

Wole Soyinka's Style of Presentation in *The Lion and the Jewel*

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Abstract: *Wole Soyinka is one of the pioneering figures of Nigerian writers who have introduced their literature outside their continent. As a poet, novelist and above all a playwright Soyinka has enriched Nigerian theatre with various elements in many ways. He has introduced many indigenous elements in his plays that have become live with those elements. Moreover, he has presented his plays in their own ways though following the international forms of drama. His play *The Lion and the Jewel* bears testimonies to such elements in vivid appearances and forms. Among many other unique qualities, the style of his presentation has been chosen for this article. Though this play, like some other ones by him, has much in common with many other plays of the world, it has some remarkable gifts with its form and way of presentation. Its divisions, stage directions and presence of some other arts in it have made it remarkably enjoyable as the play holds out African, in other words, Nigerian and in some cases, particularly Yoruban elements including culture and ways of life. For all these reasons, this article has aimed at finding out and analyzing them within a considerable space here.*

Keywords: Style; Presentation; Performance; Tradition; Culture; Life;

Introduction

Definitely it is kept in mind that this article has been inspired by *The Lion and the Jewel* as a written text, not by any of its numerous stage performances anywhere in the world. The story of this play presents a triangular relationship among three characters: Sidi, a village beauty, Lakunle, a young local teacher infatuated with her beauty along with western ways of life and Baroka, the village head. Along with these three characters, there is also another important character out of the trio-relationship: Sadiku, the head wife to Baroka, and several minor characters. Lakunle tries to woo Sidi and is willing to marry her, but he is not willing to pay the bride price as is common for marrying a chaste girl. On the other hand, Baroka, a wife, hunting old man, tries to have Sidi as his wife. He sets plots in this regard and comes out successful, and Sidi gives way to him leaving Lakunle. As the setting of this play is Ilujinle, a Nigerian village, the life of that particular place has been presented with all live by elements of its culture and tradition. Hence dance, songs, chants and mimes are integral parts of this play.

When this play was staged first in 1963, Soyinka was only twenty-three; and the play was able to attract attention of connoisseurs as it has some genuine and unique qualities. In this regard, Martin Banham, an Emeritus Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies at

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Leeds University, in his essay “Critical Responses: Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*. Royal Court Theatre, London, December 1966” has said:

Although not the first of Soyinka’s plays to be staged in London, the production of *The Lion and the Jewel* at the Royal Court Theatre in December 1966 is of particular interest for two reasons: the commitment of The Royal Court’s Artistic Director William (Bill) Gaskill to Soyinka’s work, and the range of critical responses that reflect, in equal measure, enthusiasm, uncertainty and – sometimes – naïve cultural responses to this African voice.

Praising the style of Soyinka in this play drama critic Sarah Hemming, in her essay “*The Lion and the Jewel*, The Pit, Barbican, London”, has said:

This early Wole Soyinka play comes to us courtesy of the Young Genius season - a showcase of work (mounted by the Young Vic and the Barbican) by artists who seem to have found their voice from the start. Certainly *The Lion and the Jewel*, written when Soyinka was only 23, has tremendous élan. Soyinka weaves traditional Yoruba storytelling, dance and music into his play about a girl and two suitors in a Nigerian village. He reveals a delight in language: his characters roll great long sentences round their mouths, as if savouring wine, and deal a splendid line in insults. He also melds old and new. To what feels like a traditional fable he brings contemporary concerns: should the villagers adopt progressive western ways or stick with tradition? The style is capricious, but the subject is serious.

In plays there may be many moments when characters cannot express some ways and meanings of their intentions. Those things are expressed beyond their dialogues, through the description of the playwright himself. In this regard George Bernard Shaw has a distinct place among playwrights of all times and places. Elaborate description helps his plays form in a broader expanse. Similarly, stage-directions by Wole Soyinka attract the attention of his reader for some actual reasons. As he has used dance, mimes, songs and chants along with dialogue, his plays demand description and direction, and in *The Lion and the Jewel*. he has applied stage directions profusely. For example, at the very outset of the play the stage, directions cover almost a full page through which the location of the setting is presented very vividly. The description here presents Sidi’s entrance along with Lakunle’s presence with his pupils at the bush school. She is carrying a pail full of water on her head. She is slim in appearance and her hair is plaited. She looks how a village young girl having traditional Yoruban dress may usually look. Lakunle appears in western but old-fashioned attire; his dress is not completely suitable for any native man of twenty-three, nor any western young man.

From this description Sidi’s appearance looks vivid with her social position, her mentality, her ability to work and even her importance to the little boys who are the pupils of Lakunle. In the same way, the description in the stage directions holds out the

whole appearance of Lakunle: his dress, his bias to the west though in a ridiculous way and even his treatment of the little boys. In short, this part helps the reader assume the significance of these two important characters of this play.

Likely, in many other situations of the play stage directions play some essential roles and add life to the presentation. In the scenes having dances, songs, chants and mimes particularly, the stage directions cover a vast area of the play because without description those presentations cannot be possible at all. And more important is the fact that as Soyinka presents the indigenous life of Yoruba people, he cannot do anything avoiding such things at all; these things are integral parts of their life. So, stage directions of *The Lion and the Jewel* are so much essentially live and enjoyable.

Another remarkable and very interesting merit of Soyinka's style in this play is its division into three parts of a day: Morning, Noon and Night. In ancient Greece dramas were generally divided into three main parts: beginning, middle, and end. On the other hand, all Shakespearean plays have five divisions, namely five acts. And Wole Soyinka in this play has partially followed the Greek tradition, but has created his own style as he has named the three division of the play Morning, Noon and Night. In the three parts the narrative of the play takes place in a very straightforward way. The part named Morning opens with the appearance of Sidi, Lakunle and his pupils. While Sidi and Lakunle go on arguing about their love and expected marriage and problems, some village girls arrive and express their desire to perform the appearance of a photographer who came to their village sometime ago. They accordingly perform the episode of the lost traveler, and at last Baroka arrives. At the end of this section Lakunle is chased out by a group of women while Baroka expresses his desire to have another wife more as he has not married for long five months. The Section Noon covers the appearance of Sidi and Lakunle when the former is busy in carrying firewood, and informs the latter of her beautiful pictures in the magazine of the photographer. Sadiku arrives at that place and proposes Sidi of her husband Baroka's desire to have Sidi as his wife. This section also reaches to the bedroom of Baroka as he confides Sadiku the fake news of his losing manhood. The last section Named Night covers the action area from Sadiku's appearance at the market place to dance a victory dance on Baroka's losing manhood to the last scene of the play, marriage ceremony of Sidi and Baroka.

The significance of the division of the play with names of times of a day is that it has made the play fuller with life. Act-wise division compared to this one sounds more bookish and formal and somewhat lifeless. A play which is full of sounds and colors has really suitable division in such a way. Traditional and western division could not be compatible with the sonorous voice of this play that vibrates with indigenous life of Yoruba people.

The most striking feature of Soyinka's style of presentation includes those indigenous forms of dances, songs, mimes and chants. Along with sheer celebrations of the moments, even another remarkable thing is presented through these elements; that remarkable thing may be termed as the presentation of plays within a play. From ancient times it has been

very common to present a story within a story in all types of narration like novels, short stories, poems, songs, television programs and films of modern times, and mostly in plays of all times.

This device has been used by William Shakespeare in many of his plays, including *Measure for Measure*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Hamlet*. In *Hamlet* prince Hamlet himself, asks some strolling players to perform the Murder of Gonzago. The action and characters in the murder hold out the murder of Hamlet's father in the main action. Hamlet's intention is to provoke the conscience of the murderer, his uncle.

In *The Lion and the Jewel* dances, songs and mimes take place in six situations, and in two of these situations Soyinka presents two plays: the first one is performed by Sidi, some other girls of the village and Lakunle who at first wants to avoid the performance though at last agrees. They perform the dance of the lost traveler that means the first experience of a western photographer in the village Ilujinle. The second mime is performed by Lakunle who shows how railway once was about to reach their village, but it rerouted away because Baroka bribed the surveyor. Lakunle performs this mime in front of Sidi and Sadiku to whom he tries to prove Baroka's dishonesty. The third performance is rendered by Sadiku in front of Sidi. Sadiku performs her victory dance celebrating Baroka's loss of manhood though he has confided her not to disclose it to anyone else. She performs her dance placing a carved figure of Baroka in the village center. The fourth mime takes place between Baroka and a wrestler at Baroka's home. During the wrestling match, Baroka goes on talking warmly and affectionately to Sidi as he wants to win her heart showing his virility and prowess. The fifth dance is presented by the mummers who actually celebrate virility of Baroka though at first it is not clear to any of Sadiku and Lakunle; they are present on the stage then. And the final situation of dance, songs and mimes has been presented at the last scene of the play where Sidi along with a crowd and musicians dances and sings. Her neglecting gestures on Lakunle, her seeking Sadiku's blessing and Sadiku's laying her hand on Sidi's head in blessing and many more gestures and chants of others constitute this scene.

At the beginning of the first of six scenes of live performances other than and along with dialogue, when Lakunle expresses his unwillingness to participate in the performance of the dance of the lost traveler, Sidi chants taunting Lakunle meaning that he is dressed like the outsider, he looks like him; he is speaking his language, his way of thinking is like that man and that he is clumsy like that man in his Lagos manners. With Sidi all others start chanting against Lakunle just moving around him. As they cover every round their speed of movement and the beats of drums become faster. In this way they force him to perform the role of the outsider. As at last Lakunle agrees to perform the role, all others let out a terrific shout, and having unison with the shout there booms a clap of drums. This sound expresses their inner state of glee. In this scene actually, Soyinka tries to show the incompatible condition of an outsider in the village Ilujinle. For example, four girls make a car for the traveler, and Lakunle, being the traveler, tries to drive the car. His car does not work, and he gets down to find out what may have happened to its wheels.

When he again gets on the car and tries to restart it, it does not respond at all. He gets out of the car being utterly helpless.

This machine of western world proves absolutely useless in the natural world of Ilujinle. It proves here good for nothing. As he starts his plodding journey with all his equipments, beats of drums vibrate in a lower and darker tone, and the rhythm varies according to the speed and ways of the journey: really, that journey is like trekking. The beats express the clumsy movement of the man from outside ultimately showing his inability to cope with such an environment. The condition of his incompatibility goes farther with the presence of some other direct natural objects like a snake and a monkey. When the tired traveler tries to lean against a tree, a snake slithers out of the branches and it poises over his head; a monkey suddenly drops in on his way and after gibbering at him it scampers off. In these beats of strokes the traveler takes a swig of whisky to restore his nerves. Such manners prove the ways of his life, as he is a representative of western world, to be futile in the midst of natural ambience of the Yoruba people.

This scene of performing the dance of the lost traveler stops at the appearance of Baroka. Of course, Baroka himself encourages them to go on with their play. Lakunle and others resume the play and complete the rest. Sidi comments on Lakunle's good performance and says that he could do well being a court jester than a school teacher. After Baroka's comment, Sidi proposes Lakunle to perform the role in finding out the lost man, but at this moment he tries to run away from the crowd of village girls. They try to surround him tight, but somehow he manages to run away followed by the crowd of the girls.

Here the resemblance between the lost traveler and Lakunle is brought to light through two things at least: the one is that Lakunle seems and behaves exactly like the outside man. That is the thing Sidi praises in her comment on his performance. The second thing is the running away of Lakunle; it reminds a reader or viewer of the characteristic fate of the lost traveler. They are both unable to cope with the live rhythm of the indigenous rituals.

In the context of the second mime Sidi casually mentions that each of Baroka's female guests, having supped just one night with him, turned into either his wife or his mistress. At this point Lakunle mentions Baroka's other bad deeds like his corruption in blocking the possibility of a railway in their locality. Sadiku comments that all such things are rumors and hearsays, and Sidi proposes Lakunle that she wants to hear such hearsays. Lakunle mentions that Baroka's bad names are spread up to farther towns. Lakunle says that before dying his own father told him of Baroka's die-hard roguery in respect of his corruption. He asks Sadiku and Sidi to keep sitting quiet as he shows the scene through acting.

A surveyor appears along with some prisoners who are guarded by two warders. The white surveyor examines his map. Having all his equipments the man goes on with his approach. After awhile the sound of their progressing work prove their strength and movement. The wrestler at first finds them working and goes back to reappear with Baroka. He also goes back, and after a while a bull roarer is heard, it becomes louder and nearer gradually, and a complete chaos follows, and the people in work are bound to give in. Among all others only the surveyor can stay. Baroka gives him bribe in money form

and in the forms of fowls and a goat too. The surveyor now comes to realize his seeming hazard and expresses his mind that he has not done right. At last a gourd of palm wine is offered and a cola nut is broken celebrating their agreement.

The rhythmic sounds and chants give live force to the tempo of the play. This part is more of a flash back as it is not so live as the first one is because firstly the characters in the piece are many, more than one, but the actor is one, that is Lakunle who at the last of the scene stamps on the ground in his personal reaction of hatred toward Baroka who is not in his front. Moreover, the actions and gestures of Baroka shown back here represent his greed for his own political power that could be threatened by the advent of any type of progress.

The next one is the victory dance of Sadiku though in real sense she proves to be false and cheated by Baroka. Whatever the real thing is she celebrates the end of Baroka's manhood through her dance. Observing her in that frenzied state of dance, Sidi, who is busy in pondering over her own beauty in the magazine, cannot make out what makes Sadiku act so. Though she asks her the reason, Sadiku has no time at first to stop and talk in peace coming out of her trance of ecstasy on the female victory over the male race. She spends a considerable while in surrounding the tree as she seems to be possessed by some ghoulis spirit; she yells, leaps up and lets out chanting over the bale Baroka though he is not in front of her.

Through her dance Soyinka gives vent to the flow of joy that has been so long blocked inside Sadiku. Even being about seventy in age, she does not have power over her husband; she has to manage new wives for her husband. This traditional system has a bit been brought under an oblique stare from the dramatist's part. As Soyinka has not given his clear stance in this play to any of the two conflicting flows of choices, he has brought some flaws of traditional life to light. This instance may be a bright example in this regard. Moreover, the stature of the character of Sadiku, the tone of the play itself and the life of Yoruba have all constituted the importance and significance of the dance scene by Sadiku. Besides, by surrounding the tree while chanting and dancing, Sadiku pays homage to the source of life and vitality by dint of which the female are supposed to remain alive when the most powerful male has already ended. In other words, she invokes the tree because it represents the center of all activities of life. Similarly, almost all the actions of this play take place near this tree. So, by this ritual Sadiku seeks blessings too though un mindfully, she just celebrates their victory over the male.

The fourth mime takes place at Baroka's home when he participates in a wrestling with a wrestler. When this scene opens Baroka and that stout short wrestler are seen in a stative posture in a balance from both of them. The voice of Sidi is heard as she enters addressing Baroka with a formal tone. This scene ends with the departure of the wrestler and the short appearance of a group of female persons in pursuit of a masked male. From the entrance of Sidi into this scene Baroka and Sidi gradually go on changing their apparent attitude to each other: Baroka gradually achieves hypnotizing power over Sidi, and likely, she becomes milder from her terse tone to him. And throughout the whole process Baroka goes on moving from one posture to another with his competitor in wrestling.

This scene represents seduction, fascination and showing off virility and prowess from the side of the male, and simultaneously, the gradual falling of the female into the hypnotizing ambience created by the male. For example, Baroka addresses Sidi with a very soft and alluring voice. By the power of his argumentative and persuasive tongue he even creates an authentic analogy between the case of his own with Sidi and old wine in a new bottle. Actually, what he says through this short course of time is supported by his movement in the wrestling. His movement ushers the softness and agreement out of Sidi's wild mind. For all these reasons, the playwright has mingled the wrestling into the flow of the action of the play.

The fifth dance is presented by the mummers while Sadiku and Lakunle are waiting for Sidi. At first they two can hear the noise of the mummers to be at a distance, and gradually the noise becomes louder. Lakunle and Sadiku go on talking in the mean time when she tries to pick out some money from his pocket. They both take the dance for the celebration of Baroka's loss of manhood. The beats of drums and movements of the dancers express their concern to be dance of virility. The dance is really related to virility, but its reception by Sadiku and Lakunle is different from the performers and the real one.

This performance provides dramatic irony as the real thing differs from what Sadiku and Lakunle take it for. Any stark way of declaring one's intact virility may really sound awkward to the person related and all others around. So, through this traditional ritual the declaration has been completed. Moreover, the presentation provides relief and extra enjoyment to the audience or the reader whoever enjoys it in whatever form.

The sixth and last performance is presented at the closing of the play. When Sidi has gone back home after revealing her loss of virginity to Sadiku and Lakunle, he urges Sadiku to look for Sidi what Sidi plans to do. At this moment of self analysis of Lakunle the sound of distant music with light drums, flutes, box-guitars and sekere is audible. After a while Sadiku comes back and informs him of Sidi's getting prepared for marriage. Lakunle, still in darkness about the reality, now can hear the noise of the singing group whom he actually has just wanted to hire thinking that Sidi is going to get marry him. When the singers and dancers enter, Lakunle says to them to go back; at that moment Sidi enters, and they become suddenly silent letting out O-Ohs of admiration. After a while they resume their performance with Sidi's singing. At the last moment, a young girl flaunts her buttocks at Lakunle who advances to the girl, but Sadiku tries to stop him to dance with. The crowd repeats the song following Sidi.

In this last performance, through their live movement and noise, the participants express celebration of the ritual of a marriage. Through the celebration of the marriage they maintain their traditional belief active in their life. On one side the celebration provides joy for Baroka who is actually absent from the scene, and on the other, it creates provocation, allurements and humiliation for Lakunle. Sadiku too seems to be satisfied as she tries to calm down Lakunle from following the shaking buttocks of the young girl.

About the significance of dance, songs and mime among Yoruba people, mentioning some particular characteristics of them, in an interview titled "More about Dance and Music in Yoruba Society", Jeannita Olowe says:

[The talking drum] is the one instrument that mimics Yoruba language. So depending upon how it's played, when you squeeze as well as pull on the various chords, it changes the tone, which is what the Yoruba language is based off of. The Yoruba language is based off of the do-re-mi music scale. So when you're playing the talking drum, then you actually hear the language. So that's what everyone's listening for. You're listening for that language so you know what to do when. So the drummers have different talking drums—there are big ones, smaller ones—and everyone's communicating at the same time, [including] the *agogo* (cow bell), which is playing the rhythm to keep everyone's tempo and the *shekere* (gourd rattle), which is your pulse and your heartbeat. So different instruments all telling the same story..... But when you go to Nigeria and see more men dancing, it's quite amazing. The belief there is that it is a sign of strength. So you see a male dancer from Nigeria just really popping because it is so athletic. You walk into a dance studio, for lack of better words, or a dance compound and you see probably 20 males and five females or if you go to a village you see the men dancing just as much as the women.

Conclusion

In short, Wole Soyinka deals with a very serious subject very lightly in *The Lion and the Jewel*, and making the play enjoyable to the light heart, he mingles some traditional live elements with the bare skeleton of the story of the play. Different elements of Yoruba ethnicity become integral with the play as they are performed live in the scopes created in the midst of the dialogue of the play. Along with these elements, Soyinka's particular stage, directions and unique divisions of the play make it enjoyable much. A reader of the text, at first sight, gets startled particularly finding the divisions as Morning, Noon and Night. Finally, the sound, color and rhythm of the play really prove essential in regard to its unique tastes.

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