

Tragedy as a Component of Liberation and Freedom In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

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Abstract

*Literary studies are replete with multiple exegeses of tragedy where its various notions and rubrics are expounded. However, interpretation has posed a problem. While most critics align with the Shakespearean concept which emphasises a noble character's gravitation from grace to grass, other critics align with the Aristotelian notion which emphasises the instillation of fear and purgation of emotion in the audience. In all the interpretations, tragedy is viewed as a negative phenomenon that lacerates human consciousness. However, this paper interprets tragedy as a major component of liberation and freedom. It opens a new vista in the understanding and appreciation of tragedy as depicted in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Furthermore, the paper argues that although tragedy is inherently negative, it has a positive perspective. Using the identified text as a guide and relying on the theory of deconstruction, the study reveals that King Odewale's murder of King Adetusa, his biological father, and the incest with his mother Ojuola, had to be exposed and punished for the people to be freed and liberated from the throes of sickness and death. While it is easy to feel pity for King Odewale's fate at the end of the play, it also calls for a converse appreciation of the situation as an opportunity for liberation and freedom from sickness and death.*

Keywords: *Tragedy, Liberation, Freedom, Humanity, Fate*

Introduction

Tragedy looms large in literary praxis as an identifiable genre of inevitability, human fallibility, and fatalism. Its immediate understanding is rooted in despair, regret, disgrace, suffering, and a level of wretchedness which implicates the supernatural realm in a fierce determination to overcome or punish humanity. In many cases, the gods and other supernatural essences through an inevitable duel, domineeringly stifle human potential by ultimately plunging it into chaos. Friedrich Holderlin asserts that “tragedy reveals the incarnate presence of the gods in humanity, yet for this presence to be felt in all its logocentric immediacy, its sign or medium – the tragic hero himself- must be annihilated.” (29) Thus, the gods play significant roles in human misery and eventual tragedy. When tragedy is mentioned or encountered,

it conveys a dispiriting feeling which hovers the sensibilities with an abiding air of sadness. According to Dorothea Krook, “tragedy portrays an action of universal import involving a hero of some considerable stature who is flawed, who comes to grief on account of this deficiency so that the play ends badly and in doing so shows something of the power of the gods or destiny while revealing human suffering to be part of a meaningful pattern.”(26) Krook's familiar explication adds to the growing voices which denominate tragedy as an art form conveying a portentously dangerous mindset with an appreciable level of involvement by the gods. Many times, man gloats over his capabilities, unaware of extant frailties which lead him to tragedy. This is significant of the goat as a symbol of tragedy which majestically trudges frontally with imposing horns and beard oblivious of a filthy, ugly rear. Therefore, tragedy has come to be infinitely associated with sorrow and anguish arising from a fault in character hermatia, sometimes hubris, with linkages to the supernatural. To declare that an experience, encounter or narrative is tragic is to suggest a prevailing despondent atmosphere. It is difficult to explain tragedy in any other way to the orthodox critics and students of literature.

From a standpoint of the classical notion of tragedy, to conclude that a piece of literature is tragic is to suggest an overwhelming tone of dejection. Despite this view of tragedy, it has continued to be studied as an iconic genre of literature probably because it is an indelible mark of human existence. Most early literary works flourished for depicting tragic scenes by revealing the vulnerability of human existence and the supreme infinity of the cosmos. In the main, some types of tragedy also suggest that certain aspects of human existence are predestined. In this way, there is a measure of relief associated with the knowledge that certain human actions are predestined and could not be changed. That kind of knowledge helps to alleviate the soul-wrenching effects of tragedy. It happened because it had to happen, nothing could change it. But we must at once strike a balance and differentiate between tragedy in real life and tragedy in art. While tragedy in art is predictable and can be manipulated by the writer, tragedy in real life is beyond the control of humans who are the unfortunate victims of its invidious whirlwind. In real life, humans are intricately caught unawares in a web of unfortunate circumstances beyond their immediate control which leads to despair and anguish. In this, the trite, popular meaning of tragedy as a genre that enunciates human struggles with forces beyond their control finds expression.

The complexion and general interpretation of tragedy have been unanimously defined - it is about a sorrowful change in human circumstance and destiny. Everyone seems to agree that tragedy is negative, yet there are aspects of tragedy that connote positivity. Terry Eagleton remarks that “tragedy can be among other things, a symbolic coming to terms with our finitude and fragility, without which any political project is likely to flounder. But this weakness is also a source of power since it is where some of our needs take root.”(xv) Eagleton's argument presents

tragedy as possessing dual characteristics, ushering humanity into suffering, exposing the weaknesses but again, presenting a huge opportunity for learning, freedom, and liberation. Although Eagleton's positive outline of tragedy is minimal, it registers him as one of the few critics who have acknowledged tragedy from a positive perspective. In the same vein, Juliette Brioche, writing in the Guardian Newspaper on 15th February 2001, instinctively observes that "when we learn to understand that tragedy is a treasure in disguise, then we will begin to understand life." This kind of submission by Brioche aligns with the import of this study which seeks to re-examine the extant notion, using Ola Rotimi's play *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, that tragedy is not all tragic but could provide an ennobling dimension to human existence.

To compliment tragedy as Brioche has done is to relieve the overwhelming tedium associated with the genre and provide a stimulating, invigorating idea for the sensibilities. This opinion of tragedy may not be buoyant or easily receptive in literary circles, yet it provides a refreshing response to all the searing domestication of the genre which writers find difficult to challenge. Furthermore, George Steiner argues that the three striking functions of tragedy after it has occurred are to leave us "liberated, restored, and exhilarated". (12). It is this kind of crystallizing perception of tragedy that provides a valid basis for this study. Projecting the same reviving potential of tragedy, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet are of the view that "tragedy conveys unrecognized aspects of human experience; it marks a new stage in the development of the inner man. Whether seen from the point of view of the tragic genre, of a tragic representation or of tragic man, the phenomenon appears to have certain irreducible characteristics." (23). The "unrecognized aspects of human experience" from the quote above refer to emotions and reactions hitherto ignored which only manifest when a man is faced with tragic circumstances. More pointedly, the most compelling expression in the above quote regarding tragedy is that "it marks a new stage in the development of the inner man." This "new stage" conveys a feeling of discovery, liberation, freedom, and illumination in man's myriad of vicissitudes. Indeed it smacks of new frontiers to even consider that tragedy is a necessary experience that man requires for discovery and advancement. This is the kind of intellectual responsibility that writers and critics must imbibe and export to the whole world – that is, the new, positive frontiers of tragedy.

Neo-Perspectives of tragedy

Given the negative appraisals and interpretations of tragedy, the arising tensions of sadness and melancholy seem to foreclose any other kind of interpretation of the genre. But deconstruction as a literary theory gets in the way of such a monopoly of interpretations. Although there are many variants of deconstruction, however French thinker, Jacques Derrida's provisions suit the intentions of this study. From Derrida's ideological projection, we can infer that deconstruction's immediate concern is to collapse the boundaries of meaning in a text, leaving it open to multiple

interpretations. Lois Tyson, commenting on deconstruction remarks that “no interpretation has the final word. Rather, literary texts, like all texts, consist of a multiplicity of overlapping, conflicting meanings in dynamic, fluid relation to one another and to us.” (252). With Tyson's intervention, one is at liberty to interpret and explain tragedy from novel prisms different from its original meaning. All along, we are used to adorning tragedy with the garment of grief and sadness but with deconstruction, tragedy is re-examined and re-interpreted as a component of liberation and freedom. Along the lines of Derrida's deconstructive critical tradition, tragedy in *The Gods Are Not To Blame* is retrieved from the firm grip of Shakespearean and Aristotelian sensibilities. Beyond the redeeming commitment of deconstruction, the 21st century has witnessed reformulations and re-definitions of various terms in different disciplines. There are emerging critical searchlights to engage and examine multiple terms in which understanding has reached a crescendo, therefore demanding new attitudes. Literature has not been spared from that neo-critical searchlight and tragedy, like many other genres, has become a subject of controversy.

The first neo-perspective of tragedy from the scope of freedom and liberation can easily be located in the Holy Bible, Christianity's globally acclaimed manuscript of existence. We can profitably argue that there is no tragedy without aspects of liberation and freedom. Although tragedy has the unenviable reputation to instil fear and dread in human consciousness wherever and whenever it occurs, yet, it provides an opportunity for liberation and freedom. The Bible, Christianity's moral and spiritual compass, widely acclaimed for its regenerative potential, recounts how the tragic death of Jesus Christ led to the liberation and freedom of all sinners across the world. Presently, spiritual exercises of miracle and advancement in the Christian faith across the world are anchored on the tragic death of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary. When Christians pray, they plead the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed on the Cross of Calvary as an antidote to diverse mysteries of human existence. This they do without recourse to the tragic hue of the death and shedding of blood. The tragic death is forgotten, and the liberation and freedom that come from it supersede all other considerations. Commenting on the death of Jesus Christ Mark Kubala observes that “it needed to be an ignominious death to fulfil His mission.” (9) The precedence of ignominy before the triumphant accomplishment of his mission on earth is symbolic of the important status of tragedy which gives birth to liberation and freedom. Ignominy is synonymous with tragedy. It should be noted that liberation and freedom are used as metaphors that represent success, happiness, glory, victory, and other such positive, elevating accolades.

There are many elements of tragedy but the chief cornerstone is death. It is believed all over the world that death occupies the most spatial position in the platform of tragic art. Death is a universal phenomenon and its finality does not give room for penitence or reparation. Death is final and confers the deepest feeling of grief and

anguish among humanity. Across the world, different cultures abhor death in whatever form or guise. It is seen as the final pronouncement of the cosmos in the existence of creation. Kastanbaum and Moreman argue that “death is no longer simply a natural part of life: it is a make-or-break with individual destiny.” (4) Personal achievements, aspirations and goals, destiny and fortune all terminate at the doorstep of death. Whether death occurs peacefully or violently, it is considered tragic. No matter how old a deceased may be the death is viewed as tragic. Therefore, death is understood as the most brutal pillar of tragedy in real life. But death in the arts is different. There are sometimes when, in a movie or drama, a dead person continues to participate in the affairs of humanity by either providing insight into a secret or by tormenting the living to indulge in certain attitudes. William Shakespeare makes use of this style by always involving the supernatural (dead characters) in the progress of his plays. In *Julius Caesar*, the ghost of the murdered Caesar appears to Brutus and promises to meet him in Philippi.

That encounter with the ghost of Caesar enunciates melancholy and depression in Brutus' consciousness which eventually leads to his death. Compare the foregoing with the events in *Hamlet* where the plot is animated by the appearance of the ghost of King Hamlet to his son Prince Hamlet. The ghost of the dead king appears to his son to reveal the real circumstances that led to his death. So, while death as a pillar of tragedy is final in real life, it could act as a catalyst in the arts where characters continue to participate and play roles in events among the living, thereby affecting the general outcome of the performance. The finality of death in real life varies from culture to culture and tradition to tradition. In different parts of the world, necromancy is a popular practice where the spirit of dead people is consulted for insight into the future. But these conditions of the continuity of life are not considered in the event of death. When death happens, it affirms sorrow and heartbreak. Yet, certain kinds of death offer the opportunity for people to rejoice and celebrate, ushering them into liberation and freedom.

Consider the tragic death of a criminal who tormented a locality for a long time. Upon his death, the people rejoice and celebrate. Such death affirms freedom and liberation. It reminds one of the death of a kingpin which allows the captives to regain freedom and return home. Although the family of the dead kingpin will sorrow following his tragic death, celebration follows the same death for those who were held captive by the dead scoundrel. History is replete with how certain forms of tragedy became a source of joy and celebration, a moment of freedom and liberation for people. Upon the death of Julius Caesar, Cinna, one of the conspirators announces “Liberty! Freedom! Tyranny is dead! – Run hence, proclaim, cry it about the streets.” (p.369) For Cinna, the tragic death of Caesar has ushered in liberty and freedom while closing the door on tyranny. One could argue that this kind of triumph over tragedy is pervasive, yet it does show that certain kinds of tragedy naturally call for positive conditions such as liberty and freedom. Cassius the lead conspirator

replies “Some to the common pulpits and cry out/Liberty! Freedom and enfranchisement!” (p.369).

The most positive dimension of the tragic death of Caesar can be located in the emergence of his adopted son Octavius Caesar as a co-leader of Rome with Mark Anthony. Although Caesar's age is not mentioned in the play, events support the argument that he was not a young man. His tragic death paves way for his young adopted son to emerge. The reader unconsciously feels happy that youth, generally associated with vibrancy and intellect, emerges to lead Rome and that whatever inadequacies his youthful disposition may pose, Mark Anthony's presence will ultimately provide the much-needed balance. We are also happy for Mark Anthony's emergence given his dedication and love for Caesar. In some ways, the public pity for the slain Caesar wanes due to the victorious emergence of the duo over Brutus and Cassius. If Caesar did not die, Mark Anthony and Octavius Caesar may not have emerged at the time they did. Therefore, the tragedy of Caesar's death, while it scorches the souls and pulls on the strings of empathizing hearts, we unconsciously entertain liberation and freedom from the emergence of Mark Anthony and Octavius Caesar.

Tragedy is a corollary of sorrow, anguish, and regret. Therefore, humanity is always eager to reject and extirpate its intrusion into the conscious or unconscious mind. In literary art, however, tragedy has been depicted to assume many forms in the complexion of Shakespearean tragedy, Aristotelian notion, and even traditional notions rooted in the African culture. Whatever dimension tragedy has taken in literary art, it has always tended to align with any of the foregoing notions with a slight difference in conception and understanding. While those who queue behind the Shakespearean notion of tragedy experiment with nobility and a sudden change of fortune where a king or a royal personage falls from grace to grass, the Aristotelian adherents emphasize the degree of emotional purgation enunciated by the tragic event. Both Shakespearean and Aristotelian tragedies have dominated literary art but the emergence of neo-tragedy provides a new way of interpreting the genre.

There are different notions of tragedy in African traditional societies incubated by culture and belief systems even in the modern era. Interestingly, all the notions of tragedy operate within the periphery of death as its cornerstone. Although in certain Shakespearean tragedies, death does not necessarily occur as long as the tragic hero experiences a reversal of fortune which sees him fall from a lofty height to disgrace. In the modern era, the notion of death as a cornerstone of tragedy has gradually been replaced by violence which exacerbates humanity's consciousness and existential harmony. Every violent act today is likely to be described as tragedy irrespective of the occurrence of death as long as humanity is plunged into anguish and sorrow. Certain kinds of violence are natural, occasioned by the fury of the cosmos for

example earthquakes, landslides, and storms. In any of these events, humanity is made to suffer and experience such soul-wrenching events as death, loss of property, and displacement. Some other times, violence is inflicted on humanity by man through deliberate acts of wickedness motivated by social or political considerations. Again these acts of violence lead to anguish and sorrow among humanity. There is a sense in which we can say that every human action is geared towards the improvement of the human condition, the initiation of happiness and the general well-being of man. Derek Wright declares that “devastation and despair are necessary preludes to renewal and reconstruction: in Ogun, forces must first collide before they can cohere, and the earth must be ravaged to be restored.” (15) Wright's juxtaposition of opposites as a necessary condition for the progression of humanity certifies the complementary relationship between tragedy on one hand and liberation and freedom on the other hand. There are many times when humanity could experience violence and death in search of fulfilment and happiness. This means that in some cases, what is generally termed tragedy could take place before humanity can lay claims to happiness and fulfilment.

According to the Bible, Christ is violated and eventually dies through the painful process of crucifixion but his death leads to the eternal freedom of humanity which in turn leads to the accolade attached to Him as the saviour of the world. Seeing that the violence meted out to him and his eventual death saves humanity from destruction, is it then proper to describe his death as tragic? If we are to interpret the death of Christ using any of the tragic models earlier mentioned in this study, the Shakespearean and the Aristotelian model, the death of Christ does not fit into any of the tragic modes. First, his death is not a result of any identified hubris or error of judgement, although he assumes the nature of man to come down to earth to die for humanity which can be described as falling from grace to grass. He is eventually exalted again even to a higher glory after he resurrects from the dead thereby negating the notion of the classical notion of tragedy which makes no provision for a third-tier where the tragic hero must rise again to a level higher than his original position. If Jesus Christ did not die, he wouldn't have become the saviour of the world. Again, following the Aristotelian notion of tragedy, although the death of Christ initially instils fear and purges emotion, it eventually rehabilitates human impulses when Christ defies death and ascends to heavenly glory. The violence earlier unleashed on Christ and His eventual death, although tragic, leads to the liberation of the human race, according to accounts of the Bible. It is in the same respect that this study discusses the events in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and posits that the fate which befalls King Odewale at the end of the play eventually leads to the liberation and freedom of the people of Kutuje, a consequence of the anger of the gods due to the incest in the royal family.

Liberation and Freedom in King Odewale's fate

Nigeria's famed playwright Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is one of the

most accurate definitions of adaptation in African literature. Borrowing richly from Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, Rotimi embellishes his play with African traditional elements such as proverbs, incantations, names, rituals, and transliteration which gives it a different complexion. Richly described as a tragedy which combines both the Shakespearean and Aristotelian notions, the play chronicles the life and times of Odewale who was born to accomplish what his parents consider an evil assignment on earth. At birth, his father, King Adetusa, the king of Kutuje invites Baba Fakunle, the presiding Ifa priest to consult the gods and pronounce the baby's future on earth. This is following the tradition and culture of the people. The Ifa in Yoruba cosmology is the iconic prognostic divination essence cast in the same mode as the Greek Delphic Oracle which was consulted upon the birth of Oedipus. The divination essence is symbolic in the two plays for providing a timely peep into the future. Casting his *opele*, stringed objects of divination, Baba Fakunle announces with regret that the baby Odewale has brought an evil mission to earth. According to him "This boy, he will kill his own father/and then marry his own mother!" (p.3).

The revelation by Baba Fakunle marks the first tragedy of the play. For King Adetusa and his wife Ojuola, nothing could be more tragic than losing their first child in such humiliating circumstances. For the people also, the tragedy in the royal family represents a collective tragedy because the entire Kutuje is thrown into mourning following the loss of the first royal child. But Rotimi's depiction of tragedy in this sense does not follow any of the known tragic theoretical treatises mentioned earlier. The Shakespearean tragedy of a fall from grace to grace does not apply in this case. Adetusa does not fall from grace to grace due to any fault or hubris on his part. He is completely exonerated from the tragedy of the loss of his first child. This is the immediate commitment of deconstructive theory – to go beyond the borders of obvious meanings in a text and reveal hidden alternative meanings. While many critics focus on the tragic death of King Adetusa which opens the floodgates of other tragedies in the play, the first tragedy and its effect on the artistic project receive minimal attention. Although the first tragedy could be spared of the Shakespearean tragic colouration, it accurately depicts the Aristotelian tragedy because the immediate announcement to bear the boy to the bush and kill him instils fear, pity, and purges emotion. Nothing could be more tragic than the loss of a baby in such circumstances. To stop baby Odewale from carrying out his dreadful future on earth, Ogun Priest hands him over to Gbonka, the King's special messenger to take to the evil groove. The import of this tragic development manifests in the grief that overcomes Queen Ojuola, the baby's mother. However, baby Odewale's seemingly tragic death paves the way for the entrance of another baby after two years. Ola Rotimi does not explicitly state the reason or reasons why the gods inflicted King Adetusa and his wife with such magnitude of tragedy although, in a background reading of the adapted text, *King Oedipus* reveals the reasons why King Laius was cursed to lose his first child in such circumstances.

Following the tragedy of losing their first child, the royal family is inevitably subsumed in agony and grief, King and Queen, indeed the entire Kutuje are all struck with the despair of a considerable dimension. They are locked in and shut out. But on the heels of that tragedy, liberation and freedom become immanent. Two years later, it is recorded in the play that Obatala, the god of creation and childbirth consoles the royal family with the birth of another son, Aderopo. The birth of Aderopo symbolizes the first release of liberation and freedom on the heels of tragedy in the play. Once more, the royal family rejoice, and the people of Kutuje rejoice too. They are liberated from the mourning and sorrow following the tragic death of their first son. They are collectively freed from the cosmic curse on the royal family and the land. Once more, there is liberation and freedom for everyone. Even though the gods are carefully orchestrating the tragedy in the land without the knowledge of the people, we appreciate the first liberation and freedom following the tragic death of the first royal son.

The second tragedy in the play – the death of King Adetusa - is revealed through a flashback. He had met rough death in the hands of his son, Odewale who, it is revealed, did not die as the people had thought. Gbonka, the king's special messenger had spared his life and handed him over to a hunter, Ogundele and his boy Alaka in the Ipetu bush. The hunter had taken the baby home to Ijekun-Yemoja and handed him over to his wife Mobike for upbringing. However, upon growing up, the young Odewale, without any knowledge of his foster background, one day knelt to greet an elder who replied curtly “the butterfly thinks himself a bird” (p.59) Odewale consults the Ifa oracle and was told that he had a curse on him to kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid this kind of tragic future he runs away to settle in Ede where he buys a farm. Incidentally, the same farm had already been sold to King Adetusa his biological father and on a certain day, they both would meet at the farm. Following an altercation, Odewale kills the old man, King Adetusa, his biological father.

For the second time in the play, the royal family and entire Kutuje are thrown into mourning following the death of King Adetusa. A neighbouring village, Ikolu, seizes the opportunity of the absence of the king to plunder and enslave Kutuje, therefore the people live in awe and perpetual fear of their adversaries. In comparing the first tragedy in the land, the death of the first royal son and the second tragedy in the land, the death of the king, they are not of the same magnitude. The death and absence of the king loom larger than the first tragedy. Perhaps, Ikolu would have overrun Kutuje and annexed the land, turning the people into slaves and captives of war. However, liberation and freedom characteristically result from the tragedy in the land. Odewale, who had killed his biological father inadvertently, ran away from Ede and wandering from place to place found his way to Kutuje. Harrison Inyang points out that “like Cain who fled after killing his brother Abel, Odewale flees Ede to Kutuje which happens to be his real village and liberates the people from their

captors.” (1) It is significant that Inyang agrees with the entrance of liberation amid the tragedy of the Ikolu invaders. Odewale's arrival signals the entrance of liberation and freedom in Kutuje. The tragedy in Kutuje elicits pity and compassion in him and he gathers the people, motivates them and under his leadership, Kutuje rises, defeating the marauding Ikolu invaders. P.J Conradie points out how Odewale motivates the people on his arrival in Kutuje. According to Conradie “when Odewale arrives as a stranger in Kutuje, he exhorts the people to struggle against the Ikolu attackers: 'Up, Up, / all of you; to lie down resigned to fate / is madness' (p.6).” This kind of courage by Odewale reveals him as a brave leader. Thus the tragedy of the death of the former king paves way for liberation and freedom, marking the beginning of a new era in Kutuje. Kutuje's victory over Ikolu re-establishes the waning confidence among the people, signifying a grand epoch in their evolution. In this way, tragedy carries with it liberation and freedom as an undeniable silhouette which cannot be cast away.

The third and final tragedy in the play is contained in the denouement where all the arising complicated plot tensions are resolved. It occurs in the resolution of all the conflicts where all the mysteries in the play unfold. Following Kutuje's triumph over Ikolu under the leadership of Odewale, they break tradition and crown him their king. In addition to becoming their king, he also inherits the wife of the former king, Queen Ojuola. The incestuous relationship between King Odewale and Queen Ojuola violates the spiritual and cosmic ordinances of the people and the tragic consequence is sickness and death in the land. As a dutiful king, Odewale is worried about the situation in the land, people are sick and dying and in response, Baba Fakunle, the Ifa priest is invited to consult the gods and reveal the reasons for the tragedy in the land. King Odewale's search for the truth leads him to discover that he is the murderer of the late King Adetusa and the defiler of the king's bed by sleeping with his mother. Given this situation, the entire Kutuje is caught in the vicious stranglehold of sickness and tragic death. According to Baba Fakunle, liberation and freedom would only come if the killer of the former king is exposed and banished from Kutuje. Earlier on, King Odewale had sworn with iron, Ogun's symbol of vengeance, that upon identifying the murderer of the former king, he would gorge out the person's eyes and banish him from the land into the forest. As a man of his words, King Odewale does the same thing to himself when it is finally revealed that he is the murderer he was searching for.

King Odewale's tragic mistake at the end of the play elicits pity and empathy in the audience. These are the cardinal characteristics of Aristotelian tragedy. However, his tragic disgrace signals the liberation and freedom of his people from the clutches of sickness and death. The land is imminently healed, sorrow is banished and normalcy returns. Men, women, and the young, although they mourn over the fate that befalls their beloved king, are happy to be free from intractable sickness and constant death in the land. Without King Odewale's tragic exposure and disgrace,

the people would continue to suffer until the land is completely ravaged by sickness and death. Liberation and freedom for the entire Kutuje supersede the well-being and protection of the king. For the second time in the play, the exit of the king opens a new celebratory vista for the people because Aderopo, hitherto banished by King Adewale on the grounds of suspicion of plotting against the throne, returns to assume the kingship of the land. His ascension to the throne is seen as the mark of a new, exciting beginning coming on the heels of the tragic exit of the former king.

From the textual analysis, three different kinds of tragedy have been identified in the play and in each case, it is demonstrated how liberation and freedom follow each tragic moment. Although there could be exceptions where tragedy can occur without a corresponding liberation and freedom, in the text, it is revealed that many times, tragedy creates an opportunity for liberation and freedom to occur. Critics who concern themselves with projecting tragedy in literary art must begin to consider its re-evaluation and re-assessment to examine its positive angles. The question to ask is – why do writers project tragedy in their works? What purpose does tragedy serve in the arts? How does the recreation of tragedy advance humanity's warring, conflicting impulses? To be sure, one of the main reasons why writers concern themselves with tragedy is to expose the frailty of the human condition and to also demonstrate that man is not perfect. In many instances, tragedies are created to also exalt the gods and supernatural elements by outlining their overwhelming influences on the lives of mortal men. In that sort of situation, man is revealed as a helpless victim of supernatural and spiritual forces beyond his control. Thus man is warned to tread carefully and exercise caution seeing that he does not hold all the aces to his existence.

If we agree that art is the reflection of life, the mirror which allows humanity to examine life, then the recreation of tragedy in art is a suitable way to check human excesses, hubris, judgement and pride. It exposes the roles played by such tragic elements as envy, ambition, pride, ego, and trust. It also shows that the physical realm inhabited by humans is always at the mercy of the supernatural realm inhabited by the gods and other spiritual essences. In *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, it is difficult to identify why the gods would will a man to kill his father and marry his mother. It does appear that the gods find some pleasure in using men to advance their undisclosed, inchoate objectives. Or could it be that the gods always try to lead humanity to liberation and freedom through tragedy? If we critically consider the last question, then humanity must always appreciate tragedy as a corollary of liberation and freedom. It could be considered a misplaced judgement to isolate tragedy and engage in blame while overlooking the many positive attributes embedded in tragic art. Although we can argue that the gods use men as a pun on a chess board to achieve their objectives, the audience cannot deny King Odewale's pristine leadership qualities which people in the position of leadership must emulate. The quintessential leader, according to Akwu Sunday Victor must be

understood in line with “the role of Odewale in the shaping of the Destiny of his society and how albeit with a stint of tyranny champions the welfare of the state, taking the blame for the decadence and the breakdown of law and cosmic order when found culpable.” (1) Besides his tragedy and the inevitable liberation and freedom that follow it, Ola Rotimi presents King Odewale as a metaphor for responsible leadership.

As a responsible leader, King Odewale immediately accepts responsibility for the tragedy in the land and paves way for liberation and freedom. Perhaps, Rotimi conveys a timely message to all the despotic leaders all over the world who preside over the socio-political and economic tragedy in their respective countries without sufficient attention to the pains that their people go through due to their actions and inactions. Certainly, there are leaders in the world who need to acknowledge the tragedy of their leadership and make way for their people to experience liberation and freedom. At the end of the play when Aderopo returns from banishment and beholds King Odewale's gory, pitiable site, he tries to placate the king by blaming the gods but the disgraced king accepts full responsibility and absolves the gods of any blame:

No, no! Do not blame the gods. Let no one blame the powers. My people, learn from my fall. The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me. They knew my weakness: the weakness of a man easily moved to the defence of his tribe against another. I once slew a man on my farm in Ede. I could have spared him but he spat on my tribe. He spat in the tribe I thought was my own tribe. (p.71)

The above extract sums up the critical context of the analysis in the papers.

Conclusion

It is within the artistic interstice of liberation and freedom so far explicated in this analysis as an apparent component of tragedy that Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame* should be understood and appreciated.

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