Journal of Language and Literature
Vol. 24 No. 2, October 2024, pp. 386 – 399
DOI: 10.24071/joll.v24i2.8922
Available at https://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/JOLL/index

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

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

Opeyemi Emmanuel OLAWE[1], Adekunle ADEGITE[2], Olaide Morayo BABALOLA[2] & Dunsin Oyindamola ADEOSUN[2]
oolawe6392@stu.ui.edu.ng
[1]Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, NIGERIA
[2]Department of Languages and Linguistics, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere Ekiti, NIGERIA

Abstract

In contemporary Nigeria, the proliferation of prophetic claims has profoundly influenced popular religious practices across all societal strata. This phenomenon engages individuals from various backgrounds as they seek divine insights and prophecies from spiritual leaders. This study focuses on Ola Rotimi's play The Gods Are Not to Blame to critically examine the role of prophecy within African cultural beliefs. While existing scholarship on Rotimi's work often analyzes themes of fate, tragedy, and the allocation of blame within the play among others, scant attention has been paid to the fundamental role of prophecy itself as the root cause of the play's tragic events. This research aims to conduct a deconstructive reading of the play, scrutinizing how the characters' pursuit of foreknowledge and attempts to alter their fates paradoxically precipitate their destinies. The method involves a detailed textual analysis of the play, focusing on key dialogues and actions that highlight the characters' motivations and the unfolding of events. The findings reveal two key instances: first, Baba Fakunle's prophecy, which foretells disaster for Odewale's family, leads his parents to attempt to kill him to prevent the predicted calamity. Ironically, this attempt to alter the future sets in motion the very disaster they sought to avoid. Secondly, an elder's parable causes Odewale to discover the prophecy's truth. In trying to understand and avoid his destiny, Odewale discovers that his actions to prevent it end up fulfilling it. Both instances suggest that the desire to know and change the future is fraught with peril, often precipitating the very outcomes one seeks to avoid. The conclusion emphasizes the prudence of embracing the uncertainty of the future, as attempting to alter it can lead to unintended and often tragic consequences.

Keywords: *Prophecy; African cultural beliefs; Ola Rotimi, The Gods Are Not To Blame; Predestination; Consequences*

Article information

Received: 20 June 2024

Revised: 8 September 2024

Accepted: 9 September 2024

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, 2018). Prophecy, according to Hornby (2015) 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 (Barton, 2007; Awojobi, 2021). 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, 2007; Obielosi, 2012). 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 predictable. 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, 2021). 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, 2013, Iwe, 2016, Obielosi & Idonor, 2021). 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 & Idonor, 2021).

Anayochukwu (2016) observed a growing trend in Nigeria where 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, "men of God," and prophets who assert insights and prophesy 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 favorable 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 endeavors, 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. 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. Despite the respect afforded to prophetic practices, one must consider

whether the attempt to know the future is truly beneficial. Thus, examining the possible negative effects of prophetic as well as the need to embrace life's inherent uncertainties, is vital.

The practice of prophecy is not only a spiritual and social phenomenon but also a rich subject for literary exploration (Dick, 2015). In particular, African literature offers a significant medium for examining and communicating to larger audiences the complexity and implications of prophecy (Irele, 2001; Anjorin & Nwosu, 2018). 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 prophesy, 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 2014; Ukande 2014). 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, 2014). 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 & Olatunji (2022), Ola 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. This drama, which is an adaption 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 adaption 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 skillfully combines Greek tragedy with Yoruba cultural components, as noted by Oyin Ogunba (1975), 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 prophesy coming to pass. This study investigates the idea that some knowledge, particularly prophesies, could be best left unknown, as implied by the play Rotimi'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 contribute to a broader understanding of the cultural significance of prophecy in African societies.

Set in the Yoruba culture of Nigeria, Ola Rotimi's drama *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is an adaption of Sophocles' famous tragedy "Oedipus Rex." In spite of his best efforts to avert this 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 fulfills 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.

Numerous studies have explored Ola 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 (Odebunmi, 2008; Nutsukpo, 2019; Nwabudike, 2020; Anigbogu & Ahizih, 2020; Yakubu & Jeremiah, 2022; Jegede & Adesina, 2020; Olaosun, 2012; Adamu, 2017; Odebode, 2015; Nwabudike, 2017). For example, Odebunmi (2008) analyzed the pragmatic functions of crisis-motivated proverbs, while Nutsukpo (2019) focused on the representation of women in the play. Other studies, such as those by Nwabudike (2020) and Jegede and Adesina (2020), 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 (Chabi & Dadja-Tiou, 2022; Adiele, 2022; Obika & Ojiakor, 2021; Olu-Osayomi & Adebua, 2023; Kpodoh & Olatunji, 2022; Apuke, 2016; Ogunfeyimi, 2020; Onkoba, Rutere & Kamau, 2022; Mokani, 2021; Sesan, 2014; Adeniyi, 2015; Adiele, 2024). Chabi and Dadja-Tiou (2022) discussed Yoruba beliefs and monarchy, while Adiele (2022) examined tragedy as a component of liberation and freedom. Other studies, like those by Obika and Ojiakor, explored the historical implications of the play, and Olu-Osayomi and Adebua (2023) 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 Ola 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: "Is certain knowledge, particularly prophetic knowledge, better left undiscovered in African cultural contexts, as suggested by Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*?. By analyzing 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.

Methodology

The research design employed in this study was library-based, which was thought to be suitable for gathering information about prophetic practices in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame.* The study 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 analyzing earlier interpretations. The text was closely read, with an emphasis on selected passages that highlight important themes and conflicts. This involved analyzing 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 employed a deconstructionist approach to analyze *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Deconstruction, a critical theory developed by

Jacques Derrida, aims to uncover inherent contradictions and multiple meanings within a text (Kehinde & Ibrahim, 2021). While various deconstructionist approaches exist, Derrida's framework is particularly relevant here. According to Derrida, deconstruction seeks to collapse fixed boundaries of meaning, allowing for diverse interpretations (Adiele, 2021). In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, contradictions are evident, especially in the dynamic between fate and free will. Odewale's attempts to evade a prophecy that he is destined to fulfill illustrate this paradox. The study highlights how these contradictions disrupt a singular, conclusive interpretation of the text, offering instead multiple possible readings. For instance, Odewale's decisions to leave his home and live in different locations appear to be acts of personal agency. However, Derrida's deconstruction suggests that these acts of free will are intertwined with the deterministic nature of the prophecy. Despite Odewale's efforts to change his fate, his actions ultimately lead to the prophecy's fulfillment, such as when he accidentally kills his father and marries his mother. This interplay between free will and fate underscores Derrida's notion that meanings and outcomes are fluid and constantly interacting.

Derrida's theory also posits that concepts like prophecy and fate are not rigid but fluid constructs within the narrative. The prophecy initially seems to dictate Odewale's actions, but deconstruction reveals that this sense of inevitability is constructed through the characters' beliefs and reactions. For instance, the elder's cryptic comment about a butterfly and a bird sets Odewale on a path of self-fulfilling prophecy. This remark is interpreted by Odewale through his personal lens, shaping his decisions and actions. According to Derrida, the prophecy's meaning is not fixed but continually redefined by Odewale's responses.

A critical aspect of deconstruction involves examining binary oppositions—pairs of opposing concepts where one is often preferred over the other. In Rotimi's play, significant binaries like fate/free will, knowledge/ignorance, and guilt/innocence are explored. The deconstructionist analysis reveals how these dichotomies are constructed, contested, and deconstructed within the narrative. For example, the conflict between fate and free will is highlighted by how Odewale's efforts to defy his destiny ironically bring him closer to fulfilling it. The play's tragedy arises not only from the prophecy but from how characters interpret and respond to it. Through Derrida's lens, the play demonstrates the fluidity of meaning and the interconnectedness of concepts, suggesting that interpretations are always subject to revision and redefinition.

Results 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 section that follows.

1. 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 was 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: "This boy, he will kill his own father and then marry his own mother!"* (Rotimi, p. 3)

Yoruba culture has a strong tradition of divination, with the belief that the gods reveal sacred things through prophecy (Adeoye, 2020). 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 them (Aluko, 2015). According to the prophecy, Odewale's fate had already been decided and he would not be able to change it. There is a great deal of anxiety and dread created by this. 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 entire Kutuje, are all overcome with a significant amount of sadness (Adiele, 2022). This is evident in the narrator's words below

> *Mother sinks to the ground*
> *In sorrow for the seed*
> *That life must crush so soon!*
> *Father consoles her, in his own grief*
> (Rotimi, p. 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 (2022), 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 beyond, 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, they committed a major error: the attempted murder of an 'innocent' child. It is unknown at this time whether Odewale would actually kill his father and marry his mother, but their conviction in the prophecy—rather than being a mere superstition—encaged 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. Because of the sadness that the entire 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, 2022). 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, p. 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. This prophecy, which leads to the act of carrying out the plan of killing the boy, sets the stage and pace 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, p. 63)

Obika (2020) 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 such fate was not discovered from the beginning, there would have been no reason for the child to be separated from his parents, thereby growing up to recognize strangers as his parents:

> *Odewale: "Hunter Ogundele is not my father, his wife Mobike is not my mother. You said so. Well, who gave me life?"* (Rotimi, p. 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 accidentially kills a man to defend the integrity of that tribe:

> *Odewale: "The old man should not have mocked my tribe. He called my tribe bush. That I cannot bear."* (Rotimi, p. 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, pp. 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, has 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:

> *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, p. 57).

The queen has lived with the profound burden and guilt of having taken her son's life, all due to a prophecy that dictated their actions. The prophecy, instead of preventing disaster, set the stage for it. 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.

As seen in the character of Odewale, he does not want such destiny. Though, why the gods have casted such fate on him or the family is not explicitly stated in the play, Odewale's perception of his fate as a curse is vividly expressed 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, p. 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 might 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 recognizing his true biological parents and would have had no reason to see them as strangers. Therefore, it can be said that the prophecy set the stage for the fulfillment of such a destiny.

The knowledge of the prophecy brought separation and led to the child's inadvertent fulfillment of destiny. Etherton (1982) 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. But the

fault is not the oracle's. The oracle speaks when consulted. The fault lies in the practice that tries to see the future 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 fulfillment of the very destiny they sought to avoid, underlining the tragic irony and the heavy burden of prophetic knowledge.

2. 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 handed the boy to in the Ipetu bush 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" (Rotimi, p. 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, p. 59)

In African traditional society, elders are revered for their wisdom and understanding of life. Their words often carry weight and significance, making it difficult for Odewale 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, p. 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, p. 60)

However, the elder's words awaken something in Odewale that should 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 taboo is not only an abomination 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.

> *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, p. 43)

This statement is unbelievable to Alaka and the queen when she hears it. Why would he 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, he is like a butterfly thinking itself a bird.

However, the action of running away suggests that he doesn't want such a curse to come to pass. He 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, none of this might have happened. From the beginning, the prophecy distorts his life and, later in life, it is still prophecy that acts as the weapon to ensure he goes towards the path of tragic fate.

Odewale runs 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 meet at the farm. Because of the prophecy and the attempt to avert it, the father does not recognize his son and the son sees his father as "this man… short… an old man… a thief" (Rotimi, p. 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, p. 50)

Odewale, who had killed his biological father inadvertently, ran away from Ede and, wandering from place to place, found his way to Kutuje. Inyang (2019) points out that "like Cain who fled after killing his brother Abel, Odewale flees Ede to Kutuje, which happens to be his real village. There, the people of the Kingdom of Kutuje decided 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, whose main actor he is. 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., 2022). As a result, he accidentally marries his own mother. Thus, the second prophecy comes to pass.

Adiele (2022) 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.*

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, was 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, p. 27-29).

Odewale foams with anger, feeling unjustly accused and misunderstood. He detests being referred to as a murderer and bedsharer (Nutsukpo, 2019). 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, p. 31).

Odewale's response highlights his ignorance of his true identity and the prophecy's fulfillment. 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. The prophecy revealed from the beginning, if not known, could have been a great way of averting the tragedy. Even the mother, Ojuola, does not recognize the child. Instead of a son, she unwittingly saw a husband.

Ojuola: "It is you I married, your highness, not my son. The position of a husband is different from a son". (Rotimi, p. 38).

The separation right from the beginning as a result of the eagerness to know the future of a child causes the tragedy. In this case, the attempt to see the future leads to the act to change it. But the future cannot be changed. Sometimes, an attempt to change the future is the error, an error that will eventually enhance the future from arising sooner than expected. As a popular adage 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 could not 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?" (Rotimi, p. 46)

Wont 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" (Rotimi, p. 50)

Ojuola: "The king refuses to eat, my lord" (Rotimi, p. 56).

All 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. As a matter of fact, it was the king's eagerness to clear the air that led to the discovery of the truth. Odewale thinks it was an act of jealousy and a plot from his younger brother, Aderopo, whom they gave birth to after two years they sacrificed him. Truly, Aderopo ought to be the crown king. He is the first son of King Adetusa as they know. Odewale thought it was an act of revolt to overthrow his reign. He feels bitter that Baba Fakunle would use the word "bedsharer" for him. Nutsukpo (2019) asserts that Odewale was shocked and angry, accuses Aderopo of jealousy and conspiracy with the seer to facilitate his downfall to his advantage.

Odewale: "If that's the case, he should come and sleep with his mother and let him bear children by her" (Rotimi, p. 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-th?"

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

Unfortunately, Odewale becomes perpetuated in his fate when he learns that "the woman who just went into the bedroom (Ojuola), bearer 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 resist 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 in even more tragic results

Odewale has an equally sad journey towards self-awareness. At first, he is indignant and defensive, unwilling to understand or acknowledge the charges leveled 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, p.71)

This statement captures Odewale's intense inner turmoil and horror at discovering that the same things he was trying to stop have happened. The psychological weight of realizing he killed his father and married his mother had 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 (P. 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 emphasized when he accepts full responsibility for the tragedy, despite the gods' role in determining his fate (Chabi & Dadja-Tiou, 2022).

While past studies (Chabi & Dadja-Tiou, 2022; Adiele, 2022; Onkoba, et al, 2022 among others) have focused on the inevitability of Odewale's fate and his attempts to alter it, this study reveals how deconstruction exposes the complexity of his actions. Odewale's struggle to escape his destiny, which initially appears as a clear example of free will clashing with fate, is shown to be more nuanced. The deconstructionist approach demonstrates that his very efforts to change his future are part of a larger, indeterminate system where boundaries between fate and free will become blurred. This not only contribute to the discourse on fate and free will but also emphasizes the play's commentary on the limitations of human understanding and the consequences of attempting to alter one's destiny.

Conclusion

This study explored how prophecy shapes our understanding of the future and the associated risks in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* through a deconstructionist lens. Unlike past interpretations that attribute blame to characters like Gbonka, the gods, or Odewale's temper, this analysis reveals that the core issue is the act of predicting the future. If the future had remained unknown, the tragic consequences might not have occurred. Derrida's deconstructionist approach shows that the boundaries between fate and free will

are fluid rather than fixed. Odewale's efforts to escape his destiny only led him to fulfill it, highlighting the complexity of human agency and predestination.

The study underscores that attempting to alter a predetermined future can be more destructive than accepting it. This aligns with deconstructionist thought expressed in this study, which suggests that embracing uncertainty is wiser than trying to know or change what is destined. By examining binary oppositions such as free will versus fate, the analysis demonstrates how Odewale's ignorance of his adoption and subsequent actions ultimately fulfilled the prophecy. This perspective reinforces that knowing one's destiny can be harmful, and accepting uncertainty may be the most prudent course of action.

Odewale's attempts to change the future led to tragic outcomes not only for himself but also for those around him. King Adetusa and Queen Ojuola experienced deep sorrow from losing the child they were happy to have, only to die at his hands. Odewale also married his mother and had children with her, and his foster parents never saw the child they raised due to his mistaken belief about them. His realization of the truth led to immense self-disappointment, culminating in his decision 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. Thus, embracing uncertainty can sometimes be the wisest course of action, avoiding the pitfalls of attempting to change a destiny that may be inevitable.

References

Adamu, P. (2017). Context and Politeness in Ola Rotimi's The Gods are not to Blame. *Issues in Language and Literary Studies*, *1*(1).

Adeniyi, V. O. (2015). Portrayal of Indigenous Religions and Ifa. *African Indigenous Religious Traditions in Local and Global Contexts: Perspectives on Nigeria*, 175.

Adiele, P. (2024). The Delphic Oracle and Ifa Oracle: Limits of Divination in Oedipus the King and The Gods are not to Blame. *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, *26*(1), 23-40.

Adiele, P. O. (2022). Tragedy as a Component of Liberation and Freedom in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *AKSU Journal of English*, 1, (2), 67-88

Amanze, J. N. (2013). The Role of Prophecy in the Growth and Expansion of the Synagogue Church of All Nations. *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa*, *112*(1), 1-14.

Anayochukwu, A. A. (2016). Dealing with The Recent Epidemic of Prophecies in Nigeria: Towards a Theology of Prophetism. A Valedictory Speech at the 45th Convocation Ceremony of Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, on this 19th of March, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.bigardenugu.org/dealing-with-the-recent-epidemic-of-prophecies-in-nigeria-towards-a-theology-of-prophetism.html

Anigbogu, N. C., & Ahizih, F. C. (2020). Language use in Ola Rotimi's t*he Gods are not to Blame*: a psychological perspective. *Socialscientia: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *5*(1).

Anjorin, G., & Nwosu, C. (2018). The Playwright as a Crusader of Societal Transformation: An Evaluation of Some Selected African Plays. *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*. *1*(4). 98-111.

Apuke, O. D. (2016). Thematic Analysis/Review of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, *13*(5), 11-13.

Awojobi, P. O. (2018). "Prophets as Consultants in Ancient Israelite and Nigerian Socio-Cultural Contexts" in *The Heart of the Act: Church, Politics and Social Transformation.* A Festschrift in Honor of His Grace, Most Rev. Michael Kehinde Stephen. Edited by Rosaline O. Opeke et al, UI Press. p. 125.

Awojobi, P. O. (2021). The Place of Music in Prophecy in 2 Kings 3: 15-16 and the Nigerian Context. *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Educational Sciences*, *8*(2), 2349–5219

Awojobi, P. O. (2023). Predictive Prophecy: A Catalyst for the Growth of Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria. *Lafia Journal of Religion and Humanities*, *3*(1).

Balogun, O. A. (2007). "The Concepts of Ori and Human Destiny in Traditional Yoruba Thought: A Soft-Deterministic Interpretation," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *16*(1), 116-130.

Chabi, M. S., & Dadja-Tiou, P. (2022). Yoruba Beliefs and Monarchy in Yorubaland As Seen Through Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Akofena 1, 313-332

Dick, T. O. (2015). Patterns of Deviation in Niyi Osundare's Poetry. Mgbakoigba: *Journal of African Studies,* 4, 1-12

Etherton, M. (1982). *The Development of African Drama.* Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982.

Hornby, A. S. (2015). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 1027.

Inyang, H. (2019). *Conceptual Analysis of Ola Rotimi's The Gods Are Not To Blame.* https:harrilibrary.blogspot.com/2019/05conceptual-analysis-of-ola-rotimisgods.html.

Irele, A. (2001). *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford University Press.

Iwe, E. C. (2016). *The Role of Contemporary Prophecy in the Lives of Members of Pentecostal Churches in Africa*. Azusa Pacific University.

Jegede, O. O., & Adesina, O. B. (2020). Conversational Strategies in Ola Rotimi's the Gods are not to Blame. *Studies in Literature and Language*, *21*(2), 64-75.

Jeyifo, B. (1985). *The Truthful Lie: Essays in a Sociology of African Drama*. New Beacon Books.

Kehinde, O. & Ibrahim, N. (2021). Language and Difference: A Deconstructive Reading of Niyi Osundare's "Poetry Is" and Abubakar Othman's "Wordsworth Lied". *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, *2*(3), 75-91

Kpodoh, D., & Olatunji, O. F. (2022) Playwriting: Therapies and Prophecies, Finding Meanings in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. *Port Harcourt Journal of History & Diplomatic Studies, 9*(1) 61-71

Mbachaga, J. (2014). The Creative Writer as a Social Critic: James Alachi's *Enekole* Approached. *Theatre and Socio criticism: The Dramaturgy of James Alachi*. Ed. Ododo. S., & Mbachaga, J. SONTA: 43-52.

Mokani, J. (2021). The Role of Fate in Tragedy: A Case Study of Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*. *European Journal of Literary Studies*, *3*(1).

Nutsukpo M. F. (2019). "Beyond Adaptation: The Representation of Women in Ola Rotimi's The Gods Are Not to Blame," *International Journal of Development Strategies and Humanities, Management and Social Sciences*, *9*(2), 99-111.

Nutsukpo, M. F. (2019). Beyond Adaptation: The Representation of Women in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *International Journal*, *9*(2).

Nwabudike, C. E. (2017). *Sociolinguistic Investigation of the Proverbs in Ola Rotimi's The Gods are not to Blame, Kurunmi and Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (Doctoral dissertation).

Nwabudike, C. E. (2020). A sociolinguistic Analysis of Proverbs in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria*, *23*(1), 139-147.

Obielosi, D. and Idonor, C. U. (2021). False Prophetism in Nigeria: Effect on The Credibility of The Ecclesial Communities. *Journal of Chinese & African Studies* (JOCAS), 2 (1)

Obika, A. N., & Ojiakor, C. T. Historical Implications in the Plays of Ola Rotimi: A Study of Kurunmi, Ovonramwen Nogbaisi and *the Gods are not to Blame*.

Odebode, I. (2015). Ethnography of Communication in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*: A Pragmatic Study. *British Journal of English Linguistics, 7(1)*

Odebunmi, A. (2008). Pragmatic functions of crisis–motivated proverbs in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *Linguistik online*, *33*(1), 73-84.

Ogunbiyi, Y. (Ed). (2014). *Nigerian Drama and Theatre: A Critical Source Book*. 2nd Ed. Tanus.

Ogunfeyimi, L. (2020). Beyond Western Medicine (Drugs): Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and James Henshaw's This is our Chance. *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development in Africa*, 187-205.

Olaosun, I. E. (2012). Incantation as Discourse: A Discourse-Stylistic Study of the Confrontational Scene of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*. In *Style in African Literature* (pp. 423-437). Brill.

Olu-Osayomi, O., & Adebua, B. (2023). The Relevance of the Practice of Ifá Divination in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *Yoruba Studies Review*, *8*(1), 105-129.

Onkoba, S. O., Rutere, A. M., & Kamau, N. G. (2022). Confluence of Kinship and Divinity in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King and Oedipus at Colonus*. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences (EAJESS)*, *3*(2), 102-109.

Rotimi, O. (1971). *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Oxford University Press.

Sesan, A. A. (2014). Text and (Con-) Textualization of Justice and Human Dignity in *The Gods Are not to Blame* and *Hopes of The Living Dead*: Lessons for Nigeria. *Justice and human dignity in Africa*, 227.

Ukande, C. (2014). The Playwright and Commitment: The Example of James Alachi's The Gods Are to Blame. *Theatre and Socio criticism: The Dramaturgy of James Alachi*. Ed. Ododo. S., & Mbachaga, J. SONTA: 254-263.

Yakubu, S., & Jeremiah, H. I. (2022). Turn-Taking Mechanism in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*. *Glob Acad J Linguist Lit*, *4*.