

## *Théâtre Africain : Case Study*

---

### **The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka**

#### **Full summary of the play**

"The Lion and the Jewel" by Wole Soyinka is a play set in the Nigerian village of Ilujinle. The story revolves around three main characters: Sidi, a beautiful young woman; Lakunle, a young, western-educated schoolteacher; and Baroka, the elderly leader of the village.

The play begins with Sidi carrying a pail of water, and Lakunle, who is smitten by her, offers to help. He criticizes her for her traditional behavior and dress, and expresses his desire to marry her. However, he refuses to pay the bride price, a traditional custom, considering it old-fashioned and demeaning.

Sidi, emboldened by her recent appearance in a magazine, rejects Lakunle's proposal. She also rejects Baroka due to his advanced age. However, upon learning that Baroka is impotent, Sidi plots to humiliate him.

In a twist of events, Baroka had lied about his impotence to lure Sidi to him. He ends up sexually assaulting Sidi, and she becomes his newest wife.

The play is a satire of Western notions of beauty and African culture, and it explores the clash between modernity and tradition. It takes place over the course of a single day and is divided into three scenes: Morning, Noon, and Night.

#### **Some important themes of the play**

"The Lion and the Jewel" by Wole Soyinka explores several themes:

1. **Tradition vs. Modernity:** The play pits traditional Yoruba customs against a western conception of progress and modernity, as represented by the conflict between Baroka and Lakunle for Sidi's hand in marriage.
2. **Men vs. Women:** The play focuses on the competition to win Sidi's hand in marriage, making it a battle of the sexes. It explores the nature of each sex's power and how they maintain or lose that power.

3. **Pride, Vanity, and the Power of Images:** Sidi's vanity grows exponentially when her photographs are published, introducing her and the villagers to the power of images.
4. **Language, Words, and Trickery:** The play is filled with instances of trickery, particularly surrounding language. Language is shown to be a source of power, especially when used without lies or misdirection.
5. **Male Chauvinism:** This theme is explored through the belief in the innate superiority of men over women.
6. **Marriage and Love:** Sidi is the center of attraction in the play, and her hand in marriage is sought by both Lakunle and Baroka.
7. **Deceit:** This theme manifests through Baroka, who uses trickery to achieve his goals.
8. **Virility and Cowardice:** The play explores these themes in the context of the characters' actions and motivations.

### Characters of the play

The main characters in "The Lion and the Jewel" by Wole Soyinka are:

1. **Sidi:** Known as the Jewel, Sidi is the most beautiful young woman in the village. She is being courted by both Lakunle and Baroka.
2. **Baroka:** Known as the Lion, Baroka is the crafty and powerful Bale (village chief) of Ilujinle.
3. **Lakunle:** Lakunle is a young schoolteacher who is influenced by western ways. He wishes to marry Sidi but refuses to pay the bride price, a traditional custom.

4. **Sadiku:** Sadiku is Baroka's first wife and personal matchmaker. She conspires with Sidi to humiliate Baroka after discovering his alleged impotence.

There are also minor characters such as the Wrestler, the Favorite (Baroka's current favorite wife), and the Stranger (a photographer from Lagos who never appears in the play but whose actions set the plot in motion).