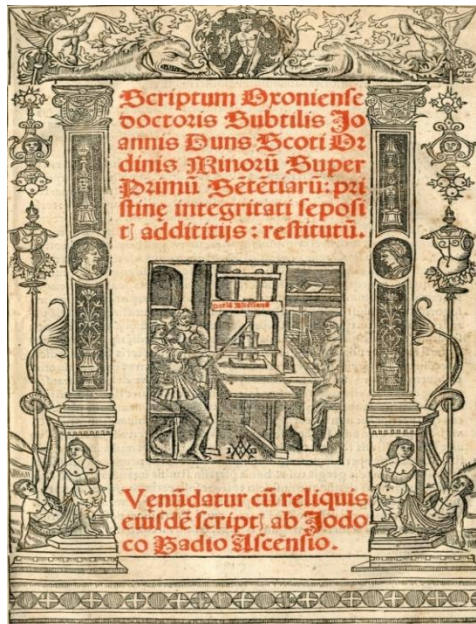


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RELIGION AND MATERIALISM IN AFRICAN DRAMA : THE CASE STUDY OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE TRIALS OF BROTHER JERO*

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Abstract : *Seduced and obsessed by the temptress prophecies and corrupt speech of Prophet Jeremy, the Faithful supposed to embody reservedly and humbly God's missions have not hesitated to follow him uncontrollably and frantically as their new God sender or messiah. Amope and her wife Chume as integral members of Christ optimists cross soldier's trends have eventually smeared the tears of disappointment and disillusionment. Wole Soyinka, one of the most outstanding playwrights of Nigerian literature, even African's, through his play, The Trials of Brother Jero, depicts acutely how facilities and commodities exert an influence on African new Christians' behaviour till soaking some of them into apostates. Brother Jeroboam in the pursuit of sparkling materialism and sordid cult of personality calls his brother of the same church-goers: 'customers'. Marxism theory will bring me referential literary material to show how religion needs reformist attitudes as well as conversion of mentalities to stay everlastly an efficient instrument of education.*

Key-words : religion, faithful, cult of personality, money, commodities, materialism

Résumé : *Séduits et obnubilés par les prophéties tentatrices et prédications corrompues de leur prophète Jérémie, les fidèles censés incarner les œuvres de Dieu avec humilité et pondération, n'ont pas hésité à suivre avec hystérie et frénésie leur nouveau messie ou envoyé de Dieu. Amope et sa femme Chume appartiennent à cette catégorie de fidèles qui espéraient trouver dans cette nouvelle église la voie du salut, et pitoyablement n'ont essuyé que les larmes de déception et de désillusion au bout du compte. A travers la pièce de théâtre, Les tribulations du prophète Jérémie, version française, Wole Soyinka, l'un des célèbres dramaturges de la littérature nigériane, voire africaine, dénonce avec acuité combien l'argent et les objets de commodités ont influé sur la conduite de nouveaux chrétiens jusqu'à produire des apostats. Le prophète Jérémie appelle ses fidèles 'mes clients', dans sa quête du matérialisme clinquant et du culte de personnalité. Le marxisme me fournira de*

matériaux de fondements littéraires pour montrer combien la religion requiert autant d'attitudes réformistes que de conversion de mentalités pour demeurer plus que jamais un potentiel instrument d'éducation.

Mots-clés : religion, fidèle, culte de personnalité, argent, objets, matérialisme

Introduction

Led by unscrupulous prophets whose dreams consist in handling presents, titles, fees or allowances, the new practice of christian religion is ostensibly erected into subtle and insidious instrument of business and quest of personality. Wole Soyinka's literary imagination goes beyond this disgust and nausea of modern conception of spirituality for the restoration of the true virtue and sacerdotal vocation of religion wiped out by a new flow of posmodernist African religious preachers. In fact, the goal of religion rimes with the true rules of drama for the quest of beauty, the sense of perfectibility and the cult of aesthetic device. Inversely, the cult of money, objects and commodities, above all the cult of personality and pursuit of sordid glory are the new expression of modern society's religious leaders. Under these circumstances, like a majority of African dramatists whose tasks revolve around the paradigm of committed writings, Soyinka's aim in writing consists in depicting, criticizing and warning readers about Africa's socio-political crumbling and religious predicaments. His play entitled *The Trials of Brother Jero*, written in 1964, seems unavoidably the direct expression of the whole Nigerian modern society in which "Brother Jero", a charismatic religious leader, is exemplifying the disintegration of traditional order by apostate preachers in quest for their own honorability, glory and publicity throughout fallacious religious machination and personal materialism. In fact, Soyinka has a thorough spiritual education and insight into Yoruba traditional religion, inherited from dead ancestors. Accordingly, he prefers to propel the attributes of "Ogun" instead of praising the counterfeit image of western religion's worshippers condoning, repudiating African religion as barbaric and archaic. In this respect, the purpose of this contribution is to show the weaknesses and foibles of the contemporary African religious leaders. Thus I will attempt to show, through marxism, how religion appears as the major instrument of business and materialism to the detriment of the cult of beauty, then Wole Soyinka's dramatic discourse on religion as instrument of cult of personality, and finally his dramatic realism for the quest of honest religious leaders.

I- Soyinka's prescience on western religion as instrument of business

Like western drama, African drama draws its primeval spring from religious institutions for the restoration of justice, honesty and equality amongst African people. African dramatist's literary imagination and artistic insight seek to transgress the boundaries of commonplace discourse for the praises of the virtue of beauty as the cornerstone of artistic creativeness and basic means of communication. It is in this context that Wole Soyinka, through his dramatic performance, strives to show contradictorily how the profanation of the notion of beauty leads African religious preachers to the cult of money as the seeds of their own disintegration.

I-1- Cult of money

Wole Soyinka's dramatic genius draws its inspiration from the cult of religious mysteries and spiritual rituals. However those mysterious divinities, under the influence of western civilization, have been substituted by a fake image of modern religion whose sacerdotal mission has been perverted to the benefit for the worshipping of western intricate objects. Money, trade, being at the stake constitutes the secret harmful and poisonous venom of religion disintegration and collapsing. Media and factual events are integral part of this grandiloquent representation of religion. In reality, it contributes to the profanation of religion: "and television too is keeping our wealthier patrons at home" (p.10). Television and wealth, here, are intertwined and overlaps one another. Television is embedded not as an ordinary means of broadcast, but as an instrument of religious propaganda and goes on to extend the publicity of religious patrons in every family. Of new religion faster than anything else in modern African society, Jeroboam's Church becomes rampant and replenishes promptly on traditional beach. One day, Jeroboam committed an error in judgment as a result of his tragic flaw and shortcomings like any hero whose power is limited. Despite Brother Jero's extraordinary talents and skills, fate has put an end to his action for having deceived his own disciples and followers. In this setting, how does money corrupt the new leader?

Money as a means of power is expressed in a satirical tone when we discover Brother Jero in perfidious attitude with Chume. In fact, he exhorts him to beat his wife Amope so that the debt owed to him becomes concealed in the eyes of faithful Christians. As such Brother Jero who is supposed to lead all the members of his congregation to reach spiritual salvation, closes his eyes to this reality. On the contrary, he ruthlessly betrays his own follower, Chume. He not only isolates him, but also deserts him in the net of the police so that the reach of money hides the preacher's devotion to have access to social well-being and sophistication of life. There seems to be something strange in the attitudes of Brother Jero who still manages to set out on the quest of disillusion that brings him nothing but suffering, dishonour, disgrace

and debasement, however may it be ephemeral or punitive, to become a crook. He even goes on naming his followers “customers” in the spirit of mercantilist ideology related to the inadequate ratio between “supply and demand” or “consumers and producers”. He pretends to be a true supplier. But, in reality, he is both a naive beneficiary, and almost producer of techniques of entertaining Christians’ illusions into deceptive contradictions when he argues convincingly: “I am glad I got here before any customers, I mean worshippers. I always get that feeling every morning that I am shopkeeper waiting for consumers” (p.19).

His position of “*shopkeeper*” as he pretends to be is a subtle machination, the quest of “cultural materialism”¹, commercial brand and packaging façade techniques to wrap his juvenile frustrations of poor preacher who feels agog of being wealthy at any costs after many years of peregrinations. Through his personal interpretation of Bible, he exerts with sweet expressions and suave prophecy an influence on his church members’ psychology to strip them of money. The use of the very cunning device leads him to borrow subtly money from Amope, his first disciple’s wife, Chume. In fact, Amope is a petty trader woman to whom Jero owes an amount of money. Amope’s dissatisfaction seems not to be astonishing in so far as he owes to her for all the goods he has benefited from credit. Thus, perplexed, baffled to pay it back, he condemns vehemently Amope’s attitude when she discovers his place, as though he were an inaccessible prophet: “I don’t know how she found out my house. When I brought the goods off her, she did not even ask any question. My calling was enough to guarantee payment” (p.19).

With the extreme poverty in which Amope is living, she cannot help claiming her money more than leaving it to him in the limits of religious donation and on the ground of faith and forgiveness. Looking furious, the prophet curses immediately the wretched woman when she starts asking the payment of her money, as evidenced by the use of this diabolic opprobrium: “God curse that woman! I never thought she would dare affront the presence of a man of God” (P19). Nevertheless, one day during a conflict opposing Amope to her husband, Chume, while calling for help and aware of the Jero’s refusal to pay back his debt, she started screaming: “Brother Jeroboam, curse this man for me. You may keep the velvet cape if you curse this foolish man. I forgive your debt” (P36).

Eventually, she concludes: “Tell the prophet. I forgive him his debt” (p.36). In this odd complicity, prophet and followers dissociate, enter into partnership, throw accusations one another for being, later on, unified in the same Church, Tabernacle, Chapel on behalf of the same God. Amope and the

¹ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*. London : Manchester University Press, 2002, p.183

prophet Brother Jero enter into money-minded conflict in such a ridiculous way that religion appears as a new instrument of business. It is difficult to distinguish the true leaders, prophets supposed to be the shepherds to goad the herd with his sacred rod, from adherents, laymen, disciples, adepts or all church-goers combined. One day she decides to make camp only to someone who owes to her money. It is no use going to church regularly in so far as cult of money substitutes cult of Lord in the eyes of Amope.

The readiness with which these common themes of greed, corruption and materialism surface in this play is a function of Soyinka's artistic and highly effective use of emphatic structure as dramatic device for education. *The Trials of Brother Jero* is infused with educational values with a view to teach accepted norms of behaviour to Nigerian audience and provide it an occasion for releasing social turmoil, political tensions and unleash pent-up religious warfare.

I-2-Cult of Objects and Commodities

One of the main concerns of drama is to learn readers or audience how to cultivate an idealistic world grounded on the seeds of well-being, honour, respect, reverence, high-opinion, admiration and comfort. Inversely, baffled to the doom of social dramas and the yoke of poverty, Soyinka's characters rebuke this world they regard as abstract, utopian and too far away to be true. They supersede the cult of God, father of happiness, concord and harmony, by the cult of object and commodities.

In Adorno's view, the cult of commodity and industrial objects such as gadgets or shining materials stems from religion which promises its adepts the celestial and blissful Heaven. One reason for this seductiveness is that those who listen to preachers are taken in by "the veneer of individual effect"², which makes the Christians think that they are hearing something new and different. Hence, "the necessary correlate of standardization is pseudo-individuality"³. For him, most people in materialistic society lead limited, impoverished and unhappy lives. Therefore, the fantasies and happiness, the resolutions and reconciliations, offered by religion or gospel celebration make people realize how much they remain unfulfilled, discontented and unsatisfied. It would seem that Brother Jero completely endorsed Christians' mercantile outline here. They continue to be adjusted to their conditions of life, and above all to be caught up into the traps of Brother Jero's treacherous celebration and mannerisms. Christians unambiguously thought that the promise of the enlightenment, lost paradise, blissful Kingdom, blossoming Eden garden and the belief in modern Africa through comfortable progress

² Theodor Adorno, *The culture Industry*. London : Routledge, 1991, p.308

³ Ibidem

had turned into nightmare. In this respect, the total effect of the culture industry is one of “anti-enlightenment”⁴ with regard to Adorno’s literary criticisms.

Therefore the money-making celebration is so well organized by the prophet Jero and friends that they never think of God revenge against its misrepresented priests who should remind that the dual function of human consists of spirit and flesh. In this context, many African Christians get confused and are at the crossroads of many interpretations of Bible and paradigms of religion. In fact, Amope like her husband Chume, the parliamentarians, including the prophet Jero himself and miscellaneous disciples peopling here and there the beach-churches refuse to have a short-lived and ephemeral existence like the flesh doomed to vanish into oblivion and putrefaction. Anxious to discover the true path of their salvation, they try enthusiastically to pursue their freak ideology and credulity on the ground that their belongings, property and commodities are the benediction of God. In this regard, Amope not only is fascinated by western products, but also ends up reducing her personality to a mere slave under this influence, as testified by her complaints during a diner: “I cooked you your meal. But when I ask you to bring me some clean water, you forget?” (p.33). In fact, she cannot help behaving like women in the shape of Estella Koomson who objects to drink local beer in favour of whisky which “agrees with her constitution”⁵. Boastful as usual, she blatantly convinces her husband that local beer does not correspond to her alter-ego both as a wife of Plenipotentiary Minister and member of upper-class. Likewise Amope refuses to drink tap water because she worships new things, new commodities as she corroborates her argumentation from the starting point: “A fine man you are then, when you cannot remember a simple thing like a bottle of clean water” (p.39)

Although Chume attempts to defend his neutrality as far as drink consumption is concerned, Amope pours on him an array of scorn and disgust. She makes us discover her true intentions and cult of commodities, ignoring the sinful attitudes of temptations. Under these conditions, she trespasses against Biblical injunction forbidding private cult and polytheist god. Paradoxically, beyond her entrepreneurial petty trading she runs, Amope regards her goods consisted of glittering objects such as “wool, silk, cloth and all that stuff” as her personal Obatala, the god of prosperity in Yoruba’s beliefs (p.29-31). Ayi Kwei Armah calls this kind of creed a “cargo mentality”⁶ and owner of commodity “a been-to”⁷, over again he identifies the sparkling light behind

⁴-Ibidem

⁵-Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*. op.cit p.131

⁶- Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments*. London: Heinemann, 1970, p.176

⁷ Ibidem

those materials with the term of “gleam”⁸. In a way, he joins Soyinka’s interpretations of post-colonial Africa when he acknowledges that Brother Jero is not alone in the series of false prophets and politicians whose true aspirations conceal behind the possession of deified objects and wonderful commodities if it is difficult for them to reach the wealth of God Kingdom. To be more explicit, Armah illustrates the emblematic figure of the false prophet Cinque and Minister Koomson. On the one side, “The largest of the white buildings Netta had called Cinque’s castles. At the head was a man in a golden robe”⁹ and the other, “The gleam in the Koomson bungalow is of paramount importance. It glinted off every object in the room”¹⁰. Frantz Fanon calls it a “precocious senility”¹¹ of modern bourgeoisie in the hands of members of parliament, policemen, ministers and religious leaders in quest of sordid glory and cult of personality.

II- Wole Soyinka’s ambivalent discourse on religion as instrument of cult of personality

Wole Soyinka is presumably one of Africa’s most distinguished playwrights, winning brilliantly the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986. From Yorubaland, after his studies at the university, college of Ibanda, he entered Leeds University in England where he became inspired by the brilliant Shakespeare scholar, namely Wilson knight¹².

II-1-The dilemma of the preachers in the quest of their own personality

Wole Soyinka’s literary prominence and prescience started gradually in the fifties as a period of intensive experimentation in the theater both in France and England. From this outset, Soyinka became versatile artistic creator in Great Britain before returning to his native land, Nigeria. His dramatist notoriety dated back actually after having written a play to celebrate Nigeria’s national independence in 1960: *A Dance of the Forest*¹³. His critics always emphasized his African backgrounds, cultural heritage fragmented by contemporaneous spoiled Africa after a drastic and nightmarish contact with western culture. *The Trials of Brother Jero* exemplifies this disintegration, dilemma of preachers in quest of their own personality instead the cult of the almighty God, Creator of Heaven and Earth. They set up their own churches

⁸ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*. op. cit p.110

⁹ Ayi Kwei Armah. *Osiris Rising*. Accra : Per Ankh, 1995, P.83

¹⁰ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*. op. cit p.171

¹¹ Frantz Fanon. *The wretched of the Earth*. London : Hammondsorth, Penguin, 1967, pp.138-139

¹² Eldred Durosimi Jones. *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*. London : James Carry, 1988, p.9

¹³ Op cit. p.9

in an apostate circle soaked inexorably in religious doctrine, codes, related to Karl Marx's theory when he pejoratively states: "religion is opium of people, tears of oppressed class"¹⁴ [*translation mine*]. When they attempt to withdraw from their original sin, they are exclusively sinking into dubious, perfidious attitudes affecting the honourability of authentic preachers, as opposed to new parasite prophets prospering uncontrollably on the beach supposed to be by its nature both a national patrimony and a repository stay for tourists or city-dwellers. They are more impressed in their own publicity, paunch and authority than salvation or redemption of the members of their congregation,

Using English common expressions "eggs is eggs", probably in algebraic terms equates, which means, they are all the same, brother Jeroboam denies the conventional rituals of churches. Beach has been a fertile land for his cult, echoing the rise and growth of religion through many sects. In Nigeria, there are justifiable signboards that account for the government intervention in the churches domain of activities. Firstly they intend to protect the interest of the citizens who tend to be devoted to spirituality that can rather be described as religious gullibility when war and violence erupt in the city. In this respect, raise strange pastors behaving as direct messengers of God.

II-2- Dramatic Grandiloquence of Churches and Christians

The churches are used by politician as a means of attractions to meet their basic needs. Subsequently, Soyinka gives readers a metaphor of modern religious pastors' attitudes. Their allure and physique refer to a mysterious personality and at the same time blind their hypocritical attitude. It is a disillusion of Christianity. With the accompaniment of song, during trance, Jero reveals his true intentions. He transgresses the spiritual rituals in the play as a single pretext to make money out of counterfeit prophecy. And his followers do not perceive his occult manipulation and malicious attitude. The idea of an offended moral order is shrouding the aura of the celebration ceremony which cannot permit to compare Jero to a natural prophet as he pretends to boast. In this latter, church becomes a national game of business and transactions and therefore, the moral aspect is vague: the episode of Amope corresponds to the profanation of spiritual values and the fall of original sin. Behind the imagery of church, it is hidden Wole Soyinka's dramatic realism in order to purport the quest of honesty in the mind of religious leaders.

III- Dramatic Magnificence for the Quest of Honest Religious Leaders

According to Eustache Palmer, writers must communicate to readers that: "the words on the page add up to a representation of a realistic world peopled

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Critique du droit politique de Hegel*. Paris : Ed. Sociales, 1975, p.198

by realistic men and women engaged in realistic activity”¹⁵. In this respect, Soyinka’s literary realism is that an artist must work in the contemporary African society as a “record” of people’s evils, social scourge and daily experiences¹⁶. As a dramatist artist, Soyinka is tremendously gifted with vision of what the society should be and probably how Nigerian people’s existential nightmare, aspirations or dreams could be achieved through theater. In other words, it is the very same conscience of Nigerian society that Wole Soyinka seeks to embody in the light of characters’ special eye and ear throughout *The Trials of Brother Jero* in which people believe in objects and money as instrument of their spiritual salvation.

III-1- Wole Soyinka as a Special Dramatic Prophet

The history of African modern literature can be seen as a testimony in the practice of writing, crystallizing the characters’ actions and attitudes between realistic consideration inspired by the failure of post-colonial independence and metonymic representation of African socio-political leaders as well as religious rulers. We are in the realm of art, where drama and life interpenetrate, and the autonomy of drama springs from life itself with imitation. For Aristotle, imitation “*mimesis*” and knowledge “*mathesis*” always intertwine¹⁷. This Aristotle’s elucidation of the goals of art endorses one Ghanaian critique’s investigation, Kofi Agyekum, when he argues that: “literature is creative, an art and literary study is a species of knowledge of learning”¹⁸. Otherwise, the main purpose of art is “to emulate the general scientific ideals of objectivity”¹⁹. Soyinka’s literary inspiration derives from this objectivity he bestows to his dramatic works, especially when they are infused with topics such as religion, materialism, moral degradation through which he not only brings a number of pieces of information to readers, but also epitomizes characters’ flaws and foibles related to “real life” as suggests Raymond Chapman all once again²⁰. Soyinka finds in religion beyond its “sacred aspect”,

¹⁵ Eustache Palmer. *Studies on the English*. Ibadan : African University Press, 1986, p.2

¹⁶ Cf. Biodun Onibonjo’s “Introduction” in *The Lion and the Jewel*. Ibadan : Onibonjo Communications, 1988, p.4

¹⁷ R.A. Malagi, “The Seminal Path : Classical Literary Theory and Criticism”. In *Classical Literary Theory and Criticism*. New Delhi: Pen-craft International, 2001, pp.13-16

¹⁸ Kofi Agyekum. *Introduction to Literature*. Accra : Legon MediaDesign, 2007, p.2

¹⁹ Ibidem

²⁰ Raymond Chapman. “Literary Criticism”. In *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1992, p.619

“holy nature”, and “spiritual connotations”²¹, the source of being more prolific and creative because Ogun is a god of fertility and thunder²². Knowing that he is writing for a given audience originated abundantly from Africa, Soyinka’s works are therefore akin to real life experiences of his people of whom he is an integral member. Brother Jeroboam belongs to the generation of prophets who, for the lack of churches, preach in the open and on public beach. He is actively involved in the practices of manipulation and machination of his followers by denying the conventional rules of churches, its ethics, deontology and the core principles of religion.

In fact, the core principles and purposes of western religion join the fundamental ideology of Black Renaissance Literature defending Black people’s right, dignity and identity among many generations of civilizations. In West African writings, the paradigm of salvation amounts to liberation extending over the isotope of “emancipation”, “independence”, “dawn”, and “peace”. In this light, an overwhelming majority of African writers are determined to cleanse their people of rubbish of their past and western domination as said Kofi Awoonor: “Lecture will have to be organized to explain the African personality, the role of press, and the importance of creating a new identity after centuries of colonial rule, slavery and rape”²³. First of all, Awoonor goes back to the centuries of slave trade and western imperialism to foster the role of African new intellectuals in the quest of “African personality” and “new identity”. Furthermore, Soyinka’s choice, particular fascination for religious topic which is at the stake in *The Trials of Brother Jero* is not fortuitous. According to Clave Wake, of all the African writers at present writing, Wole Soyinka seems “to have the truest sense of what is required”²⁴. In fact, according to him, Soyinka is particularly “incensed with the hypocrisy of religious leaders”²⁵.

In the eyes of Wole Soyinka the broad background of African new Religion springs from western imperialists, controlling the coastal offshore of West Africa. According to Eustace Palmer, dealing with Religion imperialism will be “of relevance and interest”²⁶ in the sense that it has left “significant marks”²⁷ on many African countries’ cultural and political development.

²¹ Wole Soyinka. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1976, p.156

²² Anjali Gera, *Three Great African Novelists : Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola*. New Delhi : Creative Books, 2001, p.45

²³ Kofi Awoonor. *This Earth my Brother*. London : Heinemann, 1971, p.92

²⁴ Clave Wake. “The Political and Cultural Revolution”. In *Protest Conflict in African Literature*. London : Heinemann, 1974, p.50

²⁵ Ibidem

²⁶ Eustace Palmer. *Studies on the English Novel*. Ibadan : African University Press, 1986, p.24

²⁷ Eustache Palmer. *Studies on the English Novel*, op cit. p.24

Nigeria saw subsequently many generations of church missions of civilization. The white man is supposed to constitute a springboard of economic development and socio-cultural advancement, above all the saviour to bring a redeeming Religion. In reality, the white man's religion appears as a subterfuge for trapping not only more slaves, but also converting many natives into Christianity. This subtle exhortation consisting in captivating many Christians begets fanatical, obsessive and over-enthusiastic adepts, worshipping God frenetically. Brother Jeroboam is portrayed in this domain as a prophet by inclination akin to Okonkwo's son Nwoye and many Ibo people in the wake of the years of missionaries' invasion in Mbataland²⁸. Ngugi wa Thiong'o is not excluded from this conjoint juxtaposition between writers' mission as witness of their epoch-making and literature as receptacle or medium through which African artists strive to vehicle historical facts of their continent. In this light, Ngugi recreates in *The River Between* the religious historical event when he brings on the scene a convert character, Joshua, who enthusiastically invites Gikuyu people to follow the new "butterflies"²⁹, a metonymic designation of western religious compradors as prophesized by the seer Chege. One of Ghanaian excellent writers, Francis Selormey, extends this series of the metonymic attributes of western religion through the illustration of Roman Catholic Church combined with western school whose headmaster, Nani, constitutes the sub-plot of the narrative in *The Narrow path*³⁰. Ayi Kwei Armah is closer to this new trend of writers who shed light on the massive presence of western religion in post-colonial African continent in his first fictional novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*³¹. All those writers bring on the scene young boys, parents, new followers and old adepts, new prophets and old practitioners in permanent disagreement and dialectical clashes, conflicts, and interactions with the core principles of religion.

African prophets therefore inscribe to the line of ancient Masters. Jeroboam's prophecy meets this goal when he bears witness, glorifies the prowess and wonders of his ministry consisted of various religious groups "the brotherhood of Jero, the Cherubims and Seraphims, the Sisters of Judgment Day, and even Heavenly Cowboys" (p.10), competing for territory and converts :

You have probably seen many of us on the streets, many with their own churches, many inland, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead, many curing the deaf, many raising the dead (p.11)

²⁸ Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart*. London : Heinemann. 1958, p.38

²⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *The River Between*. London : Heinemann. 1965, p.7

³⁰ Francis Selormey. *The Narrow path*. London : Heinemann, 1966, p.12

³¹ Ayi Kwei Armah. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born*. London : Heinemann, 1968, p.181

This scene certainly achieves its effects of spirituality and prophets' sacerdotal role partly by skillfully imitating the tone and method of working or evangelization. Besides Soyinka goes on to establish a parallelism between Jero's essence of spirituality and the Yoruba traditional god, Eshu Legba. In fact, in the light of Yoruba's spirituality, Eshu-Legba is a god of fertility with a strong sex of man. It is used to bewitch people. It also intercedes as a messenger of tradition and transmission-belt between men and gods. Like Eshu-Egba, the prophet Jero has a transcendental power resulting in supernatural miracles. After reading scene I, Jero states that when he was born he was gifted with peculiar physical features justified by "thick hair" as his secret power and magic inclination. He calls himself "a natural prophet", corroborated by this hyperbola when he says: "the call for prophecy runs in my blood" (p.11). He even interpolates his clothing as a mystic attribute to display certainly his position of prophet. Even on fleeing away, because pursued by chume at the end of the play, Jero manages to convince one of his disciples that he inherited his spiritual calling and attributes from God at the service of population's integration and socio-educative well-being. Soyinka's own personality can be seen and identified with those faithful Christians cited above in so far as he has been the seeker of the "light", a religious philosophy of "voidance". It means that Soyinka is almost a particular eye-witness of his countrymen with whom he has shared the same religious debates, reflections and critical remarks.

III-2- Brother Jero, prototype of utopian prophet

A prophet is not only a gifted seer endowed with visionary insight into spiritual values, but also a committed pastor deeply versed to the education of his congregation. The backbone of this education lies in biblical teachings. For Brother Jero, therefore, "prayer-book", "Bible", "chasuble" constitute the symbols of western education, spiritual knowledge and theology. While "chasuble" is the expression of religious clothing rituals, and bestows reverential, ceremonial power on celebration, "prayer-book" conveys spiritual education, instruction, truth and cultural stratification. Brother Jero even says that the way he dresses "velvet cape" and walks with a "divine rod" like the prophet Moses is a dignified mark of purification and holiness. Arguing favourably that he has spiritual predisposition when he acknowledges that the call of prophecy is in his blood, it is a credible conviction for the theorists of marxism to state that "human being is naturally a man of profits". The quest for materialism by the law of determinism is inherent to all human creatures.

However, the character of Brother Jero refuses to jeopardize his sacerdotal mission by risking his "calling with fickleness of women" (p.11). He reminds us of Obi Okonkwo's parents' pieces of advice and exhortations. In

fact, a few days before his departure to Lagos for England, Obi's parents call a particular prayer meeting at their home. The Reverend Samuel Ikedi of St Mark's Anglican Church and great members of Umuofians summon him to avoid rushing into "the pleasures of the world like the young antelope who danced herself lame when the main dance was yet to come"³². Religion is therefore meant to serve as an important vehicle for teaching, training and imparting socio-educative values between youth and parents. Religion reminds everyone, prophets, youth, religious leaders that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If young men are sent to school, the evidence is that they need to grow highly educated in conformity with immense religious knowledge, leading Brother Jero to state convincingly: "we could do with the elevation to eternity of some of our dearly beloved brother prophets" (p.9).

Therefore, Nigerians socially lawless or outcasts find new life in the new religion. The members of Christian congregation see each other as brothers echoing the hero's biblical name of "Brother Jeroboam" from the Old Testament. Sons of one God before whom the outcast, the elders or full-blooded men are equal. The illiterates, underprivileged men, the worthless, and voiceless from all spheres of activities or ethnic groups enter into harmonious interactions and perfect spirituality to find progressively salvation: "everybody come and bear witness" (p.36). This commerce with new adepts is the starting point of religious privilege they benefit from there. They get solid root and grow from socio-educative training to spiritual edification. The Christian life has often been described as pilgrimage and brotherhood connections. It is a journey that they undertake with Christ, and as such, if they continue faithfully to walk with him, they are going to find themselves sharing both his peace and his cross.

However, contemporary Nigerian students, instead of facing their studies on the grounds of religious education, went, according to Achebe, after "sweet things of flesh"³³ such as money, goods, commodities and sex industry. Others prefer, like Brother Jero, "high life to the rhythm of celestial hymns" (p10). Capitalizing "**High**" as superlative qualifier to corroborate Christians' enthusiasm, hysteria and propensity for licentious life and easy-going leisure, religion is not exempted from social depravations. The female character in the shape of Amope is the easy prey of an ambivalent prophet, wobbling on between his own hallucinations and christians' merciless quest for comfort to the point where religion borrows its powers from materialistic society.

Conclusion

³² Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*. London : Heinemann, 1960, p.9

³³ Ibidem

The play follows the classical story of tragedy. It provides us here an idea of fatality, drama, pity and pathetic device. Jeroboam is a good preacher and an extraordinary preacher but his indifference makes him behave like a trivial apostate of God divine mercy. In fact, tragedy refers to a serious drama that reveals or relates the events in the life of protagonist or tragic hero. Jeroboam consequently commits an error in judgment as a result of a tragic flaw inherent to his nature. This fatality provokes his failure in a pitiful experience. The trials are for Brother Jero's psychological drama in the limits of an individual who considers himself as the centre of all religious references. His flat preaching, actions precipitate his downfall, all rolled into none and nastily personality, perverted or blemished identity. Jeroboam is undoubtedly the main protagonist or tragic hero, with Chume as his counterpart. The trials of Jero are the collective religious members unscrupulously cheated and exploited burden. The real turmoil in the life of Jeroboam is unladed as the action of the play develops. He becomes leader, master over the land of beach as a reward for his bravery, courage, devotion, and excellent calling. But his downfall becomes sudden to him when the truth is in the far distance. Besides it consumes him in a catastrophic escape. With these remarks, it is difficult to distinguish Jeroboam from those vulgar and unscrupulous illusion-maker's prophets whose inwardly purpose is to dissimulate their followers' presents and favours. On seeing his honourability in decreasing, he confesses nearby his assistant Chume who slapped his wife for debt. It is an episode in which the prophet Jero betrays Chume to his wife, Amope by concealing his true political machination to draw knowingly the attention of politicians who crowd his church. When he is performing his final preparations and gets ready for their reconciliation, he insists emphatically on his master's previous prophecy for material gain and deep humiliation he had suffered before founding his own congregation. This insistence on the true prophet's dishonesty looks like modern African griots who, in order to reach their goal seek to wield praise, "eulogize dithyrambical panegyric and spiteful diatribe"³⁴.

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³⁴ Isidore Okpewho, *The Oral Performance*. Ibadan : Spectrum, 1990, p.24

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