

Some Things Are Better Left Unsaid or
Unknown: Confronting Traditional
Practices of Prophecy in African Cultural
Beliefs through Ola Rotimi's *The Gods
Are Not to Blame*

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Introduction

African cultural traditions place significant importance on prophecy and the supernatural, with many individuals and communities relying on

divination and prophecy for guidance and decision making (Awojobi, 'Prophets'). Prophecy, according to Hornby, is the capacity to anticipate or glimpse future occurrences. This foreknowledge is typically considered to come from a divine source or through supernatural means. It is the process by which a god or other spiritual being speaks to people, frequently via a prophet or priest acting as an intermediary, offering guidance, instructions, or warnings (Awojobi, 'The Place of Music'; Barton). This is a widespread custom in many African cultures, where it is thought that some people have a unique relationship with the supernatural that enables them to receive and understand messages from the divine.

Traditionally, prophecy was the domain of diviners, priests, and spiritual leaders, who were believed to possess the ability to communicate with ancestral spirits and deities (Balogun; Obielosi). These prophetic figures played crucial roles in guiding communities, foretelling events, and providing counsel during times of crisis. In African traditions, prophecy is seen as a means of comprehending the present and interpreting the will of the gods or ancestors, in addition to making future predictions. This practice is linked to the conviction that supernatural forces have an impact on human events and that destiny is predetermined. Prophecies frequently touch on important community issues including disputes, leadership choices, and natural occurrences, thereby influencing the collective fate of the community.

In contemporary African societies, the practice of prophecy has evolved but remains significant. The advent of Christianity and Islam, alongside traditional beliefs, has influenced the practice and understanding of prophecy (Awojobi, 'The Place of Music'). Today, prophets and diviners coexist with religious leaders, often integrating traditional practices with modern religious beliefs. Prophetic words are frequently spoken in churches and mosques, addressing issues that are both private and public (Amanze; Iwe; Obielosi and Idonor). These contemporary prophets assert that they have received revelations from God, providing counsel on matters ranging from political stability to well-being and financial success (Obielosi and Idonor).

Anayochukwu has observed a growing trend in Nigeria whereby prophetic claims have become more prevalent in Nigerian popular religion. This phenomenon affects Nigerians from all socioeconomic backgrounds, including the rich and the poor, the powerful and the helpless, the learned and the uneducated, and people of all religious persuasions. People flock to alleged visionaries, so-called ‘men of God’, and prophets who assert insights and prophecies from the divine in search of divine revelations for various reasons. For example, Christian parents frequently seek advice on their children’s futures from local diviners before arranging weddings, some seek guidance when about to embark on a journey or when confused about life’s issues. Similar to this, before elections in Nigeria, politicians often consult spiritual advisors to get insight into their destiny and favourable timing for political action. In certain cases, these revelations are used to inform their political strategy. This widespread conviction in the prophetic abilities of religious leaders – be they Christian or Muslim – shapes both spiritual and everyday decisions, marking their influential role in Nigerian society. Many Nigerian Christians, irrespective of their church affiliations, rely on self-proclaimed prophets and spiritual advisors before embarking on significant endeavours, while young Nigerians facing life decisions often turn to prayer ministries for guidance during pivotal moments.

In many real-life situations, prophecy has played a crucial role in averting tragedies and saving lives. Balogun observes that prophecy has prevented many people from being involved in accidents and other life tragedies. These instances highlight the possible advantages of prophetic practices in safeguarding communities. Prophecies, however, have the potential to be self-fulfilling, to induce worry, or to negatively influence conduct. Thus, examining the possible negative effects of prophetic knowledge as well as the need of embracing life’s inherent uncertainties are vital. This raises an important question: What are the dangers of seeking to know the future, and what is the significance of embracing uncertainty? Despite the respect afforded to prophetic practices, one must consider whether the attempt to know the future is truly beneficial. Could the revelation of prophecies lead to unforeseen and often tragic consequences?

The practice of prophecy is not only a spiritual and social phenomenon but also a rich subject for literary exploration (Dick). In particular, African literature offers a significant medium for examining and communicating to larger audiences the complexity and implications of prophecy (Anjorin and Nwosu; Irele). Through narrative, drama, and poetry, African writers explore the complex interrelationships between fate, destiny, and human action, providing readers with a sophisticated comprehension of these cultural practices. A potent instrument for capturing the essence of cultural rituals and beliefs, such as prophecy, is literature. It enables an introspective and analytical analysis of the ways in which these customs influence and are influenced by the people who follow them (Mbachaga; Ukande). Numerous literary works in the African environment have tackled the subjects of prophecy, fate, and destiny, providing a platform for discussing the societal impacts and philosophical questions that arise from these beliefs.

Ola Rotimi is one of the well-known authors of African literature who has adeptly incorporated the idea of prophecy into his writings (Ogunbiyi). As a renowned Nigerian director and playwright, Rotimi is well known for his ability to fuse modern themes with traditional African stories to create works that have a profound emotional impact on viewers inside and outside of Africa. An iconic example of how African literature addresses the issue of prophecy is Rotimi's play, *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. According to Kpodoh and Olatunji, Rotimi uses his text to portray the indigenous African society as having diverse healing properties within itself. This shows that he has a strong feeling of loyalty to the African community. The drama, which is an adaptation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, is set in a Yoruba cultural context and explores the profound and often tragic implications of attempting to escape one's fate as foretold by prophecy. Through the story of Odewale, the protagonist, Rotimi's adaptation uses the cultural context to capture the paradoxes of fate and free will, highlighting the tension between human effort and predestined outcomes.

Rotimi's depiction of African customs and his adaptation of classical themes to an African setting have been the subject of in-depth analysis.

Rotimi skilfully combines Greek tragedy with Yoruba cultural components, as noted by Oyin Ogunba, to create a story that is both universal and uniquely African. The drama explores important issues regarding the function and consequences of prophetic knowledge in human existence by showing the catastrophic results of a prophecy coming to pass. This study investigates the idea that some knowledge, particularly prophecies, are possibly best left unknown, as implied by the play's unfolding events. The story of Odewale, a man destined to kill his father and marry his mother, serves as a compelling case study to explore these issues. This investigation not only provides insights into the narrative structure and thematic concerns of Rotimi's work but also contributes to a broader understanding of the cultural significance of prophecy in African societies.

Synopsis of *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

Set within the Yoruba culture of Nigeria, Rotimi's drama *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is an adaptation of Sophocles' famous tragedy *Oedipus Rex*. In spite of his best efforts to avert his terrible fate, Odewale, the protagonist of the play, is destined from birth to kill his father and marry his mother. The play opens with King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola of the town of Kutuje welcoming Odewale into the world. Odewale will grow up to kill his father and wed his mother, according to an oracle prophecy. In an attempt to stop this, the king and queen give a servant orders to kill the baby in the forest, but the child is saved and brought up by a different couple in a distant land.

Odewale discovers as an adult that he is supposed to kill his father and wed his mother according to a prophecy. He flees home in order to escape carrying out the prophecy because he thinks his adoptive parents are his biological parents. During his travels, Odewale runs into an older man and kills him in a fight without realizing that the man is Adetusa, his biological father. When Odewale finally makes it to Kutuje, he is greeted as a hero for having participated actively in defeating the marauding Ikolu invaders who place Kutuje under siege. He unintentionally fulfils the prophecy when he marries his biological

mother, Queen Ojuola, after being crowned king as a reward. When Kutuje experiences a plague years later, the oracle indicates that the tragedy is caused by the unsolved murder of the previous king. Odewale vows to find the culprit, only to discover through a series of revelations that he himself is the murderer and has married his mother. In horror and despair, Queen Ojuola commits suicide, and Odewale blinds himself as punishment, accepting his tragic fate.

Problem Statement

Numerous studies have explored Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* from both linguistic and literary perspectives. Linguistically, these studies have examined the use of proverbs, conversational strategies, incantations, and other aspects of language use in the play (Anigbogu and Ahizih; Jegede and Adesina; Kwasau and Adamu; Nutsukpo; Nwabudike, 'A Sociolinguistic Analysis'; Nwabudike, *A Sociolinguistic Investigation*; Odebode; Odebunmi; Olaosun; Yakubu and Jeremiah). For example, Odebunmi analysed the pragmatic functions of crisis-motivated proverbs, while Nutsukpo focused on the representation of women in the play. Other studies, such as those by Nwabudike ('A Sociolinguistic Investigation') and Jegede and Adesina, provided sociolinguistic and conversational analyses, respectively.

From a literary perspective, scholars have investigated themes of fate, tragedy, and the allocation of blame within the play (Adeniyi; Adiele, 'The Delphic Oracle'; Adiele, 'Tragedy'; Apuke; Chabi and Dadja-Tiou; Kpodoh and Olatunji; Mokani; Ogunfeyimi; Olu-Osayomi and Adebua; Onkoba, Rutere and Kamau; Sesan). Chabi and Dadja-Tiou discussed Yoruba beliefs and monarchy, while Adiele examined tragedy as a component of liberation and freedom. Other studies, like those by Ogunfeyimi, explored the role of indigenous knowledge systems in addressing health and wellness beyond conventional Western medicine while Adeniyi; Olu-Osayomi and Adebua looked into the practice of Ifá divination.

Despite this breadth of scholarship, there has been little scholarly attention paid to the interplay between fate, prophecy, and free will in

the play. While some touch upon elements of destiny and moral agency, none have comprehensively explored the specific implications of the consequences of seeking to know the future through prophecy in relation to African cultural beliefs. This study therefore attempts a deconstructive reading of Rotimi's play to explore the role of prophecy in understanding what lies ahead and the potential risks and consequences of gaining such knowledge. The central research question guiding this study is as follows: Is certain knowledge, particularly prophetic knowledge, better left undiscovered in African cultural contexts, as suggested by Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*? By analysing the themes of fate, prophecy, and human agency in the play, this article aims to shed light on the ethical and cultural implications of prophetic practices.

Method and Analytical Approach

The research design employed in this study was library-based, which was thought to be suitable for gathering information about prophetic practices in Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. We used primary and secondary sources from libraries as well as pertinent websites. The literary work *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, which provided the foundation for the investigation, was the main source. Critical reference materials on the play that could be found online and in libraries served as secondary sources and helped with cross-referencing and analysing earlier interpretations. The text was read closely, with an emphasis on selected passages that highlight important themes and conflicts. This involved analysing the implicit and explicit meanings in dialogues, monologues, and narrative descriptions. The analysis examined characters' actions and motivations, the outcomes of key events, and the interplay between destiny and personal choice.

This study employs a deconstructionist approach to analyse *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Deconstruction, a critical theory pioneered by Jacques Derrida, seeks to uncover inherent contradictions and multiple meanings within a text (Nureni and Oluwabukola). Although there are many variants of deconstruction, the provisions of the French thinker Derrida suit the intentions of this study. From Derrida's ideological projection,

deconstruction's immediate concern is to collapse the boundaries of meaning in a text, leaving it open to multiple interpretations (Adiele, 'Tragedy'). In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, such contradictions are prevalent, particularly in the interplay between fate and free will. The paradoxical character of Odewale's behaviour is shown as he tries to elude a prophecy and accidentally fulfils it. By concentrating on these inconsistencies, it becomes clear how the text defies a single, conclusive interpretation and provides several possible interpretations. For example, the conflict between human agency and predestination is highlighted by Odewale's attempts to exercise his free will and the certainty of his fate. Examining binary oppositions – pairs of opposing notions where one is usually given preference over the other – is another aspect of deconstruction. We explore important binary concepts like fate/free will, knowledge/ignorance, and guilt/innocence in Rotimi's drama. Our examination concentrates on the ways in which these dichotomies are created, contested, and finally dismantled in the story. For instance, the conflict between fate and free choice is raised when Odewale paradoxically ends up fulfilling his destiny as a result of his attempts to prevent it. The intricacy and interconnectedness of these ideas are highlighted by this subversion of conventional dichotomies, implying that they cannot be comprehended in isolation.

Findings and Discussion

One important component that influences the play's plot and the lives of the characters is prophecy. The Ifa priest's forecast, which is ascribed to fate, causes suffering for the main character, Odewale. The tragic events seen in the play are the result of two major instances of prophecy and the knowledge of things that ought to have remained undetected. These are covered in the following section.

Baba Fakunle's Prophecy and Attempts to Avert Fate

The play opens with the birth of a child who later comes to be known as Odewale. The child is born to the family of King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola. Since the birth of a firstborn is a moment of great delight and

celebration, the parents are understandably overjoyed. They dance and make merry. However, their joy is short-lived due to the customary act of attempting to know the future of the boy. The family's problems begin when the most revered Ifa priest, Baba Fakunle, prophesies that Odewale will kill his father and marry his mother. This sets off a chain of events that causes troubles for the family; Baba Fakunle states: 'This boy, he will kill his own father and then marry his own mother!' (Rotimi 3)

Yoruba culture has a strong tradition of divination, with the belief that the gods reveal sacred things through prophecy (Adeoye). There is sorrow in the air when Baba Fakunle delivers this unbelievable declaration. This statement is regarded with respect and awe since Baba Fakunle, despite being blind, is the most revered seer. It is not questioned by the parents and the people of the town (Uwatt). According to the prophecy, Odewale's fate has already been decided and he is unable to change it. There is a great deal of anxiety and dread created by this prophecy. Tragically, Queen Ojuola, the baby's mother, is stricken with sadness. Anguish and sorrow invariably engulf the royal family; King and Queen, as well as the entirety of Kutuje, are all overcome with a significant amount of sadness (Adiele, 'Tragedy'). This is evident in the narrator's disclosure: 'Mother sinks to the ground / In sorrow for the seed / That life must crush so soon! / Father consoles her, in his own grief' (Rotimi 3).

Had the prophecy not been revealed, perhaps this day of celebration would not have become a day of grief. According to Chabi and Dadja-Tiou, the birth of a new child is a blessing and a wonderful time for the family. It is the opposite for King Adetusa and his spouse, Ojuola. In African societies and in many parts of the world, there is no place for a boy who will commit double abomination by killing his own father and marrying his own mother.

In this moment, the parents commit a major error: the attempted murder of an innocent child. It is unknown at this time whether Odewale will actually kill his father and marry his mother, but their conviction in the prophecy – rather than being a mere superstition – engaged their free will and drove them to try to kill their child in order to prevent the infant

Odewale from carrying out his dreadful future on earth. There is nothing more terrible for King Adetusa and his wife Ojuola than losing their first child under such horrible circumstances. Due to the sadness that the entirety of Kutuje feels with the loss of the first royal child, the tragedy in the royal family also symbolizes a collective catastrophe for the people (Adiele, 'Tragedy'). It is immediately announced that the boy be taken to the evil forest and killed. The Ogun priest 'ties the boy's feet with a string of cowries, meaning sacrifice to the gods who have sent him down to this earth' (Rotimi 3).

The Ogun priest hands over the child to Gbonka, the king's special messenger, to kill in the 'evil grove' so the blood will not be on their hands, but the stain cannot be removed. Baba Fakunle's prophecy, which leads to the act of carrying out the plan of killing the boy, sets the stage for such destiny to be fulfilled. Gbonka spares his life and hands him over to a hunter, Ogundele, and his boy, Alaka, in the Ipetu bush. Alaka, who later becomes a very close friend of Odewale, recounts the experience of how they picked him up in the bush:

Alaka: A man brought you there, wrapped up in white cloth like a sacrifice to the gods. Your arms and feet were tied with strings of cowries... with this knife, I cut off the strings of cowries and relieved you of the pain. (Rotimi 63)

Uwatt notes that Odewale would have grown up as Adetusa's son if not for the oracle. The prophecy leads to the attempt to revert fate, resulting in the separation of the baby from his actual parents. If this situation hadn't been uncovered early on, the child wouldn't have been separated from his true parents and would have grown up knowing strangers as his parents; Odewale later asks: 'Hunter Ogundele is not my father, his wife Mobike is not my mother. You said so. Well, who gave me life?' (Rotimi 62).

Odewale grows up believing his real parents are Ogundele and Mobike. He thinks he is an Ijekun man and recognizes another man's language as his language. He even fights and accidentally kills a man to

defend the integrity of that tribe: 'The old man should not have mocked my tribe. He called my tribe bush. That I cannot bear.' (Rotimi 50).

The attempt to kill baby Odewale to avert the foretold fate becomes a haunting regret for his parents, particularly Queen Ojuola. This sentiment is vividly expressed in the aftermath of King Adetusa's death, when the oracle declares that he was killed by his own blood. This is not believed by the people because they are unaware of Odewale's existence. Queen Ojuola holds Baba Fakunle responsible for the death of her son, seeing him as a murderer rather than a soothsayer:

Ojuola: He made me [...] kill my son. My very first son – by my first husband. On the ninth day after the boy was born, my former husband summoned this Baba Fakunle to tell the boy's future. Baba Fakunle said the boy had brought bad luck to the earth and that we must kill the boy so that the bad luck would die with him. And when my husband died too, this same Baba Fakunle said he was killed by his own blood. So why did you not tell that same soothsayer that he lied when he said again that it was the king who murdered the former king? (Rotimi 52–53)

In this extract, Ojuola's anguish and confusion are palpable. She grapples with the immense guilt of having lost her firstborn son based on Baba Fakunle's dire prophecy. The queen's faith in the soothsayer, once absolute, is now shattered, and she questions the veracity of his prophecies, suspecting deceit or malevolence. Her regret is compounded by the fact that she now perceives Baba Fakunle, whom the town revered and trusted, as a liar and a killer. In actual reality, Baba Fakunle said what he saw, but if they had not approached him to want to know tomorrow, none of the incidents would have happened. This intense regret underlines a significant theme in the play: the potentially destructive consequences of attempting to know the future based on prophetic insights.

Ojuola's inability to detect the full truth – that the son she believed to have been killed is the very one who has returned to murder her first husband and eventually marry her – adds a tragic irony to her situation.

This irony is evident in another lamentation from Ojuola: 'I even told him about my own trouble when I had my first baby – a boy. This same soothsayer said that the boy had bad luck' (Rotimi 57).

The queen lives with the profound burden and guilt of having taken her son's life, all due to a prophecy that dictated her actions. Had the parents not been so eager to know and alter the future, the series of tragic events that unfolded might have been avoided. Ojuola's reflection suggests that she would likely reject such prophetic interventions if given a second chance, illustrating the serious responsibility and potentially devastating consequences that come with the desire to foresee and manipulate the future.

In Odewale's character, it is clear he rejects this destiny. While the play does not explicitly explain why the gods have imposed this fate on him or his family, Odewale's view of his fate as a curse is powerfully conveyed in the following passage:

Odewale: Laugh at me while I killed my own father and married my own mother. Is that your wish? If you think that is a laughing matter, may the gods curse you to kill your own father and share a bed with your own mother. (Rotimi 61)

In this moment, Odewale's anguish and frustration are evident. He acknowledges it is a curse from the gods for one to be destined to kill his father and marry his mother. If he had known his true parents from the beginning, he would likely not have fulfilled such a destiny. He would have known King Adetusa as his father and Queen Ojuola as his mother. If not for the prophecy, Odewale would have grown up recognising his true biological parents and would have had no reason to see them as strangers. Etherton states that the gods are indeed the cause of Odewale's downfall, for his particular crimes would not have been committed if there had been no prophecy. He would have grown up in his family, hot-tempered perhaps, but there is nothing in his character to suggest that he could ever commit patricide and incest. However, the fault is not that of the oracle. The oracle speaks when consulted. The fault lies in the practice that tries to see a future as yet unknown. The

prophecies and the subsequent actions taken based on them illustrate the complex interaction of fate, free will, and the consequences of seeking to know the future. These actions ultimately lead to the fulfilment of the very destiny Odewale's parents sought to avoid, underlining the tragic irony and the heavy burden of prophetic knowledge.

The Elder's Parable and the Revelation of Truth

The elder man's parable is another significant moment in the play that reinforces the tension between prophecy and fate. The hunter whom Gbonka gave the boy to in the Ipetu bush takes the baby home to Ijekun-Yemoja and hands him over to his wife Mobike for upbringing. When growing up, the young Odewale, without any knowledge of his foster background, one day kneels to greet an elder who replies curtly, 'the butterfly thinks himself a bird' (Rotimi 59).

Odewale: Alaka here and I were one day working on my father's farm when an old man whom I had long known as my father's brother walked up on us. I lay flat in greeting as custom says. But what did this man do? He looked down at me, looked at me... looked, then spat: 'the butterfly thinks himself a bird'. That was what he said: 'the butterfly thinks himself a bird'. Then he hissed and walked away. Spat again. (Rotimi 59)

In traditional African society, elders are revered for their wisdom and understanding of life. Their words often carry weight and significance, making it difficult for Odewale here to discard the elder's words as those of a drunk, despite Alaka's initial suggestion. As an African adage goes, 'a bush does not sway this way or that way unless there is wind' (Rotimi 60). The elder's remark disturbs Odewale, suggesting to him that there is a deeper meaning behind the comparison of a butterfly thinking itself a bird. This moment is crucial as it sets the stage for the prophecy, which Odewale's parents had tried to avert, to resurface and haunt him.

Odewale consults the Ifa oracle and is told that he is cursed to kill his father and marry his mother. This is a fate he might never have learned about if the elder had not made his cryptic comment. Had he not

discovered this prophecy, he might not have taken the actions that eventually led to fulfilling that destiny. The Ifa priest warns him to do nothing and not run from the fate:

To run away would be foolish. The snail may try, but it cannot cast off its shell. Just stay where you are. Stay where you are... stay where you are [...]. (Rotimi 60)

However, the elder's words awaken something in Odewale that would otherwise have remained dormant. He cannot bear to stay idle and do nothing, so he decides to run away from the prophecy, but in doing so, he inadvertently moves toward fulfilling his destiny. If the elder had not said anything, Odewale would not have learned of his curse to kill his father and marry his mother – a fate he was desperate to avoid. This is taboo not only in African culture but also in most parts of the world. Understanding this, Odewale vows to never return home unless his father and mother are dead. According to Alaka: 'I'm going to Ede,' he said, 'and don't you come to look for me until my father and mother are both dead!' (Rotimi 43).

This statement is unbelievable to Alaka and the queen when she hears it. Both wonder why he would say that. For Odewale, the reason is clear: if he stays far away from home and avoids seeing his parents, then there is no chance he will kill his father and commit incest. He runs away from his foster parents, believing them to be his real parents, and is unaware of the true story behind his birth. Indeed, it is in this way he is like a butterfly thinking itself a bird.

Odewale has no peace staying with his assumed parents after learning he could kill his father and marry his mother. If he had actually grown up with his real parents as he should have, it is possible that none of this would have happened. From the beginning, the prophecy distorts his life and, later in life, it is still prophecy that acts as the compass to ensure he goes towards the path of tragic fate.

Odewale runs to settle in Ede, where he buys a farm. Coincidentally, the same farm had already been sold to King Adetusa, his biological

father, and on a certain day, they both meet at the farm. Due to the prophecy and the attempt to avert it, the father does not recognise his son and the son sees his father as ‘this man [...] short [...] an old man [...] a thief’ (Rotimi 46). Following an altercation, Odewale kills the old man, King Adetusa, his biological father. The first prophecy eventually comes to pass.

Odewale: The woods heard me cry. The ground heard my running.
There was nothing to stay for on my farm. I had wanted its soil to
hold yams and my sweat. Nothing more. Yams. And my sweat. Now,
there was no yam in its soil. And in place of my sweat, there was
blood – another man’s blood. In my search for somewhere to hide,
I crossed five rivers. It was that search that brought me to this
strange land [...]. (Rotimi 50)

Odewale, who has now killed his biological father inadvertently, runs away from Ede and, wandering from place to place, finds his way to Kutuje. There, the people of the Kingdom of Kutuje decide to make him their king because he had actively participated in the tribal war against Ikolu and led them to victory. His crowning thus comes as a reward for the victory, of which he is the main actor. After becoming the king of the tribe, he has the obligation to respect the tradition of that tribe by marrying the Queen mother of the former king. As custom dictates in Yorubaland, when a king dies, his successor has to marry the deceased king’s wife or wives as part and parcel of the royal legacy (Chabi et al.). As a result, he accidentally marries his own mother. Thus, the second prophecy comes to pass.

Adiele (‘Tragedy’) comments that the incestuous relationship between King Odewale and Queen Ojuola violates the spiritual and cosmic ordinances of the people. The ensuing consequences of this act are fatal, for there has only been eleven years of joy in the kingdom after King Adetusa’s death. The extract below attests this fact:

We have all lived in joy
these eleven years
and Kutuje

has prospered.
But joy
has a slender body
that breaks too soon. [...]
There is trouble
now in the land.
Joy has broken
and scattered.
Peace, too, is no more. (Rotimi 32)

The trouble that is now in the land, as referred to in the foregoing quotation, is that people die of a strange sickness all over the Kingdom of Kutuje. When Baba Fakunle, the most respected seer, is invited once again to consult the gods and divine a solution, he says the calamity is as a result of the unresolved death of the former king. He later refers to Odewale as a murderer and a bedsharer.

Baba Fakunle: I smelled it. I smelled the truth as I came to this land. The truth smelled stronger and still stronger as I came into this place. Now, it is choking me... choking me I say.... You called me pig! You are a murderer [...]. You force words from me again you [...]. Bedsharer! [...] your hot temper, like a disease from birth is the curse that has brought you trouble. (Rotimi 27-29)

Odewale foams with anger, feeling unjustly accused and misunderstood. He detests being referred to as a murderer and bedsharer (Nutsukpo). He feels it is because he was made king in another man's land.

Odewale: I am an Ijekun man. That's the trouble. I, an Ijekun man, came to your tribe, you made me king and I was happy [...]. 'Bedsharer'. You heard it. Didn't you? That blind bat who calls himself Seer says I am a 'bedsharer'. What does that mean? Sharing bed with whom? Ojuola, Aderopo's mother. In other words, I don't belong in that bed. In other words, I have no right to be king. What do you think of that? (Rotimi 31)

Odewale's response highlights his ignorance of his true identity and the prophecy's fulfilment. Odewale's anger stems from his belief that Baba Fakunle's accusations are rooted in his status as an outsider, not realizing that they are the bitter truth of his origins and actions. This ignorance exacerbates his frustration and sense of injustice. If the prophecy had been known from the start, it might have helped prevent the tragedy. Even the mother, Ojuola, does not recognize her child. Instead of a son, she unwittingly sees a husband: 'It is you I married, your highness, not my son. The position of a husband is different from a son.' (Rotimi 38).

The separation right from the beginning as a result of the eagerness to know the future of a child ultimately causes the tragedy. In this case, the attempt to see the future leads to the act to change it. However, the future cannot be changed. Sometimes, trying to change the future can lead to mistakes that bring that future about sooner than anticipated. As the saying goes, destiny may be delayed, but it cannot be changed. When it cannot be prevented, why the desire to see the future?

Amid the accusation of Odewale as a murderer and bedsharer, he is very unhappy and eager to find out the truth. Odewale's relentless pursuit of the truth, driven by his desire to clear his name and understand his fate, takes a psychological impact on him. He cannot sleep well or eat well. This is revealed in the extracts below:

Ojuola: Listen, all of you. Come, come, come closer. Listen: Father is not happy today, and I want you to behave yourselves, do you understand? [...] Won't my lord eat even a little before he goes?

Odewale: No, no food yet. I must carry on my search for the murderer of King Adetusa. If we fail to catch the murderer in the town, we shall move on to the villages around us. If we find no murderer there either, we will go to the farms [...].

Ojuola: The king refuses to eat, my lord. (Rotimi 46, 50, 56)

Each of the above extracts reveal the psychological impact of the whole scenario on Odewale. His inability to eat and sleep reflects his disturbed

mental state and the depth of his despair. Indeed, it is King Odewale's eagerness to clarify the situation that leads to the discovery of the truth. Odewale believes that the turmoil stems from jealousy and a conspiracy by his younger brother, Aderopo, who was born after their parents sacrificed Odewale two years earlier. According to the people, Aderopo is the rightful heir to the throne: he is the first son of King Adetusa as the people know. Odewale suspects that Aderopo's actions are an attempt to overthrow his reign. He feels bitter that Baba Fakunle would use the word 'bedsharer' for him. Nutsukpo asserts that Odewale was shocked and angry, and accuses Aderopo of jealousy and conspiracy with the seer to facilitate his downfall to his advantage. Odewale comments about Aderopo: 'If that's the case, he should come and sleep with his mother and let him bear children by her' (Rotimi 61).

The psychological toll on Odewale is immense, as his quest for justice and clarity brings him face-to-face with the reality he sought to avoid. The climactic revelation by Gbonka and the Ogun Priest that Ojuola, his wife and mother of his children, is also his biological mother, seals his tragic fate.

Gbonka: Pray, have mercy, I meant you no wrong. I only tried to spare your life, my lord, I meant no harm. They ordered me to kill you in the bush. But I took pity and gave [...].

Odewale: I said who gave me b-i-r-t-h?

Ogun Priest: She. The woman who just went into the bedroom. Bearer of your four children, she too is your mother! (Rotimi 68)

Unfortunately, Odewale becomes complicit in his fate when he learns that 'the woman who just went into the bedroom [Ojuola]', the '[b]earer of his four children is also [his] mother!'. The terrible knowledge that the prophecy has come true causes Queen Ojuola's untimely demise. Her previous attempt to change fate by sacrificing her newborn son, as advised by the soothsayer, comes back to haunt her in the most unimaginable way. Queen Ojuola commits suicide due to the fact that she cannot comprehend such an abomination, testifying to the tragic consequences of prophecy. This act is not merely a result of her immediate

shock but a product of years of repressed guilt and her eventual recognition of her part in fulfilling the prophecy. Her death serves as a poignant commentary on how difficult it is for people to accept and deal with destined events, particularly when trying to escape them leads to even more tragic results.

Odewale has an equally tragic journey towards self-awareness. At first, he is indignant and defensive, unwilling to understand or acknowledge the charges levelled against him. But as the reality becomes clear, his response changes from being furious to being deeply ashamed of himself and hopeless:

Odewale: 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. (Rotimi 71)

This statement captures Odewale's intense inner turmoil and horror at discovering that the same things he was trying to stop have actually happened. The psychological weight of realizing he killed his father and married his mother and fulfilled the grim prophecy is too much for him to handle. Additionally, his comments here convey his acceptance of the harsh irony of his circumstances and the unavoidability of fate. The curse he lays on others – may the gods curse you to kill your own father and sleep in the same bed as your mother (61) – reflects his own doomed life and acknowledges the unbreakable connection between his deeds and destiny. Odewale is greatly affected psychologically. He is overcome with self-loathing and guilt, recognizing that his life's actions have led to unimaginable horror. This psychological turmoil is further emphasised when he accepts full responsibility for the tragedy, despite the gods' role in determining his fate (Chabi and Dadja-Tiou).

Conclusion

In many literature classes, various characters in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* are apportioned blame for the misfortune that befalls Odewale and his family (Chabi and Dadjia-Tiou; Mokani; Adiele). Some blame Gbonka for not fulfilling the task assigned to him. If he had ended the boy's life from the beginning, Odewale would not have lived to experience such horror. Also, some blame the gods that use men as a pawn on a chess board to achieve their objectives. Others blame Odewale's temper, the tragic flaw which drove him to kill his father accidentally. However, this study reveals that the root of the problem lies in the act of divining the future. If the future had remained unknown, the consequences witnessed might not have occurred. Attempting to change the future was the error that led to the tragic events. The resultant effects were not limited to Odewale alone. King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola suffered the depression of losing a child they were happy to have, with the former later dying at his hand. Odewale not only married his mother but also bore children with her. His foster parents never saw the child they raised with love again because Odewale mistook them for the parents he was prophesied to kill. Odewale's realisation of the truth led to his immense disappointment in himself, causing him to gouge out his eyes and live in exile. This narrative does not negate the existence of fate or the role of prophecy in our destiny. Rather, it suggests that sometimes we must embrace the uncertainty of the future. The knowledge of the future can be more destructive than the future itself. Scripture advises, 'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own' (*NIV Bible*, Matt. 6.34). This suggests that we must let the future decide for itself what tomorrow will bring. Embracing uncertainty can sometimes be the wisest course of action, avoiding the pitfalls of attempting to change a destiny that may be inevitable.

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