

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 9 September 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Assistant Managing Editor: Swarna Thirumalai, M.A.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D.

C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.



Wole Soyinka

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1986/soyinka-bio.html

Post-colonial Literature

In the current scenario of transition from tradition to modernity, re-reading history and reviewing value systems have become inevitable. This is particularly true of nations with a Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

colonial past, since the literary, cultural, political and even religious developments in such countries have been profoundly influenced by colonial rule. This is all the more true of former British colonies, because the British colonizers evolved their own unique strategy of administering their colonies.

The re-reading of history has led to the genesis of a new discipline —post-colonial literature – in the recent decades. Post-colonial literature examines social, cultural, economic, military and political events that emanated from the imperial process from the first moment of colonization to the present day. It foregrounds the tension inherent in the natives’ interface with the imperial power.

Study of African Literature in India

Any study of African literature in India normally invites comparison with Indian literature. Critics suggest a theory that locks this study into the binary oppositions of colonizer/colonized, domination/resistance. But this experience of colonialism is not similar as the binary oppositions of post-colonial theory claim (Agarwalla:2000:11).

Wole Soyinka’s Plays – Ranging from Comedy to Tragedy

Wole Soyinka’s plays range from comedy to tragedy, and from political satire to the theatre of the absurd. He has combined influences from western traditions with African myth, legends and folklore.

Sidi in *The Lion and the Jewel*

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Wole Soyinka portrays Sidi’s character as a village belle who admires her own beauty. She realizes that she is beautiful on seeing the photographs taken by a strange traveler. Lakunle is portrayed as a man with full of romantic ideas drawn from western literature. He woos Sidi who does not reciprocate his love. Baroka, the chief, sees Sidi’s photograph and wants to have her as one of his wives. He sends her senior wife, by name Sadiku, as a go-between to ask Sidi to marry him. Sidi turns a deaf ear to Sadiku’s request. Baroka hatches a plot to bring her to him. He confesses to Sadiku that he lost his manhood. Sadiku

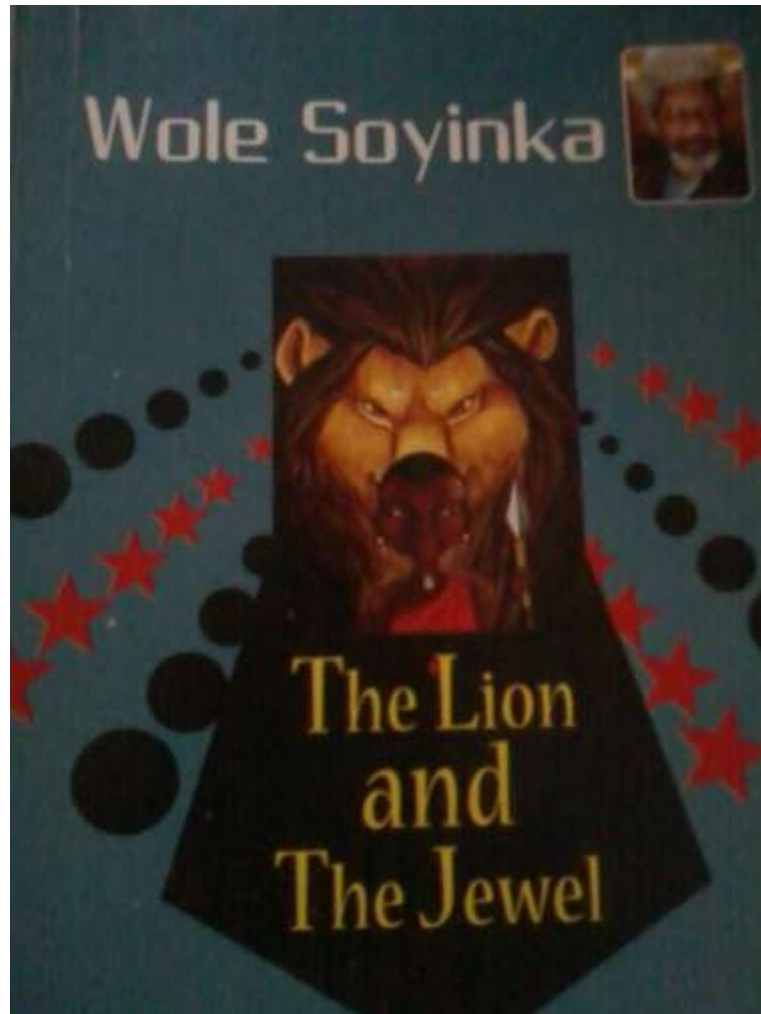
Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.

Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

believes him and tells the secret to Sidi. Sidi plans to torment him and reaches his palace. The Bale by wile means of flattery seduces her. Sidi returns to Sadiku. She goes back to Baroka whom she values for his manliness.



This play can be considered a post-colonial play. The stranger, the man from the outside world (10) visited the village of Ilujinle riding his motorbike taking photographs of men and women brought a new wave of cultural domination of the colonizer. Though the village maids consider his misadventures as a matter for laughter, they welcome his photographs and his magazine with great enthusiasm. Sidi, the heroine of the play starts loving and admiring her own beauty after seeing them. She is pride of her beauty:

My name is Sidi. And now, let me be.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

My name is Sidi, and I am beautiful.
The stranger took my beauty
And placed it in my hands.
Here, here it is. I need no funny names
To tell me of my fame.
Loveliness beyond the jewels of a throne –
That is what he said. (20)

Baroka

Baroka, the chief, takes notice of the young maid only on seeing her images in the magazine. It starts a chain of events culminating in the seduction of Sidi by the chief. The strange machine which he shows to Sidi will print stamps with her image on them:

Oh. Oh. I see you did your hand
Into the pockets of the school teacher
And retrieve it bulging with knowledge.
[Goes to the strange machine, and pulls the lever up and down.]
Now this, not even the school teacher can tell
What magic this performs. Come nearer,
It will not bite. (50)

The camera and the machine play a vital role in the play. Critics remark that the play explores what happens to individuals and society when a previously unknown instrument of civilization erupts into their lives.

Baroka thwarts the attempt of the white man to lay a railroad touching the village of Ilujinle. Lakunle considers this to be Baroka's reaction to the threat to his authority. He describes Baroka as the enemy of progress:

My father told me, before he died. And few men
Know of this trick – oh he's a die-hard rogue
Sworn against our progress ... yes... it was ...some where here

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

The track should have been laid just along
The outskirts. Well, the workers came, in fact
It was prisoners who were brought to do
The harder part ... to break the jungle's back... (24)

Baroka's fear is not without reason. Laying the railroad signifies an alien technology disrupting a stable political order and eventually paves the way for the conquest and control of his people's land and goods. In Baroka's view, the so called progress not only contributes to the mechanical uniformity of things but also suppresses the elemental vitality and beauty of nature. He says:

Among the bridges and the murderous roads,
Below the humming birds which
Smoke the face of Sango, dispenser of
The snake – tongue lightning, between this moment
And the reckless broom that will be wedded
In these years to come, we must leave
Virgin plots of lives, rich decay
And the tang of vapour rising from
Forgotten heaps of compost, lying
Undisturbed ... But the skin of progress
Masks, unknown, the spotted wolf of sameness...
Does sameness not revolt your being
My daughter? (52-53)

Lakunle - The Modern Means of Transport for Progress – Attitudes

But for Lakunle the modern means of transport is a way to progress and civilization and Baroka for his selfish ends has prevented it. Cultural domination of the colonizer starts even before the actual act of conquest and it continues after he leaves. The village has already got a

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

school and an English educated teacher. Lakunle is westernized in his clothes, manners and ideas.

Lakunle's opinion about women as the weaker sex or his views about their dress are drawn from the west. His notion of romance and love-making is European. He is for modernizing Ilujinle.

But his concept of civilization and progress is dangerously superficial. He considers eating with knives and forks on breakable plates as an act of civilized people. High-heeled shoes and lipstick, waltz and night clubs and kissing on the lips are symbols of progress for him. He will change all the village practices. He is against paying bride price. According to him it is a savage practice. But Sidi does not think so. She calls it meanness on his part not to pay the pride price.

Lakunle is a perpetrator of nonsense about the modern world with the celebration of civilized eating off breakable plates. Sidi is tempted towards the western ways by the photograph but she returns to the fold of her tradition when she decides to marry Baroka. Baroka stands for preserving the ancient values of the village and brings her back.

A Clash between Traditionalism and Modernism

The question whether the play presents a clash between traditionalism and modernism or between two cultures is often debated. Whole Soyinka himself asserts that there is no clash of cultures in the play. However there is resistance to westernization and colonization as evident from Baroka's behaviour. So, it can be called a post-colonial play.

References

Shyam S. Agarwalla, *The African poetry and Drama*, Prestige Books, New Delhi, 2000, p. 11.

Wole Soyinka, *The Lion and The Jewel*. Oxford University Press, USA. 1976

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.

Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play

S. Thirunavukkarasu Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English
Government Muthurangam Arts College
Vellore -632002
Tamilnadu
India
ksthiru_37@yahoo.com

C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.
Assistant Professor in English
S.A. Engineering College
Chennai -600077
Tamilnadu
India
vidhunidhu@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 9 September 2012

S. Thirunavukkarasu, Ph.D. and C.N. Vidhya Lakshmi, M.A., M.Phil.
Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and The Jewel* as a Post-Colonial Play