Review

Soyinka as satirist: A study of The Trials of Brother Jero

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Literary artists use language and the power of words to communicate messages to their audiences or readers. Satire provides these artists one such medium for language use. This paper discusses the African literary giant and Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, as a satirist. Specifically, it examines Soyinka’s use of the tools of satire which are irony, exaggeration and invective in The Trials of Brother Jero, in which he bitterly criticizes religious and socio-political vices, especially in his native Nigerian society. The paper concludes that Soyinka is successful as a satirist with this play largely because of his effective diction whose power provokes laughter in the audience and keeps them “listening” as he bitterly condemns religious charlatanism and other societal cankers and seriously urges correction.

Key words: Religious charlatanism, fake, corruption, phoney prophet, Juvenalian satire.

INTRODUCTION

Satire is a “mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to ridicule and scorn… Its tone may vary from tolerant amusement, as in the verse satires of the Roman poet Horace, to bitter indignation, as in the verse of Juvenal and the prose of Jonathan Swift. Juvenalian satire is the kind of satire that bitterly condemns human vices and folly, in contrast with the milder and more indulgent kind known as “Horatian satire” (Baldick, 2008).

In literature, today, satire refers essentially to a technique of criticizing societal vices through ridicule with a view to urging correction. The views of Johnson, Swift, Dryden and Defoe confirm this idea as these writers define the term in relation to its function. Johnson defines satire as “a poem in which wickedness or folly is censured”. Swift notes that “satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders generally discover everybody’s face but their own…” Dryden says the true goal of satire is “amendment of vices” and Defoe thinks it is a “reformation” (Cuddon, 1982).

It is gathered from the discussion that satire has been a method of social commentary and contains criticism and humour. The main tools by which the satirist effectively produces humour and still launches criticism include irony, exaggeration and invective. As Okleme (2002) observes, irony is the art of saying something without really saying it. It is double-layered with lower and upper levels and usually manifests itself as a contradiction, incongruity or incompatibility. What we are ironical about is the “object of irony” which may be “a person, an attitude, religion, a whole civilization or even life itself”. The “victim of irony” refers to the one who exhibits a kind of “innocence” or “confidential unawareness”. Irony allows ridicule and criticism. Exaggeration allows a magnification of follies in order that they can be seen clearly and condemned while invective or abusive language permits an extension of scornful laughter on what is being attacked.

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This paper posits that, in his five-scene play entitled *The Trials of Brother Jero* (Soyinka, 1964), Soyinka (a winner of the Nobel Prize of Literature), uses satire to criticize the shortcomings of society.

In brief, *The Trials of Brother Jero* is about the protagonist, Brother Jero, a beach prophet who decides to use Christianity to line his pocket. To him, the beach is his "goldfield". He exploits the ignorance of his flock, especially his assistant called Chume, in a most unbelievable manner; for example, Chume is advised – quite suddenly – to beat his own wife, but this advice is given him by Jero only to save Jero the prophet himself from looming trouble at the hands of none but Chume's wife, Amope. What has transpired is that Amope has moved house to strategically pitch tent at the prophet's premises in order to ensure that she settles scores with him for being such a recalcitrant debtor, who has refused to pay for the goods bought from her. Chume never knows this and it is when Jero's identity is revealed as that same debtor of Mrs Chume (Amope) that Jero offers Chume the advice to go and batter her. Jero, the phoney prophet, is wickedly shrewd and so unrepentant that, as the curtain is finally drawn, his mind is set to get the angry Brother Chume incarcerated in a lunatic asylum for a year through the connivance of a powerful man, a Federal back-bencher Member of Parliament (M.P.), who consults the prophet too because he is after a ministerial post.

Soyinka's satire is Juvenalian, that is, bitter, biting invective. With it, the satirist shows contempt for and bitterly condemns corrupt society anywhere, but especially contemporary Africa, with greater emphasis on his native Nigeria as he holds it to ridicule, and launches a scathing attack on two of its major institutions: religion and politics. He launches a diatribe on hypocrisy, selfishness, mischief, rogery, deceit, charlatanism, corruption and other vices that have become so widespread, by exposing harshly those who dabble in them, particularly, under the cloak of religion.

The main focus of this paper is to examine the play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and its major characters (Jero, Chume, Amope, and the M.P.) as well as the church and its worshippers, scene by scene, to bring to the fore how Soyinka effectively uses the tools of satire- dramatic irony, exaggeration and invective- to criticize society and advocate change.

**SCENE ONE**

In Scene One, which serves as introduction to the play, Soyinka prepares us by skilfully giving us a feel of all that is to happen and will constitute his themes and criticism of fake Christian religion. He ridicules and condemns in no uncertain terms Brother Jeroboam (Jero), as a shameless, self-confessed rogue of a "beach divine," who embodies all the evils of fake Christianity and its leadership together with the Old Prophet, Jero's master.

Right from the start of the play, in this scene, Brother Jero introduces himself to us as the audience in a very dramatic way. The stage directions are particularly helpful here as elsewhere in the discussion:

> The stage is completely dark. A spotlight reveals the PROPHET, a heavily but neatly bearded man; his hair is thick and high, but well-combed, unlike that of most prophets. Suave is the word for him. He carries a canvas pouch and divine rod*. He speaks directly and with his accustomed lolliness to the audience (Soyinka, 1964: 9).

In a derogatory self-introduction, Soyinka reveals to the audience the true nature of this man of God through this man's own words and commentary on his own actions. He turns out to be the very opposite of what he is supposed to be. Jero, who claims to be a prophet "by birth and by inclination", is just a quack. To him the ministry is only a "trade": it is just a means to fill his stomach and acquire property, and he will stop at nothing to protect his own selfish interests even if this means hurting others.

When Jero says "...I was born a natural prophet. And I grew to love the trade", the word "trade" becomes ambiguous: does "trade" refer to the prophethood, ordinarily, or it refers to a profit-making business where the accent is on money-consciousness? We realize that Jero takes his prophetic job as a trade, meaning a profit-oriented venture and, therefore, we understand Jero's idea of being a prophet as a money-siphoning activity. This idea of the work of God as a money-making business is reinforced later by Jero's perception of the flock as "customers". Jero even confesses that: "I always get that feeling every morning that I am a shop-keeper waiting for customers" (Soyinka, 1964: 20). With the ambiguity of words in this scene, Soyinka criticizes Jero's materialism.

Without mincing words, Jero tells of how he has cunningly and deceitfully played a role in helping the Old Prophet, his master, to acquire land from the councillors at the beach – literally, the land of milk and honey. He also shows his selfish character by quickly adding that all his efforts are indeed geared at helping himself when he shamefully declares that, "I was helping myself" (Soyinka, 1964: 11). In all this, Soyinka's irony, exaggeration and invective are clear.

First, there is dramatic irony seen in the incongruity between what a man of God is expected to be and what the supposed man of God we have here is. Jero's physical appearance and presentation to the audience in the stage directions as "suave" and "dignified" on the one hand and his own words and role in Christ's ministry on the other hand are at variance. Second, through Soyinka's exaggeration, we observe to what extent Jero reveals himself as a bad religious leader and, therefore, shows
how much of a rogue he is. Finally, we note that there is an undertow of insults against Jero, his master, and their church to the effect that they are all bad for the contradictions they portray in their habits as professed practitioners in the top echelons of the church's hierarchy.

When the play continues, Jero who says "the call of prophecy is in my blood" (Soyinka, 1964:11) also confesses to his weakness with women, and discusses with contempt his master's revengeful curse with women — "the Daughters of Discord", "the Daughters of Eve" (Soyinka, 1964:11). In fact, Jero finds this curse pronounced on him to be nothing new but only a cheap curse since he is already lustful. He thinks his good looks "do the trick" with women but says he is being careful not to risk his calling "with the fickleness of women" so he has "remained single" (Soyinka, 1964:11). However, the audience is able to detect Soyinka's irony even in Jero's tone of speech, which suggests that he has "remained single" only to take advantage of his good looks and give free reign to his lust, for judging from his roguery, if he has been careful at all, it has been just to avoid scandal and thereby save his own face and profits. Jero's sayings show the inconsistency in his character. We see that, as a man of God, he condemns himself by telling us that he is immoral.

The audience is now very much aware of Jero's character as a real wolf in sheep's clothing and is therefore on the lookout for what lies ahead in the play when there is a person like Jero around. Thus, Soyinka is able to create suspense also through this shocking self-revelation by Prophet Brother Jero, who says he is "not at all vain" (Soyinka, 1964:11) but is exactly the opposite (to us as the audience): a totally vain man of God thus revealed through Soyinka's irony, exaggeration and invective. In the ensuing scenes, Jero's actions only go to confirm what he has told us about himself. After all, it is said that "action speaks louder than words". Soyinka is, therefore, able to satirize Jero's (mis) behaviour every bit of the way as the play unfolds. However, he also satirizes the church itself.

Soyinka ridicules the church by making Jero tell us about it from the very beginning. From all indications, its characteristics and activities reveal it as a false spiritual church with its multitudinous nature, places of operation and varied claims to spiritual power and abilities. The use of the word "many", repeated eight times, leads us to Soyinka's exaggeration and goes a long way to reinforce the proliferation and ubiquity of the false churches. Thus Soyinka is able to show clearly on the stage rather than only tell the audience how the false churches have invaded the fabric of the Nigerian society with their evil activities. As we learn from Jero, they are,

many in the streets, many in their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, many curing the deaf and many raising the dead (Soyinka, 1964:9).

The enumeration of the activities of the false churches and their claims as to what miracles they can perform, for example, healing and raising the dead, and also the kind of leader-prophets they have, as we have noted of Jero, are all as ironic as they are hyperbolic. The effect of Soyinka's irony and exaggeration is that it throws into relief the seriousness of the problem of quack prophets and churches and the urgency of a solution to it. Soyinka goes on to mock also the very names of the churches he is attacking, which names are not only funny but also give them away as suspects, heightening their hypocritical outlook.

At one level, when we consider "cowboys", in a name like "the Heavenly Cowboys" for a church, Soyinka's irony, exaggeration and invective hit us all at once. The irony in the expression is extended by laying "Heavenly" and "cowboys" side by side to create an oxymoron with the meaning "Heavenly dishonest and irresponsible people". This name, the "Heavenly Cowboys", which sounds exaggerated and insulting, is an apt description of the rogue churches and the roguery that goes on in them.

At another level, however, we have mismomers in the sense that the other church names, "The Brotherhood of Jehu", "The Cherubims and Seraphims" and "The Sisters of Judgment Day", do not reflect the expected godliness. Contrary to the activities of Prophet Jehu, who wiped away evil from Israel (see 2 Kings 9, 10: 1-36 in Stamps and Adams eds., 1992), and those of the angels, Cherubim and Seraphim, who are sweet and innocent and do only the will of God, the activities of these churches rather spread evil among God's people showing their ugliness, ungodliness and lack of genuineness. Their works are therefore incongruous with the beautiful names, which adorn them only superficially. Even the Sisters of Judgment Day could not be heavenly-minded people meditating on the Great Day. Rather, considering that "sisters" are females and are described as the "shakers of bosoms" in the church and, therefore, the main cause of immorality in the House of God, Soyinka is being ironic and insulting, warning them as to the terrible fate that awaits them on That Day.

When next Jero gives us a glimpse of what is inside the churches, we note who the worshippers also are. Again, Soyinka descends on them with his irony, exaggeration and invective. He portrays them as foul while magnifying their foul nature in order to make his satiric point about their double standards and the danger their churches pose to society. We observe that the false churches are filled with carnal, "Nicodemus" Christians; impersonators, fornicators and adulterers. They are of varied socio-economic backgrounds as there are both the poor (like Chume) and the rich (like the M.P.). The rich are the ones whom Jero prefers to call "our wealthier patrons" and are symbolized by the television which, the worshippers, being worldly, stay at home to watch instead of attending
church services. That some of the wealthier patrons would go for consultations at the prophet's at odd times when they would not be easily recognized shows that they know it is wrong to visit such places, and Soyinka condemns this attitude of wilful "sinning" as hypocrisy.

Apart from being lovers of the television, the worshippers are also said to "prefer High Life music to the rhythm of celestial hymns" (Soyinka, 1964:11). This is an ironic comment with sexual undertones with regard to the movement and shaking involved in dancing to highlife music as opposed to the stillness involved in singing hymns. Thus, while extending the worshippers' carnality and lack of heaven-mindedness, the reference to High Life music which is associated with Ghana, suggests that Soyinka is extending his criticism beyond the borders of Nigeria to neighbouring Ghana also. This confirms the observation that the satirist does not confine his condemnation of the follies of society to his homeland, Nigeria, alone but rotten society anywhere, especially contemporary Africa.

Added to what has been previously noted of the fake prophet-leaders, their fake churches and their fake worshippers, we have Soyinka still denouncing them by pouring scorn on these leaders. Their pugnacious character is revealed in how they violently compete for "land" and "converts". This is reflected in Soyinka's rather exaggerated use of the word "warfare" and the fact that it takes the Town Council to settle "the territorial warfare of the prophets once and for all" (Soyinka, 1964:9).

The incessant quarrels among the leader-prophets are symbolized by the Old Prophet, the master, who rudely cuts Jero's speech and starts an argument, and Jero who is so disrespectful to him. Both have lost the way as leaders of the church and so if Jero is bad, then, the audience can conclude that the one who brought Jero up "in prophetic ways", is worse. Worst, it could be surmised that Chume, Jero's assistant, whom Jero describes variously as "apprentice of God", "appointed to follow my footsteps" and "the one on whom my mantle should fall", will become the worst and most dangerous of the three as prophets. Therefore, in an abusive manner, Soyinka points out that from the past (symbolized by the Old Prophet) to the present time (symbolised by Jero) and even the future (symbolised by Chume), the false prophets have not changed: it is still the rogue prophets as leaders of their rogue churches, and so we as the audience have got to be careful of them.

From the discussion so far, we can say that, to Soyinka, there is a lack of seriousness about Jero's church, its leader and its worshippers, and their ways are deceitful. It is therefore a dangerous church and Soyinka strongly criticizes its shortcomings as he points these out through his ironic descriptions with words and expressions that sometimes lapse into puns in this scene. For example, Soyinka criticizes the tricks of Jero and his master as well as their kind using the word "ways" (Soyinka, 1964:10). Thus the expression, "prophetic ways" comes to mean not just ordinary procedures or processes, but prophetic schemes, tricks or deceits. Therefore, Soyinka gives us an idea that Jero was trained in "prophetic tricks" and so "ways" becomes a pun and an ambiguity.

### SCENE TWO

We find in Scene Two, Chume and his nagging wife, Amope, involved in a hilarious confrontation. The hard and serious Amope has come to sit at the doorstep of her recalcitrant debtor and is bent on taking her money from that clever debtor who is none but the prophet, Jero.

In this scene, we are treated to a comic but sad encounter between Chume and his wife, Amope, and are far away from Jero and the church, yet Jero is present since he is the main cause of the argument between the couple although Soyinka intentionally hides Jero's identity until later. Thus even in Scene Two, Jero's crooked nature still manifests, but the suspense is created until his final discovery heightens his crookedness even more forcefully. When finally Soyinka unmasks the real Brother Jero, the false prophet's nakedness becomes total.

However, we also realize that Soyinka intentionally continues to blacken Brother Jero so much that the prophet becomes an appalling and detestable character as a result of the satirist's use of unrelenting criticism that merges with exaggeration. Again, the effect is to underscore what one would call the "nonsense in Christianity" - to borrow the words of Konotey-Ahulu (2006) - by the ungodly Prophet in the work of God, something which Soyinka is persistently condemning.

The scene is comic also because of Chume's physical appearance and the situation in which he finds himself with his wife and then his bicycle, which is his only treasured possession. In fact, everything about his circumstances is funny. We see Chume, the pigmy-sized man whose feet hardly touch the pedals of this bicycle riding the wife, who has saddled the bicycle with all the belongings she will need to stay in front of the debtor's house for one full week. These items include even a mat and a kitchen stool, both of which are tied around the same bike. The total picture, clearly exaggerated by Soyinka, provokes laughter and serves as comic relief to the distressing information about Prophet Brother Jero and God's church.

What is ironic, really, is that Chume, who rides the wife to the new "abode", does not know the identity of the wife's debtor and occupant of that "house". Chume, therefore, becomes the victim of irony here and Soyinka exploits this to move his play forward as Chume never suspects it could be and is, indeed, his own master. This is because he believes Jero is very holy. This sort of mistaken identity is pursued by Soyinka such that, later in the play, Chume even divulges the wife's plan to his master, Jero, as he complains to him about Amope's
constant nagging.

Also, Scene Two provides perfect examples of Soyinka’s use of invective and exaggeration. He skillfully alternates three incidents in which we witness Amope’s particularly sharp tongue for which the husband really knows her and which we as the audience are about to discover. First is the confrontation between Amope and the husband, second is the one between Amope and the trader (Fish-seller) and third is the one between Amope and Jero. In the first confrontation, the “hot-mouthed” Amope slights the husband by referring to her own poor condition as his wife and to his mean job as a Chief Messenger. Here is part of the couple’s exchange:

AMOPE: Just leave the bag here. I can use it for a pillow.
CHUME: Is there anything else before I go?
AMOPE: I know it’s not much, but I would like something to sleep on. There are women who sleep in beds of course, but I am not complaining …. They are just lucky with their husbands, and we can’t all be lucky, I suppose.
CHUME: You’ve got a bed at home. He unties the mat which is wound round the cross-bar.
AMOPE: And so I am to leave my work undone. My trade is to suffer because I have a bed at home? Thank God I am not the kind of woman who…
CHUME: I am nearly late for work.
AMOPE: I know you can’t wait to get away. You only use your work as an excuse. A Chief Messenger in the Local Government Office – do you call that work? Your old school friends are now Ministers, riding in long cars…
Chume gets on his bike and flees. Amope shouts after him craning her neck in his direction.
AMOPE: … He doesn’t realize it is all for his own good. He’s no worse than other men, but he won’t make the effort to become something in life. A Chief Messenger. Am I to go into my grave as the wife of a Chief Messenger? (Soyinka, 1964:14-15)

In the confrontation between Amope and the trader, we notice Soyinka’s use of invective. Amope uses insulting words like “cross-eyed wretch”, “pauper that you are” and “your miserable fish” while the trader also uses insulting expressions such as “your cursed fingers”, “Carry the burden of your crimes and take your beggar’s rags out of my sight”, “your flatulent belly” and “you barren sinner” (Soyinka, 1964:17). We observe how foul-mouthed these women can be, and laugh as to how the trader, after all the insults she hurls at Amope, who we thought had finally met her match, disappears later. This encounter also provides comic relief.

In the confrontation between Amope and Jero, Amope throws away all respect for the man of God as she cheekily dialogues with Jero. She intimidates Jero when she confronts him at his first attempt to escape. Jero’s attempt to be smart here does not work at all, as the following dialogue shows, and he is belittled before a “mere” woman, something too despicable for an African man:

AMOPE: (without looking back). Where do you think you’re going?
BROTHER JERO practically flings himself back into the house.
AMOPE: One pound, eight shillings and nine pence for three months. And he calls himself a man of God. (She puts the notebook away, unwraps the brazier and proceeds to light it preparatory to getting breakfast. The door opens another foot).
JERO (coughs). My … my dear sister in Christ…
AMOPE: I hope you slept well, Brother Jero…
JERO: Yes, thanks be to God. (Hems and coughs) I – er – I hope you have not come to stand in the way of Christ and his work.
AMOPE: If Christ does not stand in the way of me and my work.
JERO: Beware of pride, sister. That was a sinful way to talk.
AMOPE: Listen. You bearded debtor. You owe me one pound, eight and nine for three months. You promised you would pay me three months ago, but of course, you have been too busy doing the work of God. Well, let me tell you that you are not going anywhere until you do a bit of my own work (Soyinka, 1964:15-16).

From the dialogue, Jero’s bad attitude is observed to be what has earned him and his profession disrespect and we quickly see, again, his hypocrisy in blaming others as the bad nuts. Jero ought to remove “the plank” in his eye first to be able to see and remove “the speck” in others’ eyes (see Matthew 7:5 in Stamps and Adams eds., 1992), and it is through Soyinka’s ironic treatment of him that this becomes clear. Indeed, when during the encounter with the fish seller Jero escapes through a window, the prophet spells his total disgrace as Amope shouts obscenities after him with: “Help! Help! You bearded rogue”, “a thief of a prophet” and you “call yourself a man of God”, and threatens to deal terribly with him (Soyinka, 1964:17).

Through these confrontations and trading of insults, Soyinka manages to build up Amope’s anger and strengthen her decision to teach Jero a lesson, and this enables the play to progress in a provocative way. In fact, Amope nags too much and so she is also portrayed as a disrespectful hypocrite. We feel pity for Chume, but we feel disgust for Jero because he is the root cause of unrest in the home of his own church members. How ironical!

Even though we do not side with Amope’s insulting habit, we admire her industry and desire to succeed.
Above all, we admire her refusal to be cowed before a man and an opportunistic Christian leader at that. Here, she is an individual because she is different from the many African women that are only abused, first by men, and second, in the “Prophet Jero” churches. Thus, through his use of irony, exaggeration and invective, Soyinka gives us a different African woman, who is enlightened, knows what she is about, and cannot be easily deceived.

With the discovery of Jero’s true nature and his pretences, one would think that the play has come to an end but no. The skilful director and actor that he is, Soyinka is able to manipulate the stage and the protagonist’s character, so that the play continues until its intended conclusion and audience interest is also sustained. The satirist does this by making Jero continue with untoward behaviour for a man of God, muddying himself in sin. “The threat of unmasking sustains the play and once Chume discovers the true nature of his master the whole structure threatens to collapse” but “Soyinka saves the knaves in order to make the play’s final satirical point” (Jones, 1978:55).

From the daring confrontation by Amope and Jero’s own humiliating escape from her, in the most embarrassing and unconventional manner, we see that, for once, Brother Jero is shaken even if only “a bit”. Yet he does not change. In this very comic scene, Soyinka uses irony as evidenced in the discrepancy between what the audience knows Brother Jero to be and the mask of holiness which he wears for the benefit of his gullible worshippers whom, in his business parlance, he will later refer to as “customers” (Soyinka, 1964:20).

SCENE THREE

In Scene Three, we learn more about Jero, his church and the worshippers, including Chume. The stage directions at the beginning of the scene show Jero’s physical appearance. He is dressed in white – “flowing gown and a velvet cape”, and even wields a “divine rod in one hand and caressing the velvet cape with the other hand” (Soyinka, 1964:19). The whiteness of Jero’s robes and the velvet cape can be said to symbolize purity and holiness. We also see the “accoutrements” of his trade – rosary, cross, bottles for “holy water” and others, all pointing to holiness. However, considering the many weaknesses of Prophet Jero, his white clothes look too stained and he becomes very dirty or “blackened”. So, Soyinka, who is still condemning Jero’s roguery and hypocrisy, makes the meaning of the colour “white” black thereby creating an oxymoron in the idea of “blackened white” clothes. This becomes an insult since “blackened” in this sense refers to the stained or tainted nature of Brother Jero. Moreover, when Jero begins to speak – in his long soliloquy at the beginning of the scene - he first hints at his nasty experience with his creditor, Amope, in Scene Two and tries to justify himself while blaming and even cursing the woman. He also thinks of ways to distinguish himself from the other prophets whom he calls “the scum who degrade the calling of the prophet” and further declares them as “charlatans” (Soyinka, 1964:19). So he “dreams” of names that will depict him as sacrosanct and, thus, holier than his colleagues, especially before his members, who he says: “…will look at my velvet cape and they will think of my goodness. Inevitably, they must begin to call me… The velvet-hearted Jeroboam” (p. 19).

When he “straightens himself” as the stage directions say, he adds other titles like “Immaculate Jero and Articulate Hero of Christ’s Crusade” (Soyinka, 1964:19).

We note that his explanations do not help but rather betray him, and he ends up condemning himself as in Scene One. The audience observes Jero’s ingratitude as long as he can blame Amope. After all, the woman was kind enough to give the white gown and velvet cape to Prophet Jero on credit. Jero confesses to us that, when he “bought the goods off her”, “[s]he did not even ask any questions”. Jero says further that his “calling” alone as a prophet “was enough to guarantee payment” (Soyinka, 1964:19). This means that Amope showed him great respect and consideration as a man of God and that, it is Jero’s own abuse of the privilege that spelled the embarrassment.

Thus, we do not fail to observe Soyinka’s irony, invective and exaggeration in Jero’s self-condemning confession. While the irony underlines the discrepancy between Jero’s words and what he really is, it also exposes him as one of those very prophets that he hypocritically accuses in Scene One as “having turned the profession into a thing of ridicule” (Soyinka, 1964:11) while he pretends to be innocent. In fact, even though he has the effrontery to once again point an accusing finger at others in the present scene, and even attempts to be “distinctive” with the holier-than-thou attitude, the audience is not perturbed at all about perceiving him rather as the “scum of the trade” and a “charlatan”. The effect of the irony is that it highlights Jero’s culpability and compels the audience to regard him as probably the worst of all the prophets he has been blaming. Therefore, Soyinka shatters Jero’s self-righteousness.

But the most ridiculous and insulting fact is that the very velvet cape Amope sells to Jero on credit, which Jero has still not paid for is the same cape with which Jero wants to distinguish himself from the other prophets and also seek a new face and name from his members as “he that is holy”, as if clothes on their own simply make one pure and holy. We observe him saying:

I have set my heart after a particular name
….You’ve got to have a name that appeals to the imagination. Must catch the imagination of the crowd. Yes, one must move with the times. Lack of colour gets one nowhere, even in the prophet’s business (Soyinka, 1964:19).
From the quotation, we can see that Jero wants and has "colour" which is his resplendent, pure white and holy velvet, yet his colour is no colour at all to the audience since it is tainted ("blackened"), and so leads him nowhere in his prophetic business. Therefore, as previously noted, Jero's (im)purity and (un)holiness are not helped at all by all this whiteness and velvety. In all, we can conclude that, although Prophet Jero wears white and velvet, symbol of purity and holiness, carries a rosary and a rod after Moses, and blasphemously gives himself beautiful titles, he is still as dirty as his master, members, church and colleagues. His attempts at purity and holiness are, ironically, still null and void, for they are only superficial and even attract insults.

Further, we observe that the rhyming in the titles "Immaculate Jero" and "Articulate Hero" adds to the humour in that scene. Interestingly, Jero's "appellations" remind us of Soyinka the poet. "Immaculate" and "Articulate" go together while "Jero" and "Hero" also match. The number of syllables in both parts of the titles also match, being 4-2, 4-2. This provides a harmony which is musical and entertaining, but Jero's rougery lies heavily beneath the entertainment and harmony. There is only hypocrisy and discord about him: he is a real Jeroboam. This observation is in itself ironic and the effect, together with Soyinka's "linguistic gymnastics" and poetry is that, it heightens the criticism he is embarking on against charlatanism and counterfeit Christianity, especially among its leaders.

Also in Scene Three, Jero tells us that Chume is his most "dependable" adherent and assistant. But we note, once again, Jero's cunning ways even in his relationship with his own assistant. Chume has been complaining to the prophet about the constant scolding and nagging of his wife with a view to seeking the "holy" man's permission to solve the problem once and for all by giving her "Just one sound beating" in order to save him "from madness" (Soyinka, 1964:22). But it is ironic that, all along, Jero has strongly exhorted and restrained Chume from beating her. First, because it is just part of his plan to keep his flock, "the customers" and this shows his selfishness. As Jero blatantly admits:

... I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full they won't come again. Like my good apprentice, Brother Chume. He wants to beat his wife, but I won't let him. If I do, he will become contented and then that's one of my flocks gone forever. As long as he doesn't beat her, he comes here feeling helpless... (Soyinka, 1964:20).

Second, Jero is unaware that the creditor tormenting his life is, in fact, Chume's wife, the very woman he has been preventing Chume from beating. The irony, therefore, stems from the lack of knowledge about the woman's identity or the mistaken identity that she is someone else.

Therefore knowing the satisfaction beating of the wife will bring to Chume's embittered soul and cause him to lose his faithful adherent, Jero, in his hypocrisy, has been preventing Chume from that action. He even tries to help Chume with prayers for strength in order not to be disobedient to God, and to be able to carry "well" that "cross" which, in Jero's own words to Chume, is "the good woman whom God has chosen to be your wife, to be your cross in your period of trial" (Soyinka, 1964:25).

The timing of this prayer to strengthen Chume is also ironic coming after Jero has offered one for himself and asked Chume to help him with more prayers to be able to stand against "this one weakness" – being the Daughters of Eve. He surely needs this prayer because, while soliloquizing about his nasty experience with Amope, a daughter of Eve who can make a "whole" prophet escape through a window, Jero's eyes lustfully survey "all over" another daughter of Eve who happens to be an almost naked young woman who, usually scantily-dressed, passes by Jero's place to the beach to swim. Although Jero refers to this lady as a "Dirty-looking thing" (Soyinka, 1964:19), we immediately realize that he means the opposite and his moral looseness hits us once again.

The case of a sinner praying for a sinner as we find Chume and his prophet doing in this scene is the height of Soyinka's cynicism as he prolongs his condemnation of the hypocrisy of Jero in particular.

In these episodes also, Soyinka's use of inventive comes into play once more in Jero's ridiculous prayer to cleanse Chume's sinful mind, which is only bent on beating his wife. Jero invariably insults Chume by condemning him spiritually. Jero uses words and expressions such as Apostle, Traitor, Sinner, Hardener of heart, harbouer of Ashtoreth, Protector of Baal ... and Petrifier of the soul. It is interesting to note how hilariously the terms of abuse Jero uses for Chume sound in themselves. Even their rhyme scheme and parallel structure as well as the manner in which they punctuate Chume's stupid repetition of his wish to beat "am", "Just once, small small", are all very funny. Indeed, Chume looks so funny himself, particularly with the accompaniment of his "broken English", which provides a sort of comic relief. But we observe again that the derogatory terms, which Jero uses for Chume describe Jero himself better. Even his own name, Jero - Jeroboam in full - portrays him rather as “Protector of Baal,” and so Soyinka ridicules and exposes Jero's hypocrisy once more in this scene.

In this same prayer we also see how Chume trusts the deceptive Jero who gives him the impression that he is the reason behind any success in Chume's life: past, present and future. For example, he trusts Jero who deceives him into thinking that he has become a Chief Messenger by dint of his miracle and is set to become a Chief Clerk, "giving orders", "with a telephone and a table bell for calling the messenger" (Soyinka, 1964:23).

Despite the triviality and meanness of what is prophesied as prosperity for him, we find Chume trusting in
the abilities of Jero. Also, we note how he is so engrossed in a prayer in which he is repeating, vehemently, unrealistic demands for better life, which are unlikely to get to him. This is when at the church, he is forced to take over from Jero and continue with blessing of the bottles he has just filled with water from the sea (to become holy water) and minister to a woman penitent who needs ministration. Chume takes over Jero’s duty because Jero neglects his own “duty” just to pursue a woman, whose thighs are exposed, and he returns with a bruised face having been beaten by this woman, who is as tough as Amope, and will not tolerate an unholy prophet. We observe that, in his confusion, Chume, in what turns out to be a prayer, pours his heart out to God while ordering Him to grant his desires, by providing almost instantly his own needs and those of the flock, who enthusiastically respond “Amen, Amen” to the repetitive “big big” requests:

...Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Make you no forget those of us who dey struggle daily.

Then Chume’s pattern becomes:

Sweep street today? – Own big office tomorrow.
Walka today? – Own bicycle
Tomorrow.

And finally changes to:

Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow.
The stage direction is that: The enthusiasm of the response becomes, at this point, quite overpowering.
I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow (Soyinka, 1964: 29).

Now when Jero gets to know the identity of his creditor, Amope, to be Chume’s wife, and the prophet instantly gives the go-ahead to Chume to go and beat the wife “very well”, the situation becomes dramatically ironic because the audience knows why Jero is recommending the beating of Amope this time around, but Chume does not know yet. The victim of irony is therefore Chume, who is ignorant about, or “confidentially unaware of”, what is happening exactly. Like Jero, his ignorance is the result of lack of knowledge as to the identity of the wife’s debtor as none but Jero and, indeed, the cause of nearly all his woes. The identity problem becomes one way Soyinka creates irony in this scene to point out how unsuspecting and gullible Chume is and how wicked Jero is. In fact, it could be inferred that Chume’s naivety and gullibility are what lead Jero to assert that Chume is his most “dependable” adherent. “Dependable” then loses its positive connotation to a negative one, becoming an insult!

Here again, the scene shows that Jero’s selfishness is backed by clever action, for it is when Jero is going into one of his usual admonitions against wife-battery that Chume drops the hint which reveals the identity of the woman he owes as Amope and Chume’s own wife. His supposedly holy action here is diametrically opposed to the real reason for this action he has taken. Also, his reference to Amope as a good wife from God Himself for Chume, and the prayers to strengthen Chume against beating the wife are so soon forgotten. They are rather replaced with a command from the same man of God to beat her. Therefore, we detect an irony in these incidents whose effect is to expose Jero’s roguery still. With his pretence amplified, the audience disdains Jero, but he is not remorseful at all for seeking vicarious revenge against Amope. So, here again Soyinka attacks Jero’s wickedness also.

However, it can be seen that it is the satirist who, in seeking to add to Jero’s evil character and show it as very repugnant, makes him this recalcitrant. He exaggerates Jero’s faults so much that the Prophet finds it almost impossible to change, and would rather go to the extent of seeking revenge against her, thereby shocking the audience the more with his hardened criminality that is so unbecoming of a man of God. Instead of being remorseful about hurting her feelings, he rather decides to also “teach her a lesson” and that is why he plans to get Chume to beat her this time around. This discovery is funny but, through it, Soyinka exposes and deepens the villainy of Brother Jero and reinforces the fact that he is a very dishonest person, playfully mischievous, a scoundrel – a veritable rogue!

That Jero can turn around so swiftly to suggest the beating of Amope whom he the prophet has rather wronged shows how desperately cruel he can be and how much of a social misfit he is, and this is exactly what Soyinka criticizes. Brother Jero, who should be the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5: 13-14 in Stamps and Adams eds., 1992) and impact positively on society as a Minister of the Gospel of Christ, is the opposite having become now the “pepper and darkness” that inflict pain and sorrow on society. In fact, Soyinka the satirist condemns him beyond redemption through the use of the “trinity” of irony, exaggeration and invective.

The effect of the exaggeration and the invective is that it lays bare Jero’s satanic ways while magnifying his faults. More importantly, it hits the conscience of the “insane” in society. So, through the medium of drama, Soyinka is able to attack crooks such as Brother Jero, who are also in the majority in the audience (watching the play), and he is also able to appeal to the consciences of such rogues to change. The fact is that it is bad to be so cruel to others while pretending to profess Christianity. Worse is when the unfortunate victims have been good and loyal as Amope and Chume have been to Jero.
Concerning the church and the worshippers, we now observe in this scene more of their characteristics: they offer vain repetitions for prayers, they use holy water, which is nothing but water from the sea collected into bottles and blessed by people as sinful as their prophet, Jero, and they have absurd wishes which open them up for false prophecies and duping by the fake prophet, Jero, irrespective of their status in society. Soyinka condemns their hypocrisy once again by making the rogue tell some of his prophecies to the members as well as expose his insincerity all along. When the worshippers start to arrive, Jero tells us that they follow their usual order and he proceeds to confess his prophetic "ways". According to him:

This one here who always comes earliest, I have prophesied that he will be made a Chief in his hometown. That is a very safe prophecy. As safe as our most popular prophecy, that a man will live to be eighty. If it doesn’t come true … that man doesn’t find out until he is on the other side. So everybody is quite happy. One of my most faithful adherents, unfortunately, he can only be present at weekends – firmly believes that he is going to be the first Prime Minister of the new Mid-North-East State when it is created. That was a risky prophecy of mine, but I badly needed more worshippers at that time. (He looks at his watch.) The next one to arrive is my most faithful penitent. She wants children, so she is quite a sad case. Or you would think so… (Soyinka, 1964:25).

From Jero’s own words quoted above, he applies his “plans” of telling what the people want to hear. Indeed, early in Scene Three, the prophet says to the audience that “Everything is, in fact, planned” (Soyinka, 1964:20). But it is in these plans that we find the satirist exposing Jero as a cheat and insulting the penitents as foolish, vulnerable and gullible beyond measure. In the wishes of the penitents, Soyinka shows the varied reasons for the which the various adherents go to consult the prophet. The desires are unrealistic, but while some are frivolous and provoke laughter, others are genuine worries, like the desire for childbirth for an African, especially the married African woman, which must in all seriousness, probably be tackled in a more scientific manner than being handled by prophets such as the quack Brother Jero.

The case of the barren woman in Jero’s church then becomes a different story altogether and a pathetic one which, even the callous Jero can describe as “sad” (Soyinka, 1964:25). This observation is clearly shown in Soyinka’s exaggeration of her commitment confirmed by Prophet Jero, who remarks that she is the most faithful penitent in his congregation and that she has been the only one to note that Jero’s mind is not on the service. Her high expectations underlie her seriousness and the attention she devotes to the services and prophecies of the church which, sadly, are fake.

The irony in her situation is that she seems to be more serious than the prophet-cum-church leader himself, who can even afford to disregard his duty. As we identify with her, we are careful to observe that if the wicked Jero is able to feel for her and identify with her plight, then this attests to the delicate nature of her situation, how vulnerable she can be and, more importantly, how dange-

ously she can be manipulated by the duping prophet(s). Thus Soyinka shows in this woman’s situation, the reality of the problem of barren women consulting fake prophets for “breakthrough” as far as child-bearing is concerned. There is therefore an urgent need to find a solution to the phenomenon. At the same time, however, Soyinka continues to ridicule the charlatan prophets, whom he denounces as opportunists.

Even though the worshippers in the false churches are seen to be after their own personal interests, we as the audience observe that, ironically, the congregation still sings the hymn: “I will follow Jesus” amidst clapping of hands and dancing just for sheer spiritual excitement which, the satirist rather contemptuously describes as a “frenzy” or “paroxysm” – or even near-madness amounting to sheer hypocrisy. Even Jero himself sees all these as insincere and, once, he derogatorily refers to Chume’s prayer as “animal jabber” commenting that, “I wonder what is the matter with him… Only Brother Chume revert to that animal jabber when he gets his spiritual excitement” (Soyinka, 1964:22). Therefore, in Scene Three also, we would notice that Soyinka extends his criticism of the main character, the false prophet Brother Jero, together with his church for their sins, especially their double standards, and he uses not only irony but also insults and exaggeration.

SCENE FOUR

When the play progresses to Scene Four, Soyinka is still satiric and uses a mixture of irony, exaggeration and inventive or abusive language (to push his condemnation of religious charlatanism, corruption and other social vices, especially among leaders such as Jero).

The stage directions say this scene is in front of Prophet Jero the debtor’s home as in Scene Two. We observe that with Jero’s “permission” to beat the wife, there is a switch in Chume’s mood and he becomes more powerful. The negative influence the prophet wields over him is, therefore, clear, and it becomes ironical that Chume, who is a man like Jero does not use his mind but allows himself to be fooled so easily. Ever ready to do the work of the one who has sent him by taking his wife, Amope, back home and beating her, Chume decides to be harsh and confrontational now. Quite unusually, he talks back in response to the naggings of the wife, who will not hear of the husband’s call to return home, surprised at his
strange, new attitude. Soyinka exaggerates the behaviour of the new, powerful Chume using the word “imperiously” (Soyinka, 1964:35).

The scene is pure comedy as Chume packs her items - mat and all – and ties them onto his bicycle while trying to bundle the unwilling Amope next onto the machine. The stage directions as to how Chume, out of anger, frantically handles the tying of the mat, heighten the comedy in this scene. Not only does Soyinka exaggerate the boisy behaviour of the new, powerful Chume using the word “imperiously” but also he describes Chume’s action of tying the simple mat to his bicycle in hyperbolic terms such as “viciously tying up the mat” and “[p]ractically strangling the mat”. When Amope becomes saucy, Chume reminds her that she is “talking to a man” and commands her to hurry and “pack up” because they are “going home” (Soyinka, 1964:33). In their humorous dialogue in which, again, Soyinka uses invective, Chume, while he is all along tying “the mat round the cross-bar” of his bicycle, is being provocative and saying:

“Hurry, I have certain work to do when I get home and I don’t want you delaying me.”; “You’d better be ready soon.”; “Shut your big mouth! I said shut your big mouth.”; “Shut your big mouth before I shut it for you.”

Continuing, Chume threatens her with:

“... you’d better start to watch your step from now on. My period of abstinence is over. My cross has been lifted off my shoulders by the prophet” (while he is viciously tying up the mat). My period of trial is over (as he is [p]ractically strangling the mat). “If you so much as open your mouth now ….” (he “[g]ives a further twist to the string” and (says) imperiously) Get on the bike... (Soyinka, 1964:33-35).

Amope asks and dares him to “kill” her first because until she gets her money, she is “not budging from here” (Soyinka, 1964:34).

It is also comic and ironic that, as the quarrel gets intense between the confused couple, Jero hides and observes them, “crossing himself” at one point to signify his thanks to God for his “deliverance” from Amope, and also for suggesting “sweet revenge”, as it were, for Amope’s impending predicament. It would be observed that, though it is sad that the couple should suffer so, their suffering can be traced right to the doorstep of the prophet, thereby exposing Jero’s villainy even the more.

When Chume talks of a certain work he has to do, his “certain work” is an irony which results in a pun and an ambiguity to the audience. There is a play upon the word “certain” which has the double meaning of “what is yet unknown” and “what is very much known or sure”. Chume has an imminent work, which we do not know of yet, yet we know this work very well. His sure work refers to the beating he is going to give his wife, Amope. The periods of “abstinence” and “trials” underlie the restraint he exercised earlier and the fact that he is now more than eager to act. All these linguistic gymnastics make us laugh at Chume, who is unaware of his own gullibility. However, we also pity him. The funny but sad story of Chume in The Trials of Brother Jero reminds one of Toundi’s in the hilarious but gripping story of his predicament in Houseboy, which “The Punch” aptly describes on the blurb as “very funny and inexpressibly sad” (Oyono, 1990).

As for Jero, we find that he is still a rogue for these actions and we condemn him. What is more, his self-deception is also ridiculed when he thinks the Lord is pleased with him and communicates that by “crossing himself” – a sign that the Lord has protected him. Elsewhere, he says “the Lord protects his own” (Soyinka, 1964:10).

In addition to Soyinka’s use of invective in this scene seen in the insults and insinuations as is usual in this husband-wife confrontation, Amope abusively refers to Chume’s poverty and inability to fend for her as other husbands would do for their wives. Comparing him unfavourably to the Sanitary Inspector, who meets her around the prophet’s beach abode and takes her for a slum dweller, she spitefully comments on Chume’s bicycle as a poorer means of transport. At least, the Inspector has a motor bike which, to her, is better. Also, she reminds the husband of his very low status in his career even if he is a Chief Messenger because, to her, it is a position, which cannot attract any “kola” from anyone. Incidentally, with the mention of kola, there is a hint that the sanitary inspector is corrupt. In fact, he is open to bribes to soften his hand in the clearing of squatters as occurs later with the Town Council which, after all, is unable to clear Jero and the other prophets from the beach as planned (see Soyinka’s other play Jero’s Metamorphosis which, together with The Trials of Brother Jero, is referred to as The JERO PLAYS).

Amope also calls Chume “mad”, repeatedly, and “foolish”, and she shouts for the prophet to come and first offer a prayer for her soul before the husband carries out her command to kill her. This is ironic since she does not know that Jero is actually the one who has recommended her beating. Her innocence exposes her to ridicule for seeking refuge with Jero and Soyinka criticizes her. As part of the invective, we as the audience also note that Amope insults the prophet before Chume as “good-for-nothing” (Soyinka, 1964:34). On his part, Chume also reminds her that she is “a wicked woman” with “no soul” that could be prayed for before her death. While the use of invective makes the play somewhat lively, it also homes in the foolishness of those they are thrown at. This is because the victims often merit how the insults describe them. Here, as in Scene Three, Chume is portrayed as an irresponsible husband: he might as well
improve upon himself in a better way than expect manna from heaven in the form of the prophet's miracles to transform his circumstances overnight or trust his own vain, wishful prayers.

For Amope, we would observe that she is truly a wicked woman because in spite of the husband's shortcomings, she tends to be too disrespectful to him. Perhaps, it is her very constant nagging which, driving him insane, has become the chief reason for his following the prophet in the hope of finding "signs and wonders" or, better still, training to become a prophet too in order that he can also dupe others and amass wealth over-night. In the case of Jero, Amope's observation is keen and really suits him as a useless man of God, for Prophet Jeroboam is a rebel; "one who does evil" (2 Kings 14: 23-29 in Stamps and Adams eds., 1992).

Besides these observations, however, we do not fail to see the ironic twists to the scene and the incidents in it. First, unlike the audience, Amope does not understand clearly Chume's sudden change in behaviour; she is now the victim of irony. Second, underlying Chume's eagerness to send her back home on his bicycle is a relief not for himself, really, but rather for the prophet, who, ironically but shrewdly, instructs that Chume should take his wife back home to administer the punishment. Jero's selfish motive is to avoid further public disgrace and to be freed of this tough woman who has, at least, put some fear of God in him - something which only Jero and the audience know. The effect is that suspense is created and the audience continues to expect more, making the play progress. In addition to the invective and irony noted above, we also mark the exaggeration of the incidents in order to vividly portray the bad sides of the characters involved, especially Brother Jero and his waywardness and Brother Chume and his folly.

Chume the gullible goes home and starts to beat his wife in another very comic encounter. He does not know the identity of the debtor as Jero, and he does not yet know the relationship between his wife and the charlatan prophet. Matters turn sour when in the course of bundling and beating her as a way of venting his pent-up anger on her, Amope screams for Jero's help allowing Chume to discover then that it is Jero who is behind all the unrest in his own family. Chume frantically insists that the screaming woman should answer him: Desperate, he asks her the following questions breathlessly:

CHUME: Did I hear you say Prophet Jeroboam? Woman, did you say it was the Prophet who owed you money? .... Is this his house? Does he live here?

? Is Brother Jeroboam....? (Soyinka, 1964: 37)

He gets no answer; it takes a bystander to get him an answer and the bitter reality dawns on Chume shattering him completely. His shock and despair are clear as he spits repeatedly the "pregnant" word "so": so... so... so..." (Soyinka, 1964:37).

The stage directions indicate that the crowd is puzzled and even Amope "looks up wonderfully" at Chume's change of mood as he walks towards his bicycle muttering to himself:

So... so... suddenly he decided I may beat my wife, eh? For his own convenience. At his own convenience (Soyinka, 1964:37).

From this brief comment spelling Chume's sudden consciousness of the situation, we can say that Chume's disappointment is total and he has learned the hard way. Still, though pitiable, Chume looks foolish because he has been so committed to his fellow man and trusted "the arm of flesh", which has truly failed him as the Bible indicates (see Jeremiah 17: 5-6 in Stamps and Adams eds., 1992). It is in this light that Chume's crest-fallen face and general situation now is very funny yet very sad. He is like Sheridan's Sir Peter Teazel in The School for Scandal who so trusted Joseph Surface-Jero's counterpart in roguery in that play by Sheridan, until "Sir Pete" became so disillusioned with the reality (see Okleme, 2002). Soyinka's humour is "loud" but is again designed to awaken the depraved in society to the rude shock and bitterness that they cause in those they disappoint; those that make the only mistake of relating well with them. In all this, Soyinka is being ironic and also insulting as he exaggerates Chume's naivety and its bitter consequences for him and his marriage.

In fact, Chume’s disillusionment hits all of us as people who have had in one way or the other such bitter experiences from those we have trusted. We therefore identify with Chume, but we find ourselves sympathizing with him also as a result of Soyinka’s exaggeration of Chume’s unpleasant experience. We and Chume become pitiable indeed. But the question is: Do we always merit anyone’s sympathy when the tables turn against us as it happens to Chume? Do not we and Chume sometimes make ourselves rather stupid and therefore prone to such disappointments, considering the blind faith and trust we build around some personalities, especially people of “influence” such as this prophet?

Thus through the adroit handling of irony and other devices, Soyinka succeeds in portraying Jero to us as a hardened “criminal” every bit of the way; he is a prowling lion seeking someone to devour (see 1 Peter 5:8 in Stamps and Adams eds., 1992). We are sad and shocked at his behaviour and the wicked treatment he has doled out to Chume, who is his most ardent supporter. Nevertheless, we are also able to laugh at the foibles of both. But is that the end of the story? No. Soyinka is able to handle his techniques so well that he still moves his play forward. Thus he creates suspense and the audience waits for the aftermath of this clash to see whether Jero and Chume will learn any lessons and change for the better.
SCENE FIVE

At the beginning of Scene Five, which is the last, we find that Jero does not feel remorseful at all about what he has done to Chume. Indeed, he dismisses the thought of any conviction of guilt or even the loss of Chume’s companionship. He rather tunes his mind onto the next victim and “studies” him as the authorial comment in the stage direction goes. This victim is a real big catch and easy too – “a Member of the Federal House, a back-bencher”, who desires a ministerial post (Soyinka, 1964:39). As Jero surveys the “Poor fish”, as he considers this influential man in society and thinks about how to catch him, all he can say about Chume is the following:

... Oho, I had almost forgotten Brother Chume. By now he ought to have beaten his wife senseless. Pity! That means I’ve lost him. He is fulfilled and no longer needs me. True he still has to become a Chief Clerk. But I have lost him as the one who was most dependent on me.... Never mind, it was good price to pay for getting rid of my creditor ... (Soyinka, 1964:39).

We can observe from this speech that Jero has not repented. That Jero still refers to Chume as “Brother” is even ironic. Is “Brother” just a title in Jero’s brand of Christendom? Shouldn’t the word hold meaning so that if one were truly a brother (or sister for that matter), another brother or sister would not find it so easy to intentionally hurt one’s feelings just to suit one’s whims and caprices as does Brother Jero not only to Brother Chume but also Brother Chume’s wife, Amope, whom Jero once refers to as “My dear Sister in Christ? The effect of the irony here is that it throws into sharp focus the hypocrisy in religion as so-called Christians neglect what they ought to do, that is, the show of true brotherliness rather than lip service. Soyinka appears tired with hypocrisy in the church and he bitterly condemns it.

Naturally, Chume is very angry and, in turn, seeks revenge. In fact, he wants to kill Jero and finish with him, as his conscience becomes seared and he goes further. In this scene, his character is even worse than his conscience becomes seared and he goes further to declare Chume “insane”. The fact that Jero does not change tells us as the audience that, in society, there are always riff-raffs like “Brother Jero”, who have no conscience whatsoever because they have become so hardened that they would not mind at all infringing on the human rights of others in order to serve their own selfish interests. While pointing this out with the character of the prophet, Soyinka also maintains that such people should be bitterly exposed just as we find him doing all along through his able manipulation of irony, exaggeration and invective, with the hope that, perhaps, the conscience of miscreants – if they have any - will be pricked to effect the necessary change while the rest of society stays carefully away from them. This explains why Soyinka’s satire is acerbic.

Later, in the dying moments of the play, when in his desperation Chume comes on stage and blames himself as a fool soliloquizing – “... What for ... why, why, why, why, why, ... ?” we laugh at him, but this is another instance where in our laughter we are also moved to tears since we also often ask ourselves and no-one in particular “Why?”, but only after we too have been fools and fooled. As such, we identify with Chume, once again, over his plight. When he returns brandishing a cutlass and insulting Jero in pidgin English saying: “Adulterer! Woman thief! Na today a go finish you!” (Soyinka, 1964:42), we are again torn between laughter and tears, notably because this time he is full of venom and pursuing Jero on stage eager to revenge. With Chume’s multi-million dollar questions “What for”? and “Why?” the latter repeated as many as four times: “why? why? why? why? why?”, we do not fail to observe that Soyinka is being ironic with those questions. He seems to be asking: “Why at all do we allow this to happen to us or anyone else?”

As Jero gets more entangled in the web of religious roguery, we are not surprised that his next step should be a kind of darkly alliance with an unscrupulous politician, and geared towards doing more mischief. Again, Soyinka pours scorn on crooked politicians who seem to abound in postcolonial Africa. He unMASKS them also as crooks and selfish, evil persons as we find in the example of a “whole” Member of Parliament who comes to consult a rogue of a prophet just because this M.P. is after political power.

The term “Poor fish” which Jero uses to describe the “big shot” is not only insulting but also ironic. Besides its abusiveness, it carries a deeper meaning which suggests that the M.P. is an easy prey - a very potential catch. This observation is confirmed in Jero’s next words when he tells the audience that the man is already in his net and asks if we as the audience doubt his ability to catch the M.P. Indeed Jero casts insinuations as to how very easy it is to trap him.

The irony in this is the discrepancy between the great and powerful status of the M.P., a Member of the Federal House – even if only a back-bencher – and how small he has become in the hands of an ordinary citizen, who is also a religious sham. The irony is reinforced by the place where the big man, who is supposed to be an “honourable” person has come, that is, the beach and the time he has come, that is, the evening and the purpose for being there “every day”, that is, “he has one eye on a ministerial post” (Soyinka, 1964:39) as Jero informs the audience about the M.P. Thus, we find out that the M.P.’s power-drunkennes has made him vulnerable and belittled as any ordinary person, who can be manipulated by quacks, when he ought to have lived up to his accolade as an “honourable” man. In fact, we are at a
loss as to where his intelligence has gone. Soyinka's attack therefore falls on all who are like this disgraceful politician. The playwright mocks the likes of such power-drunk people by using irony, insults and exaggeration to belittle and condemn them mercilessly. Even Soyinka shatters whatever air of arrogance surrounds the M.P. that makes him dismiss the prophet "with great pomposity" and spitefully suggest to him to "[G]o and practice your fraudulences on another person of greater gullibility" (Soyinka, 1964:40). In fact, looking at the discrepancy between what an honourable M.P. should be and what this M.P. really is, we could say that he becomes himself that other "person of greater gullibility". Therefore, Soyinka deflates this politician, "one of the elected members of the country" (Soyinka, 1964:43), with his irony, using Jero, an ordinary citizen, to abuse the M.P. further as a "poor fish", a "nincompoop" and "that spiteful man".

We also note that the political power and choice of ministerial position which Jero "promises" the M.P. is as ironic as it is hyperbolic. According to Jero, "The Minister for War would be the most powerful position in the Land" (Soyinka, 1964:41). The title of the post, Minister for War, is ironical because "[w]ar" suggests that one is "in favour of (war)" and so hunts "[f]or (war)" as opposed to (Minister) "of (war)" which suggests that one is only in charge. Therefore, with this post of Minister for WAR (Emphasis is mine), Soyinka ridicules and exposes the various political leaders "for war" who, because they favour war, attend meetings upon meetings in the name of peace while they make their people die and make their profits all right from sale of arms and the like.

Hence, although it sounds paradoxical, it is actually in the area of war that a minister will wield the most power, as Jero makes the M.P. believe, considering, for example, the numerous unrests on the African continent and how some politicians have enriched themselves thereby. Thus, by extension, Soyinka attacks all warlords and haters of peace anywhere, especially those in Africa, while urging them to change.

The current and final scene, Scene Five which is also the concluding scene, alternates Jero and the M.P. and Jero and Chume. Chume comes in shattering and having learnt his lesson but the M.P. is now entering the trap. By laying the powerful M.P. and the poor Messenger ("P.M.") Chume, side by side in the ultimate scene, Soyinka levels the two as far as their stupidity is concerned even if, for the sake of political power, the M.P. assists Jero to have Chume sequestered in a lunatic asylum for a year as it turns out later. By also aiding Jero to carry out that assignment on Chume, Soyinka puts the M.P. in the same category of rogues as Jero. Therefore, his message for all the rogues on the continent, religious and/or political, is that they should change for the better.

Soyinka condemns politicians and religious "experts" who have tended to seek their own personal well-being alone while they have gone to the extent of imprisoning or even murdering their own people; that is, to borrow the words of Farah (1992), "removing from circulation" those people who discover or muster the courage to speak against the diabolical deeds of the rogues.

In Jero's Metamorphosis (first published in 1973), Soyinka's twelfth play written long after The Trials of Brother Jero (first published in 1964), of which it is the sequel, it is sad to observe that Jero becomes neck-deep in evil-doing while Chume is ever so gullible as to allow Jero to lure him back to his camp after some Good Samaritans from the Salvation Army have had him released from the lunatic asylum and also taught him a trade.

Soyinka therefore urges ordinary Africans to become wiser and change from being obsessed with their own problems and running after other people whose backgrounds they do not know. The playwright contends that doing this would enable these Africans to enjoy some freedom. This explains Soyinka's contempt for Chume and his harsh criticism of him, too, for his gullibility and vulnerability in The Trials of Brother Jero. As in all cases, Chume's blind faith in the abilities of a religious functionary such as Prophet Jero, culminates in bitterness. This is so for all the gullible worshippers, "low" and "high" alike, since their absurd and unrealistic expectations from the religious experts like Prophet Jero seem to force these charlatans to continue to be false and deceive them. Jero even confesses to the "safety" or otherwise of making certain prophecies, including that for the M.P. Consequently, Jero hopes to capitalize on how long the M.P. will continue to come to him for fulfillment of "his" prophecy, and count on him to help "pack" Chume away. Just before the end of the play, Soyinka alludes ironically to the prophecy in order to show how unsure the fulfillment of that prophecy is to the author of it himself, that is, Jero and what fate awaits Chume when Jero says:

I have already sent for the police. It is a pity about Chume .... With the influence of that nincompoop, I should succeed in certifying him with ease. A year in the lunatic asylum will do him good anyway... And so the day is saved. The police will call on me as soon as they catch Chume. And it looks as if it is not quite time for the fulfillment of that spiteful man's prophecy (Soyinka, 1964:44).

In an interestingly revealing paper akin to Soyinka's work, Asamoah-Gyedu (2003), a Ghanaian religious scholar, discusses among other things, the issue of Africans troops to religious functionaries for mediation. He thinks that the practice has become rampant in Sub-Saharan Africa, and assumed paranoid proportions, especially in Ghana and Nigeria and that it is worrying because it often involves fraudulent religious specialists, who abuse
others, in particular their women clients. For the medical doctor Evans-Anfom (1986), another Ghanaian scholar, the practice has serious implications for health. Therefore, considering the penchant for seeing “prophets” at the least pretext, it is believed that Africans need a drastic change of mindset to be able to free themselves from the shackles of religious mediation by charlatans. From the foregoing discussion, we note the concerns of Asamoah-Gyedu and the other scholars as concerns which are paramount to our playwright, the committed Soyinka, who, through the literary technique of satire, magnifies the problem on stage for all to see and find solutions to it.

Conclusion

This paper has examined Soyinka as a satirist with reference to his play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*. It has considered Soyinka’s use of irony, exaggeration and invective as tools of satire to hammer home his bitter criticism of religious and political roguery that have become rampant worldwide particularly in post-colonial Africa and his own Nigerian society. We have noted that hardened criminals in the form of ruthless, quack prophets and power-drunk politicians must persistently be exposed to prick their consciences to effect the necessary changes in order for all to enjoy personal freedom and peace. And Soyinka shows the way by ridiculing the perpetrators, his general preoccupation being largely corrective. He also discourages ordinary Africans from permitting themselves to be duped.

We conclude that if Soyinka effectively indulges in his criticism and successfully sends his message across as a satirist, it is because, in addition to other things, he is able to handle irony, exaggeration and invective so well that he can sustain audience interest throughout the play while urging correction.

REFERENCES


