CHAPTER - IV
SATIRICAL THEME

In Soyinka’s own remarks ‘Satire in the theatre is a weapon not yet fully exploited among the contemporary dramatists of Nigeria, fertile though the social and political scene is for well aimed barbs by the sharp, observant eye’. Here Soyinka makes satire a theme to expose the disparities between appearances and underlying realities as well as entertainment. Though Soyinka used satire in many of his plays like Kongi’s harvest, Madmen and the specialists, A dance of the forests, these plays mirror the political scene of the contemporary Nigeria. The Lion and the Jewel is a satirical comedy with music, dance and songs. It treats serious issues in a generally light -hearted manner, content to oversimplify and to leave some issues unresolved in order to provide an entertaining and provocative experience. The play is set in Ilujinle, an imaginary Yoruba village, and it presents the conflict between the Bale, Baroka, and the village school teacher, Lakunle, over the village beauty, Sidi. In the trials of brother Jero, Soyinka reveals that the ‘persona’ cultivated by Jero (that of selfless visionary and inspired prophet) is a false persona and that he is in reality a scheming, venal profiteering sham. The fact that Jero succeeds in deluging everyone around him (other than the shrewd Amope) represents Soyinka’s acid diagnosis of a widespread in ability in Nigeria to distinguish truth from falsehood.
The play *The lion and the jewel* represents a dialogue with the European tradition of comedy and of plays about impotence from Terence’s *Eunuch* to Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* and William Wycherly’s *The country wife*. Soyinka basically is a Yoruba and often he says, a religious occasion is celebrated with music and dancing and this produces a performance tradition which may be called African Festival Theatre. They provide a useful background to this play. Another performance tradition is the preserve of companies of professionals or semi professionals – the Yoruba Masque theatre. This has been clearly described by Joel Adedeji who identifies one of the destined genres as the revue - masque. The revues are usually based on subjects of topical interest and easily display the comic spirit of the Yoruba; but there is more emphasis on the dramatic action than on the working out of the plot.

Wole Soyinka intends to compare the old and the new order in Nigerian society. He presents vividly the conflict of the new order with the old over social customs such as marriage; and the struggle between progress and tradition. The new order in society is represented by the village school teacher, Lakunle, who opposes vehemently the practices of the old order as represented by Baroka, Bale of Ilujinle. For instance, Lakunle does not like to see a girl going about half-naked and detests the idea of bride price in marriage. He believes in modern marriage – as he says to Sidi the girl he loves, ‘Be a modern wife’. He has wonderful plans to modernize their village Ilujinle and offer the inhabitants better
amenities. As Sidi says to him, 'You really mean to turn the whole world upside down.'

On the other hand Baroka, the chief of the village and representative of the old order, would not even allow a rail track to pass through or near Ilujinle in case his society might be influenced by modern inventions and civilization; he was 'sworn against our progresses'. Soyinka presents these two orders in dreadful conflict but emphasizes the hold of the old traditions on the people.

The theme of the play is to attempt an attack on those in canvas shoes, the half-baked and half-educated, who have little awareness on their own community and only a very superficial knowledge of Europe. It is a drama not on conflict not only between protagonists, but between progress and tradition, differing views on the role of women, the sexes and intellect versus cunning. Overriding all these is the issue of status which ultimately drives the story to its conclusion. The result is a lively piece interspersed with music, dance and mime as a device for providing back story. The main theme of the story tells us of a sexual rivalry between the progression but arrogant teacher Lakunle, and the aging village chief Baroka, the symbol of tradition and the object of their attention being a simple village girl, Sidi – the jewel in the little.

The play opens in the morning on the edge of the market square outside the school building during school hours. We can see Sidi entering, dressed in traditional fashion, with her shoulders base and carrying a pail of water on her head. The market in a Yoruba town is usually situated in front of the 'Afin' or palace and
the ‘oba’ or ‘baale’ or ‘the bale’ can easily watch his people assembling there. Dan Izevbaye considers the market a microcosm: it contains all the variety and diversity of the larger world. He cites the following saying as a proof “Oja L’ aiye, Orun n’ile” (The world is a market, heaven is home). The Yoruba are a great trading people and their markets are crowded, colourful and hectic.

Shortly before the play begins, Ilujinle has been visited by a photographer who has taken pictures of the village, its chief and particularly of Sidi, a very pretty young woman. In the opening sequence, Sidi is countered by Lakunle, the village school master, but, when the photographer arrives with copies of the magazine featuring side, Bale Baroka decides that he and no one else will possess ‘the jewel of Ilujinle’. Lakunle interrupts the argument at intervals to beseech Sidi not to accept Baroka’s proposition, calling her sweet names, ‘My Ruth, my Rachel, Esther, and Bathsheba’. Meanwhile Sadiku continues to argue on Baroka’s behalf. Sidi is satisfied that she has become famous in Lagos and ‘beyond the seas’ and considers it beneath her to marry somebody from the village.

Compare my image and your lord’s- An age of difference!

Sadiku tells Sidi that Baroka has invited her to supper at his house, which Sidi also ridicules, remembering that he is called the Fox.

Every woman who has supped with him one night becomes his wife or concubine the next. (CP II 182)
Lakunle recalls the reactionary wiliness of Baroka when he refused to let the railway be built through the village. A mime of this is done on the stage.

In the next scene Baroka is revealed with his current favourite. Sadiku returns to tell Baroka about Sidi’s refusal of both his offers because he was too old. Baroka, in a fury, recalls some of his feats and sexual prowess. Baroka then reveals to Sadiku that his manhood ended near a week ago and that he had thought that Sidi might revive him. He pledges Sadiku to secrecy, and the scene ends with Baroka at ease with her: ‘beyond a doubt... queen of them all’.

At night in the village centre Sidi is found standing by the schoolroom window gazing at her pictures. Sadiku appears, unveils a carved figure of the Bale and bursts into ribald laughter. The old woman rejoices for her victory over the Bale-‘I ate him up! Race of mighty lions, we always consumes you.’ She then reveals Baroka’s secret to Sidi, and also to Lakunle. Sidi is very intrigued and goes off to supper with Baroka in order to ‘mock the devil’. Sadiku supports her, but Lakunle tries in vain to dissuade her. Lakunle and Sadiku argue: she taunts him about his reforming ways saying it is only a way of avoiding the bride price.

The scene changes. Sidi goes to Baroka’s palace and tries to engage him in conversation while he is busy with a wrestling match. Their talk is full of insinuations and innuendoes. He finishes with the wrestler and he and Sidi talk together. He reveals his plan to print the stamps, which he makes with his own
machine, with Sidi's image. He tells her about the old ways and how 'the old must flow into the new'; it is obvious that Sidi has fallen for his wiles. The scene breaks off abruptly to show Lakunle and Sadiku waiting for Sidi. The wrestler passes on his way home, which seems suggestive. Mummers enter and dance in mockery of Baroka, having been tipped off by Sadiku to do so.

Sidi enters violently and confesses to Lakunle that she is no more a virgin, and that Baroka has tricked her. Lakunle assures her that he will still marry her, but as she is no longer a virgin there does no question of bride price have to be paid. Sidi rushes off mysteriously. Lakunle and Sadiku are met by a singing group. Sidi appears gorgeously dressed holding a bundle in one hand, and in the other the famous magazine, which she hands to Lakunle. It is then revealed that the impending marriage ceremony is between Sidi and Baroka, and that Lakunle is jilted. The play ends with singing and dancing before the wedding. The old order would appear to have triumphed over the new.

Through his eldest wife Sadiku, the Bale invites Sidi to dinner. When she refuses the invitation and makes a disparaging comment about the bale's age he sets another, more devious plan in motion, He lies to Sadiku that he has become impotent, knowing that she will pass on this to Sidi and anticipating that Sidi's cheekiness will draw her to his bedroom – the lion's den. The plan works and, once he has a chance to talk to Sidi alone, he croons her so subtly and plays on her vanity so effectively that he is able to seduce her when Lakunle hears what has happened he declares that
he is still prepared to marry Sidi, but she will have nothing to do with him. She has, she says.

‘felt the strength, The perpetual youthful zest, Of the panther of the trees – (p-163)

And is happy to marry the sixty two years old chief the play ends with Sadiku ‘The mother of brides’ invoking the fertile gods and lakunle clearing a space among the dancers for a new ‘Madonna’.

Soyinka displays much wit and humour when we hear Baroka reproach Lakunle in such jovial way. He addresses Lakunle: ‘A kowe. Teacher wa.a Mista Lakunle’, and goes on to mimic him. Proverbial and moralistic sayings abound these and these add much force to the humour of the play. Sadiku says’ The hour of victory is not time for any women to die’. Baroka says to sidi:

‘- - - - as we say

The woman gets lost in the woods one day and every wood deity dies the next’

The activities of the morning, noon and night are so well linked that the trend of the story is unhindered. There is complexity in the way the plot of The lion and the jewel is handled, the way various techniques are used to fill in the background and the way the audience is sometimes left in suspense. But the story itself is straightforward and can be simply told and in this, the play resembles Soyinka’s ‘African drama’. The play is written in both poetry and prose characteristic of Wole Soyinka, when the poetry is original and of the highest merit. The mixture of these two
elements adds more force to the originality of his technique. He uses folk music, in the loose sense of ‘the music of the people’ or popular music’ from a variety of sources. On the songs sung at the end of the play, Segun Osiboye comments: these are two of many Yoruba songs for celebrating marriages. They are part of a village repertoire to all including children, and part of the ever-changing body of popular music.

“Mo te’ ni. Mo te’ ni.
Mo te’ ni. Mo te’ ni.
Sun mo mi. we mo mi
Sun mo mi. fa mo mi

Yorabi Lo m’eyi tio le d’omo……

(My net is spread, my net is spread come close to me, wrap yourself around me only god knows which moment makes the child) 4

Soyinka displays much wit and humour, and the audience is kept roaring with laughter, we hear Baroka reproach Lakunle in such a jovial way. He addresses Lakunle: ‘Akowe. Teacher wa. Mista Lakunle,’ and goes on to mimic him:

Guru morin guru morin ngh-hn! That is all we get from ‘alakowe’. You call at his house hoping the sends for beer, but all you get is Guru morin. Will guru morin wet my throat? 5

The activities of the morning, noon and night are so well linked that the trend of the story is unhampered. Festivities are common throughout Nigeria, and vary according to tribal tradition. In The
Baroka refers to the festival of rain, in which prayers and sacrifices are given to the god of rain, to ensure plenty of it. Traditionally when a man wants inspiration he calls on his dead ancestors and invokes their spirits. This is seen in *The Lion and the Jewel*. The Yoruba believe that dead ancestors can answer prayers and grant requests; this is one of the functions of ancestor worship. Male wrestling is one of the traditional sports of the Yoruba. Sometimes it is on an organized basis, with one clear or village against another. Strong young men go out to test their skill, with youngsters singing and clapping to encourage them. Baroka engages in single-handed wrestling.

Baroka, the image of Ilujinle as a compost of heap is one which reverberates, indeed it draws attention to a concept which recurs again and again in Soyinka's work and which has become a feature of his view of life. This is summed up in a line from requiem. Rust is ripeness, which suggests that in evidence of decay is to be found maturity and fruitfulness. He describes himself as a 'seven-horned devil of strength'."he has a huge harem: is given to misuse of authority and corruption: and is wily. Hearing that Sidi has rejected his offer, he pretends to be impotent and baits Sidi who is finally seduced by him.

But Baroka also has vitality and zest for life. He is an excellent hunter, generous and open-handed and the young as well as the old are reported to seek his counsel. In other words, he is, the trickster figure par excellence, god, man and animal all at once."
Some of the marriage customs are shown. Lakunle loses Sidi because he refuses to pay the bride price, and Baroka takes Sidi without much formal or personal wooing, which is the exclusive privilege of a chief. At a marriage, the bride is escorted to her husband’s house amidst singing and dancing groups. This is usually done at night, and the majority of the escort will be women. Some strong young men serve as guards. This is the traditional way of marriage in Yorubaland. The beginning of the wedding ceremony is described at the end of the play. Elders give their blessings to the couple on the eve of the ceremony. The bride is blessed on her departure to the groom’s house by elderly women. Here Sadiku blesses Sidi: ‘I invoke the fertile gods. They will stay with you.’ There are various songs to celebrate marriages. There are two such in this play, ‘Mo te’ni, Mo te’ni’ and ‘Tolani tolani’.

The problem of bride price is acute in Nigerian tribal society. The man who wants a wife must pay for her. He pays a sum of money to the girl herself and to her parents before final arrangements are concluded. The amount varies according to the tribe, but in some tribes, it has become so high that young men are frightened away from marriage. Some people think that the practice should be stopped, but tradition is still very strong. Lakunle refuses to pay the bride-price on the grounds that it makes it appear that the woman is bought, and could be subjected to any type of treatment. During courtship among the Yoruba an intermediary helps to take messages to and from the couple involve. In the palaces of the Oba in Yorubaland certain protocol is observed. Nobody rushes in, but
everyone is ushered in by a palace attendant. When Sidi arrives at Baroka’s palace, she fails to do the right thing, and Baroka reproaches her.

Nigerians like music and merry-making. In The Lion and the Jewel there is much drumming and dancing which are employed judiciously to express emotions already implicit in the action of the play. In Yoruba traditional music there are many types of drums, for instance the gangun, which is the talking drum, and the iya ilu, the main drum, which gives the background and base to the music. A sekere is another instrument. This is a gourd with coral beads roped all over its body. There are also flutes and box-guitars. These instruments are used in The Lion and the Jewel.

When the Yoruba are involved in exciting or emotional situations they sing to express their feelings. At the Bale’s Sidi starts a song involuntarily, when she sees him beat the wrestler.

Yokulu Yokolu. Ko ha tan bi,
Iyawa gb’oko san’le
Oko yo’ke. . .

This means: ‘It has happened, the wife has so badly floored her husband in fight that he has become a hunch-back.’

Here Soyinka incorporates a number of dances, dance dramas and mimes which have rhythmical accompaniment. The following ‘dances’ occur in the play.

a) The dance of the lost traveler’ – a dance drama with episodes of mime and a final communal dance which is familiar enough from the English language tradition of
the musical. A community swept into creative life by one of its members, re-enacts a recent event.

b) ‘The mime of the white surveyor’ largely a mime in the course of which the prisoners sing and move rhythmically. The mime marks a slight departure from established western dramatic conventions and constitutes a statement of the Yoruba concept of time. The presence of Baroka and the white surveyor on stage is prompted by Lakunle’s it was….. Somewhere here’ and by his account, ‘prisoners…were brought’. A link is made with the world of the past: unseen reality temporarily put on visibility. It is a flash sideways onto another plane, rather than a flash-back.

c) ‘The dance of Baroka’s story “– in two parts, however, a fundamentally different convention, a masquerade convention, is used and this present the audience with a distinctive element from the sophisticated and stylized idiom of African drama. The wearing of the mask often implies or induces possession by a deity; here the mask is not that of a god. Though Baroka is ‘the living god among men’, but it still indicates cultural values and attitudes. It also makes a statement about African art and its search through stylization and symbol for essence rather than appearance.
d) ‘Sadiku’s dance of triumph – a solo performed around a carving of the bale, expresses her satisfaction within the bounds of possibility.

e) ‘The finale’ – a bridal and communal dance which likes Sidi off to her husband and, draws the play to a close. Given the observations of Bebalole and Adediji and others on the role of dance in African society it is easy to believe that the news of marriage would quickly spread and that the community would gather to celebrate and dance.

The dramatic functions of the dances differ but Soyinka is aware of the accepted practice of the musical stage, that the performances should open with a ‘big number’ and that each act should close with a story spectacular set piece. He amends this slightly and makes us wait for the end of the ‘opening dialogue’ before we move into the ‘dance of the lost traveler’. This is in a tradition which European and American practice shares with Yoruba ‘Alarinjo’ theatre, which usually concludes its performances with a dance.

There is no doubt that the play deals with the period of transition when Nigerians still have to make up their contact with the west. These values are at times in direct conflict with traditional culture and individuals may have to choose between acquired values and inherited culture. Soyinka presents these two as opposed one to the other. Judging from the fact that the bale finally succeeds in capturing Sidi, it could be said that Soyinka takes the
side of tradition. However, this conclusion can hardly be sustained, since the picture of the Bale we have here is that of an unrealistic reactionary village head who is a stumbling block to progress – which must come whether he likes it or not. Also, the playwright ridicules the whole idea of bride price and makes Lakunle put forward incontrovertible arguments why the custom should be abolished. He makes many other attacks on the traditional beliefs and customs of the Yoruba, for instance, the wedding arrangements between Sidi and the Bale, and the complete absence of any pressures on Sidi in her love affairs. It is by simple theatrical devices and the memorable things which these people are made to say and do that Soyinka has succeeded in making *The Lion and the Jewel* a great and typically Nigerian play.

A Yoruba sense of balance is also well established in this play. It is manifested in the careful contrasts of old and young, of male and female, of night end day and in case of Baroka who likes to have the hairs plucked from his armpits, of pain and pleasure. The play also has a cyclical dimension and ends almost where it begins.

In constructing the play *The trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka borrows a technique used by Brecht in scene eight of *The Good woman*, one which, in a sense, grows out of ‘The story telling tradition’. This play makes considerable use of monologue or of talking to the audience is very simply constructed. Jero like may stage rogues before him-explains himself to his audience and then invites them to share his delight in his triumphs during one day of
his life. Religious exploitation has always been a fertile field for satire. Cheating credulous public in the name of God continues to be practiced not only as an occasional game but also as a thriving business, by several individuals as well as groups, sects or organizations. Among those who depended on such exploitation as a sole means of livelihood, Geoffrey Chaucer’s Summoner and the Pardoner have become immortal on the literary pantheon. Wole Soyinka’s Brother Jeroboam excels even Chaucer’s Pardoner in his business acumen. He does not need pig’s bones to display in the guise of holy relics. He sells not just the Pope’s ‘pardons’. Jero deals in costlier items: he sells salvation. The story is of Brother Jeroboam ‘a prophet by birth and by inclination’, who, after serving his apprenticeship, has out-maneuvered his mentor and established his own right to territory on Victoria Beach. The old prophet had cursed Jero with the curse of the ‘daughter of discard’ and it is appropriately, women who pose the greatest threat to Jero’s continued prosperity. When the play opens, Jero owes a cloth merchant Amope £ 1.8.9 for a velvet cape, and we see the determined debt collector lying seize to the hut in Ajete where he sleeps. It so happens that Amope’s husband, a chief messenger called Chume, is one of Jero’s most fervent followers, but at the start of the play, the characters are unaware how extensively their lives are intertwined. Jero avoids paying his debt, conducts morning worship on the beach and is distracted by a passing ‘daughter of discord’. Chume wants Jero’s permission to beat his wife, but the prophet, unaware of course that Chume’s wife is the
‘vulture crouched on (his) bed-post’, and realizing that Chume must be kept discontented if he is to remain in the congregation, refuses to grant him dispensation. When Jero leaves his congregation in pursuit of young women Chume conducts the worship to an ecstatic pitch.

*The Trials of Brother Jero* is dominated by the personality and style of the holy fraud himself, whose oratory is cultivated to deceive, whose rhetoric serves duplicity rather than divinity. Here he is, magnificent in his white flowing gown and costly velvet cape, expanding on his most cherished subject – himself:

> It becomes important to stand out, to be distinctive. I have set my heart after a particular name. They will look at my velvet cape and they will think of my goodness. Inevitably they must begin to call me . . . the Velvet-hearted Jeroboam. Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ’s Crusade . . . Well, it is out. I have not breathed it to a single soul, but that has been my ambition. You’ve got to have a name that appeals to the imagination – because the imagination is a thing of the spirit – it must catch the imagination of the crowd. Yes, one must move with modern times. Lack of colour gets one nowhere even in the Prophet’s business. (C.P. p.210)

As usual, the play uses two contrasting styles. Jero’s is one, and the second belongs to the plain folk who are his victims. Their language is as humble as their status, and in moments of deepest
sincerity it becomes mainly West African pidgin. In the following scene on the beach, an emotional prayer session is in progress under the direction of Chume, the assistant prophet whose wife Jero has seduced. The petitions are frankly materialistic but, coming from the poor, touchingly human for all that. They are punctuated regularly with Amens, and the whole effort builds to a tremendous climax as these humble people whip up their emotional fervour:

Yes, Father, make you forgive us all. Make you save us from palaver. Save us from trouble at home. Tell our wives not to give us trouble . . . Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. Make you not forget those of us who dey struggle daily. Those who are clerk today, make them Chief Clerk tomorrow. Those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow. Yes Father, those who are Messenger today, makes them Senior Service tomorrow. Those who are petty trader today, make them big contractor tomorrow. Those who dey sweep street today, give them their own big office tomorrow. If we dey 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. Give them
big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow. (C.P. p.219)

For all its comic quaintness, and for all that Soyinka is gently mocking the materialism behind it, this is language marked by pathos and unquestionable sincerity. Jero, however, calls it 'animal jabber'. He remarks that Chume always reverts to it when he gets his spiritual excitement. It is a sign of his assistant's crudeness; but it has the advantage of ruling out any possibility of rivalry from that quarter. In the Prophet's business, sophistication and style are needed more than the crude fervour of men like Chume.

Thus we can understand Soyinka's fundamental interest in language. Language as a key to man's inner being; languages as a mirror of social standing; language as an instrument of deceit and oppression; language as a device for sheer entertainment; language as a vehicle for man's deepest utterances; language as a source of comedy; language as an instrument of satire – Soyinka is keenly aware of all these facets and explores them energetically in his plays. From the conversation which follows his return, Jero is able to work out that Chume is Amope's husband and with some relief, gives him permission to thrash her. The plan of revenge backfires, however, because Amope reveals to Chume that the man who owes the money – and sleeps at Ajete – is none other than Brother Jero. Chume's eyes are opened; he realizes that Jero sleeps in a hut and not, as he had believed, in sanctifying discomfort on the beach and he sets off intent on murdering the perfidious prophet. He comes upon him ensnaring a mentor of parliament in his web of honeyed
promises and puts him to flight. Even Jero’s departure before Chume’s cutlass works to the charlatan’s advantage, for the MP thinks that the prophet has literally vanished from his sight. Jero escapes from Chume’s wrath and summons the police to arrest the gullible chief messenger. In an address to the audience, the prophet indicates that he will, with the MP’s help have Chume confined to a lunatic asylum. The play draws to an end with the MP clearly within Jero’s power: in a final tableau, the politician prostrates himself before the ‘prophet’, crying ‘Master’ – the triumph of the deceiver is complete.

At the beginning of the play, Jero introduces himself to the audience with the word’s ‘I am a prophet’ Direct address of this particular sort of technique Soyinka had not used before and has not used since when a little later Jero says ‘my whole purpose in coming here is to show you one rather eventful day in my life’ it appears that Soyinka is finding common ground between a convention used by Brecht in The good woman of Setzuan and the flourishing story – telling tradition of the Yorubas. The technique allows him to establish Jero’s character, create rapport with the audience and fill in essential background. In order to prevent the monologue becoming boring, and because Soyinka rarely tells his audience about an episode when he can ‘show’ it to them, he brings the old prophet, hurling his curses at Jero’s head, out of the past and onto the stage. The ‘Brechtian’ technique is useful and Soyinka employs it to good effect.
With the spectacular entrance of Chume and Amope on a bicycle, the play gathers pace. The Couple, who come to an awkward halt in the middle of the stage, are vibrantly alive; in their relationship and dialogue Soyinka strikes notes which may have recognized as familiar. Amope is aggressive and assured, full of complaints about her husband; she is also practical and determined, equipped to besiege Jero. Chume is almost inevitably repressed, resentful, long-suffering and much put upon and he is not lacking in spirit. After his first exit, the play begins to move subtly in two directions – one farcical, as Jero attempts to escape through the window of the hut and Amope without looking back says, “where do you think you are going?” the other rooted in the everyday exchanges of Yoruba markets: greetings, business transactions, insults, after highly imaginative insults.

In the worship of Jero’s congregation, Soyinka finds opportunity to bring onto stage the rhythmic chanting and the apparently total involvement which is a feature of African Pentecostal churches. It is an exciting stage spectacle, but it is not ‘mere’ spectacle Chume’s participation is particularly intense and revealing and in the course of it, the audience becomes aware how much Chume’s domestic and professional frustrations find outlets in his religion. First when he prays (If I could only beat her once, only once”), and then, in a masterfully orchestrated sequence, when leading the congregation in prayer, his intercessions merge with imperatives (‘ I say those who dey walka today, give then own bicycle tomorrow. Those who have bicycle today; they will ride
their own car tomorrow'). This sequence, which few who see it can forget, leads into a neatly constructed encounter in which Chume, emboldened by Jero, confronts his formidable spouse. The exchange is followed in turn by the final scene, containing some well-directed political satire at the expense of Members of parliament.

The play is a successful combination of farce, characterized by slapstick, concealed identities and neat coincidences, with brilliantly observed and sharply realized details of Yoruba life and with well-directed satire. The vitality of the piece is partly the result of the appeal and personality of Brother Jero, who, from his very first speech, establishes a special relationship with the audiences. Though he is a villain, a hypocrite, a liar and a cheat, his disconcerting honesty has won him friends on every stage he has stepped on. Part of his attraction lies in his eloquence; he can, for example, adopt an ornate, ecclesiastical register, full of high-minded statements, rhetorical flourishes and visionary insights to the MP, he recalls a vision in lines which have won Soyinka himself the title of 'Prophet'—

"I saw this country plunged into strife.
I saw the mustering of men, gathered in
the name of peace through strength.
And at a desk, in a large gilt room,
great men of the land awaited your decision" (CPU p. 169)
The audience delights in knowing that this is only the public side of ‘the articulate hero of Christ’s crusade’, that the apostate has a weakness for women and that he often emerges from encounters with them with his face scratched and his clothes torn. More generally, the play indicates the spiritual confusion and by extension, the political naivety of many of the play wright's fellow countrymen and fellow human beings. His satirical instincts, already highly developed, identified an early target and he loosed a wounding shaft. As it struck home, he called for that ending which often follows a punch-line and concludes a revue sketch; the quick blackout.

Further Soyinka has described the play as ‘a comedy a very light recital of human ends and foibles’. In so far as Jero represents one kind of character identified by Soyinka as typical in modern Nigerian society, the revelation of his methods and of his final triumph is instructive. Soyinka employs satire to bring out Jero’s character. The chief characteristic of satire is that it reveals the truth of a situation through exposing the disparity between appearances and underlying realities. Thus in *The trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka reveals that the ‘personal’ cultivated by Jero (i.e. selfless visionary and inspired prophet) is a false ‘persona’ and that he is in reality a scheming, venal, profiteering sham. The fact that Jero succeeds in deluding everyone around him represents Soyinka’s acid diagnosis of a widespread inability in Nigeria to distinguish truth from falsehood.
JERO: The son of God appeared to me again this morning, robed just as he was when he named you my successor. And he placed his burning sword on my shoulder and called me his knight. He gave me a new title... but you must tell it to no one—yet.

CHUME: I swear, Brother Jero.

JERO [staring into space.]: He named me the Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade.

[Pauses, then with a regal dismissal -] You may go, Brother Chume.

CHUME: God keep you, Brother Jero—the Immaculate.

JERO: God keep you, brother. [He sadly fingers the velvet cape.]

Soyinka does not reveal the truth about Jero by having him exposed by another characters. Instead, he has chosen to have Jero reveal himself, in a number of monologues delivered directly to the audience.

JEROBOAM: I am a Prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination. You have probably seen many of us on the streets, many with their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, many curing the deaf, many raising the dead. In fact, there are eggs and there are eggs. Same thing with prophets. I was born a Prophet. I think my parents found that I was born with rather thick and long hair. It was said to come right down
to my eyes and down to my neck. For them, this was a certain sign that I was born a natural prophet.

And I grew to love the trade. It used to be a very respectable one in those days and competition was dignified. But in the last few years, the beach has become fashionable, and the struggle for land has turned the profession into a thing of ridicule. Some prophets I could name gained their present beaches by getting women penitents to shake their bosoms in spiritual ecstasy. This prejudiced the councilors who came to divide the beach among us.

Yes, it did come to the point where it became necessary for the Town Council to come to the beach and settle the Prophets' territorial warfare once and for all. My Masters, 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 dressed as Jehovah’s Witness. What my old Master did not realize was that I was really helping myself. Mind you, the beach is hardly worth having these days. The worshippers have dwindled to a mere trickle and we really have to fight for every new convert. They all prefer High life to the rhythm of celestial hymns. And television too is keeping our wealthier patrons at home. They used to come in the evening when they would not easily be recognized. Now they stay at home and watch television. However, my whole purpose in coming here is to show you one rather eventful day in my life, a day when I thought for a
moment that the curse of my old Master was about to be fulfilled. It shook me quite a bit, but . . . the Lord protects his own . . . [Enter Old Prophet shaking his fist.]

Helpless as you make me now...(C.P II.p.145)

Thus in the opening speech of the play, Jero candidly admits that he has used underhand means to gain his ‘territory’ on the beach; later he instructs the audience in the methods he employs to secure his converts loyally (including the adoption of regalia – a fine white gown, a velvet cape and a divine rod – and the adoption of praise names, such as Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ’s crusade). Worshippers are frankly described as ‘customers’, Jero is not in this game for his amusement, merely but to make his living, Jero reveals that the majority of his congregation are motivated not by the love of god, but by greed and are inspired by his prophecies of wealth and advancement. Brother Chume, Jero’s personal assistant, fares no better in his estimation, being callously dismissed as a ‘crude’ dupe, who reverts to an ‘animal jabber’ when he grows over – excited. Since Jero’s speeches to the audience precede each scene, or the different sections in each scene, they function as a kind of commentary on the action that follows; only after Jero’s secrets have been revealed is the audience able to enjoy seeing how in the presence of Jero’s victims those secrets are concealed.

Jero’s informal, ingratiating tone is designed to win the approval of the audience. There is no doubt that Jero’s wit and intelligence provide the chief source of pleasure in the play; this is
paradoxical, but not absurd. Quite apart from the (amoral) pleasure the audience may derive from contemplating Jero’s methods, his frank admission of commercial motive behind his preaching raises him in moral terms above most of the characters in the play. Compared, however, with the mediocre Member of Government for whom politics is only a means to self advancement and compared with Chume, wife beater and crude disciple of the gospel of promotion, Jero cannot be said to be exceptionally unprincipled or materialistic; indeed Soyinka implies that in these respects he is representative of his society. He is distinguished from his follows in respect of his lack of hypocrisy, in his willingness to acknowledge his wickedness; in doing so, in providing the key by which to interpret his own behavior and that of his congregation, he even becomes a critic of his society.

A comedy of suspense, the whole play hinges on the question of whether Jero will, as he fears, meet his ruin through the ‘Daughters of Eve’ or succeed in evading his old Master’s prophecy that he would do so. His love of women twice causes him embarrassment in the play; over the bathing beauty, who very nearly provokes him into temptation and over his neighbor, whom he pursues, unable to resist the sight of her bare legs. It is not, however, through these encounters that he nearly meets disaster, but through his involvement with Amope and – apart from the comic business involving the fish-seller and the drummer-boy, which is intended simply to add to the general liveliness of the
play – the plot builds up from the initial premise of Jero’s attempt to avoid harboring his debt to that very formidable lady.

The pivotal point in the play is Jero’s discovery that Amope is the wife that Chume so greatly desires to beat. This is the point of maximum confusion, the point at which it is least clear how Jero can evade Amope; up until that point, the suspense has gradually increased, as the audience first discovers that Jero is threatened by Amope, then that Amope is Chume’s husband, and then waits for that knowledge to be revealed to Jero. When this occurs, in the third and central scene of the play, the direction of the plot is changed and from this point on the play heads towards its resolution. The fact that Chume discovers Jero’s involvement with his wife before he has beaten her introduces a last minute complication: again, unexpectedly, Jero finds himself threatened. The arrival of the Member provides Jero with the means of escaping from this new entanglement and, at the end of the play; he has secured a double victory – freeing himself first from Amope and second from her husband.

The acclaim the play has received from theatre audiences bears witness both to the vividness of Soyinka’s characterization of Jero and to his success in transforming the slender material of Amope’s pursuit of Jero into a tense and amusing plot; it is questionable, though, whether the last scene of the play is very successful. Chume’s discovery of Jero’s involvement with Amope and his fumbling attempt to decipher the nature of that involvement are introduced by Soyinka with well-judged comic timing, and
Chume's final monologue is a fine conception, but – although Jero’s approach to the Member is amusing enough in itself – the farcical resolution of the play seems contrived and unconvincing.

REFERENCES


