
The Transformative Vision of Modern Society in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*

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Abstract:

For Wole Soyinka, satire is a tool in bringing about societal transformation. He therefore uses satire to mock sociopolitical problems like leadership and mediocrity, religious hypocrisy, moral decadence and the egoistic tendencies of leaders in his Nigerian society. In his play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the playwright endeavours to portray the shortcomings of contemporary Nigerian society by holding human psychology to ridicule. The purpose of this essay is to show how the playwright has used satire as a corrective instrument for solving sociopolitical problems of contemporary society.

Key words: satire, social, transformation, hypocrisy, shortcomings, human psychology, ridicule.

INTRODUCTION

Satire, as a form of discourse, has always been used to make fun of the foolish or evil behaviour of men and how they run societal institutions. Since satire is not only used to criticize but also to reform, Wole Soyinka's interest in using satire is to explore in depth the sociopolitical situation of contemporary Africa and to analyse the nature of contemporary man whose psyche runs agog. With *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the playwright offers to awaken the consciousness of the people and make society come to terms with the nature of their problems which is a precondition to solving them. With this text, Wole Soyinka satirizes the gullibility of contemporary man who thinks his psychological needs can be solved by prayers and religion. In this, the playwright exposes the socio-political malaise of contemporary Nigeria: malaise in religion and leadership by articulating religious hypocrisy, moral decadence and family squabbles. The play is a satire on an unscrupulous preacher who turns Christian religion into a profit making business.

To get his message across, Wole Soyinka exploits the relationship between minor characters like Brother Jero's assistant, Chume, his wife Amope, the member of parliament and his worshippers to show to his readers on the one hand that the attitude of Brother Jero in his text is not distance from what we see in the large society where business partners or debtors (Chume as well as his wife) as try to get rid of their creditors so that they will no more be asked to settle what they owe and on the other hand show the weakness of some so called sanctimonious men of God and the unquestioning devotion some gullible people show to these leaders. In this sense, Soyinka is able to handle many themes simultaneously without endangering the reality of his characters with the use of music, songs and dance in the background. Psychological or spiritual themes are important to him as social ones. Through the use of songs, dance, music and drum beating, he

has portrayed the characters' conflict, fear, the complexities and the problems of the human heart.

The most significant aspect of Soyinka's work, many critics have noted, lies in his approach to literature as a serious agent of social change and his radical commitment to promoting human rights in Nigeria. Critics have it that the humour and compassion evident in his plays to mark this end, as well as his unquestioning portrayal of the consequences of political greed and oppression, add a universal significance to his portrayals of his own Nigerian life. Through the use of irony, sarcasm, and of satire, he attacks the socio political vices as seen in his contemporary Nigerian society. Most critics see Soyinka's satire as an attack on societal ills with the intention that this can bring transformation or change. He employs the use of images and symbolism to castigate his own society. Thus, he carves characters to match the situation he presents in his fictional work. The characters that are presented in his drama text through their behavior, deeds and what they say can be likened to people and situations in real life. Through what they say and do, he satirizes his own society. The preoccupation of the playwright is to explore human condition by presenting and analyzing the absurdities, abnormalities and ills inherent herein. To him, the artist should be the vision of his people and through his satirical writing; he believes transformation can be achieved. With this play, Wole Soyinka exposes the point of weakness of his society and intends to make his society come to terms with the nature of their problems which is an indispensable step towards solving them.

The purpose of this essay is to show how the playwright has used his text as a mechanism by which he exposes the ills and vices of his society such as the lust for materialism, moral and spiritual bankrupt and exploitation in the light of the Aristotelian's unities of time, place and action. An attempt will be made to sort out satirical elements which the playwright thinks can suit his artistic responsibility.

I- The Use of Satire as a Weapon

According to the *Dictionary of Literary Terms (1977)*, satire is a literary work intended to arouse ridicule, contempt and follies of man and institutions; and its primary aim is to correct malpractice by inspiring both indignation and laughter with the mixture of criticism and wit.

From this definition, the one which I think best fits this essay is formulated from the combination of its corrective intent and its literary method of execution. In the context of this essay, the definition of satire is:

“a literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved. The true satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man's devising and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling” (Thrall, et al 436).

A text or performance that uses irony and derision, to expose or attack human vice, foolishness or stupidity is satirical. Thus, the essence of satire is to ridicule the ills of an individual or an institution with the aim of correcting and transforming the society and in the process mould people's character. From satirical writings, readers derive satisfaction because through all these, we are able to experience a code of conduct which may apply to our daily lives. Some novels, poems and plays constitute a composition in which folly or vice is held up to ridicule or to expose folly. In the African context, as a literary genre, satire is considered as any expression

that makes fun of an institution or an individual. For that matter, it draws the attention of the reader and to the society to their vices with the aim of making appropriate or adequate adjustment or amendment and; is most often considered as a tool which brings about societal transformation. To a greater extent, it should cut across geographical boundaries because human beings are the same all over the world.

For my own concern, I will concentrate on political and social contradictions for the primary aim of any satire is to ridicule so that a correction can be affected. An institution, a particular behaviour in the society, a government and a political party can be made fun of so that a correction can be made. I shall explore the bitter and funny language used by the playwright to put his message of disillusion across. Although there is a little bit of exaggeration and burlesque in the play, some of the events described are realistic in nature; all these are designed to make the situation vivid and more interesting so that when the truths underlying the situations are revealed to the reader, the fun becomes grim and biting. It is in this vein that Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* are written. They are considered as sociopolitical satires. Before I examine what satirical elements are contained in Soyinka's drama text, it will be interesting to know the plot-thematic of the play. Recipient of the 1986 Nobel Prize for Literature, Soyinka through his nonfiction works and essays has established an international reputation as an unflinching critic on sociopolitical injustice inherent in African societies postcolonial.

Wole Soyinka's play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, is a satire which pokes fun at religious hypocrisy in Contemporary Nigeria. Soyinka's interest is to use it as a potent weapon to mock political and religious shortcomings, expose and analyze the egoistic tendencies of some people who are entrusted with the mandate of leading the masses. The playwright's concern is to enumerate the relevance of satire for the correction of socio political ills of his own country which he considers as the microcosm of the macrocosm. He holds the psychology of people who think that their needs can only be satisfied by religion to ridicule. Thus in the form of a charlatan preacher called Brother Jero, he makes him preach to his followers whom he calls "customers" on Bar Beach in Lagos, Nigeria, in their lust for materialism.

Prophet Jero is presented to the reader as a rogue who manipulates and keeps his "gullible" followers in a subservient position for he is able to read from their minds what they long for: money, social status, and power. Thus when the play opens, we see Brother Jero claiming that he is a "prophet by birth and by inclination"(10) and tries as much as possible to convince people that although there many prophets they are not at all the same. The prophet, then, uses a pun to show that the more prophets there are the more different they are. Thus, he states: "eggs is eggs" (10) which means in English "they're all the same"; but this he denies and sustains. Really, as he says he is different from other prophets. He keeps people dissatisfied for once they are satisfied they will leave him. He believes that as long as they are unhappy, worried and dissatisfied, they will continually seek his service for prophesying. This is contrary to the message of freedom and choice that Christianity spells to its followers. Brother Jero's philosophy of keeping people dissatisfied and helpless does not conform to basic Christian ethics.

Wole Soyinka uses the protagonist to show that the attitude of some religious leaders negate to a greater extent what they preach. For instance, the exploitative manner of the prophet is contained in the expression of calling his followers "customers" (20) and he himself, a "shop-keeper" (20). The first victim of this system is the old prophet under whose tutelage he grew. In fact, he pretends to help the old man acquire land on the beach, but denies him the same land. Helpless and frustrated, he cursed him for his ungratefulness: "*Ingrate! Monster! I curse you*

with the curse of the Daughters of Discord. May they be your downfall. May the daughters of Eve bring ruin down on your head!”(11).The narrator in these words shows the reader that the pretentious and exploitative manner of the prophet lies in his relationship with his followers.

He is presented as being part of the clergymen who takes delight in preaching in the open, on the public beach in this context, because they lack churches. Soyinka presents him as an unscrupulous preacher who is much more interested in greed than in saving the soul of the people by saying convincingly that “[t]he call of prophecy is in [his] blood” (11).To some extent, the prophet tries as much as possible to gain credibility by prophesying the futures of his followers and that of the working class. For instance, Chume, his assistant, is a messenger who suffers from two serious problems; firstly, he seeks advancement in his career and secondly, he seeks relief from his bad-tempered wife, Amope, who has made his life very unbearable reducing him into a very humiliating state. In another instance, we see the MP bowing to the prophet because he wants to be promoted. In the process, he convinces them that they will soon be able to fulfill these materialistic desires if they are faithful to him. Thus, Chume, the messenger and the likely successor of the prophet, vainly seeks relief from his scolding wife Amope. Amope, Chume’s shrewish wife, is a market woman to whom Jero owes money: the sum of “one pound eight shillings nine pence” (14). She continually harasses him for the money he owes her for at least three months.

The reader here is aware that Chume is Amope’s husband. Brother Jero is Chume’s Boss and the house where Chume brings his wife to lay siege is Jero’s own house; but Chume and his Boss are all ignorant of this. While Brother Jero and Amope are partners in trade and that they have shared a relationship of customer and seller, Amope and Chume are partners in marriage; but the characters themselves are ignorant to this situation. So, Brother Jero, Chume and Amope are unaware of the happenings and circumstances, both present and future, unlike the audience. Dramatic irony is a technique used by Wole Soyinka to show that the characters in the play are ignorant of the true situation, whereas the reader or audience is aware of what is happening in the plot and what will come next. The characters in the plot are sympathized by the reader as they are unaware of the plot. The playwright uses this method to keep the reader engaged in the story and enables him to predict certain circumstances for the characters.

Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*(1964) is the first of his three “Jero” plays.With this play, he brings to limelight topical issues that are integral to modern society which many people do not know for over five scenes in the play.The MP’s lust for social status as used by Soyinka is to lash political leaders in contemporary society. Soyinka’s plays, novels and essays reflect, no doubt, his commitment to social welfare. This has always attracted the ire of the status quos. Soyinka has been imprisoned several times for his criticism of the Nigerian government. From the 1970s, he has lived long periods in exile lecturing the entire world over. Soyinka’s plays range from comedy to tragedy and from political satire to the theatre of the absurd. To put his message of disillusion across, he has successfully combined influences from Western traditions with African myth, legends and folklore, and such techniques as singing and drumming to make his work an original one. Since then, his works have been appraised as a corrective instrument for solving societal problems.

II- Satirical Elements in Wole Soyinka’s Play

For the playwright, man's vices constitute a threat to the culture in which the satirist himself lives, and for that matter, feels obliged to expose those vices for the society's own good on the one hand and for his own on the other, in a way that will allow the ones attacked to modulate a new direction for correction. Satire is, most of the time, presented in a manner which brings

action in a world full of complacent hypocrites. In a word, the purpose of satire is the correction or deterrence of vice, and its method is to attack hypocrisy through the ironic contrast between values and actions.

Thus, in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka treated social satire which is obtainable in contemporary Nigeria with dexterity. He is ridiculing human and institutional follies with the intention of correcting them. As was said earlier on, my task here is to hint at satirical elements or thrusts of Wole Soyinka in the play under consideration. Let us try to enumerate satirical elements which might have inspired the playwright. The first one is religious hypocrisy; and this delineates Soyinka's wit at religious beliefs and institutions. This is going to be analysed through the behavior of Jeroboam's followers whom he called "customers" (20).

"I am glad I got before my customers, I mean worshippers-well, customers if you like. I always get a feeling every morning that I am a shopkeeper waiting for customers..." The regular ones come at definite times. Strange and dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied..." (20)

To Brother Jero, religion is lucrative business acumen, very profit making and the surest way to meet one's material needs. This shows in his use of words like "trade and competition" which are no doubt lexis in the business world. To gain ground for preaching, he has competed with others to set his business in motion. This gives a clear picture of the prophet's real intentions. The playwright, in this instance wants the reader to understand the fact that today some men of God have the same mentality and are not ready to change at all. They hold dearly their own devious religious orientations. Closely linked to religious hypocrisy are the themes of "deceit and subterfuge" which Soyinka treats as part of his satirical thrusts. These constitute second elements featured in the play. The third element is the feigning of or lack of commitment as is shown in the relationship between the characters of Chume, his master and the worshippers. Abnormal profiteering is reflected in the relationship and interaction between Amope and the prophet. The last element which I will discuss is that of conflicts. Conflict in drama is an essential ingredient to the overall happenings in the story. Wole Soyinka succeeds in weaving all the conflicts into a composite whole in the play to give it a special taste.

The conflicts in the play include the one between Jero and the Old prophet, Jero and Amope, Amope and Chume, Amope and the fish seller, the drummer boy and the woman, the woman and Jero and finally Jero and Chume. All these conflicts are considered as single, complete and ordered structure of actions, directed towards intended effects, in which none of the component parts, or incidents, is unnecessary as Aristotle puts it. All the conflicts are "so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any of them will disappoint and dislocate whole". Chume's sudden awareness as the play closes leads to the resolution of all the conflicts in the play; this terminates the plot. In a dramatic irony, the playwright has showed a kind of suspenseful expectation as was said earlier on and the reader/audience foresees the oncoming disaster but the characters do not see.

The principal character in the play, on which my interest is centered, is called Jeroboam. He is pitted against an important opponent; unknowingly one his of servant's wife to whom he owes an amount of money. The relation with her is one of the important conflicts in the play. It should be emphasized that in addition to conflicts between individuals as said below, there is the conflict between the protagonist and fate or curse by his mentor, and against the circumstances that stand between him and his mercantile desires on the one hand, and the goal he stands for

himself on the other. Jero's intrigue in the play is expressed in his desire to keep his followers dissatisfied for his success depends not only on their gullibility but also on their ignorance.

In Wole Soyinka's plays, novels, and poetry, he blends elements of traditional Yoruba folk drama and Western dramatic form to create something new so as to satirize social injustice, immorality, and distorted virtue. His narrative style or technique is based on the African cultural tradition where the artist functions as a "sensitive point" (Mphahele as quoted by Achebe) of his society. Soyinka's works reflect this philosophy and serves as a consciousness-raiser in postcolonial Africa's political, social and economic turmoil and exposes the continent's endless struggle to reconcile both tradition and modernization. The play discusses a certain number of striking experiences which are contrary to the basic ethical viewpoint of Christianity. The essence of satire is criticism; socio-criticism. Thus, an object or a person is criticized because it/he falls short of some standard which the critic deems fit. Inseparable from any definition of satire is its corrective purpose, expressed through a critical mode which ridicules or otherwise attacks those conditions needing reformation in the opinion of the satirist. I believe there is no satire in African literature without this corrective purpose. Soyinka was the first African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature and he has been applauded by commentators for the versatility and power they have observed in his works. It is perhaps by now apparent that almost all of these techniques have one element in common: each provides a way to say two or more things at one time, and to compare, equate, or contrast those things, usually with heavy irony.

Drawing on his observations of the separatist Christian churches of postcolonial Nigeria and mostly on Ijebu folk narratives, and on modern and traditional theatrical conventions, Soyinka constructed a vigorous comedy around the character of a messianic beach prophet. Brother Jero, a kind of trickster figure who sets up a shack on Bar Beach, Lagos, prophesying promising futures in return for money and materialism. Soyinka traces this from the revivalist Christian sects that existed at the time of Nigerian independence. Stylistically separated from his early farces, Soyinka's text relies heavily on classical theatrical devices as a vehicle for his potent sociopolitical satires. The prose in Soyinka's fictional works and essay collections is largely based on his own life and his own personal political convictions.

III-The Observance of the Three Unities

1- The Aristotelian Unities

Wole Soyinka, the playwright wrote *The Trials of Brother Jero* to fit within the conventions of the classical unities; *Aristotelian unities or three unities*. According to Martha Fletcher Bellinger (1927, 61-67) the Aristotelian rules were those relating to the so-called unities of time, place, and action. The unity of time limits the supposed action to the duration, roughly, of a single day; unity of place limits it to one general locality; and the unity of action limits it to a single set of incidents which are related as cause and effect, "having a beginning, a middle, and an end." In other words, the rules of drama derived from a passage in Aristotle's *Poetics*. In their neoclassical form they are as follows:

1. *The unity of action: a play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots.*
2. *The unity of place: a play should cover a single physical space and should not attempt to compress geography, nor should the stage represent more than one place.*
3. *The unity of time: the action in a play should take place over no more than 24 hours*

Any one of the three principles of dramatic structure deriving from Aristotle's *Poetics* by which the action of a play should be limited to a single plot (unity of action), a single location (unity of place), and the events of a single day (unity of time) is discussed in this essay.

Before proceeding, it should be emphasized that drama is literature in play form. It is a form of literature in which actions of other people are copied or dramatized for others to watch or to read. It presents a narrative through dialogue, conversation and action; and effects such as sound, music, lighting, custom and scene. Drama is to be seen and heard and has to follow some principles. Wole Soyinka's play is a successful drama which adheres to the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action as described above. This is based on the assumption that *verisimilitude* requires that the action represented in a play approximate the actual conditions of the staging of the play. Critics of drama impose *the unity of place* in writing drama, that is to say the action of the play must be limited to a single location; the *unity of time*, that is the time which is represented be limited to two or three hours it takes to act the play or at most to a single day of either twelve or twenty- four hours.

Like most Greek plays of ancient times, one important point to note about the plot of *The Trials of Brother Jero* is that, it observes all the three unities—*unity of place*, *unity of time*, and *unity of action*. The entire action of the play takes place at *Bar Beach*, in the city of Lagos which is not far from *Brother Jero's* house. The *entire action* of the play occupies no more than the twenty-four hours which is the maximum duration that match the rules. In the play, the reader's entire attention is focused on a single action. There is singularity of action. The playwright reveals to the reader that only one action takes place at a time on the stage. In this case, the playwright presents at every event Brother Jero and his mentor, the old prophet; Brother Jero and a group of worshippers etc. Even where there seem to be more than one action at a time, for example, Brother Jero and the worshippers, the woman perusing the drummer boy, etc.,. In all these, even where there seem to be more than one action to the reader as is in this case, the action is technically subdued or reduced to miming while the other is active in order to avoid distraction. Thus, as far as the unity of time is concerned, Brother Jero the protagonist of the play declares clearly at the beginning of the play, his intention to let the audience know the ordeals he has had in just one day, a memorable day in his life as a prophet (30).

"I had a premonition this morning that women would be my downfall" (30). This morning alone I have been thrice in conflict with the daughters of discord. (31).

From all the information and speech gathered, the play does not exceed twenty four hours, as had been suggested in Aristotle's *Poetics*. There are no side-plots, or under-plots. Here the observance of unities is an important achievement by the playwright because the unities make *The Trials of Brother Jero* close-knit and produce a great concentration of effect, even though they restrict Soyinka's freedom in many ways.

2-The Action in *The Trials of Brother Jero*: A Drama of Great Tension and Tragic Feeling.

As required by Aristotle, *The Trials* has a beginning, middle, and an end. A beginning is a situation which has definite consequences, though not very obvious causes; middle is a situation with both causes and consequences; and an end in the result of the middle but creates no further situation in its turn. It begins with a complaint by the Old prophet, and the arrival Brother Jero with a command from the God that he is a prophet by inclination and banishing the old prophet from the city.

This beginning is the prologue in which the problem is stated and the way is prepared for the development of the real theme of the play. A feeling of suspense is also created in this opening scene. Then follow into important episodes: Brother Jero joins the fight to acquire land and very soon quarrels with the Old prophet over the acquired land. Both scenes are highly dramatic, especially when the new prophet proves more than a match for the old one. The next episode, more important from the point of view of plot-development, is the arrival of Chume on the scene, a messenger and likely successor of Brother Jero, with his wife on the crossbar of his bicycle. Amope, his wife, realises the house and Chume leaves in a state of great perturbation; while Brother Jero, still ignorant, is still in his house. Jero learns the truth which is unbearably agonizing that this woman is the wife of Brother Chume.

Brother Jero looks through the window and sees Amope. Soon a superstitious attendant-fish seller-comes and she argues violently with her allowing the prophet to escape through the window. All these incidents belong to what has been called *the middle of the play*. It will be noticed that the emotional excitement of the audience rises with each of these scenes and a tension is generated in their minds till the great shock comes with the discovery in the next scene first by Brother Jero that Amope, his creditor and tormentor, is Chume's wife and then Chume himself that his wife's creditor is his own Boss. The tragedy lies in the discovery of the truth and not in the truth itself, and so the feeling of anger and revenge reach their height with the discovery by Chume. The end of the play consists of the scenes in which Chume laments his fate and the fate of his own wife; and the prophets laments the fate of Chume in planning to get rid of him in sending him in an asylum. What strikes the reader/audience most here is the orderly development of the plot. There are no digressions of any kind and nothing irrelevant. Every situation contributes to the furtherance of the plot, even the scene of Chume's confrontation with his Pastor with a cutlass in hand.

2.1. Scenes Leading to the Final Revelation

Then follow two scenes which lead to the final revelation—the scenes with Amope, Chume the messenger, and Brother Jero, the Prophet. This drama of revelation extends over two pages. The excitement increases, rather than diminishes, by being spread out. Chume tries to make light of Jero's relationship to his wife's which has been aroused by the prophet's allegations and questionings. He asks that this woman I see this morning who you so much desire to beat is your wife? (31) "You must take her home tonight... and beat her"(32). The secret has been let out. But the gullible Mp's own experience when he opens his eyes, which he thinks the pastor has gone to heaven to enquire about his ministerial post is evidence of his great gullibility, and produces yet another doubt in the mind of the Mp. However, a little later, the scene with the prophet and his wife brings the greatest possible shock for him, though all of them Chume, brother Jero and Amope, at that stage remains unenlightened. The shock for both the prophet and Chume comes after his questioning of Chume in the scene that follows. The discovery of the truth by all of them is the culminating point of the play and of the excitement it produces.

2.2. Logical and Convincing Sequence of Events

It is evident that everything proceeds in a logical and convincing manner. Nothing is forced; everything happens naturally. The quarrels between Amope and the fish-seller are the coincidence in the play. All the five scenes which I have surveyed produce various feelings in the reader—pity, fear, awe, resentment, and irritation. But the dominant feelings are three—fear of what might happen and what really happens; pity at the sad fate of Jero and Amope; and admiration for the integrity of Chume who seeks vengeance.

2.3. The Peripeteia and the Anagnorisis

Aristotle spoke of peripeteia and anagnorisis. A peripeteia occurs when a course of action intended to produce a certain result actually produces the reverse of it. Thus Chume tries to kill Jero for suspecting him of unholy relations with his wife; but, by knowing that Chume is quite satisfied beating his wife; this produces exactly the opposite result. The *anagnorisis* means the realisation of the truth, the riddance of both Chume and his wife; one for having been fulfilled and the second for her demands for payment and the opening of Chume's eyes on the lies of the prophet, the sudden fading of lightning. This moment comes when, while the prophet is working his wiles on the Mp, Chume appears talking to himself with a cutlass in hand.

2.4. The Moving Last Scene

The final scene of the play is highly moving. The account of Chume's desire to murder the prophet is extremely horrifying; the lamentations of both Chume and the Prophet show the former for a while to be a helpless and pathetic figure, but soon his original gullibility reasserts itself and he insists on having his own way out the predicament. The last scene is very touching and at the same time highly uplifting and productive of the cathartic effect of which Aristotle has spoken.

2.5. Use of Tragic Irony

Another important feature of the construction of the plot of *The Trials* is the use of tragic irony. Tragic irony is to be found almost in every major situation in this play. Thus, when the Prophet discovers that Chume now knows him very well and the exact truth (and so do the audience/reader) and is out to defame and slander him, he decides to counterattack. Thereafter Jero speaks insultingly to himself and to the Mp, the latter not realising that very soon he will be his victim and be reduced to the position of a suppliant. Amope's sarcastic comments on the behaviour of the prophet and about her husband's social status are also full of tragic irony. The use of tragic irony is a device by means of which a dramatist heightens the tragic effect. Soyinka is famous for his use of tragic irony, and this play clearly shows the skill with which he has employed it.

2.6. The Role of the Chorus

The songs of the Chorus may be regarded as representing the reactions of the audience to the play as it unfolds itself. The function of the Chorus was to comment upon the major incidents as they occurred. This exemplified in the Urchin who beats a parting abuse on his drums whenever he is denied alms by both Amope and the young woman who beats the prophet up. In this way, the Chorus not only represented the feelings of the audience but also reinforced them, sometimes providing a kind of guidance to them.

V-Soyinka's Vision: A Blend of the Past, Present and the Future

Wole Soyinka's vision is nowhere better presented than in his plays. Through the usage of songs, drums and dances, he explores in his plays, the adventure of man's metaphysical self and through these symbolically, they reflect man's struggle to vainly comprehend reality. To him, human life is an act of sacrifice and an individual is engaged in an incessant struggle to be absorbed into the cosmic oneness despite the fact that there exists a vast abyss in which human endeavours for transition, often ends.

Wole Soyinka's play is a blend of the past, present and the future. Whenever he writes he keeps the social purpose in mind and tries as much as possible to make his works relevant to the times and uses the past only to clarify the present. The profuse employment of music and dance

suggestively and symbolically represent the intrinsic value of the components and adds new dimensions to the ideas that the dramatist wishes to tell through his plays when staged. Consequently, what emerges is a portrayal of African experience in which he tries to make a successful attempt to apprehend and comprehend the African world in its full complexity; its traditional beliefs and structures, conventions and superstitions, contemporary progression as well as distortions.

His greatest achievement lies in his ability to make the world he creates to look at life through African eyes. He is greatly concerned about the wellbeing of his own community and his works constitute a keen dissection of his own society. To come to this end, he uses drama as a medium of exposition with a powerful weapon called satire. With this, he endeavours to correct human follies through ridicule. His satire is incisive and witty. He also incorporates a traditional myth or ritual to heighten the effects. This is because he is an individualistic and solitary iconoclastic playwright.

With his plays, Soyinka seems to suggest that the artist's voice of vision is found through exile and arduous re-discovery and re-formulation of the ancient values of tradition, but not through the unquestioning acceptance of inherited truths. A truly modern human state, Soyinka seems to suggest, will emerge from the unity of past, present and future in the moment of vision. The tradition should be revitalized through visionary self-discovery and regeneration. Life for man is a series of struggle, adjustments, and conflicts. Soyinka succeeds in portraying this brilliantly with the use of songs, dances and drumbeats. He therefore translates ideas into actions. This form of belief is such that an ideal situation is a new integration which accommodates the past and the traditional culture with a moral perspective. Soyinka is a writer who is endowed with a powerful social vision. Psychological as well as spiritual themes are as important to Soyinka as social ones. In nearly every work that Soyinka has written there is a blending of social and psychological themes.

A perspective reading of all Soyinka's plays proves that his artistic sensibility is suitably shaped by African history and present. In his plays, Soyinka not only fictionally relieves the African reality but also envisions a better social order expecting many progressive minded among his countrymen who can strive for its realization. Soyinka's socio-political vision attains clarity. His traumatic experiences as a victim of his country's military regime because of his firm stand on the gradual violations or suppression of the rights of individuals and his recognition of an individual's right to sovereignty as articulated in his works, have left indelible scars on his psyche. A committed writer, Soyinka feels that Africans should become one and a united force. Basically as a satiric writer, Soyinka exposes the society in breadth and is quite dissatisfied with men of god and men of power-as is evident from his plays. Soyinka exposes snobbery, corruption, bureaucracy and hypocrisy in modern urban life.

VI -Language and Style

The *Trials of Brother Jero* is a story which traces through a typical day the trials of a self styled prophet who acts as an evangelist. Cursed and pursued by his Old mentor, the old prophet, who has raised him in prophetic ways and whose territory he has seized, he displays himself to the audience trying to explain and demonstrate how he manages to live by his wits on the gullibility of his followers. He is besieged by Amope, a woman creditor, who is unfortunately the wife of one of his devoted disciples. He is presented as a cunning beach charlatan diviner and preacher who woo gullible penitents by using Christian superstition for his lonely salvation. To give him a choice place among his competitors in the fight for land namely,

The Brotherhood of Jehu, The Cherubins and the Seraphims, the Sisters of Judgement Day, Havenly Cowboys, The Jehovah's Witnesses... the Jehovah's witnesses... (10).

To Brother Jero, preaching is a trade which, he thinks should be worked out with skill. To come to this end, he then gets himself a velvet-cape and begins to call himself names like “*Velvet-hearted Jeroboam*” and “*Immaculate Jero*”, *Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade*”...(19). All the worshippers that follow him are considered by him as “customers”. Thus, he explains: “*I am glad I got here before any customers-I mean worshippers...I always get the feeling every morning that I am a shop keeper waiting for customers; customers who must be kept dissatisfied and baited with promises*” (20) of material gain. Jero's speeches have mainly mercenary and mercantile attitude toward his followers. He aptly puts the terms of his philosophy in the following terms:

Strange, dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full, they won't come again...everything in fact is planned.(20).

Brother Chume is a case in point: he is a victim of his witty ways. He asks permission from the prophet to beat his arrogant wife “just once”(22); but this he refuses. He lures people to his church by promising them material gains and promotion through his prayers. The playwright keeps the suspense till Brother Jero gets to know that Amope is Chume's wife. Thereafter, he grants him permission to take her home and beat her. Amope keeps on harassing him for the Velvet-Cape he bought on credit from her. For more than three months, he has not been able to pay her back her money. As an excuse, he accuses her for having sold him a cape which is too expensive. For him, had it not been for his church business, he would not have bought it. His refusal to pay her attracts the ire of the woman who uses a dangerous strategy to get her money: she decides to camp at her debtor's house to claim her money. The play delves deep into the problems of Chume, a civil servant and his frustrations who stands in contrast to the modern idealist Brother Jeroboam who is well-endowed with dissuasive equipment, witty methods of exploitation, and whose recipe for people's frustration and psychological needs is to bait them with promises and then keep them dissatisfied in the name of religion through wit.

Brother Jero's lust for women earns him on one or two occasions a severe beating from an angry woman, one of “the daughters of Eve”. When Chume finds out why Brother Jero grants him permission to beat his wife for his own convenience, he becomes totally disappointed; because and then suspects the prophet of being his wife's lover. When Chume appears on scene with a cutlass in hand accusing him of being an “adulterer” or “woman thief” and menacing to finish with him, the prophet who was in prayers with the politician flees for his life; but the gullible back-bencher thinks the prophet has gone to heaven to enquire about the ministerial post he has been baited with.

Wole Soyinka ridicules traditions and norms of post-independence society where it is believed that religious beliefs regulate a believer's actions by promise of reward or by the threat of punishment. But Wole Soyinka satirizes the hypocrisy of “pastors” and “brothers” who are skilful in grasping of contemporary man's psychology who strongly believes that the “imported religion” is an important acumen which can protect them from “material want”, disease, accidents and many other earthly sorrows. The church has become a place where people's psychological needs are exposed (29).

In this play, this belief gives comfort to church members and may well serve to reduce the incidence of nervous breakdown on the part of individuals. This plea is expressed in a Pidgin English. Thus Chume leads the congregation as a result Jero's absence and expresses the ladder expectation set up by the prophet to keep his congregation dissatisfied. This can be exemplified in the speeches of Chume. For example, in one of his speeches he says:

those who are pretty trader today, make them big contractor tomorrow. If we de walka today, give us our own bicycle tomorrow. I say those who dey walka today, give them their own bicycle tomorrow. Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow'' (29).

Pidgin English can be defined as a variation of English language, characterized by multiple syntactic errors. This variation of language is spoken by some Africans and predominantly by the uneducated in urban African societies. This variation, though suffering from syntactic, phonological, morphological and graphological errors because of the speaker's educational background, shows how effective and persuasive this language offers to be in the process of convincing people of different levels of education or social strata. The use of this language was deliberately employed by Soyinka to show the nationality and racial identity of Chume. Having attributed "Pidgin English" to Africans, its usage in the text under review authenticates it as an African literature. In this play, it is too obvious to comprehend that in African societies religion played a more important role than it does today. Soyinka wants us to understand that the twentieth century Christian is steeped in hypocrisy and this is due to an excessive love put in money (or mammonism), the excessive love of the "self", in modern technological devices, knowledge and to the rise of totalitarian governments so as to cope with modern life.

Wole Soyinka's *The Trials Brother Jero* is a modern example of a literary form known as social, political and religious satire. This play blends a critical attitude with humour and wit for the purpose of ridiculing the follies of twentieth century man's political and religious behaviour and his social institutions for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity for a harmonious society. It should be emphasized that such satires have existed in early classical writings ranging from Aristophanes to Horace. The dramatist holds human psychology to ridicule and shows the foolishness of the idea of being promoted (29). Pidgin is used by Chume to serve a purpose. Furthermore, he continues his plea to boost the morals and ease the psychology of worshippers:

I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow. (29)

In this sense, it is worth saying that Wole Soyinka shows that Brother Jero is a charlatan preacher whose burden or "cross" is the "Daughters of Eve" or "Daughters of Discord". The self-proclaimed holyman and profit-minded prophet is presented as a rogue who capitalizes on people with psychological problems. The more he keeps them dissatisfied the more anxious and faithful they become. Chume's desire to beat his wife is a case in point. Wole Soyinka uses "the bearded debtor" (16) as the prophet is called by Amope to ridicule the attitude of some gullible people who easily fall in his traps. The behavior of pastors and their adepts is made fun of so that an adjustment can be made. Religious beliefs probably had their origin in the attempt of early man to explain his environment with his limited life knowledge. *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1988) has proved beyond reasonable sense that modern man has since extended the frontiers of knowledge considerably and this in turn has had some effects on the realm of religion.

The application of scientific knowledge to practical purposes has enabled man to solve many problems posed by his environment, which has all the same increased his pride and self-reliance and made him less dependent on nature. It should be emphasized that the excessive love of materialism and a better condition of living, have enabled man to solve many environmental problems increasing thereby the rejection of the religious *Golden Rule* among many men, who are busy making money and have little or no time for thinking about things pertaining to heaven. "Dishonesty" as is the case of Brother Jero, is nowadays viewed by many people as an important business acumen which enables pastors to amass huge sums of money at the expense of gullible believers. Thus in the Church, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" as is advocated by the Word of God, is not seriously upheld today by some Christians like Brother Jero. Nowadays, as advocated by the Prophet, "it is self first and self last" as can be found in the episode between him and his mentor:

My Master, the same one who brought me up in prophetic ways staked his claim and won a grant of land...I helped him, with a campaign led by six dancing girls from the French territory, all dresses as Jehovah's Witnesses. What my own master did not realize was that I was helping myself. Mind you the beach is hardly worth having these days.(10).

The State itself has become an idol; and there is no officially supported religion and very few people acknowledge religious beliefs. In this context, orthodox religious beliefs and feelings appear to have been transferred to both the State and political leaders. The extent of the protagonist's indoctrination and the author's extensive knowledge of the Bible is shown by the use of several biblical allusions in the play. When Brother Jero, therefore, says "Brother Chume, this woman whom you so desire to beat is your cross-bear it" (24). The prophet's own "cross" is the "*Daughters of Discord*". At least on three occasions, he has suffered from self-control when he meets them. "I have my own cross too, Brother Chume. This morning alone I have been thrice in conflict with the "*Daughters of discord*" (31).

When the protagonist talks about "carrying a cross", he is making allusion to the Holy Bible. In this, what he says is in comparison to what had happened to Jesus Christ with his own cross: from his capturing up to crucifixion. Chume's confrontation with his master with a cutlass in his hand and its aftermath symbolise the prophet's roguery because he is now allied to political power and is just like politicians preparing to get rid of Chume who has become his opponent by sending him to a lunatic asylum. This shows that he can easily eliminate mortals like him for deserting him.

What is interesting about Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* is that he does not state specific moral alternatives to replace the villainy he attacks. He presupposes an educated readership will easily be able to discover the implicit morality without any hint rather than a few ironic ones he features in this play. It is important to notice the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary topical political, economic and religious issues such as gullibility and roguery is very appalling. Soyinka believes that the satirist must love or at least care for mankind to take the trouble to attack and correct man's wickedness, i.e. the behaviour of *Brother Jero*.

This marks the satirist's practical application of Christ's injunction to loving one's enemies (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-28), because genuine concern for another's welfare when it does not affect one personally is one of the basic indications of disinterested love. With all this, *The Trials* does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule; rather it seeks to create a shocking recognition of the presence of false prophets and aims at making exploitation repulsive so that it

will be expunged from the society or the person under attack. In so doing the person or society intended to benefit from the attack recognizes this through laughter or wit. The formula for satire is implicitly constructive, and the satirists themselves often depict themselves as such constructive critics. Most often, satirists like Soyinka attack foibles or failings basic to man's nature which cannot be changed automatically. In cases where the satirist ridicules man because of the necessity for elimination and change, he seeks at all costs, to correct man's view of himself.

One notes the satisfaction and release the young girl experiences in swimming, presumably naked, is contrasted with the systematic frustration employed by Jero to control Chume. The names to which Brother Jero refers to in they play to invoke and explain situations are all pious men from the Bible, Samuel, Jezebel, David etc., who presumably could help him in his struggle against temptation, though he is now not different from David who notoriously was linked to women. These names and their wordings are meant to draw miracles on believers in the next aside by Jero. Ashtoreth and Baal allude to pagan gods considered as demons and denounced in the Bible.

Stylistically unlike his early farces, Soyinka's recent plays rely heavily on classical theatrical devices as a vehicle for his potent socio-political satires. Wole Soyinka; the dramatist enhances the artistic values of his words by adopting an adapted style using songs, dances, mime, drums and music. For him, language is not the only thing relied upon for effective theatre. Thereafter, his drama is a creative mixing of his Yoruba rituals, dramatic techniques, music and dance with the foreign language, English. The rites, rituals, gestures, music and dance are some of the non-verbal techniques Soyinka employs skillfully so as to achieve his dramatic effect. The language of his plays is full of wit and graphic insult and is consequently to be staged rather than be read.

CONCLUSION

This essay on the *Trials of Brother Jero* has discussed the critical nature of one of Wole Soyinka's most popular plays bringing to the fore societal issues. In this the playwright has depicted an unscrupulous preacher, the main character, who is much more, interested in greed than in salvation of his worshippers. The play is a straightforward one about, societal, religious and political corruption in his Nigeria. He has used Christian themes articulated in symbols, and myths to put his message across. His use of "water symbolism" is very impressive. Wole Soyinka satirises false prophets who capitalizes on the gullibility of his loyal followers. I think that critics like Wole Soyinka show that the role he has to play is to raise the consciousness of the people and whip them into revolutionary action. His artistic forms reflect his ideological stand which to a greater stand pushes him to use satire and ridicule as "corrective narrative techniques" to enlighten his society which is suffering from moral depravity. The despair that pervades Soyinka's works, which portray the oppressed as suffering from material want, psychologically and physically, awakens and enhances the playwright's political stand. Wole Soyinka has used a real language of helplessness – pidgin – to translate and express the actions and speeches of the prophet's victims; his characters who, with optimism will look forward to remaking their world.

It should be emphasized that African writers are producing artistic works that show that the history, culture, and civilization of post colonial Africa needs to be reread. To come to this end, these writers apply pathos and emotive power of their works to instigate new oppressors in their societies and to initiate a political and economic reorganization of their society in the interest of the oppressed majority.

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