends to be impotent and baits Sidi who is finally seduced by him.

But Baroka also has vitality and passion for life. He is an excellent hunter, generous and open-handed and the young as well as the old are reported to seek his counsel. In other

words, he is the trickster figure par excellence, god, man and animal all at once.⁷ Lakunle loses Sidi because he refuses to pay the bride price, and Baroka takes Sidi without much formal or personal wooing, which is the exclusive privilege of a chief.

At a marriage, the bride is escorted to her husband's house amidst singing and dancing groups. This is usually done at night, and the majority of the escort will be women. Some strong young men serve as guards. This is the traditional way of marriage in Yoruba land. The beginning of the wedding ceremony is described at the end of the play. Elders give their blessings to the couple on the eve of the ceremony. The bride is blessed on her departure to the groom's house by elderly women. Here Sadiku blesses Sidi: 'I invoke the fertile gods. They will stay with you.' There are various songs to celebrate marriages. There are two such in this play, 'Mo te'ni, Mo te'ni' and 'Tolani tolani'.

The problem of bride price is very sensitive in Nigerian tribal society. The man who wants a wife must pay for her. He pays a sum of money to the girl herself and to her parents before final arrangements are concluded. The amount varies according to the tribe, but in some tribes, it has become so high that young men are frightened away from marriage. Some people think that the practice should be stopped, but tradition is still very strong. Lakunle refuses to pay the bride-price on the grounds that it makes it appear that the woman is bought, and could be subjected to any type of treatment. During courtship among the Yoruba an intermediary helps to take messages to and from the couple involve. In the palaces of the Oba in Yoruba land certain protocol is observed. Nobody rushes in, but everyone is ushered in by a palace attendant. When Sidi arrives at Baroka's palace, she fails to do the right thing, and Baroka censures her.

Nigerians like music and merry-making. In *The Lion and the Jewel* there is much drumming and dancing which are employed judiciously to express emotions already implicit in the action of the play. In Yoruba traditional music there are many types of drums, for instance the gangun, which is the talking drum, and the iya ilu, the main drum, which gives the back ground and base to the music. A sekere is another instrument. This is a gourd with coral beads roped all over its body. There are also flutes and box-guitars. These instruments are used in *The Lion and the Jewel*.

When the Yoruba are involved in exciting or emotional situations they sing to express their feelings. At the Bale's Sidi starts a song involuntarily, when she sees him beat the wrestler.

Yokulu Yokolu. Ko ha tan bi,

Iyawa gb'oko san'le

Oko yo'ke. . .

This means: 'It has happened, the wife has so badly floored her husband in fight that he has become a hunch-back.'

Here Soyinka incorporates a number of dances, dance dramas and mimes which have rhythmical accompaniment. The following 'dances' occur in the play.

✓ The dance of the lost traveler' – a dance drama with episodes of mime and a final communal dance which is familiar enough from the English language tradition of

the musical. A community swept into creative life by one of its members, re-enacts a recent event

- ✓ 'The mime of the white surveyor' largely a mime in the course of which the prisoners sing and move rhythmically. The mime marks a slight departure from established western dramatic conventions and constitutes a statement of the Yoruba concept of time. The presence of Baroka and the white surveyor on stage is prompted by Lakunle's 'it was..... Somewhere here' and by his account, 'prisoners...were brought'. A link is made with the world of the past: unseen reality temporarily put on visibility. It is a flash sideways onto another plane, rather than a flash-back.
- ✓ 'The dance of Baroka's story' – in two parts, however, a fundamentally different convention, a masquerade convention, is used and this presents the audience with a distinctive element from the sophisticated and stylized idiom of African drama. The wearing of the mask often implies or induces possession by a deity; here the mask is not that of a god. Though Baroka is 'the living god among men', but it still indicates cultural values and attitudes. It also makes a statement about African art and its search through stylization and symbol for essence rather than appearance.
- ✓ 'Sadiku's dance of triumph – a solo performed around a carving of the bale, expresses her satisfaction within the bounds of possibility.
- ✓ 'The finale' – a bridal and communal dance which links Sidi off to her husband and, draws the play to a close. Given the observations of Bebalole and Adediji and others on the role of dance in African society it is easy to believe that the news of marriage would quickly spread and that the community would gather to celebrate and dance.

The dramatic functions of the dances differ but Soyinka is aware of the accepted practice of the musical stage, that the performances should open with a 'big number' and that each act should close with a story spectacular set piece. He amends this slightly and makes us wait for the end of the 'opening dialogue' before we move into the 'dance of the lost traveler'. This is in a tradition which European and American practice shares with Yoruba 'Alarinjo' theatre, which usually concludes its performances with a dance.

There is no doubt that the play deals with the period of transition when Nigerians still have to make up their contact with the west. These values are at times in direct conflict with traditional culture and individuals may have to choose between acquired values and inherited culture. Soyinka presents these two as opposed one to the other. Judging from the fact that the bale finally succeeds in capturing Sidi, it could be said that Soyinka takes the side of tradition.

However, this conclusion can hardly be sustained, since the picture of the Bale we have here is that of an unrealistic reactionary village head who is a stumbling block to progress – which must come whether he likes it or not. Also, the playwright ridicules the whole idea of bride price and makes Lakunle put forward incontrovertible arguments why the custom should be abolished. He makes many other attacks on the traditional beliefs and customs of the Yoruba, for instance, the wedding arrangements between Sidi and the Bale, and the complete absence of any pressures on Sidi in her love affairs. It is by simple theatrical devices and the memorable things which these people are made to say and do that Soyinka has succeeded in making *The Lion and the Jewel* a great and typically Nigerian play.

A Yoruba sense of balance is also well established in this play. It is manifested in the careful contrasts of old and young, of male and female, of night and day and in case of Baroka and Lakunle who, in the entire course of the play behave as if they have come from different worlds. The play also has a cyclical dimension and ends almost where it begins.

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