The Trials of Brother Jero and The Strong Breed Study Guide

The Trials of Brother Jero and The Strong Breed by Wole Soyinka

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Soyinka, Wole. Five Plays. Oxford University Press, 1964.

The Trials of Brother Jero and The Strong Breed are two plays by Wole Soyinka, a Nigerian playwright and poet. The Trials of Brother Jero was first performed in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1960. The Strong Breed was first performed there in 1966. In The Trials of Brother Jero, Soyinka uses the overlapping lives of three main characters to explore themes such as corruption and abuse of power. These characters include a beach “divine” or holy person named Jeroboam (or “Jero," for short); Chume, Jeroboam’s assistant; and Amope, Chume’s wife. The action unfolds near a fishing village in southern Nigeria, over the course of a matter of days. The Trials of Brother Jero opens on a monologue delivered by Brother Jero, describing his work as a prophet. As he tells the audience, there is a rivalry amongst the different prophets on the beach. In order to distinguish himself, Jero betrays his old Master who, according to a brief flashback, Jero drove off his land. In response, Jero’s old Master cursed him, and warned Jero that eventually the “Daughters of Eve” will bring about his “downfall” (203). Jero tells the audience that, though he tried to avoid women, one day he woke up to a confrontation with his very own “Daughter of Eve” (203).

The second scene shifts to a conversation between a man named Chume riding on a bicycle and a woman named Amope riding on the handlebars. Amope tells Chume to stop the bicycle outside a particular hut. As she prepares to get off, Amope nags Chume for his low-ranking job as a Chief Messenger in the Local Government Office. After Chume leaves, Amope sits outside the hut, which belongs to Brother Jero. Jero owes Amope one pound, eight shillings and ninepence that he borrowed for a velvet cape. Amope demands her money back, but Jero prevaricates. A female trader selling smoked fish enters the scene. While Amope is haggling with the woman, Jero flees the hut.

The scene shifts again to the beach, where Jero is preaching to his congregation. Jero comments on a young girl who goes swimming everyday in the ocean. Jero also thinks to himself that he cannot allow his assistant Chume to beat his wife, because he believes he must keep his followers in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction. Chume enters, prays with Jero, then asks for permission to beat his wife. Jero forbids him from doing so, then runs off after a woman. Chume stays with the congregation, and leads the service himself. When Jero returns, he is bruised and bloody. He sends the worshippers away, and in a conversation with Chume, realizes that Chume’s wife is the same woman who lent him money. After his realization, Jero encourages Chume to beat his wife, thus reversing his earlier position.

In the fourth scene, outside Jero’s hut, Amope is criticizing Chume in her usual way. Chume tells her to pack her belongings, ordering her to keep quiet. When Chume threatens to beat her, Amope runs to Jero’s door to beg for help. Jero does not answer. When Amope finally begs Jero by name, Chume makes the connection between

Brother Jero, who told him to beat his wife, and this man who owes his wife money. The scene then cuts to Jero, who is listening to a speech from a well-dressed Member of the Federal Government. Jero targets the man for his congregation, promising him future job promotions. Eventually, the Minister is kneeling at Jero's feet when Chume rushes onto the stage, wielding a cutlass, and chases him off the beach. Chume chases Jero off the beach, and when he is gone, the Minister believes that the prophet's disappearance is a sign of his genuinely divine power. Having escaped Chume and gained a new convert, Jero addresses the audience. Jero picks up and throws a pebble, thinking that another day has passed in which he has successfully evaded the "Daughters of Eve."

In The Strong Breed, Soyinka writes about the themes of social inclusion and exclusion in another small village in Nigeria. The play opens on a scene between Sunma, a local woman, and Eman, a young schoolteacher from another village. Sunma is anxious for Eman to leave the town. Eman ignores her and instead plays with Ifada, the village idiot. Sunma harshly sends the boy away. At this point, a person identified only as "The Girl" enters the scene, dragging behind her an effigy of a human being. The Girl explains the she is sick and the effigy will cure her. Again, Sunma harshly sends the girl away, saying she is "evil." The Girl and Ifada fight, then exit the stage together.

Sunma again tells Eman that the villagers are evil, and that he should leave. Sunma wonders whether Eman has had some problem with a woman in the past, and immediately asks for forgiveness when she realizes her offense. Sunma then alludes to a festival, telling Eman that they must remain in the house until the festival is over. The Girl and Ifada reappear outside, and two men capture Ifada. Sunma and Eman do not notice.

Later, Sunma notices the abandoned effigy and tells Eman not to touch it. Sunma and Eman again fight over Eman's decision to stay in the village, and Sunma accuses Eman of lovelessness. They are interrupted, however, by the sight of Ifada pounding at Eman's door. When Eman lets Ifada into the room, five men appear in pursuit of him. One of the men is Jaguna, Sunma's father. The men demand that Ifada be returned, and explain that Ifada has been chosen as the village carrier. When Eman protests on the basis of his own village's purification rituals, one of the men named Oroge explains that only an outsider can be village carrier. Jaguna challenges Eman to volunteer as village carrier in Ifada's place.

After the play's only extended blackout, Ifada and the Girl fight over the effigy. Sunma suddenly realizes that if Ifada is back to the house, then Eman has turned himself over to the village men. The next scene shows the men chasing a half-naked Eman. It is revealed that after Eman volunteered as carrier, he was undressed, prepared, beaten but ran off before the end of the ritual. As he flees, Eman encounters an Old Man and his attendant. It becomes clear that this Old Man is Eman's father, and that the men in their family are what is called a "strong breed." They have the responsibility to act as carriers for their village. After the death of his wife in childbirth, Eman refuses to take on this responsibility. The ritual then begins, with two men placing a model boat on the Old Man's head and following him as he runs off stage.

The play then jumps back to the present moment, as Eman crouches in the bushes. His pursuers squabble amongst themselves, claiming that Eman's escape has contaminated the entire village. Eman has a second flashback to the time when a young girl named Omae, who eventually became his wife, is mocking him for being uncircumcised. Suddenly, a man named the Tutor appears and tries to convince Omae to go back to his house to, euphemistically, "wash clothes" together. Eman defends Omae, and promises her that he will go to the city and make a living so that he can support them both.

Back in the present moment, the Girl asks Eman if he is thirsty. The Girl betrays him, however, and goes to fetch the men instead of a glass of water. Eman has a third memory, this time of him, a Priest, and the Old Man standing beside Omae's gravesite. Back in the present moment, Eman kneels by the grave and watches as Jaguna and Oroge approach. To the imagined presence of his father, Eman asks for the direction of the stream, and his father tells him to go elsewhere.

The Strong Breed then cuts to Sunma and Ifada's discovery of the effigy, hanging from the roof of Eman's house. Eman has been hung. Jaguna and Oroge are disappointed by the villagers' reactions. They claim not to have received any benefit from Eman's sacrifice. Sunma, Ifada and the Girl are silent.

The Trial of Brother Jero, Scenes 1-2

Summary

The first scene opens with a spotlight on a well-groomed and “suave” (201) man identified as the Prophet. Holding a canvas pouch and “divine rod” (201), the man speaks directly to the audience. In his soliloquy he explains that he was born to be a prophet. However, nowadays, the man says, the profession is overrun by inferior Prophets, and “territorial warfare” (201) has broken out amongst the competing Prophets along the Beach. The Prophets are also losing their congregation to the new influences of High Life, a popular style of Nigerian music, and television.

When the Prophet also mentions that he has been cursed by his old Master, the scene then cuts to a brief flashback of the Old Master shaking his fist and cursing at the Prophet. The Old Master curses the Prophet Jeroboam, wishing that “the Daughters of Eve bring ruin down on [his] head!” (203). Jeroboam dismisses his old tutor as “foolish” (202) and “conceited” (203) for believing that he worked without seeking his own benefit. He also admits the Master’s curse is a cheap shot because women are already his greatest weakness. In the final two sentences of the play, the Prophet tells the audience that one day he woke up to find none other than a “Daughter of Eve” waiting for him. It was, he says, comparable to “waking up and finding a vulture crouched on your bedpost” (203).

The second scene opens on a small hut in a fishing village. A short man on a bicycle enters the scene. A woman is balancing on the crossbar and clutching a traveling sack. The text identifies the man’s name as Chume, and the woman’s as Amope. Amope tells Chume to stop in front of the house. She nags him for his abrupt stop, complaining that she could have broken her ankle. Amope sits down on a stool near the door of the hut, and tells Chume to unload her things, which include two water bottles, three parcels, a box of matches, a piece of yarn, a spoon and a knife. When Chume observes that he is nearly late for work, Amope chastises him for his low-ranking position as a Chief Messenger in the Local Government Office. She laments: “Am I to go to my grave as the wife of a Chief Messenger?” (206).

The Prophet from the first scene, who is now identified as “Brother Jeroboam, known to his congregation as Brother Jero” (207), is inside the house. When Brother Jero tries to escape out the window, Amope accosts him and demands the one pound, eight shillings, and nine pence that she once lent him. Brother Jero tries to skirt her demand, telling Amope that he hopes she has “not come to stand in the way of Christ and his work” (207). Just then, a female trader selling smoked fish passes by the house. Amope haggles with the trader. Amope and the trader exchange pointed abuses towards one another. The trader maintains that since it is early in the morning, she cannot drop her price. When Amope insists, the trader curses Amope, noting her “flatulent belly” (209) and “foul tongue” (208). Amope, in turn, tells the trader to take her “beggar’s rags out of [her] sight” (209).

This discussion, however, is cut short when Amope notices Brother Jero attempting to escape through the window. Amope scares off a young drummer-boy who comes onto the scene. Amope is disgusted by all three characters: the “thief of a prophet,” the “swindler of a fish-seller” and the drummer-boy who she describes as “that thing with lice on his head…begging for money” (209).

Analysis

Together, the first two scenes suggest a relationship between the two plot lines (Brother Jero in the first scene, Amope and Chume in the second) that otherwise seem disconnected. The two scenes take place in different spaces, with the first scene at the beach where Brother Jero has set himself up as a prophet and the second scene by his hut in the fishing village. Moreover, the two scenes place a different emphasis on the individual versus interpersonal relationship. The first scenes offers only one main focus and perspective: Brother Jero who speaks in lengthy monologues. The only appearance of another character in this scene is the Old Tutor, who is already filtered through the lens of one of Brother Jero’s memories. Meanwhile, the second scene focuses on two characters, Amope and Chume, and the dynamic between them. Here, instead of Jero's lengthy monologues, short sentences and cutting barbs abound. The effect of these decisions emphasizes Brother Jero’s solipsistic worldview in which only he matters and all other characters are secondary.

However, as Amope and Chume’s appearance in the second scene makes clear, Brother Jero’s comfortably solitary, self-involved existence is newly under siege/threat. In fact, Amope literally intrudes on Brother Jero’s property, where his hut functions as a kind of sanctuary for Brother Jero away from the beach, away from his congregation and away from his (self-imposed) obligations as a “prophet.” The close proximity in the text to the Old Master’s curse, which is included in a flashback in the first scene, suggests that Amope may be one such “Daughter of Discord” here to plague Brother Jero for his callous ways.

In fact, Jero’s memory of the Old Master’s curse will be the only flashback featured in this play, suggesting that there may be a singular importance to this moment in Jero’s life. Certainly, the flashback is important to the play’s plot as it defines and sets in motion the central, animating tension in the work: Will Jero succumb to the curse placed upon him by his Old Master? Or, more specifically, will Jero succumb to an encounter with a “Daughter of Discord,” such as Amope or the swimming girl? On the heels of the curse in the first scene, the second scene thus puts Jero to the test. It is clear that Amope will function as one of the “trials” mentioned in the play’s title and which Brother Jero must endure and even thwart. At stake in the Old Master’s curse are also questions related to Brother Jero’s character and development. Is Brother Jero’s self-confident dismissal of the Old Master's curse merely hubris, and will he be humbled throughout the play? Or will the play validate Jero’s scorn towards his Old Master, who he considers “foolish” and “conceited”?

As is evident in the first two scenes, Brother Jero is not the only character who stands to be either humbled or vindicated. Like Brother Jero, both Amope and Chume stand to lose and gain power, reputation, and/or status. Amope, for one, stands to regain the money that she has already lost to Jero. There are significant similarities between the three characters, especially in terms of their desires for greater professional opportunities and upward mobility. Here, Amope and Brother Jero are the most explicit and ruthless about their desires for status and economic security. For that reason, they are framed as arch-rivals. Amope is a smart, ruthless businesswoman, and Jero is a smooth-talking, unprincipled “prophet” who approaches his profession like a business.

However, as the play's title and opening two scenes suggest, Jero may have more than one arch-rival. The word “trial” as it is mentioned in the title of the play is plural, indicating that Jero will find multiple people or things trying over the course of the play. In Jero’s opening monologue in the first scene, there are hints of the shifting social and cultural landscape around him. Although Jero believes that he was born into his profession, the prophet “industry,” so to speak, is changing. For instance, he mentions that the Prophets are losing followers to the new elements of Nigerian cultural life, such as High Life and television. The fact that something like television competes with the religious communities and sentiments that the beach prophets offer suggests that the beach prophets are themselves offering a form of consumable entertainment. No doubt aware of this aspect to his profession, Brother Jero maintains a “suave,” eye-catching appearance.

Discussion Question 1

How does Brother Jero's self-representation in his opening monologue compare with other characters' reactions to him?

Discussion Question 2

What is the purpose or significance of the fish-seller at the end of Scene Two?

Discussion Question 3

What kinds of social issues seem to affect the village community represented in these opening scenes?

Vocabulary

dignified, prejudice, councillor, celestial, patron, cherubim, seraphim, discord, fickleness, exasperation, brazier, rogue, flatulent

The Trial of Brother Jero, Scenes 3-4

Summary

The third scene returns to the Beach, where Brother Jero is preaching to his congregation. He is wearing a white flowing gown and a white velvet cape. In a soliloquy to the audience, Brother Jero explains that he took money from Amope in order to buy himself the cape, which distinguishes him from his competitors —"charlatans" (210), he calls them—on the Beach. He has devised a number of new names for himself, including "the Velvet-Hearted Jeroboam" and "Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade" (210). Then, Brother Jeroboam thinks about Chume's request to beat his wife, and thinks that he must keep his followers "dissatisfied" (211) so that they continue to require his services.

As Jero thinks about Amope and Chume, a young girl passes by him on her way to go swimming. After she gets out of the water, Jero notes the "divine transformation" (211) in the girl's appearance and prays to God for "strength against temptation" (211). Chume enters the scene, and joins Jeroboam's prayer. Suddenly, Chume pleads to be allowed to beat his wife. To gain control of the conversation, Brother Jero reminds Chume that he predicted Chume's professional development, from a common laborer to a messenger and finally to Chief Messenger. Jero prays over the kneeling Chume: "Out Ashtoreth. Out Baal" and "Forgive him, father, forgive him" (215). A drummer-boy, pursued by a woman complaining that he has abused her father, then appears on the stage. They run off stage, and Jero, entranced by the sight of the woman's "exposed limbs" (217), runs after them.

Chume is left alone to conduct that morning's service. Chume's confidence in his role as preacher grows as he calls on the father to "make you forgive us all" and "make you save us from palaver" (219). At this point, the drummer-boy returns to the scene, followed by Jero whose clothes are torn and his face is bleeding. The implication is that the woman tried to fend off Jero's attempted assault.

After Jero sends away the members of his congregation, his conversation with Chume reveals to him that Chume's wife is the same woman demanding her money to be returned. Jero suddenly reverses his earlier position, explaining to Chume that his wife is "such a wicked, willful sinner" (222) that he must beat her. Jero then promises Chume that he will become his successor, and reveals his new name as "Immaculate Jero."

In the fourth scene, Chume and Amope are finishing a meal outside the prophet's home. Amope refuses to leave her place outside Brother Jero's hut, and again criticizes Chume for his lowly position in the local government. Amope tells Jero that she wishes he would be a Sanitary Inspector instead. At this Chume tells her to "shut [her] big mouth" (225) and threatens to beat her. Amope calls for police and pounds on Jero's door, begging him for help. Brother Jero will not open the door. Neighbors gather around as Amope and Chume's fight escalates. When Chume hears Amope say that it is

Brother Jero who owes her money, he suddenly connects the dots. Chume is incensed, and rides off on his bicycle.

Analysis

The third scene returns Jero to the beach, where the reader finally sees Jero in action in his role as prophet. Here, in the third scene, Brother Jero's apparel is more detailed and elaborated than it has been before. For instance, it is mentioned that he is wearing a flowing white gown and white velvet cape—signs both of the opulence and privilege of his position, as well as the false purity that he claims for himself. Brother Jero's clothes are also signs of the ways in which his supposedly spiritual profession as a divine orator is actually a superficial matter of performance and spectacle. As Jero freely admits in a monologue to his audience (but not to his congregation), he bought the cape in order to distinguish himself from his competition. These small details call attention to the ways in which doing what Jero considers God's work actually benefits himself materially.

This theme of self-modification and self-transformation is also reflected in the handful of new names that Jero devises for himself. In essence, Jero plans to improve his preaching (and his profits) by rebranding himself "Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero" or the "Velvet-Hearted Jeroboam." Like Jero's speeches, the names are clever and shrewd, as they either rhyme or riff on his appearance. And like the whiteness of his apparel, Jero's names for himself also engage in a discourse of purity, making an absurd parallel between Jero and Mary's "immaculate" conception. Rather than investing in new Bibles or studying in order to enrich the spiritual content of his preaching, Jero changes its packaging instead by modifying his appearance and name.

However, at the same time that Jero toys with different names for himself, the third scene between Jero and the congregation also shows the ways in which words can become meaningless and empty. Over and over again, Jero repeats the phrases "Out Ashtoreth. Out Baal" and "Forgive him, father, forgive him" (215). "Ashtoreth" and "Baal" are pagan gods excoriated in the Bible—a fact that Jero does not bother to explain to his congregation because, in fact, it matters very little in this scene who or what they are. For that matter, even the act for which Chume needs to be "forgiven" does not seem to matter much. What seems to matter more to Jero and the congregation is the repetition of these phrases. The call-and-response format has a kind of dulling, numbing effect on Jero's congregation, which makes Chume's later prayer that God "save" them "from palaver" (219) ironic. Though Chume does not realize it, worship itself has become the idle and pointless talk, the very "palaver," from which Chume needs saving.

This scene also shows the tremendous power and authority that a self-declared "prophet" holds in religious worship, and how that power can transform into the abuse of power too. For instance, Jero's reversal on his position of wife-beating is stunning because it is purely dependent upon his own selfish and personal gain. Moreover, his reversal shows that Jero is comfortable using his religious authority to inflict harm and punishment on others through proxy. Rather than confront the "Daughter of Discord"

himself, Jero resolves to discipline Amope through Chume. In this sense, Jero's decision to confront Amope via Chume indicates his cowardice and selfishness.

Meanwhile, the fourth scene highlights the real, physical toll that Jero's decision takes as Chume, emboldened by Jero's advice, eagerly attempts to beat his wife. However, Soyinka uses Chume's discovery of the debtor's identity as a convenient means of circumventing that outcome. When Chume is about to beat his wife, tensions within the play are high. When Chume finally connects the dots that, for the reader, have been connected all along, these same tensions are defused. In the split between scenes four and five, the reader is left uncertain and in suspense as to how Chume will use his new knowledge, and whether Jero will finally be taken to task.

Discussion Question 1

What does Brother Jero's description of himself as a "shop-keeper waiting for customers" (211) suggest about his character and religious work?

Discussion Question 2

How does dramatic irony (in which the audience knows something that the characters do not) work in Scene 4?

Discussion Question 3

What rhetorical strategies does Brother Jero use to exert control and influence over his congregation?

Vocabulary

inevitably, apprentice, sheer, disciple, fortitude, harborer, self-abasing, convulsion, penitent, bolster, punctuated, placid, ecstatic, immaculate, articulate, successor, scrutinizing, abstinence, blasphemy, palaver

The Trial of Brother Jero, Scene 5

Summary

In the fifth and final scene of The Trials of Brother Jero, Brother Jero watches a man in a cape with a long train and a cap deliver a speech. In a soliloquy, Jero says that the man visits the beach every day and that he is a member of the Federal House hoping to join the ministry. Brother Jero realizes that the man is “already a member of my flock” (229), and he vows to “claim him” and to “go to work on him” (229). The potential recruit spurns Brother Jero’s advances, telling him to go “practice [his] fraudulences on another person of greater gullibility” (229). Jero persists, and says that he has had a vision of the man being appointed to the position of Minister for War. At this mention, the man turns around slowly and is drawn to the Prophet.

A light then appears on Chume onstage. In pidgin dialect Chume raves to himself, trying to work out how his wife and Brother Jero know each other. Suddenly, he realizes that, “She no’ go collect nutin! She no mean to sleep for outside house. The Prophet na ’in lover” (231). The spotlight shifts back to Jero, who is blessing the potential recruit. Chume, holding a cutlass, rushes in, and Jero flees. The man opens his eyes and finds that the Prophet has disappeared. He believes it is a miracle, and that he had “stood in the presence of God” (232).

Jero enters again, and speaking to the audience, explains that by tomorrow, the entire town will have heard about his “miraculous disappearance” (232). Meanwhile, the man continues to wait for Jero’s reappearance, believing that “if I show faith, he will show himself again to me” (232). Brother Jero has the last words of the play. He explains that Chume will likely be taken away by police and sent for a year’s imprisonment in a lunatic asylum. Referring to the curse of the old master, Jero concludes that it is “not quite time for the fulfillment of that spiteful man’s prophesy” (233). When the member opens his eyes, he sees Jero with a halo of red around his head and bursts out: “Master!” (233).

Analysis

The final scene, which operates almost like a seduction scene, provides a glimpse into the workings of Brother Jero’s recruitment process. Hitherto, the play has only showed how Brother Jero uses tantalizing promises and incentives to maintain control over his established followers. However, the fifth scene shows how Brother Jero makes his initial appeal to a potential member whom he has already scouted, assessed, and vetted. In fact, Brother Jero is so practiced and calculating in his recruitment process that he considers the ministry hopeful “already a member of my flock” (229). To Brother Jero, then, the recruitment is a fait accompli. Though this may seem presumptuous and conceited on Brother Jero’s part, the scene shows that, in fact, Brother Jero has enough expertise and experience as a “prophet” to correctly make that call.

With its final suggestion that Chume rather than Jero will be the only character punished, the fifth scene provides an unexpected resolution to the play's driving question: Will Jero succumb to the curse placed upon him by his Old Master? Despite numerous "trials" ranging from Amope and the swimming girl to finally Chume's outraged attack, Brother Jero prevails—or at least, seems to prevail for another day. In fact, the play ends with the ominous image of Brother Jero's head encircled by a red halo. The image seems to imbue Brother Jero with demonic attributes that, thus far, have not featured prominently in the play's depiction of its suave, smooth-talking-yet-still-comical main character.

Many of the small details mentioned in the final interaction between Jero and the potential recruit reinforce this image of Jero as a demonic seducer. For example, Jero's outright intention to "claim him" and to "go to work on" (229) the recruit suggests a kind of insidious appropriation of other people and beings that has thus far only been implied. Meanwhile, the specific choreography of the ministry hopefully turning around slowly suggests that Jero exerts some kind of irresistible force or attraction to the "members of his flock." As the scene increasingly emphasizes Jero's unbridled power and control over others, its tone loses the humor of the past scenes. These final moments of the play are dark and pessimistic.

There is no explicit mention of any state power or individual authority being able to check Jero's power. In fact, Jero predicts that he will be able to get the police on his side against Chume. That said, there are unstated actors in the play who, it is implied, may be able to do the moral work of holding Jero responsible for his actions. For instance, Amope is absent from the final scene, therefore raising the possibility that she may in some way still be able to get revenge. Perhaps more importantly, the play involves the audience in its work of moral judgment and recrimination. If neither the police nor Chume will stop Jero, it falls to the audience to condemn Jero. In this sense, the play functions as both an indictment of those who abuse religious power, as well as a cautionary tale.

Discussion Question 1

How does Chume interpret the events of the play, and what does that interpretation reveal about his character?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance or effect of Chume's switch into pidgin dialect?

Discussion Question 3

How does the final scene play with questions of visibility and invisibility, light and dark? You might think about which actions take place onstage and off of it.

BOOKRAGS

Vocabulary

fraudulence, strife, mustering, mantle, entrenched, intercede, transmuted, asylum, emissaries, rapt

The Strong Breed, pages 237-243

Summary

Soyinka's play, The Strong Breed, opens in front of a mud house. A man named Eman is looking out the window, while Sunma is clearing the table of exercise books. Sunma tells Eman that they need to leave, but Eman instead turns his attention to Ifada, the village idiot, who is outside the house. When Sunma learns that Eman is trying to persuade Efada to join "the young maskers" (238) in tonight's festival, she becomes upset and yells at Ifada to leave. Eman intuits that there is something else bothering Sunma, asking Sunma "what is the matter?" and "What really is it?" (239). Sunma brushes him off, explaining only that the sight of Ifada suddenly disgusts her and that she does not want a "mis-shape" (240) near her and that she wants only "some wholesomeness" (240) in her life.

Suddenly a girl comes onstage, dragging an effigy by a rope. The stage directions describe the Girl as possessing a "kind of inscrutability that…makes her unsettling" (240). The Girl asks Eman if the "Teacher" is in, and tells Eman that she is not attending the festival. When Eman asks why the Girl is dragging the effigy behind her, the Girl explains that she is sick and that it "will take away my sickness with the old year" (241). Before the Girl leaves, she asks Eman for clothes for her effigy, or her "carrier" as she refers to it. Sunma takes an strong disliking towards the Girl, who she says is "as evil as the rest of them" (242). Eman gives the Girl his buba (a short and loose style of garment).

When Eman leaves, the Girl and Ifada exchange words and play together. The Girl observes that Ifada has a "head like a spider's egg, and your mouth dribbles like a roof" (242). Then, the Girl turns vicious, explaining to Ifada that just because the carrier will cure her does not mean it will cure him too. "It is my carrier," she says, "and it is for me alone" (243). The Girl walks off, and Ifada follows, carrying the effigy along with him.

Analysis

When the play opens, the atmosphere is tense and the characters are mysterious, not only to the play's audience but also to each other. No immediate backstory is provided for the characters, although it is abundantly clear that there are many things unspoken between the play's two main characters, Eman and Sunma. Both characters seem more eager to hide than to divulge their thoughts. The effect of this in the language of the text is a number of conversations revolving around questions, which the characters ask but never answer.

Instead of dwelling further on the dynamic between Sunma and Eman, the author heightens the tension in the scene by bringing in two elements from the society outside the hut: Ifada and "the Girl." Ifada and the Girl are both children, though they are not

innocent and carefree. Although children are often considered transparent in their emotions and unsophisticated in their thinking, the Girl in particular is ominous, solemn, and generally un-childlike. Upon her intrusion into the narrative this un-childlike child's presence is "unsettling" (240) and foreboding. Continuing the theme of an un-childlike child, the Girl also drags an effigy behind her in the way that other little girls may carry sweet-faced dolls. Although the Girl describes the effigy as a kind of healing agent, effigies are typically models of individuals intended to be burnt or otherwise destroyed as a symbol of anger or protest. In this sense, effigies are potent—and in this scene, ominous—symbols of latent violence that will eventually be unleashed.

The specific language that the Girl uses to describe the effigy, as a "carrier," suggests a curious contradiction between the effigy's proclaimed status as a healing object and the frequent use of the word "carrier" to describe an agent carrying disease and illness. Moreover, the word "carrier" also indicates that the effigy is "carrying," if not disease or illness, something. The suggestion seems to be that this effigy or "carrier" will "carry" the little's girl's illness in the way that someone might "carry" another's burden. As this is only the first section of a complicated longer work, these allusions and objects are not resolved for the audience, but rather left to signal ominous, unsettling developments to come.

Discussion Question 1

What kinds of things are said aloud and what is unspoken in the conversation between Eman and Sunma?

Discussion Question 2

How is the effigy described, and how is it different from a doll that a girl may carry?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the adults and the children. In what ways are they typical adults or children, and in what ways do they trouble these categories?

Vocabulary

lorry, keenly, effigy, inscrutability, accustomed, gaiety, impassive, baffled, venom, belabor

The Strong Breed, pages 243-255

Summary

Eman and Sunma come out onto the stage again. Sunma tells Eman that the lorry is honking, and again asks him to leave. Harshly, Sunma asks Eman why he continues to stay in a place where nobody wants him, and explains that he is "wasting [his] life" (244) here. Sunma admits that sometimes she wonders if she is really part of the same community as the rest of the village because, as she explains, "they are evil and I am not" (244). Sunma then accuses Eman of being too afraid to leave, because he is afraid to put "his sense of mission…to the test" (245). Eman protests that he has no "sense of mission," that he has "found peace" (245) here in the village and that Sunma should go home. Sunma then suggests to Eman that "keeping faith with so much is slowly making [him] inhuman" (246).

The lorry drives off, and Sunma admits to Eman that she has renounced her home and her status as Jaguna's eldest daughter. While Eman paces the room, the Girl returns with her carrier. Ifada follows behind her. According to the stage directions, two men suddenly emerge from the shadows and throw a sack over Ifada's head. The Girl turns around just in time to see Ifada being taken away. Slowly, she turns and flees. Sunma goes outside and sees the effigy. She forbids Efada from touching it. Eman presses Sunma further. He wants to know why she is really upset and what the festival really means to her. Sunma brushes off his questions, and they return to the house.

Sunma and Eman begin to play ayo (a two-player game using seeds or stones in hollows of a wooden board). Sunma again accuses Eman of being inhuman and loveless. Suddenly, they are interrupted by Ifada, pounding at the door and "desperate with terror" (251). Despite Sunma's pleas that Eman not interfere and that the affair is none of his business, Eman opens the door. As Eman lets Ifada in, Oroge and Jaguna appear onstage. It is clear that they are tracking Ifada. Jaguna dispatches one of his men to accompany Sunma home, then turns to Eman, who asks them why they are targeting an unwilling, "helpless boy" (253). Oroge and Jaguna explain that their purification rituals are different. Oroge, ominously, says that he has successfully "prepared" (255) carriers in the past who were more unwilling than Ifada is. Jaguna grows impatient with Eman's objections, and explains that they must use a stranger in the purification ritual. As the only other stranger in town, Jaguna asks, would Eman be willing to take Ifada's place? They carry Ifada off, and Eman stays rooted to the spot, staring after them.

Analysis

While this section once again explores the relationship between Sunma and Eman, it also touches on general questions of membership inclusion and exclusion within communities. It becomes clear for the first time in this section that Sunma and Eman are

living in Sunma's village, and that Eman has come there from another village. It also becomes clear for the first time that Sunma wants Eman to leave, for reasons which are still unknown to the audience. Towards that end, Sunma tries a number of different rhetorical strategies. First, she insults Eman, explaining that he can never become a part of the village community. When this does not seem to perturb Eman, Sunma takes a second tactic, this time trying to drive him away by revealing the community's true "evil" nature. Sunma eventually tries a third tactic, accusing Eman of being "inhuman" and lacking love in his heart. In essence, Sunma's tactic lies in reminding Eman of the ways in which he is isolated from community, as he is an "inhuman" foreigner isolated from both the village community and even the human community itself.

Frequently, the text suggests a disconnection between words and meanings. Sometimes these disconnections are incidental, and sometimes they are defensively deliberate. Sunma in this section is a good example of the latter. While Sunma accuses Eman of "inhumanity," it is clear that she loves and cares for Eman; her words function as a defense mechanism. Moreover, though Sunma criticizes Eman for his willful independence, her observations about her own life suggest that Sunma has some measure of respect and admiration for an isolated, independent life. In this section, she repeatedly insists upon her separateness from and renunciation of her home village. This section unfolds a wide variety of possible ways in which individuals can orient themselves in relation to the communities in which they were born or which they have chosen for themselves. They can accept it, reject it, or seek out an alternative to both.

In this section, the play charts Eman and Sunma's feelings of distance from and connection to their communities. However, the author neglects to concretely identify how Eman has turned up in Sunma's village and why Sunma so strongly denounces her village as "evil." Instead, the play fixates on the interplay between its two major plot lines: Eman and Sunma quarreling inside the house, and Ifada and the Girl quarreling outside the house. Although there is no concrete connection between these two spheres of action other than the fact that the characters can see one another and occasionally interact with each other, there are hints that the Girl's arrival with the effigy is linked to Sunma's wish for Eman to leave the village. For instance, Sunma is consistently disgusted by the sight of the effigy, a fact that Eman connects to the village's "festival" which is going on at the moment. The "festival" is mentioned in context, without any direct acknowledgment of what the festival celebrates. In this sense, the play prolongs the suspense it has built up in the first section by giving the audience enough new information to continue asking questions, but never quite enough information to answer their questions.

This section also introduces the characters of Oroge and Jaguna who occupy very different positions in this society than either Ifada or the Girl. Unlike the children, Oroge and Jaguna and adult men in positions of power within the village. For that reason, they are also authoritative sources of answers to some of the questions that have been building up. For instance, Oroge and Jaguna are the first characters to allude directly to the village's "purification ritual." The mention of a "purification ritual" raises new questions: Who or what is "pure"? The word "purification" suggests that it is a process the village undergoes, rather than a permanent state of purity or impurity. How does that

process work? What use does the ritual have for foreigners, like Ifada or Eman? Rather than answer these questions directly, the play frames the purification ritual as a personal and ethical choice for Eman: will he or will he not volunteer in Ifada's place?

Discussion Question 1

How does the door, which Eman and Sunma debate opening or keeping close, function as a symbol in this section?

Discussion Question 2

How are Sunma and Eman mobilizing the binary between individuality and community? How do they prefer to see themselves: as individuals or as part of a community?

Discussion Question 3

What seems to be motivating Oroge and Jaguna?

Vocabulary

distress, reproach, unwholesomeness, incense, distressing, contempt, renounce, harbor

The Strong Breed, pages 255-263

Summary

According to the stage directions, the blackout lasts no more than one minute. When the lights come up, Ifada is shown returning to the house. The Girl then appears onstage, and accuses Ifada of trying to steal her effigy. Eventually, Sunma intervenes, telling both the "untrained pigs" (256) to leave. However, Sunma then realizes that if Ifada is present, Eman must have taken his place in the ritual. She demands that Ifada show her where the men have taken Eman.

When the stage lights go on again, there is a narrow passageway between two mud houses represented on stage. Eman crouches between them, with an "alert hunted look…in his eyes" (257). He is naked from the waist down. A woman throws slop out the window, onto Eman. When she realizes who it is, she spits on him and shouts that the carrier is here. Eman flees down the passage. Jaguna and Oroge continue to track Eman down.

The scene changes, and Eman now is crouching in shrubbery. He is bleeding, and ranting about being thirsty. Suddenly, the image of an old man appears. The old man asks his attendant if he has seen his son. When his son, Eman, appears, the Old Man tells him that he is part of a "strong breed": "only a strong breed…can take this boat to the river year after year and wax stronger on it" (259). Eman protests that he has nothing to live for now that his wife, Omae, died in childbirth. The Old Man tells Eman that no woman ever survives bearing "the strong ones" (260). Eman continues to protest, saying that he has changed in the 12 years since he was away, and says that there are "other tasks" and "even greater things" (261) waiting for him in life. Eman leaves, and the attendant returns. The sound of drumming can be heard in the distance, as two men come in and set a miniature boat down upon the old man's head. The Old Man holds it down to his head, and sets off running. The two men give him a head start, then take off running after him.

Eman is staring out into the distance. It is clear he has been imagining this scene. Oroge and Jaguna catch up to him. Jaguna and Oroge disagree over whether to continue with the ritual as it is almost midnight. Suddenly, Sunma appears and attacks her father, Jaguna. Oroge stops Jaguna from beating her, though Jaguna wants to "cripple the harlot for life" (263). They leave. Ifada creeps onto the scene and helps the sobbing Sunma up off the ground.

Analysis

The blackout is an important and unusual symbolic void in a work otherwise laden with suggestive rhetoric and symbolic gestures and objects. It is the only blackout in the play, which otherwise has no scene breaks. The blackout occurs in the moment when Eman

must weigh his options and choose whether to volunteer to participate in Ifada's place in the purification ritual. While Eman deliberates, the blackout preserves his privacy of thought and feeling. The blackout also briefly obscures the audience's knowledge of the outcome, and allows Eman's decision to be revealed in particular ways. The audience learns that Eman has, indeed, volunteered in Ifada's place because immediately following the blackout, Ifada wanders onstage. If Ifada is free, so the logic goes, Eman must be captive.

The direct substitution of Ifada's body for Eman's emphasizes the ways in which both characters exist, for villagers like Oroge and Jaguna, as bodies to be used (and possibly also to be disposed) in the purification ritual. In fact, this section shows Eman's increasing animalization as he flees Oroge and Jaguna. Like the hunted animal he is becoming, he is described as having a "hunted look" in his eyes. He is also half-naked, another sign of Eman's dehumanization. The scene in which the woman throws slop on Eman and spits on him is a poignant commentary on the villagers' unsympathetic, even cruel response to its foreign-born, isolated, and dehumanized "others."

In this section, there is one particular exception to the villagers' treatment. By confronting and attacking her father Jaguna, Sunma proves her loyalty to Eman and her willful dissociation from the village. Both she and Eman make choices to act in ways that separate them from the village community. By volunteering in Ifada's place, Eman cements his status as village outsider. Meanwhile, Sunma, by going after the powerful village elders, sends the message that she aligns herself with the outsiders and, therefore, against the village. In this sense, the play sets up a contrast between individual conscience and the collective, indoctrinated rule of the village-cum-mob.

At the same time that Eman's body is increasingly subjugated, abused, and dehumanized, this section is also marked by a number of Eman's memories of the past. These memories are key to preserving a sense of Eman's humanity and interiority as a character, with a past that is filled with a father and a wife that Eman has not yet mentioned. The connection between the past memory and the present moment is subtle and unstated, yet significant. In Eman's memory, his father (referred to as "Old Man") explains to him that, as a member of "the strong breed," he has a duty and a calling to sacrifice himself for the sake of the village. Although Eman in the past rejects what his father considers his duty and birthright, the position of this memory in the narrative suggests that Eman's destiny has caught up with him. By volunteering to take Ifada's place, Eman has fulfilled the "task" that his "Old Man" envisioned for him.

Discussion Question 1

What seem to be some of the differences between Oroge and Jaguna in their attitude towards Eman and towards their village?

Discussion Question 2

What is the relationship between Eman's flashback and the events of the play unfolding in the present moment?

Discussion Question 3

What seems to be the Old Man's definition of "strength"?

Vocabulary

slither, apprehensive, retain, loathsome, apprehension, indefinable, contamination

The Strong Breed, pages 263-end

Summary

The next scene flashes back to Eman's youth, to one of his memories with the young Omae. Eman tells Omae to go away in case the tutor sees her. Omae is flirtatious and tells Eman she knows he has not yet been circumcised. When Eman goes to leave, Omae runs after him. Eman is incensed when she almost touches him because she might "pollute" (266) him with her touch. Eman explains that he is becoming a man, and as a man, he "must go on his own, go where no one can help him, and test his strength" (266). There is no room for Omae in this vision.

The figure of the Tutor suddenly appears. He asks Omae if you would like to come with him to his hut to wash clothes. It is clear that "washing clothes" is a euphemism. Omae resists, and Eman defends her. The Tutor threatens them, saying that Eman can never return, and disappears. Eman tells Omae that he is going on a journey to the city and that she must go home and wait for him until he turns. Omae begs him not to go, but Eman is determined.

In the next scene, the Girl enters and asks Eman if he is the carrier. He assents, and asks for a drink of water. When the Girl takes a long time to return, Eman realizes that she has gone to fetch Oroge and Jaguna. He leaves, and wanders into an overgrown part of the village. Suddenly, the stage directions describe how a spotlight shows a group of people, heads bowed, clustered together. A village priest lays a hand on Eman's shoulder. Eman asks the priest why his wife, Omae, had to die in childbirth. He does not understand the meaning of it. Eman tells the priest to go comfort his father. The priest goes, but can "make no dent in the man's grief" (273). This memory departs the stage, and the present day version of Eman is show kneeling by his wife's grave. He scoops up sand and pours it over his head. The scene fades to blackout.

Jaguna and Oroge enter the stage. Eman enters a well. In front of him, he sees the Old Man, his father, from his dreams. Eman tries to follow his father to the river, but the Old Man tells him to turn back. As Eman approaches, his father breaks into a trot and runs away from him.

The scene cuts to the image of Eman's house, with the effigy dangling from the sheaves. Sunma and Ifada enter. In the distance, the Girl watches them. The villagers pass by silently, and Jaguna declares that he does not want to run into his daughter. Without specifying exactly what he did, Jaguna protests that, "We did it for them. It was all for their common good. What did it benefit me whether the man lived or died" (275). Jaguna and Oroge leave for home. Sunma, Ifada, and the Girl remain onstage as the light slowly fades.

Analysis

As Eman is physically hunted down and as the village seems to close in upon him, Eman increasingly takes refuge in the past. This next section gives the audience two scenes from Eman's memory in close succession. The first scene, involving his love interest Omae, gives context for Eman's decision to leave his home village. In the same way that Eman in the present moment stands up for Ifada, it is shown how in the past Eman defends Omae against the lecherous, threatening Tutor. The memory reinforces what the audience already suspects about Eman's loyal character and upstanding moral fiber.

Eman's memory of his conversation with Omae also gives the audience indications of Eman's evolving definition of masculinity. As a young teenager, Eman seems to understand masculinity in terms of selfhood, independence, and solitude. For Eman to access and prove his masculinity, he must "go on his own…where no one can help him" (266). Eman's declaration takes on new meaning in the context of the play, where this memory is revealed in a moment when Eman is literally "on his own," in a place where no one will help him even if they can. The Girl's betrayal is a prime example of Eman's total isolation. Although Eman has technically gotten what he once desired, the very independence and solitude that he once believed would prove his masculinity has in fact produced his dehumanization. The crouching, thirsty, and hunted Eman seems more like an animal than a man.

While Eman does not directly comment on this first memory, it is clear that these are the attitudes, beliefs and words of a much younger Eman. Eman's second memory in this section gives some indication of his later emotional maturity, which he attains through grief and sorrow at the passing of his betrothed, Omae. In this second scene, Eman again finds himself emotionally and spiritually alone, without his wife and unable to connect with the Priest or his distraught father. This scene provides an explanation for what Sunma identified in Eman's character in the first section. Eman seems "loveless" and "inhuman" because he has erected emotional walls to protect himself against love, friendship, family and society. His seeming "inhumanity" is a guard against his most empathetic, loving impulses, which he demonstrates in the present day by his decision to volunteer on Eman's behalf. Through his memories, the audience accesses Eman's interiority and sees the character's profound humanity—despite his increasing dehumanization.

The play's ending suggests a complicated tension between individuals and their community. Through his death, Eman has supposedly "purified" the community. Jaguna holds fast to this belief, adamantly protesting that Eman's sacrifice served the community's "common good" (275). Under this calculus, which measures the worth of the individual against the benefit of the community, the life and death of one of the community's marginalized, ostracized members is insignificant. However, there are indications that the community and even Oroge himself are beginning to question the purpose of the purification ritual, which reduces individuals into mere mechanisms for

the greater good. Perhaps, in this sense, Eman’s death will ultimately “purify” the village in more ways than he expected or intended.

Discussion Question 1

What does the flashback to Eman's relationship with Omae reveal about his own character?

Discussion Question 2

How are grief and death represented in this section?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the play end with a conversation between Jaguna and Oroge, and the silent appearance of Sunma, Ifada, and the Girl?

Vocabulary

thatched, mimicry, coyly, disgrace, rascal, withdraw, wrench, unchecked, aimlessly

Characters

Brother Jero

Brother Jero is the main character of the play, and a false prophet. He is greedy and scheming, but has a smooth, charismatic style and strong command of language that he uses to reel in new worshippers. Brother Jero owes money to Amope.

Amope

Amope is the play's most significant female character. She wants Brother Jero to pay back the money he owes her and frequently berates her husband, Chume, for his lack of career success. She is the only character who sees Brother Jero for what he is.

Chume

Chume is Brother Jero's assistant and Amope's husband. He is devoted to Brother Jero, and wants desperately to beat his wife.

Old Prophet

The Old Prophet is Brother Jero's former tutor. In the play, he appears as a memory, chastising Brother Jero for his betrayal. At some point in the past, Brother Jero drove the man off his land.

Trader

A female trader appears in the second scene selling smoked fish. Amope gets into an argument with her about the price of her fish. Her arrival also interrupts a quarrel between Amope and Chume, and allows Brother Jero to escape.

Member of Parliament

The Member of Parliament appears in the fifth and final scene of the play. Wearing an elaborate train and cap, the man comes every day to the beach to practice his speeches but is too scared to make them. Brother Jero converts him to his Brotherhood.

Eman

Eman left his old village where he was a member of the “strong breed,” and is now a foreigner in Sunma’s village. He is close with Sunma, and compassionate towards Ifada. He volunteers in Ifada’s place in the village’s purification ritual.

Sunma

Sunma is Jaguna’s daughter. She is tense and anxious because she believes that Eman is in danger. She tries to convince Eman to run away with her.

The Girl

The Girl is an unsmiling, enigmatic figure in the play. She first appears dragging an effigy behind her, which she describes as the “carrier” that will heal her illness. She is sometimes cruel to Ifada, and later reports Eman’s whereabouts to Jaguna and Oroge.

Ifada

Ifada is described as an “idiot.” Though the sight of him disgusts Sunma, Eman shows compassion to him. He is not originally from Sunma’s village, and for that Jaguna and Oroge conscript him into the purification ritual. Eman eventually takes his place.

Jaguna

Jaguna is one of the village men who come to take Ifada. Jaguna is more direct and ruthless than Oroge. He is also Sunma’s father.

Oroge

Oroge is another of the village men who come to take Ifada. Oroge is more questioning of he and Jaguna’s plans to capture Eman, and is relieved when the night is finally over.

Omae

Omae is Eman’s betrothed in his past life. She waits 12 years for Eman to return, and when he does, dies giving birth to their child. She appears in the play only in Eman’s memories.

Old Man

The Old Man is Eman's father who appears in Eman's memories. In the first, he tells Eman about the sacrifice required in being a member of the "strong breed."

Tutor

The Tutor appears in one of Eman's memories. He tries to seduce the young Omae, and attempts to beat Eman. When the Tutor threatens to tell the Elders and have him banished, Eman flees.

Priest

The Priest appears in one of Eman's memories. He comforts Eman after Omae's death.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Velvet Cape

Brother Jero's velvet cape, which he purchases using money borrowed from Amope, symbolizes his attachment to and reliance on material goods, as well as his tendency to put himself before others. The velvet cape also represents the fact that Jero's "Brotherhood" is founded more upon spectacle and performance than spiritual substance. Rather than improving his speech style or studying from the Bible, Jero seeks to demonstrate his superiority by adopting a flashier, more ostentatious dress style than his competitors.

Chume's Bicycle

Chume's bicycle is a potent symbol of his middling class status and his desire for upward mobility. In his fiery, impromptu speech to the congregation, Chume rants about those who walk getting bicycles, and those with bicycles getting cars. Chume's bicycle is thus a symbol of what he attained so far (a bicycle and a certain lower middle class status as a local government official) as well as what he hopes to attain in the future (a car and a higher class status).

"Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade"

Brother Jero's proposed new name symbolizes his hubris and self-aggrandizing impulses. Brother Jero's preoccupation with the names he calls himself also suggests that his "Brotherhood" is more a matter of marketing and branding that spirituality and worship.

Jero's Red Halo

The mysterious red halo that appears around Brother Jero's head in the last moments of the play symbolizes the consolidation of Brother Jero's power and, as the Member of Parliament says, his "mastery" (233). Because it is red, a color associated with the devil, and because the play does not provide a worldly explanation for its sudden appearance, the red halo seems ominous and even supernatural. It also suggests that while Brother Jero may not be a true prophet doing God's work, he has power and influence over his worshippers.

The Lorry

The lorry symbolizes the possibility of escaping one's environment and upbringing, and of starting afresh somewhere else. Although Sunma encourages him to take the lorry, Eman repeatedly rejects that possibility. The lorry's departure towards the middle of The Strong Breed play gives the play heightened drama and suspense, as Sunma and Eman have no options of escape.

The Effigy

The effigy is a complicated symbol of the way in which communities turn not only dolls but people into "carriers," forcing them to bear the burden of societal ills and the responsibility of "purifying" them. The Girl suggests that the effigy has healing properties and will make her well again, yet drags the effigy in the dust all the time. In other words, while the effigy theoretically helps the Girl, it is subjected to harm and abuse. At the same time, Sunma treats the object as though it is contagious, suggesting that a "cure" to one person may be a "sickness" to another. Because the effigy eventually hands outside Eman's house, it is also associated with Eman's sacrifice.

Ifada

Although he is a character, Ifada also symbolizes the village's treatment of strangers, foreigners, and all people considered "different." As an "idiot," he is considered both "useless" (239) and "helpless" (253), which suggests the extreme vulnerability of social outsiders.

The Girl

Also a character, the Girl symbolizes the village's pervasive attitude towards strangers. She relies on the effigy to cure her, and when presented with the opportunity to bring Eman a glass of water, she instead alerts Jaguna and Oroge as to his whereabouts. Although she may possess an "unsettling…inscrutability" (240), ultimately the girl functions as a condensed version of the societal attitudes at work in this play.

The Blackout

The only blackout in the play, after Jaguna and Oroge begin to take Ifada away, is a symbolic representation of Eman's own compassionate response to Ifada's pain and suffering. Before the blackout, Jaguna and Oroge tell Eman that they will accept him as a substitute for Ifada. After the blackout, Ifada is shown returning to the house, implying that Eman has agreed to Jaguna and Oroge's terms. The decision to leave Eman's thought process and decision-making hidden from the audience suggests that Eman's act of compassion arose instinctively and particularly to the sight of Ifada's suffering.

The Boat

The miniature boat that the old man, Eman's father, wears on his head during one of Eman's flashbacks is a complicated symbol of both death and sacrifice. On the one hand, the idea of a ship setting sail for a new destination mimics the knowledge that the old man will soon die. On the other hand, the fact that he wears it on his head suggests that this is also a symbol of the burden that he, as a member of the "strong breed" chosen for the village's purification ritual, must bear.

Settings

The Beach

The beach is the site of Brother Jero's makeshift church, which is identified by a few stakes and palm leaves marking the territory on the beach. Jero's church makes use of the resources of the beach itself, and features a "heap of sand" (210) decorated with a mirror and empty bottles. Hanging off one of these bottles is a rosary and a cross. This beach is not a pristine oasis, but rather a place of washed-up detritus and junk. Although this is at odds with Brother Jero's own luxurious clothing and personal style, the penury of and decrepitude of the beach reflects Brother Jero's "Brotherhood" itself, which is predicated on deception and manipulation rather than purity and worship.

Jero's Hut

Jero's hut is located in the fishing village, which is supposed to be represented onstage by a "few poles with nets and other litter" (203). Within that setting, the hut is the place that reveals Jero's continued attachment to material things and worldly comforts. Thus, he keeps the hut a secret from his congregation, telling them falsely that he sleeps on the beach. As the place where Jero relaxes and escapes his duties as a prophet, the hut is one of Jero's places of weakness. Any action at the hut contains within it the threat of exposure, and it is significant that it is here that Chume discovers Jero's real identity as Amope's debtor.

Eman's House

Eman's house is described as a mud house with a "modest clinic" (237) inside, which includes some exercise books and worn textbooks. Though Sunma and Eman are both tense at the beginning of the play, it is clear that Eman's house is a place of warmth, love, and generosity. Throughout the play, that place is gradually infiltrated and punctured by the outside society, first in the form of Ifada, then the Girl, and finally Oroge and Jaguna. At the end of the play, Sunma, Ifada, and the Girl remain standing outside Eman's house. Their presence makes the absence of Eman, the true owner of the home, both conspicuous and poignant.

The Passageway

When Eman is fleeing from Jaguna and Oroge, he takes brief refuge in a narrow passageway between two mud houses. The image of Eman caught between two houses is a rich symbol of Eman's own lack of community and his in-between status at the moment. He belongs neither to one community not to the other. Instead, he runs, hunted, between them. While in the passageway, a woman dumps slop on his head and spits on him when she sees that he is the deplored, hunted "carrier." In this sense, the

passageway reflects Eman’s vulnerability as an outsider and the danger supposed “strangers” face.

The Shrubs

After Jaguna and Oroge set up watch outside his house, Eman is forced to hide in the shrubs. The shrubs symbolize his growing alienation from human society, as he moves from his house to the passageway and finally to the shrubs. It is here in the shrubs and on the outskirts of human society that Eman has his visions of his past life. The implication is that as the men of Sunma’s village hunt him down, reminding him of his status as an outsider in their village, Eman comes to a fresh understanding of his past life, his relationship with his family and betrothed, and his responsibility as a member of the “strong breed.”

Themes and Motifs

Proving Masculinity Through Trial

Both plays represent and question the villages' dominant understandings of masculinity. In The Strong Breed, these themes are overt as Eman struggles with what it means to be a "man" within a broader community and family unit. Throughout The Strong Breed, Eman struggles to find his identity as a man. His self-doubt and self-questioning is particularly evident and poignant in the flashbacks. In a remembered conversation with his father, his father suggests that being a "carrier," the village's sacrifice, is the ultimate expression of strength and masculinity. "Other men," the old man says, "would rot and die doing this task year after year" (260). Eman rejects this association between masculinity, strength and self-sacrifice. As a young teenager, Eman tells Omae, who eventually becomes the mother of his child, "a man must go on his own, go where no once can help him, and test his strength" (266). Although Eman also associates masculinity with strength, strength for the young Eman exists independent of society. He believes masculinity is individual and solitary.

Throughout the play, however, Eman grows to accept his father's understanding of masculinity as self-sacrifice. In fact, he chastises Jaguna and Oroge for their purification ritual, which targets the weakest and most marginalized members of their community, such as Ifada, rather than themselves. When Eman tells Jaguna and Orogo that a "village which cannot provide its own carrier contains no men" (254), he links the concepts of masculinity and self-sacrifice. Ultimately, Eman dedicates his life to this principle and fulfills his and his father's ideals, by sacrificing himself for Ifada. Thus, Eman proves himself as a man by his definition of masculinity.

In a more muted way, The Trial of Brother Jero also treats masculinity as something that must be tested and proved. In many ways, Amope and Chume's marital disagreements stem from Amope's belief that professional achievement is a reflection of masculinity. Chume finds Amope's persistent criticisms emasculating. Therefore, he seeks to discipline his wife by beating her—and in so doing, prove his masculinity to himself and to his wife. This tension becomes clear in the third scene, when Chume insists that his wife address him as a man. At this point, Amope replies: "A fine man you are then, when you can't remember a simple thing like a bottle of clean water" (223). Though they have different standards for what a "man" is, both Chume and Amope adhere to the belief that certain actions and behaviors constitute masculinity; for both Chume and Amope, masculinity must be tested and proved. Amope interprets house help, like fetching water, as the test of a "man." Chume interprets Amope and women more generally as the test of masculinity. Disciplining, subduing, and silencing women thus becomes the supposed proof of Chume's masculinity.

On his own behalf, Brother Jero does not seem to struggle much with his masculinity. While he struggles to conquer feelings of lust for women, he does not seem to question his own masculinity. In fact, the suave and confident Brother Jero never seems to

question much about who he is or what he does. Rather, he expends this energy manipulating others' self-doubts and self-perceptions. Brother Jero exploits Chume's doubts about his masculinity to serve his own ends when he authorizes Chume to beat his wife. Thus, Chume's and Amope's conflicting visions of masculinity result in a toxic cycle of violence that is only cut short by their joint realization that they have both, equally, been manipulated. For Chume in particular, the knowledge that he has been duped is particularly devastating as it compounds his feelings of worthlessness and emasculation. In The Trials of Brother Jero, masculinity through a display of dominance and through a subordination of others leads only to a cycle of violence and revenge.

Human Will and Social Manipulation

Both plays highlight the tensions between individual will and sociocultural formation, suggesting that social groups including religions and villages often depend on the sublimation of individual will. In The Trial of Brother Jero, Brother Jero uses manipulative, deceitful techniques such as lying and brainwashing in order to bend individuals to his will. For instance, to one woman Brother Jero promises God will give her children. To another man, he promises he will become the first Prime Minister of the "new Mid-North-East State—when it is created" (216). Brother Jero recruits many people by predicting they will live until they are 80 years old, a promise that cannot be proven false until after the person's death. Above all, Brother Jero exploits his worshippers' fears and self-doubts, making them believe that the only path to professional development and self-fulfillment runs through him. This is especially clear in the scenes of Brother Jero working on Chume and the Member of Parliament. By positioning himself as a conduit to God, Brother Jero makes these men dependent upon him for his advice, thereby robbing them of any independent volition.

In The Strong Breed the village's purification ritual simply disregards human will and volition, rather than manipulating and deceiving it. Jaguna and Oroge explain that for their purification ritual, they use only strangers to the village. In this case, they plan to use Ifada. When Eman objects that Ifada as the village "idiot" is not a willing subject in the ritual, Jaguna asks, "Does he have to be willing?" (253). Oroge then explains to Eman that, "No one is his senses would do such a job" (254), implying that the village must then select someone who is not "in their senses" to participate in the purification ritual. When Eman persists, asking is "it really ha[s] meaning to use one as unwilling as that" (255), Oroge explains that Ifada will be adequately "prepared" so that he is "not only willing but joyous" (255) about his participation in the ritual. Eman identifies this "preparation" as a form of "deceit," raising the question of where to draw the line between the two.

In some sense, "preparation" and "deceit" are two ways of looking at the ways in which societies and communities condition their members into accepting the group's terms. In The Trials of Brother Jero, Jero uses manipulative observations of and predictions for his worshippers' lives to condition them for life in his Brotherhood, which demands that they be wholly respectful of Brother Jero's authority. Meanwhile, in The Strong Breed, villagers such as Oroge and Jaguna see "deceit" as a means of conditioning and

persuading someone to take on an undesirable role in society. It is important that both Brother Jero and the village men prey on their weakest, most marginalized members of society. Eman's suggestion—that these men are themselves the weak ones—implies that an insecure, fearful community or leader views independent will (both thought and action) as a threat, while a secure, confident leader and community views it as an asset.

Self-Serving "Purification"

Here, "purification" has been put in quotes because, in both plays, scenes of characters looking for purity are presented as false, self-serving, or nonsensical. In The Trials of Brother Jero, Brother Jero seems to offer spiritual purity to his congregation, alongside material benefits such as promotions and money. One of the rituals outlined in the play involves filling two bottles with seawater, which Brother Jero must then bless and sprinkle over the foreheads of penitents in the congregation. The seeming purity and innocence of the ritual is juxtaposed with Brother Jero's lecherous adoration of a woman's figure. In fact, Brother Jero goes chasing after the woman, therefore abandoning his congregation. While Brother Jero is supposedly the arbiter of purity and chastity for the congregation, he cannot adhere to these standards himself.

In The Strong Breed, are similar layers of irony to the invocation of "purity" and the references to the village's "purification ritual." Although the purification ritual of Sunma's village is considerably more violent than that of Eman's village, both villages adhere to the belief that they must be purified annually through a kind of ritual. Indeed, Sunma's village represses some of these more violent aspects of the ritual by focusing on the "festival" surrounding the ritual and by choosing an outsider who is more easily disposed and forgotten than another person. Only when the villagers confront the particularly upsetting, tragic circumstances of Eman's capture and death do they first face the reality of the ritual that they believe "purifies" their village.

In The Trials of Brother Jero, purity and purifying rituals stand in stark, ironic contrast to Brother Jero's own impurity and depravity. In The Strong Breed, the existence of the purification ritual depends ironically on its own obscurity; if the villagers understood ritual's human dimension and body count, they would perhaps see—and they begin to see in the final pages of the play—that the purification ritual itself sullies the village's humanistic ideals. In both plays, rituals dedicated to purification often suggest or do precisely the opposite. Moreover, purification rituals often hierarchize communities according to who is pure and who is impure, placing those deemed "pure" above those considered "impure." Thus, the perceived "purity" of Sunma's village rests upon the eradication of its "impure" elements: outsiders like Eman and "idiots" like Ifada.

Vocation and Destiny In Both Plays

Both plays touch upon the ideas of having a vocation and calling, albeit in different ways. Whereas Brother Jero in The Trial of Brother Jero readily accepts what he sees as his calling to become a prophet, Eman in The Strong Breed at first resists and

eventually only reluctantly accepts his destiny and calling in life. The Trial of Brother Jero opens on Jero's declaration that he is a "prophet by birth and by inclination" (201). Jero goes on to explain that because he was born with "rather thick and long hair," he was a "natural prophet" (201)—after which he "grew to love the trade" (201). In this opening monologue, Brother Jero is claiming that his current position as prophet stems from a predestined vocation, the evidence of which he finds in something so seemingly mundane as his hair.

According to Brother Jero's interpretation of his destiny, Brother Jero's status as a prophet bring him greater privileges and none of its responsibility. He uses his belief in his destiny to naturalize his methods of manipulation, deceit, and greed; these attributes are what is "natural" to him. In other words, he exploits his own "destiny" to excuse himself from a deeper examination of his responsibilities to his followers. Moreover, because Brother Jero is a known dissimulator and liar—a "smooth talker"—it is impossible to take his story of his birth and destiny at face value. The story must be understood, instead, in terms of what it allows Brother Jero to do and get away with.

The Strong Breed takes a much more complicated and nuanced stance on the concepts of vocation and destiny, which are central to the play. The end of the play reveals Eman's legacy and life in his past village as a member of the "strong breed." As the word "breed" suggests, their position in the village has been handed down over the generations, from father to son. The old man explains to Eman that being the village's carrier is his destiny, and cautions him against avoiding his fate. "Your own blood will betray you son," the old man says, "because you cannot hold it back" (261). Although Eman insists that there are "other tasks" (261) waiting for him in life, his father insists that he will only end up "giv[ing] to others what rightly belongs to us" (261). This conversation sheds light on why Eman has run away to Sunma's village, and suggests that Eman's sacrifice for Ifada fulfills the destiny he was fleeing. Although Eman has the choice of making this sacrifice for his own village or for another village, fate leaves him no choice of whether to sacrifice at all. Unlike Brother Jero's destiny, which gives him privileges, Eman's destiny gives him the privilege only to sacrifice himself.

The differences can be attributed to the plays' different attitudes towards personal destiny. Destiny in The Trial of Brother Jero is something mutable. It can be changed, resisted, and adapted to serve one's own selfish needs. For instance, Jero ultimately avoids the old prophet's prediction that he will succumb to a "Daughter of Eve." Meanwhile, destiny in The Strong Breed is something immutable. Eman's destiny is unwavering, and ultimately overpowers his attempts to resist it and find a different path in life. Eman's destiny, which he inherits through his father and which he carries in his "blood" itself, follows him from one village to another. Thus, while he escapes the village, he cannot escape his destiny to sacrifice himself for a community.

Implied Yet Unrealized Critiques Of The Social Order

At the endings of each play, readers and viewers may find themselves surprised by the seeming lack or absence of sociological critiques. Both plays take society as their

general subject, and call attention to its inanities, inequities, predations, and ritualized forms of marginalization, subjugation and execution; yet, their endings punish the individuals trying to resist these harmful aspects of society, while rewarding the individuals that profit off them. For instance, The Trials of Brother Jero generally comments on the false prophets' abuse of power and their manipulative use of religious ideology. However, the play's ending suggests that Brother Jero will continue to operate as usual, winning new recruits and earning greater profits. At the same time, it is suggested that the police will soon arrest Chume, ones of the characters who comes to resist and resent Brother Jero's manipulations. In fact, the very last words of the play ("Master!") suggest that Brother Jero has attained total mastery and unchecked power over his subordinated congregation.

In The Strong Breed, the author seems to leverage a critique against the village's insular, predatory "purification ritual," which ostracizes and sacrifices one foreign-born member of the community per year. Yet, The Strong Breed's ending also rewards the village members who perpetuate this ritual, while seeming to punish the individuals who speak out and resist it. Together, Oroge and Jaguna successfully capture Eman and head off, safe and unscathed, for their own homes. Meanwhile, Eman has been not only captured but also killed. Accordingly, Sunma and Ifada have lost a person they cared deeply for. Like it does in The Trials of Brother Jero, a cursory glance of The Strong Breed's ending suggests that the unstoppable power of ritual and tradition has conquered a desperately futile and frail resistance effort.

However, both plays hint towards the possibility of reform and justice in the more or less distant future. In The Strong Breed, this possibility is more explicit. While Oroge and Jaguna ultimately succeed in carrying out the purification ritual, there is no moral victory awaiting them. In fact, they both lament the "cowardice" (275) of the villagers, who apparently were sickened and "crept off like sick dogs" at the sight of Eman's body. Oroge also notices that they are both alone, effectively abandoned and cast out by the society. Oroge and Jaguna's conversation thus suggests that the most recent purification ritual was such an egregious moral offense that the attitudes of the villagers are beginning to shift. At one point, Jaguna mentions that he is "in no frame of mind" (275) to run into Sunma, his daughter and most prominent critic throughout the play. In other words, it is clear that over the course of the play Sunma has come to exert a kind of powerful effect and influence on her father. While Sunma's efforts were not able to spare Eman's life, it seems probable that future lives will be saved through her efforts and Eman's sacrifice.

The subversive critique offered in The Trials of Brother Jero is more subtly suggested, if at all. Here, there is no direct suggestion of a shift in the community's attitude towards Brother Jero. Although Chume individually breaks with Brother Jero's congregation, Brother Jero effectively replaces him and consolidates his power. However, Jero has two implied critics by the end. The first is Amope, who goes mysteriously missing from the final scene. Yet the fourth scene ends with Amope unpacking her bundle outside Brother Jero's house and telling a female bystander that Brother Jero is a "debtor…who can't do anything" and who only knows "how do [sic] dodge his creditors" (228). In other words, Amope is continuing to spread the word about Brother Jero's scams while also

planning to hold Brother Jero directly accountable. Although Brother Jero in the fifth scene has largely forgotten Amope, it is highly likely that he will find her on his stoop when he returns later that night to his hut. The other implied critic of Brother Jero's actions is actually the play's readers or viewers. Although the play's endings are not optimistic in and of themselves, the author is clearly pointing out this misbehavior and enlisting the audience's sympathy in his critique. Within the fictional world of the play, Brother Jero may be unstoppable and its critiques unrealized. However, outside the play, in the world that its readers inhabit, false prophets stand warned.

Styles

Point of View

As plays without narrators, both The Trial of Brother Jero and The Strong Breed are able to show the action from a variety of characters' perspectives. However, certain characters have more dominant points of view than others. For instance, in Brother Jero, the eponymous "Jero" gives the vast majority of the play's monologues. Monologues have a unique ability to bring viewers into the mind of a particular character, and to show that character's perspectives on the events unfolding in the play. From Brother Jero's monologues, the viewer sees his thought process in work, which reveals his character, his past, and his ambitious schemes for the future.

In The Trial of Brother Jero, Chume is the only other character to give an extended monologue. However, his monologue is delivered in pidgin English and is shorter than Brother Jero's speeches. As such, Chume's monologue does not recruit the viewer to his perspective. Moreover, it is clear to the audience that Chume misinterprets several details about Amope and Brother Jero's relationship. While Chume believes that they are lovers, Brother Jero simply owes Amope money. The audience knows they are not lovers, and that Chume is wrong.

In other words, the audience has a perspective on the characters that they do not have. This is true in both The Trial of Brother Jero and The Strong Breed. Although monologues give viewers' a sense for that individual character's perspective, these monologues appear in particular, discrete moments in the play. The format of the play allows the audience to learn different characters' perspectives through their monologues, but not to share in them. The audience will always experience a character's perspective as a particular drama unfolding outside of themselves, on the stage and in a particular moment and scene.

In The Strong Breed, the play's point of view is most closely aligned with Eman. Whereas the The Trial of Brother Jero uses monologues to give Brother Jero's perspective, The Strong Breed uses memories to give insight into a character and to see events that other characters cannot witness. In The Strong Breed, the audience is privy only to Eman's memories.

However, just as in The Trial of Brother Jero, the viewers can see with a perspective much larger than any individual character can. For instance, there are scenes in The Strong Breed that go beyond what Eman could plausibly have seen or witnessed. For instance, Jaguna and Oroge often have conversations that Eman, who is fleeing them, cannot overhear. The effect of these overlapping, partial perspectives in both plays is that of dramatic irony, which is produced by the fact that the audience has information that the individual characters do not have. This is especially true in Brother Jero, where the audience already knows that Chume's revered Brother Jero is also Amope's debtor.

The only people who have not connected the dots are the play's three major characters: Amope, Chume, and Brother Jero.

Language and Meaning

In both plays, the author uses words and images as euphemisms standing in for larger and often darker concepts. In The Strong Breed, these euphemisms often cluster around death and the village's purification ritual. In one of Eman's memories, he and his father (the Old Man) discuss what it means to be a member of the "strong breed." During the conversation, the Old Man refers to his next sacrifice as his "last journey" (261) and when he is told that "the boat is ready" (261), observes that, "I am ready, too" (261). Though it is never stated outright, it is implied that the Old Man will soon die. The author manages to convey the full emotional impact of this knowledge with delicacy and sensitivity.

These euphemisms can also take shape in the form of structural and syntactical ellipses. Eman's death is never shown explicitly, but rather as an interaction between this world and the afterlife. Eman tells his father's spirit to "wait…wait for me father…" (274). This comment is immediately followed by a stage direction noting "a sudden trembling in the branches. Then silence" (274). The ellipses in Eman's own language and the "silence" described in the stage directions together communicate the news of Eman's death through absence, rather than presence.

In this respect, the mood of each play is different. Whereas The Strong Breed is mournful and reverential, The Trial of Brother Jero is satirical and humorous. Thus, while The Trial of Brother Jero also employs euphemism, it does so to a different effect. Often it is Brother Jero who uses a kind of doublespeak—not for the purposes of saying what is too painful to say aloud, but for the self-serving purposes of deceit and manipulation. This is the case when Brother Jero mentions in a monologue that he is glad he got to the beach "before any customers—I mean worshippers" (211) arrived. "Worshippers" is simply a word acting as a veneer for the individuals that Jero really sees as his "customers."

The overall linguistic mode of both plays also diverges. In some sense, both plays rely on a series of questions, they do so to different effects. In The Strong Breed, much of the early scenes are based around Eman's and Sunma's questions for one another. Sunma asks many questions of Eman ranging from self-doubting ones such as "What is it?" and "What did I say?" (246) to interrogative ones, such as "What brought you here at all, Eman? And what makes you stay?" (250). By raising questions about each character and answering them only with a series of miscommunications and pleading, the author captures the fact that both characters' interest and concern for the other, as well as the fundamental disconnect between them.

The Trial of Brother Jero also makes use of questions, particularly in the scenes of Brother Jero with his congregation and with his potential recruit on the beach. Brother Jero in To convert the Member of Parliament in the fifth scene, Brother Jero asks him a

series of loaded questions about whether he knows him, whether he is “in fact worthy,” and “of God or…ranged among his enemies” (230). Unlike Eman and Sunma, Brother Jero has no genuine, altruistic curiosity in the Member of Parliament. Instead, he uses questions as a form of manipulation to gain control. Similarly, when Brother Jero invokes “forgiveness,” he uses the word, unlike Sunma, as a numbing spell to exert control over his congregation. While there are instances of shared vocabulary and linguistic mode between the two plays, they use euphemisms and questions to very different effects.

Structure

The first scene of The Trial of Brother Jero sets up the guiding question for the play: Will Brother Jero succumb to a “Daughter of Eve”? The first scene introduces Brother Jero, and informs the audience of the curse that his Old Master put upon him. It also informs viewers that Brother Jero has a weakness for women, which already suggests that this so-called prophet is more lascivious and worldly than his title suggests. Amope’s arrival in the second scene sets the question of the Old Master’s curse into motion. Brother Jero immediately identifies (as does the audience) the fact that Amope may be his “Daughter of Eve.” The third scene then develops the second plot between Chume and Amope, showing how Brother Jero as Chume’s spiritual counselor is implicated in their relationship. Throughout, these three scenes maintain a comedic tone and steadily satirical gaze on the characters, though there are darker moments. For instance, Brother Jero in the third scene gives Chume permission to beat his wife. Also in the third scene, there is the suggestion that Brother Jero accosted a young woman offstage. Thus, the third scene places Jero’s control and manipulation of his brainwashed congregation alongside his and Chume’s desire for physical, bodily control of women. It is left to the audience to make a connection.

The two plots (Jero’s and Amope/Chume’s) converge in the fourth scene, when the three characters become aware of their connections to one another. The fourth scene is also the most physically violent in the play, as Chume attempts to discipline and beat Amope. However, the plot is structured such that Chume’s realization that he is being manipulated prevents the beating. The confrontation between Amope and Chume is thus transmuted into a confrontation between Chume and Brother Jero, and therefore deferred to the fifth and final scene. Under this suspenseful specter of violence and revenge, the fifth scene opens on Brother Jero’s attempts to convert the Member of Parliament. Jero manages to not only avoid a physical fight with Chume, but also to have Chume locked up. In the end, Jero remains a passive and technically non-violent actor, though the play has shown how Jero uses his worshippers as instruments to carry out his destructive, self-serving impulses.

Whereas The Trial of Brother Jero is structured around the slow revelation of the characters’ interconnections, The Strong Breed is structured around the slow revelations of Eman’s past and the meaning of the purification ritual in Sunma’s village. Broadly speaking, when the play begins, Sunma knows the full extent of the purification ritual in her village, while Eman obviously knows the details of his own past. Both are

unwilling to divulge what they know to the other. Sunma fears that if she speaks about the purification ritual with Eman, she will have to recognize and confront it. Meanwhile, Eman fears that telling Sunma about his past will force him not only to relive the painful memories of his past, but that the events of his past will somehow repeat themselves.

The ominous appearances of The Girl, Ifada, and finally Jaguna and Oroge interrupt the personal dramas of Sunma and Eman's lives. They also trigger memories for Eman, flashbacks which become increasingly frequent in the second half of the play. These flashbacks allow the audience to understand the salient points of Eman's past: his 12-year exile from home, Omae's death, his father's death, and his destiny as a member of the "strong breed" and as a "carrier." These are the details, which because he refuses to tell Sunma, must be communicated to the audience via flashback. The revelation in one of Eman's flashbacks with his father of what it means to be a "strong breed" gives not only added significance to the title, but changes the driving question of the play. Until this point, the play is structured around two mysteries: Who is Eman, and what is the village purification ritual? The reveal of the "strong breed" raises a new question: Will Eman, who left home to escape his destiny as carrier, ultimately succumb to his fate? In the final scene, after Eman's death, Jaguna and Oroge raise yet another question: Was it all worth it? Though the characters reassure themselves that it was, the play leaves this final question open to the audience's interpretation.

Quotes

Those who are petty trader today, make them big contractor tomorrow. Those who dey sweep street today, give them their own big office tomorrow. If we dey walka today, give us our own bicycle tomorrow...Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow...Give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow.
-- Chume (Scene 3)

Importance: Chume's impromptu speech to his fellow worshippers shows how much he has imbibed Jero's manipulative ideology. His speech rests on the promise of tomorrow, of upward mobility, and with it, the feeling of never being satisfied.

Ingrate! Monster! I curse you with the curse of the Daughters of Discord. May they be your downfall. May the Daughters of Eve bring ruin down on your head!
-- Old Prophet (Scene 1)

Importance: The old prophet's curse on Brother Jero establishes the driving question behind the play: Will Brother Jero succumb to a "Daughter of Discord"?

Listen, you bearded debtor. You owe me one pound, eight and nine. You promised you would pay me three months ago but of course you have been too busy doing the work of God. Well, let me tell you that you are not going anywhere until you do a bit of my own work."
-- Amope (Scene 2)

Importance: The specificity of the numbers Amope uses (one pound, eight shillings, and nine pence) and her ruthless, no-nonsense attitude towards Brother Jero speaks to Amope's considerable talents as a businesswoman. She is also the only character to immediately express skepticism towards Brother Jero, as her cutting reference to the "work of God" suggests.

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. Once they are full, they won't come again."
-- Brother Jero (Scene 3)

Importance: Here, Brother Jero's confusion between "worshippers" and "customers" is more than a slip of tongue. It reveals Brother Jero's true attitude towards his congregation and church, which he sees as a source of personal profit and financial gain. This quote also reveals Brother Jero's market-inspired approach to religion in which he must continually create demand for spirituality so that he can continually supplying it.

Almighty! 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. As soon as 'e dark, she go in go meet 'in man. 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, your life done spoil."
-- Chume (Scene 5)

Importance: Chume's reversion to pidgin suggests that Chume, like Amope, has been engaged in a performance of sorts: that of the proper, educated Christian and government official. His pleads to God are also different in this passage, as his tone is more despairing than it is aspiring or covetous.

Yes, brother, we have met. I saw this country plunged into strife. I saw the mustering of men, gathered in the name of peace through strength. And at the 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... [The member turns round slowly.]
-- Brother Jero (Scene 5)

Importance: This passage shows the seemingly magic effect of Brother Jero's grandiose, titillating words, especially when he touches upon the possibility of a promotion. It also shows that Brother Jero's approach really works on his targets.

You will hang it up and I will set fire to it. [Then, with surprising venom.] But just because you are helping me, don't think it is going to cure you. I am the one who will get well at midnight, do you understand? It is my carrier and for me alone."
-- The Girl (Section 1)

Importance: This passage shows how the Girl views the effigy as an object for her own individual possession and benefit. It also shows how the Girl considers the effigy's curative powers to be exclusive to one individual; if she benefits, Ifada cannot.

Sunma: By yourself you can do nothing here. Have you not noticed how tightly we shut out strangers? Even if you lived here for a lifetime, you would remain a stranger. Eman: Perhaps that is what I like. Sunma: For a while perhaps. But they would reject you in the end. I tell you it is only I who stand between you and contempt. And because of this you have earned their hatred. I don't know why I say this now, except that somehow, I feel that it no longer matters. It is only I who have stood between you and so much humiliation."
-- Sunma and Eman (Section 2)

Importance: Here, Sunma cautions Eman against his romantic belief that he can be an independent outcast within society. As Sunma suggests, that attitude comes with significant costs, including social rejection, "contempt," "hatred," and "humiliation." Sunma also suggests that Eman's belief that he is socially independent and isolated is a myth, since she herself has been looking out for him all along.

Mister Eman, I don't think you quite understand. This is not a simple matter at all. I don't know what you do, but here, it is not a cheap task for anybody. No one in his senses would do such a job. Why do you think we give refuge to idiots like him? We don't know where he came from. One morning, he is simply there, just like that. From nowhere at all. You see, there is a purpose in that."
-- Oroge (Section 2)

Importance: The language of Oroge's description of his village's purification ritual is revealing. He shows how the village considers strangers as something to discard, or as something that have a "purpose" which they can utilize for their own benefit.

[He sits perfectly still for several moments. Drumming begins somewhere in the distance, and the old man sways his head almost imperceptibly. Two men come in bearing a miniature boat, containing an indefinable mound. They rush it in and set it briskly down near the old man, and stand well back. The old man gets up slowly, the attendant watching him keenly. He signs to the men, who lift the boat quickly onto the old man's head. As soon as it touches his head, he holds it down with both hands and runs off, the men give him a start, then follow at a trot.]"
-- Stage directions (Section 3)

Importance: These beautiful and moving stage directions show the textured, deeply symbolic purification ritual of Eman's past village.

[Points to the hut.] A man must go on his own, go where no one can help him, and test his strength. Because he may find himself one day sitting alone in a wall as round as that. In there, my mind could hold no other thought. I may never have such moments again to myself. Don't dare to come and steal any more of it."
-- Eman (Section 4)

Importance: This passage captures Eman's youthful definition of masculinity. His idea of what it means to be a "man" includes being solitary, isolated, and independent.

Eman: Then why? Why the wasted years if she had to perish giving birth to my child? [They are both silent.] I do not really know for what great meaning I searched. When I returned, I could not be certain I had found it. Until I reached my home and I found her a full-grown woman, still a child at heart. When I grew to believe it, I thought, this, after all, is what I sought. It was here all the time. And I threw away my new-gained knowledge. I buried the part of me that was formed in strange places. I made a home in my birthplace. Priest: That was as it should be. Eman: Any truth of that was killed in the cruelty of her brief happiness."
-- Eman (Section 4)

Importance: In this passage, Eman is speaking to the priest about his happiness with Omae and his eventual realization of the joys of family and home. However, Eman's rejection of that experience as somehow false or misleading shows the tremendous sadness and disillusionment that followed Omae's death.

We did it for them. It was all for their common good. What did it benefit me whether the man lived or died. But did you see them? One and all they looked up at the man and words died in their throats."
-- Jaguna (Section 3)

Importance: Jaguna's final remarks on the purification ritual suggest general stirrings within the village of a collective conscience. While Jaguna remains adamant about the importance of "the common good," his remarks suggest that the villagers' internal moral compass is causing them to question question of the "common good," and that Eman's death may have longer-lasting effects on village life.