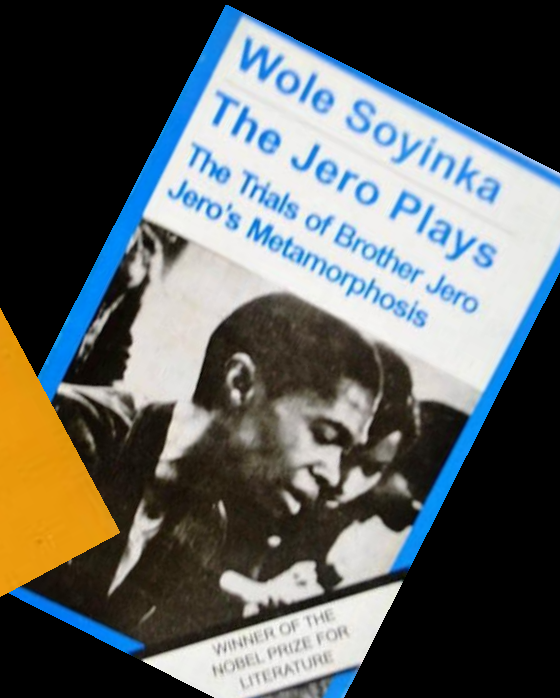
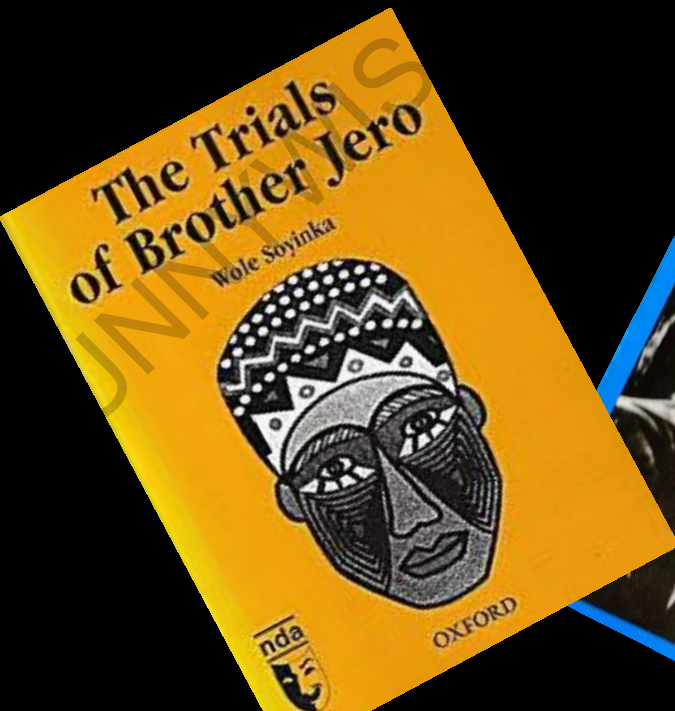


# ENG2209

MODERN AFRICAN DRAMA

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS II (The Trials of Brother Jero)

<http://www.gradesaver.com/the-trials-of-brother-jero>



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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Wole Soyinka, born in 1934, Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist, and lecturer, whose writings draw on African tradition and mythology while employing Western literary forms. In 1986 Soyinka became the first African writer and the first black writer to win the *Nobel Prize in literature*.

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka was born near Abeokuta, Nigeria. He studied at the University College of Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) and graduated from the University of Leeds in Britain in 1957. He then returned to Nigeria, where he established the 1960 Masks drama troupe (later the Orisun Theatre) and produced his own plays and those of other African playwrights. During the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the government arrested Soyinka and held him in solitary confinement from 1967 to 1969. His time in jail prompted him to write the verse collection *Poems from Prison* (1969; republished as *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, 1972) and the prose work *The Man Died* (1972).

Soyinka often wrote about the need for individual freedom. His plays include *A Dance of the Forests* (1960), written to celebrate Nigeria's independence in 1960; *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), a political satire; *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975); *A Play of Giants* (1984); *From Zia, with Love* (1992); *The Beatification of Area Boy* (1995); and *King Baabu* (2001), a satire about a fictional African despot. His other writings include the novels *The Interpreters* (1965), about a group of young Nigerian intellectuals, and *Season of Anomy* (1973); the poetry collections *Idanre* (1967) and *Mandela's Earth* (1988); and the essay collection *The Credo*

of Being and Nothingness (1991). His principal critical work is *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (1976).

Following the annulment of Nigeria's 1993 democratic elections and the assumption of power by military dictator Sani Abacha, Soyinka went into exile in 1994. His subsequent essay collection *Open Sore of a Continent: A Personal Narrative of the Nigerian Crisis* (1996) recounts the history of Nigeria from its independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 until the regime under Abacha. The essays show Soyinka's anger and sadness over what he views as the deterioration of Nigeria as a nation. In 1997 Nigeria's regime charged Soyinka with treason, claiming that he and other dissidents had been involved in a series of bombings. Soyinka denied the charges, and after Abacha's death in June 1998, his successor, Abdulsalam Abubakar, dropped the charges. Soyinka returned to Nigeria for a visit later that year.

In 1996 Soyinka was named Robert W. Woodruff Professor of the Arts at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1999 he published *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, which deals with crimes against humanity committed in Africa and with the difficult issue of reconciliation. A volume of poetry about his years of exile, *Samarkand and Other Markets I Have Known*, appeared in 2002. A series of five Reith Lectures for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was published in 2005 as *Climate of Fear: The Quest for Dignity in a Dehumanized World*. Soyinka has also written the autobiographical works *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981), *Ìsarà: A Voyage Around Essay* (1989), and *You Must Set Forth at Dawn: A Memoir* (2006).

***Wole Soyinka. " Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft***

## ABOUT THE TRIALS OF BROTHER JERO

The Trials of Brother Jero was first published in 1964. Its original performance was organized by Farris-Belgrave Productions and held at the Greenwich Mews Theatre in New York City in 1967. Today it is known as one of Soyinka's most popular plays.

The play mocks the effects of the quick spread of Christianity across Africa. Soyinka takes issue with a common figure of the time, the phony preacher who proselytizes by deceiving his followers. Many of these preachers did not have churches of their own and so preached in public spaces, as does Brother Jero. The play thus exposes the contradictions in blind faith and following, while also drawing attention through satire to many of the social and political imbalances of Nigeria in the early 1960s.

In 1966 Soyinka published another play featuring Brother Jero, called Jero's Metamorphosis.

## SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

The Trials of Brother Jero follows a day in the life of Jero, a self-named prophet who is eager to present this turn of events to an audience to proudly illustrate his wise and cunning nature. The play opens with Brother Jero offering a monologue on his beginnings: He tells the audience that he was born a prophet and reveals his view of prophethood as a "*trade*." Jero was able to acquire his current beach-side realty in the name of his former master, the Old Prophet, by leading a campaign against

the other prophets and followings also claiming the land. He then drove the Old Prophet off his own land, however, and midway into his monologue the Old Prophet enters to curse Jero, wishing his downfall via women. Jero presents this day as one in which the Old Prophet's wish is almost fulfilled.

In Scene 2 the audience is introduced to Chume, a messenger in the government, and Amope, his ill-tempered wife. Amope is determined to receive money that Brother Jero owes her for a velvet cape that he purchased from her, unbeknownst to Chume, who is his most faithful penitent. Amope camps outside his door and after a brief confrontation Jero sneaks out to the beach, where he tells his followers he lives. Chume arrives at the beach and meets Jero in Scene 3, eager to list his grievances about his wife. Jero has told Chume that he must not beat his wife, despite repeated requests from Chume. As the rest of the congregation gathers, a fight between a Drummer Boy and a woman temporarily distracts Jero, who leaves to attempt to mitigate the fight while Chume temporarily takes over his sermon, empowered. When Jero returns, exhausted, he discovers that Chume's wife is in fact Amope and grants him permission to beat her, hoping it will take care of his problems as well.

In Scene 4, Chume is emboldened to talk back to Amope. He soon discovers, however, that the man who is her debtor is in fact Brother Jero, and that his prophethood is built on a web of lies. Instead of beating Amope, he takes off to confront Jero. In Scene 5 Jero is in the process of converting another penitent, a Member of the House, by playing on his desire to become a

Minister, when Chume arrives with the intention of killing Jero. Jero flees, as the Penitent interprets his disappearance as a sign of his divinity. When Jero returns he has arranged for Chume to be taken to an insane asylum, and his newest Penitent is more strongly convinced of his status as a Prophet, dedicating himself to Jero as his "Master."

## **CHARACTER LIST**

### **Brother Jero**

Brother Jero is the main character of the play and the leader of his self-organized Brotherhood of Jero. He is a “*suave*” and false prophet who preaches to the community in hopes of attracting more followers. Although claiming to have been born a prophet, Jero frequently admits to his acts of deception and above all else desires to be held in high esteem as “*Brother Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ’s Crusade.*”

### **Old Prophet**

The Old Prophet is Brother Jero’s former tutor, whom Brother Jero later drove off his own land. He appears only in the first scene, in which he curses Brother Jero for his maltreatment.

### **Chume**

Chume is one of Brother Jero’s most loyal and trusting assistants, a chief messenger in the local government office. Chume is trapped in an unhappy marriage with his wife, Amope, and frequently turns to Brother Jero for advice.

### **Amope**

Amope is Chume's wife, who is unhappy and self-righteous, constantly arguing with Amope and other characters about the injustices they have caused her.

### **Trader**

In Scene II, a woman trader selling smoked fish appears briefly on her way to town. She is stopped by Amope, argues with her about pricing, and leaves cursing her.

### **Drummer Boy**

A drummer boy appears in the third scene, pursued hastily by a woman who has accused him of using his drums to abuse her father. He insists to Brother Jero that he has not done anything wrong, and begs the woman to not take away his drums.

### **Member of Parliament**

This cowardly Member of Parliament holds a position in the Federal House but desperately wants a position as minister. Although he constantly practices his political speeches on the beach, he is too afraid to act on these desires. While he initially distrusts Jero, the Member of Parliament is ultimately put under his spell when Jero prophesies that he will one day be Minister of War.

## **THEMES**

### **Gender**

The characters of *The Trials of Brother Jero* are bound to their gender roles, with many personality traits explicitly attributed to a character's sex. Men constantly struggle to steer clear of



the temptation of sin posed by women: Brother Jero himself admits that he has “*one weakness—women,*” the basis of the central conflict between his desired self-image and reality. Chume, too, fights the urge to beat Amope for her constant pestering. Women are described as “*fickle,*” “*the plague,*” and “*daughters of discord.*” This characterization by Brother Jero and Chume places blame on women for the burden they place on men and their sinful nature. The women of the play, on the other hand, feel tied to the will of men and therefore similarly limited. Amope complains that “*it is a tough life for a woman*” as she must depend on Chume and what he provides, which she deems insufficient for her needs. This barrier between men and women causes lapses in understanding and strained relationships. In this way, the theme of gender drives much of the plot in the play.

### **Faith and Religion**

Soyinka's play is widely considered a satire of proselytizing faith. Brother Jero's success rests entirely on the blind faith of his followers, whom he is able to win over easily by offering false and fantastic prophesies. Thus the virtue in faith alone is called into question, and Christianity—at least in the form found with characters like Brother Jero—scrutinized. Although Brother Jero loses one follower in Chume at the end of the play, he is able to win over another, the Member of Parliament, just as quickly, speaking to the power of faith in its aim to fulfill personal hope and desire. Soyinka's play forces the reader to question when belief is and is not justified, and to consider who has the power to claim and impart knowledge.

## **Social Status**

The influence of social status is also a driving force in the play: Brother Jero's false prophethood is driven by a desire to elevate himself to a nearly divine status in his community. Yet just as this drives his willing deceit of others, it influences the willingness of others to be deceived. Brother Jero in fact plays on the same desires in others to elevate his own status: Chume relies on Jero's prophecy that he will become a Chief Clerk, while the Member of the House is seduced by the power that will come with Jero's prophecy of his becoming Minister for War. In this way, the quest for increased social status and the privileges it brings influences every character in the play, regardless of their current social standing.

## **Communication**

The role of communication in theater, and especially in Soyinka's play, is important, as Soyinka pays special attention to its influence in power dynamics. One of Amope's most powerful characteristics is her ability to insult even while speaking indirectly around the subject, whereas Jero's lofty and elegant wording is integral to his perception of himself as superior to those he converts. Similarly, Chume expresses his confusion and emotion through a change in his speech, relying on pidgin during moments of tension and excitement. Each character's words are carefully chosen, as words misunderstood or misinterpreted push the play forward.

## **Politics**

Soyinka is not only poking fun at religion but also criticizing politics; often, as the play reveals, there is a large overlap between the two. Politics appears at an official level, such as the supposed low salary granted to Chume as the local government's messenger and the Member of the House's desire for a position of more power, between the local village and the central government. But it also exists at a more informal level, between each character attempting to figure out her/his role in a country still negotiating its new independence from Britain. Jero's very rise to power was a result of what he called a successful "campaign" against other prophets and their followings, and as the self-elected leader, or tyrant, of the Brotherhood of Jero, his every action is political, serving to consolidate his own power.

## **Financial vs. Intrinsic Value**

The assignment of value to peoples, professions, and goods is central to *The Trials of Brother Jero*. While religion ordinarily serves to hold value in itself, Jero uses his Brotherhood as a tool to achieve power. Rather than valuing his followers as people and ends in themselves, Jero assigns value as if they were goods to be traded and swapped. This is demonstrated when, following his loss of Chume's faith, Jero attempts to convert the Member, as if balancing his books. In doing so, Jero commodifies religion, turning toward a system that understands only financial gains. Through his actions, Soyinka seems to be asking his audience how we should properly value each other

and our lives, in a world where people focus increasingly on making financial gains.

### **Individual vs. Community**

The ever-present and observant crowd is quite prominent throughout the play, watching scenes of provocation and fighting, such as Amope's fight with Chume. The tension between the needs of the individual and the community is apparent in Amope's firmly held belief that everyone wishes her ill and that she can only rely on herself. Chume is first empowered by his interaction with an eager crowd, stepping in to take over Jero's sermon: Once the crowd believes Chume's words, he believes them as well. But even as the individual finds strength in the support of the community, he or she struggles to find strength in its absence. Chume seems to become even more incensed as the crowd watching his attack on Amope questions his actions, as he breaks from society's expectations and understanding of what is rational to pursue Jero. The pressure of an always-alert crowd also plagues Jero, who constantly thinks to inform and share secrets with the play's audience, as if asking for their approval.

### **QUOTES AND ANALYSIS**

*"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. (Straightens himself.) Immaculate, Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade..."* Jero, 14

In this quotation, Brother Jero reveals his ultimate aim to be a figure of high esteem within his community. Yet although his intention is to be known as velvet-hearted, or kind, his statement reveals the emphasis that Jero places on image rather than on his actions. Here we understand that Brother Jero is not concerned about his actions earning his name so much as his outward appearance reflecting it.

*"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."* Jero, 14

This quotation reveals Jero's view of the relationship between imagination and spirit, essential for the faith of his followers. Jero feels pressure to "**appeal**" to his followers by advertising his prophecy and teachings. His mention of modernity also points to what Soyinka evaluates as an increasingly artificial nature of religious communities and their followings. A modern consumer culture has pushed even prophecy into becoming a "**business**," as Jero states.

*"I am glad I got here before any customers—I mean worshippers—well, customers if you like. I always get that feeling every morning that I am a shop-keeper waiting for customers. The regular ones come at definite times. Strange, dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep the, 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 another of my flock gone forever. As long as he doesn't beat her, he comes here feeling helpless, and so there is no chance of his rebelling against me. Everything, in fact, is planned."* Jero, 14-15

Here Brother Jero reveals his strategy for attracting and retaining his worshippers, whom he sees as customers. Religion and prophecy for Brother Jero are commodified: He values his human relationships merely as business transactions and thus views prophecy as a means to material ends. Soyinka aims to point out the irony in this understanding, as true faith rests on the immaterial. In this quotation Brother Jero also indicates that he has lost other followers in his "flock" in the past (his diction further dehumanizing his worshippers), foreshadowing the fate of Chume. The reader understands that Jero's power rests on his control, as he emphasizes his ability to "plan" the fate of his worshippers.

*"From the moment I looked out of my window this morning, I have been tormented one way or another by the daughters of discord."* Jero, 21

This quotation reflects the play's central characterization of women as vexing and malevolent figures. Jero's statement places blame on the female sex for his personal failures, and it also condemns women to the realm of permanent sin.

*"You didn't hear me complain. You did your best, but if my toes are to be broken one by one just because I have to*

*monkey on your bicycle, you must admit it's a tough life for a woman."* Amope, 9

This quotation is one of the first lines of dialogue attributed to a woman in the play. It immediately draws attention to the hardship of women. Here Amope, the only female character consistently highlighted in the play, underscores the irony of the expectations placed on women and the way in which women act these expectations out. Amope feels like she cannot complain although she perceives great hardship. Of course, her actions belie her words: She is in fact complaining. Although the hardship she references in this quotation is greatly exaggerated, Amope here demonstrates her intelligence, her *ability to have her voice heard*.

*"Actually I knew it was he the moment he opened his mouth. Only Brother Chume reverts to that animal jabber when he gets his spiritual excitement. And that is much too often for my liking. He is too crude, but that is to my advantage. It means he would never think of setting himself up as my equal."* Jero, 16

In this quotation, Brother Jero reveals his distaste for pidgin, which he disparagingly describes as "*animal jabber*." Although he criticizes Chume's "*crude*" manners, he also reveals that they are essential to maintaining his own position as Chume's trusted leader. This quotation highlights Jero's own conception of his false prophethood: He must invent a distance between himself and his subjects in order to maintain his elevated status. Jero's use of the word "*animal*" is not only condescending but also

filled with layers of historical connotations, especially as colonizing white settlers in Africa frequently dehumanized Africans by referring to them in the same way. Thus Jero does not really intend to help Chume or take him seriously; he is equally willing to dehumanize Chume to consolidate his own power.

*"Yes, Father, those who are Messenger today, make 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 them their own bicycle tomorrow. Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow. ... I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow."* Chume, 20-21

This quotation marks the first step of Chume's transition from serving as Brother Jero's blind, faithful follower to finding his own voice. Chume originally feels uncomfortable temporarily taking over Brother Jero's sermon, speaking calmly and hesitantly measuring his words. However, as he continues to preach to his captivated audience, Chume, too, begins to believe his own words and will them into being, becoming more animated as the crowd matches his own enthusiasm. Chume and the crowd enter a reciprocal relationship where the crowd's passion empowers Chume, and vice versa. As Chume believes more in his own words and what they predict, his language becomes less formal and more impassioned; he begins to use some pidgin, often regarded with disdain by elites like Brother



Jero. The irony here is that Chume's candid, casual use of pidgin seems to make him more able to connect with the crowd he addresses.

*"Chume, fool! O God, my life done spoil. My life done spoil finish. O God a no' get eyes for my head. Na lie. Na big lie. Na pretence 'e de pretend that wicked woman. She no go collect nutin! She no' mean to sleep for outside house. The prophet na' in lover. ... O god, wetin a do for you wey you go spoil my life so? Wetin make you vex for me so? I offend you? Chume, foolish man you life done spoil. Your life don spoil yea, ye..."* Chume, 29

This quote encapsulates Chume's full transition, once he has discovers Jero's inventions and lies. Chume laments his former blind faith in Jero; because his faith in the Brotherhood was central to his life, his discovery of Jero's fallacy leads him to question all constants in his life, including his wife's fidelity. As Chume becomes increasingly sure of the reality of his situation, he increases his use of pidgin. What makes less and less sense and becomes more disjointed to the reader, or viewer, becomes clearer and more obvious to Chume. This version of reality, however, is pursued just as dogmatically, and is just as flawed, as Chume's original belief system.

*"Now he... he is already a member of my flock. He does not know it of course, but he is a follower. All I need do is claim him. Call him and say to him, My dear Member of the House, your place awaits you ... Or do you doubt it? Watch me go to work on him."* Jero, 28

In this scene Jero approaches his next penitent, aware that he has lost Chume's faith. Jero's attitude toward the Member of the House is the same as it had been toward Chume, however, signifying no lessons learned on Jero's part. Jero sees the Member, too, as an animal he can tame and then "claim" by incorporating him into his "flock." Jero thus sees his followers just as a shepherd might see own sheep: as tools to serve a purpose. Jero also explicitly addresses the audience, anticipating their doubt--perhaps, a bit of his own as well. Jero deeply values the art of performance, as his profession itself is an act, and this new opportunity as a next setting, into which he eagerly invites the audience.

***"I don't know what the world is coming to. A thief of a prophet, a swindler of a fish-seller and now that thing with lice on his head comes begging for money."*** Amope, 13

This quotation from Amope ends Scene 2 and further illuminates Amope's personality. Constantly playing the role of both the victimized and the superior, Amope self-isolates. While it is true that she has been "swindled" by Jero, who will not pay her back, she attributes a sense of malice or deception to almost everyone she meets, acting aggressively toward both the fish-seller and the drummer child. Amope punctuates these beliefs and actions by placing blame on "the world," acting as if everything is entirely in her hands, while she serves to perpetuate tensions and conflict.

## SUMMARY

### Summary and Analysis of Scene 1

In Scene One, Jero introduces himself directly to the audience. The setting is a completely dark stage with the spotlight shining directly on Jero, emphasizing the religious nature and importance of his role. He is described as "suave," a "heavily but neatly bearded man" with hair "thick and high."

Jero immediately asserts that he is a prophet, "by birth and by inclination." He was born with thick hair that covered his eyes and neck, convincing his parents of his prophethood. He laments that prophethood is no longer as respectable as it had been in the past; he explains that a struggle among competitors for land on the beach degraded the profession until the Town Council stepped in to "settle the prophets' territorial warfare once and for all." We learn that Jero helped his master, the prophet who educated him, win land through a campaign of "six dancing girls from the French territory, all dressed as Jehovah's Witnesses."

Jero admits, however, that he was really intending to help himself. Yet he tells the audience "the beach is hardly worth having these days," as worshippers have depleted and gaining converts becomes increasingly difficult. He complains that "they all prefer high life to the rhythm of celestial hymns" and attributes a lack of worshippers to the popularity of television. As he is explaining that he aims to show the audience an important day in his life, "a day when I thought for a moment

that the curse of my old master was about to be fulfilled," the Old Prophet enters the scene.

Shaking his fist, the Old Prophet interrupts Jero, to call him an "ungrateful wretch" and admonish him for driving him off his own land, neglecting the training he had received. He curses Brother Jero but becomes inaudible as Jero continues his explanation. Finally he cries, "I curse you with the curse of the daughters of discord. May they be your downfall" and goes offstage, as Brother Jero continues. He admits that women are his only weakness but insists that he would not risk his profession and calling by giving into the temptation. He insists that he has never been involved in a scandal with women. He sets up the next scene by concluding, "And it was a sad day indeed when I woke up one morning and the first thin to meet my eyes was a daughter of Eve. You can compare that feeling with waking and finding a vulture crouched on your bed post." The stage goes black.

### **Analysis**

The first scene introduces Brother Jero as a confident, self-righteous character with little conscience. He has no qualms about deceiving his old tutor, and is confident in his ability to convince the audience that his actions are warranted. Soyinka makes clear that he speaks with "accustomed loftiness," emphasizing that he is well versed in the art of influence, which Jero aims to show the audience by presenting them with a day of his life.

Also important is the managerial nature of Jero's profession and the language with which he discusses it. Jero must sell his prophecies like a businessman, eagerly convincing the audience of his authenticity and capabilities. Yet he also admits to recent hardships, posed by modernity, in what he calls "the trade." Already the audience has a sense of Soyinka's satire, as Jero's entire sense of self is built off a phony prophecy and actions unbefitting of a true prophet.

## **Summary and Analysis of Scene 2**

### **Summary**

Scene 2 opens in the early morning, set outside of Brother Jero's hut in a fishing village. Chume arrives into the scene on a bicycle, with Amope, his wife, riding on the handlebars. They pull up beside the hut, on Amope's command; the bike tilts to one side and Amope stops it from falling with her foot. With a "tone of martyrdom" she immediately accuses Chume of breaking her ankle, and begins to limp. Chume criticizes her complaining, and Amope responds that she is not complaining, but that he must admit "it's a tough life for a woman."

The pair continue to bicker aimlessly, as Amope continues to claim that she is not "the kind of person who would [ever] think evil of anyone" while she criticizes Chume for his treatment of her. Meanwhile, Chume unloads a bag, saucepans, two bottles of water, a box of matches, a piece of yam, two tins, a spoon, and a knife from his bicycle, placing them next to Amope. Amope snaps that he has forgotten her mat, but Chume replies that she has a bed at home and that he is late for work.

Now Amope turns toward a criticism of Chume's job as a Chief Messenger in the local government, noting that his other friends are ministers, "riding in long cars." More than exasperated, Chume flees from the scene as she talks. She continues her monologue even in his absence, explaining that she thinks he will not "make the effort to become something in life." At this point, Jero opens the window of his hut, staring outside for a few moments in meditation. He is calm until he sees Amope's back from his view. Confused, he opens his door cautiously for a better look, and realizing that it is Amope shuts the door quickly. Amope opens a notebook and goes over figures, as Jero attempts to discretely climb out the window without her notice. "Where do you think you're going?" she asks him without even turning around. He jumps back into his house.

Amope says that Jero has owed her one pound, eight shillings, and nine pence for three months, as she closes her notebook and begins to prepare her breakfast. Jero opens the door slightly and now addresses Amope uncomfortably. "I hope you have not come to stand in the way of Christ and his work," he tries. Amope circumvents his evasion, calling him a "bearded debtor" and insisting that she will not let him leave until he has paid her. Jero insists that he must go to the post office to receive the money, and goes back into his hut when Amope calls his bluff.

A woman trader carrying a bowl on her head now passes through the scene, and Amope calls out to her to ask what she is selling. The trader is reluctant to stop and asks Amope if she is buying to trader further or for herself, to which Amope replies that she must first know what the trader is selling. The trader is

selling smoked fish and stops to take it out for Amope, although she says that she does not ordinarily stop before getting to the market. At Amope's request, she says she is selling a dozen fish for one pound and three shillings and no less. Amope asserts that her fish are from last week and that they smell, while the trader warns her not to ruin her luck for the morning and retorts that maybe the smell is Amope herself. Amope responds negatively, and the two trade insults as the trader packs her fish off and begins to leave. Amope demands that the trader "take your beggar's rags out of my sight," and she responds, "May you never do good in all your life."

At this moment, Amope notices that Jero has just left through the window of his hut, and jumps up. She accuses him of being a thief, questions his prophethood, and then turns back to the trader who is also gone. As she is cursing both Jero and the trader, a drummer boy enters and approaches Amope. She immediately turns toward him and demands that he leave. The boy runs, while beating insults on his drum. The lights fade on Amope who is still complaining of the "thief of a prophet, a swindler of a fish-seller and now that thing with lice on his head."

### **Analysis**

This scene establishes Amope as a powerful female character who threatens almost everyone she encounters. Jero, Chume, the trader, and the drummer boy all fear her anger and constant criticism. Although Amope curses almost everyone she meets, the audience is aware that she is very unhappy with her own life

and limited options. She must depend on Chume as her husband and on Jero for his debts to be repaid; both men she feels she cannot trust. Amope is ultimately left alone in front of Jero's hut, but also alone in lack of real companionship, with no one to complain to but herself.

## **Summary and Analysis of Scene 3**

### **Summary**

Scene 3 represents the majority of the rising action of the play. The scene opens at the beach, where palm leaves and stakes mark the land of Jero's church. A cross and rosary hangs from one of many empty bottles on the ground. Brother Jero is wearing a white velvet cape, standing with his divine rod. He first addresses the audience, saying that he is unsure how Amope found his house. He reveals that he had brought his fine cape from her, and that she did not originally question his ability to pay. Jero explains that he wished to procure such a cape so that his followers would call him “the velvet-hearted Jeroboam.” He aims to be known as “Immaculate Jero, the Articulate Hero of Christ’s Crusade.”

Jero suddenly becomes very angry at the prospect of having had to escape through his own window, and curses Amope. As he does, a young girl wearing little clothing passes by his sight. He explains that she basset by every morning before going to swim. Jero launches back into a monologue, admitting that he feels like “a shop-keeper waiting for customers.” He adds that his followers are “dissatisfied” because he keeps them so, referencing Chume specifically. Jero says that although Chume



wants to beat his wife, Jero will never let him do so, because keeping him under Jero's power means that he will not rebel.

The girl, now clean after swimming and with much better appearance, returns to walk back across the stage; Jero stares as she passes, calling it a "divine transformation." He shouts to the Lord to pray for the power to resist temptation. As he leans over his knees with hands together, Chume arrives. Jero asks him to pray as well, and he submits. Together they invoke the Lord, Abraham, David, Samuel, Job, Elijah, and Jesus, becoming increasingly passionate. Finally, Jero stands up to address Chume and inquire why he is not at work in the morning. Chume says he has called in sick, and Jero sees that he wishes to pray to relieve his troubles. Speaking to the audience only, Jero refers to Chume's excitement while praying as "animal jabber," calling him crude but admitting this means that "he would never think of setting himself up as my equal." He then mentions that most of his followers believe he lives on the beach, and that "it does them good to believe I am something of an ascetic."

Jero returns to coax Chume into silent meditation, until Chume bursts out insisting that Jero must let him beat his wife. Jero says it is not the will of God, as Chume desperately insists, speaking in passionate pidgin, that his wife will be his downfall. Jero asks God to forgive Chume, calling him a sinner. He continues instructing Chume as other worshippers enter, joining in with the prayer. Jero says that Chume's wife is his "heaven-sent ritual" and then begins to address the audience alone. He reveals that he prophesied that the first-arriving worshipper will

become a chief in his town, and that another of his followers will become prime minister of a yet-to-be-formed Mid-North-East State. Another of his penitents desperately wants children. He turns back to his congregation, and summons Jero once again. The congregation begins to sing and dance, and Jero gives Chume bottles to fill with seawater.

As he leaves, the drummer boy runs onstage looking over his shoulder, followed by a woman, Jero's neighbor, who is chasing him. Jero inquires what the drummer did; he has been accused of insulting the woman's father but denies his guilt. They both run off stage quickly while Chume reenters with the water, which Jero intends to bless. But the two reappear, and Jero feels the obligation to run after them, leaving Chume with the task of blessing the water. Chume leads the chorus when one penitent separates herself from the group, shouting incoherently in spasm. Chume calls desperately for Jero, and unable to find him hesitantly sprinkles some of the holy water on the penitent and crosses her. He begins to ask for her forgiveness, and gaining confidence with the consistent cries of "Amen" from the congregation, continues on his own sermon asking God for future successes. As he is passionately speaking, the woman again enters, drums in hand. The drummer boy follows, begging for his drums to be returned. The penitent then points out Brother Jero's return: He is bleeding, with his clothes torn.

Jero orders everyone to leave, so that he can pray for the "soul of that sinful woman" on his own. He tells Chume he is shocked that a woman would "dare lift her hand against a

prophet of God” and that he’d sensed that women would cause him trouble today. Chume agrees, citing his experience with his wife (whom Jero still does not realize is Amope) in the morning. As Chume continues his story and Jero makes the connection that Chume’s wife is Amope, Jero alters his advice to Chume for his own benefit. He says that since Chume’s wife “seems such a wicked, willful sinner,” Chume must beat her. Chume is overjoyed, but Jero adds that he must do it within his own household. Jero capitalizes on Chume’s glee and blind trust by adding that the Son of God appeared to him and called Jero a knight: “He named me the Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ’s Crusade,” he tells the gullible Chume. Chume leaves in awe, bidding farewell to “Brother Jero—the immaculate.” Jero is left on stage holding his cape.

## **Summary and Analysis of Scene 4**

### **Summary**

Scene 4 opens in front of Jero's home later that day -- Amope has been waiting there during the aforementioned plot. Chume is finishing his meal, complimenting Amope, who has still found something to complain to Chume about: In this instance, she claims he has not brought her any clean water. Emboldened by his previous conversation with Jero, Chume insists that he did not forget the water, saying, "I just did not bring it." He then orders Amope to pack up and says they are returning home. Skeptical of his motives, Amope accuses Chume of being drunk. She refuses to leave, saying she will not pack until she has received the money she is owed. She continues to protest, arguing that Chume's small salary alone is not enough to

support her, as Chume packs up and prepares for departure. Even Sanitary Inspector would be a better job, she insists.

To this, Chume replies starkly, "Shut your big mouth!" Amope is astonished, and challenges Chume to continue his aggression. He replies that his "period of abstinence is over" and that his *"cross has been lifted off my shoulders by the prophet."*

Amope is now genuinely concerned, believing that Chume has gone mad. She, too, turns to God, begging for help. Chume orders her to get on the bike, but she refuses in fear, saying that she will find her own way home. Chume approaches her as she tries to back away, and she runs back toward the prophet's home, banging on the door and crying to be let in. Inside, Jero simply puts his fingers in his ears and mutters, "Blasphemy!"

Chume lifts Amope up, to her repeated and escalated screams. She now threatens to call the police, shouting for the prophet, and Chume threatens her by lifting his fist. Jero "gasps in mock-horror," then shakes his head and leaves. Chume orders Amope once again to get on the bike, to which Amope replies, "I won't get on that thing unless you kill me first."

Now neighbors are surrounding the scene, and Amope shouts that they can bear witness to the scene. She proclaims that she forgives all those who have caused her "evil" and forgives her debtors, "especially the prophet who has got me into all this trouble." She explicitly names Brother Jeroboam as this prophet, shouting that he can keep the velvet cape that he bought from her if he "curse[s] this foolish man."

Suddenly, hearing Amope mention Jero and his debts to her, Chume appears confused and turns away, telling Amope to shut up. The surrounding crowd grows more anxious, whispering to one another, but no one intervenes. He then approaches Amope, as she continues to pound on Jero's door. "Did I hear you say Prophet Jeroboam?" Amope is still shouting that Chume will kill her, but he insists that he will only touch her if she does not answer his question. He pushes further, asking Amope if Brother Jero lives in the house whose door she is facing. She only replies, "Kill me."

The nearest member of the crowd confirms that the house indeed belongs to Brother Jero. Astonished, Chume turns to stare at the house in silence, occasionally muttering "So.... so...." as he puts together the pieces. The crowd and Amope look to him in anticipation. Finally, he starts toward his bike, appearing to have made sense of Brother Jero's intentions. "So...suddenly he decides I may beat my wife, eh? For his own convenience," he says. He removes all belongings and packages from the bicycle and, before riding off, demands that Amope remain in place until he returns.

Amope addresses the crowd, saying she has never before seen Chume act in such a way. She claims he is mad, and confirms this when a bystander asks for verification. If that is the case, the bystander responds, Amope must send Chume to Brother Jero; she relates a story of a brother of hers whom Jero cured of the devil. Amope responds that this prophet is merely a debtor, and "that's all he knows." The scene closes on Amope unpacking the bundles that Chume had removed from his bike.

## **Analysis**

This scene represents that peak of the play's rising action, as Jero's fallacies are revealed to Chume. Chume has finally decided to act on his own volition, making his first decision in the play that is not reliant on the opinions of Jero or Amope. It is ironic that in moments of real fear, Amope, too, relies on Jero, turning to a power considered--if not by her, then by most others--higher than her own. In this moment, Amope will herself to believe in Jero's power as well. Yet she is just as quick to dismiss him once again, when out of Chume's angry hands.

Jero is satisfied with his presence in the scene, unknown to all others, as if he is omniscient, watching the characters act out the plot of a play he has already written. His "mock-horror" at the scene unfolding before him stresses his own enjoyment at the disaster, and his ability to separate himself from the consequences of his actions as if he were indeed watching a play rather than engaging with reality. He is, of course, unwilling to take responsibility for his actions, as he sneaks out of the scene.

## **Summary and Analysis of Scene 5**

### **Summary**

The final scene of the play opens at the beach at nightfall. A man, the Member of the House, is standing wearing an intricate agbada and passionately practicing a speech that the audience cannot hear. Jero watches the Member from afar with "lofty

compassion." He explains that this man works for the Federal House but hopes to become a Minister. Although he comes every day to practice speeches, he does not ever make them, Jero tells the audience, calling him a "poor fish." He contemplates the member condescendingly before recalling what he has just witnessed from Chume.

Jero assumes that Chume has now "beaten his wife senseless," which he views as a shame only because it means Chume is "fulfilled and no longer needs me." However, Jero dismisses the loss of his most faithful follower as a "good price to pay for getting rid of my creditor." Turning his attention back to the Member, Jero proclaims that he is already a follower, although he is currently unaware. Demonstrating to the audience his ability to "claim" the Member, Jero calls out to him.

"Dear brother, do I not know you?" he shouts. The Member is originally startled, but turns to continue his speech. Jero continues, proclaiming that he knows the Member, just as was predicted by God. He insists that he carries a message from the Lord.

The haughty Member rejects Jero, considering himself above the prophet: "Go and practice your fraudulences on another person of greater gullibility," he responds. Jero laments that indeed, the Member must not belong to the Lord, but continues that "his favour" was directed toward the Member. Jero launches into a lengthy and elaborate description of his vision, in which he asserts that he saw the Member leading his country out of war. "And, at a desk, in a large gilt room, great men of

the land awaited your decision. Emissaries of foreign nations hung on your word, and on the door leading into your office, I read the words, Minister for War [...],” he describes.

At the mention of this title, the Member turns around, facing Jero, who continues to emphasize this future position of power. He now begins to draw the member in by asking whether he should tell God to give this blessing to another, "more God-fearing" man? As the Member begins to move forward toward Jero, Jero stops him, saying he thinks that he sees the Devil in the Member's eyes. The Member tries to deny these claims by lifting his arms, as Jero continues that he might has the influence to change the Lord's mind. "Brother, are you of God or are you ranged among his enemies?" he asks the Member.

At this point, the lights fade on Jero, as Chume's voice grows apparent. Chume then appears on stage, talking to himself. He is still lamenting his former belief in the prophet, proclaiming that Jero is not a man of God who sleeps on the beach. He asks himself how the prophet and his wife know each other, and how they could have met, then stops, thinking, and grows even more impassioned. Now exclaiming that his life is ruined, he has convinced himself that Jero and Amope are in fact lovers, both deceiving Chume for two years. He also curses himself for being "foolish." His cries continue, but fade as the lights turn back to Jero, who is now preaching over the kneeling Member, whose eyes are closed and hands pressed together.

Jero bellows, asking the Lord for protection so that the Member can become a leader of the country. As his voice heightens,



Chume runs in with a sword. He calls Jero an "adulterer" and "woman-thief" and makes clear his intentions to kill him. Jero flees, as the Member opens his eyes and comes to, uncertain of what has happened. In his view, the prophet has miraculously vanished. He first begs for Jero to return but is left more convinced that he had been "in the presence of God."

Jero re-enters the scene, unseen by the Member. Jero attests, to the audience, that "tomorrow, the whole town have heard about the miraculous disappearance of Brother Jeroboam." The member, meanwhile, sits down after taking his shoes off, insisting that he must show his faith and wait for Jero's re-appearance on this holy ground. He stands up again, determined.

Jero continues explaining to the audience what has transpired: He has already called the police, arranging for him to spend a year in an asylum. Meanwhile, the Member has begun to fall asleep; Jero says that when he reappears, it will be as if he has fallen from the sky. He plans to tell the Member that Chume is controlled by the Devil, and that they must act to have him sent away.

Jero then throws a pebble at the Member to awake him. A ring of light as a halo appears around his head, as the Member wakes up to see Jero right in front of him. He is shocked, falling on his face, and whispers, "Master!" as the scene comes to an end.

### **Analysis**

Thus the play ends with a contented Jero who has seduced another follower, with promises of later power and privilege, to

take the place of Chume, whom he has also dismissed as deranged. The scene highlights Jero's transactional relationship with his followers, as Jero simply writes off his loss of Chume as an unfortunate but necessary "price to pay." Thus Jero has managed to strip religion and faith of its basics, turning prophethood and prophecies into commodities. Yet those that willingly follow him are just as guilty of helping Jero take advantage of their greed and desperation.

The climax of the storyline, in which an enraged Chume approaches Jero intending to kill him, temporarily subverts the power structure that Jero maintains throughout. Jero is terrified, and too cowardly to explain himself or confront Chume, flees. This important moment reveals the very fine line Jero walks with his followers. Chume's anger could very well foreshadow that of future discoveries, and traps Jero into a relationship with his followers in which he is equally desperate and frightened. Underneath his act, Jero, too, is just as desperate for power and fame, as evidenced by the elaborate measures and web of lies he creates to elevate his own status. While luck is on his side so far, he is ultimately just as trapped as those he converts.

Soyinka's description of the final halo of light that appears around Jero's head stands as a final emphasis on his falsehood: The "red or some equally startling colour" is clearly unnatural, uncomfortable and forced. A red light seems to emphasize Jero's trickery and deception, placing him closer to the Satan that he often uses to scare others.

## **Satire as a genre**

Satire is a form of literature or theater that employs humor and irony to expose the flaws in a certain subject (e.g., corruption), usually with a critical or disparaging tone.

## **The Trials of Brother Jero Nigerian theater**

Soyinka writes as a member and important shape, of the Nigerian literary and theatrical canon. Theater carries a rich tradition in Nigeria, as performances were traditionally a part of ritual and social gatherings. An early form of today's Nigerian theater, written primarily in Yoruba, emerged in the 1940s and was heavily reliant on local folklore. As Nigeria moved toward independence, theater was also used to serve a political purpose, apparent in even Soyinka's early writings. Soyinka's plays incorporate Nigerian and Yoruban traditions with his Western education, making his plays accessible and popular within both communities.

Other influential Nigerian playwrights include Hubert Ogunde (1916-1990), Ola Rotimi (1938-2000), and Philip Begho (1956-), among others.

## **Essay Questions**

**1. Soyinka's play is often characterized as satire. Do you agree? If so, what does he satirize, and how? If not, how would you categorize this work?**

Soyinka's play can easily be seen as a satire in his critical focus on the falsities of certain religious followings. Soyinka

satirizes his specific visions of Christianity and religion through his ridiculous portrayal of Jero and his determination to expand his Brotherhood. Soyinka's play, however, can also be considered a tragicomedy, as its humor also ends in a disappointing outcome for Chume and further perpetuation of Jero's lies, highlighting humanity's unbounded desire to believe.

Amope is not exactly a heroine or a villain, but she is undoubtedly one of the play's leading characters. What purpose does she serve in the play?

Although Amope's constant complaints make it hard to view her favorably, she is often the voice of reason in the text. She is, in fact, the only character that accurately calls Jero out for what he is: a debtor and a fraud. Although she is often correct, she is also the character people are least likely to listen to, and most likely to avoid, demonstrating the ease with which characters can stray from reality.

### **3. How does Soyinka incorporate the use of Nigerian pidgin into the script, and for what purpose does he do this?**

Never fully comfortable in English, Chume often breaks into pidgin while particularly excited, both for negative and positive reasons. Chume's use of pidgin as such first seems to underline the stark differences in background and education between Chume and Jero. However, pidgin is not necessarily to be looked down upon here: rather, it can be seen as tool exploited by Jero to further cement his own position of power.

**4. Jero, the Old Prophet, and Chume, all of who are significantly sexist, constantly criticize women. What does Soyinka intend to reveal about gender dynamics in this play, and how? Does he agree with the men of his story?**

Soyinka's play certainly draws attention to the gendered divides common in parts of Nigeria; however, it is important to remember that the society he here describes is corrupt and confused. Although women do face marginalization and sexism, Soyinka provides irony in creating Amope as one of the most feared characters of the play. Chume and Jero alike are equally terrified of Amope, underlining what Soyinka presents as ridiculous and unfounded stereotypes about women.

**5. Analyze, with reference to Soyinka's description of Jero's character, Jero's desired title of "Immaculate Jero, the Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade." What does this self-attributed title intend to highlight?**

Jero's proud title seems odd for that of a prophet, yet it stems from a will to place himself apart from his own economic and cultural climate. His desire to be seen as "immaculate" reflects his peculiar dress and appearance, his need to separate himself from the rest of the villagers. His emphasis on "articulate" is a reaction to what he sees as the uneducated pidgin used by Chume and others. As he separates himself from his peers, Jero's title, too, must reflect the visible signs that prove his prophethood.

**6. Chume faces a large transformation over the course of this tale. Describe his change of character as it relates to one of the play's themes.**

Chume begins without his own sense of agency, blindly following Jero's words, deeply frustrated with his wife, and almost resigned to his unhappy state of affairs. However, he is empowered by his moment of leadership while taking over Jero's sermon, emboldened by Jero's permission to beat Amope, and finally snaps when he discovers that Jero is a phony. Although set free of lies and finally independent, Chume's final fate speaks to the power of social dynamics and their restrictions.

**7. Upon Chume's sudden change of character, Amope declares that he has gone mad. Discuss the role of madness in the play as it relates to the main characters.**

Amope's assertion that Chume has gone mad and Jero's plans to have him sent to a "lunatic asylum" are ironic as they come when Chume has finally discovered the truth of his situation. Having broken free from his former deception, Chume's newfound ability to act outside of the constraints set upon him by Jero or Amope cause both to frame him as "mad." Thus, madness in the play is actually associated with Chume's ability to act independently, highlighting the constant deception by which other characters, acting as the followers Jero forms, live.

**8. Discuss the significance of the social and historical context in which the play was written on its action and characters. Answer with reference to historical research.**

This essay can lead to a number of directions. One route could discuss Soyinka's experience with a Christian upbringing combined with elements of the traditional Yoruba faith. Another could discuss how the social and political circumstances post-independence in Nigeria contributed to an environment that makes this play believable.

**9. Discuss the significance of the beachfront, where Jero proselytizes and claims to live. What is important about this location, and why?**

The beachfront is almost holy for Jero, where he holds his congregation meetings and where he convinces his congregation he sleeps. Thus this liminal space, located between the ocean and the mainland, serves as an important borderland between reality and illusion. It is the home to Jero's deception: the location where Jero targets his new converts like the Member of the House and pulls them into his following.

**10. Jero is always seen with his velvet cape, which is of great importance to him. Discuss its role in the play, as well as its symbolic significance.**

Brother Jero's velvet cape is a symbol for his false prophecies. With the intention of being known as the "velvet-hearted" Brother Jero, Jero believes the cape will allow him to embody the title. Yet the action, and his reliance on the cape, speaks

more to his vision of religion and prophecies as a transactional business--something that can be purchased and exchanged. In fact, at the end of the play the audience learns that Jero purchased this velvet cape from Amope, and it is the item for which he owes her money. The cape, therefore, embodies the debt he owes others, and the false credit on which he bases his own claims.