

## The Lion and the Jewel Themes

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**Tradition versus Modernization:** The central conflict in the play is the struggle between traditional African values and Western modernization. Baroka, the Bale (chief) of Ilujinle, represents cultural tradition. He values the old ways of life. He sees the village as a place where these traditions must be preserved. Lakunle, on the other hand, is the village schoolteacher and a symbol of modernization. He admires European ways of living, including technology, Western marriage customs, and gender equality.

Lakunle refuses to pay Sidi's bride-price because he considers it an outdated and barbaric tradition. He values modern thinking over tradition. Lakunle thinks paying bride-price for a wife is like buying a cow from the village market:

***"To pay the price would be  
To buy a heifer off the market stall."***

Lakunle wants a modern marriage where he and his wife are equals. He wants Sidi to be a modern wife, as he says:

***"Be a modern wife, look me in the eye  
And give me a little kiss."***

Baroka, however, views Sidi as a prize to add to his harem of wives. Polygamy is Baroka's way of maintaining traditional customs. Baroka marries a new wife every few months. He says:

***"It is five full months since last  
I took a wife."***

In the end, Baroka tricks Sidi and rapes her. Sidi chooses Baroka over Lakunle. This fact suggests that tradition still holds strong in the village. However, Soyinka suggests that neither tradition nor modernization is perfect, when it is forced on other's free will.

**Gender Roles, Marriage, and Power:** The play also explores the roles and expectations of men and women in society. In Ilujinle, women are expected to be submissive, take care of domestic duties, and fulfill their husbands' desires. Men, on the other hand, are seen as decision-makers. Men are the symbols of strength and power. Sidi challenges these expectations by refusing Lakunle to marry without her bride-price. She believes marrying without her bride-price would make her a laughing object in the village. She tells Lakunle:

*"Will you make me  
A laughing-stock?"*

Lakunle claims to believe in equality, but his actions show otherwise. He calls Sidi ignorant and insults her intelligence:

*"You are as stubborn  
As an illiterate goat."*

It suggests that Lakunle's "modern" beliefs are shallow. Baroka, while deeply rooted in tradition, uses his power to manipulate and control women. He tricks Sidi and rapes her.

**Pride and Vanity:** Sidi's character symbolizes pride and vanity, especially after seeing her photographs in a magazine. She becomes obsessed with her beauty. She believes it gives her power over others, including Baroka. Sidi says:

*"I am greater than ... the living god among men."*

However, her vanity blinds her to Baroka's cunning nature, and she falls into his trap. Baroka also displays pride in his status as the Bale.

**Trickery:** Trickery is a recurring theme in the play. Baroka is portrayed as a clever trickster who uses lies and manipulation to get what he wants. He pretends to be impotent, knowing that Sadiku, his wife, will spread the news. This trick lures Sidi to his home, where he ultimately rapes her. Sidi tries to outsmart Baroka by mocking him, but her inexperience and vanity lead to her failure.