

**THE ANATOMY OF TRAGIC HEROES: J.P CLARK'S ZIFA AND OLA ROTIMI'S
ODEWALE.**

BY

Shalom Elohor EDOYE (Miss)

ART2100202

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERATURE,
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**A RESEARCH WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project titled: The Anatomy of Tragic Heroes: J.P Clark's Zifa And Ola Rotimi's Odewale. was undertaken by Shalom Elohor EDOYE (Miss) of the Department of English and Literature University of Benin, Benin city under my supervision.

Prof . Kola Eke
Project Supervisor.

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Mrs. Ifechi Bridget Edoye, for her guidance and support throughout my academic journey, and my late father, Mr. Earnest Ubaru Edoye.

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ABSTRACT

This study analysed the tragic heroes in JP Clark's, and Ola Rotimi's plays "*Song of A Goat*", and "*The Gods Are Not To Blame*", respectively. Using close-reading and the qualitative research method, the components that make up these tragic heroes are revealed, with emphasis on how human agency and fate intertwine. It also compared and contrasted the tragic heroes of the plays, drawing from instances in the play. In addition, the study highlighted tragic heroes in an African setting, showing how the playwrights adhered to, and differed the Aristotelian theory of tragedy.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study

This research investigates the portrayal of the tragic hero in two landmark Nigerian plays, *Song of a goat* by John Pepper Clark and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi. The study is concerned with how both playwrights adapt and localise the classical idea of the tragic hero to reflect the peculiar realities of the African environment. In both texts, the central characters—Zifa and Odewale—embody profound human flaws and suffer tragic consequences that stem from their individual limitations and the cultural systems within which they operate.

The purpose of this research is to critically examine how Clark and Rotimi construct their tragic heroes, how the concept of fate interacts with human agency in these works, and how each character's downfall illuminates broader themes of masculinity, honour, tradition, and existential dilemma in postcolonial African society. Through this inquiry, the study also aims to uncover the unique forms and structures of tragedy as it emerges in African drama, particularly in the hands of playwrights who skillfully marry Western literary forms with indigenous cultural patterns.

1.2 Scope of Study

This study is limited to the analysis of the tragic heroes in *Song of a Goat* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Although both plays contain a rich array of characters and address multiple thematic concerns such as tradition, family, religion, and social decay, this research focuses exclusively on the protagonists—Zifa and Odewale—as tragic figures. The study will examine the psychological, moral, and cultural forces that shape their respective journeys and will analyse how their personal flaws contribute to their downfall within the structural framework of each play.

The geographical scope is confined to the Nigerian dramatic landscape. *Song of a Goat* is set within an Ijaw fishing community in the Niger Delta, while *The Gods Are Not to Blame* is grounded in Yoruba cosmology. The study will not explore other works by the two playwrights nor engage with a broad survey of African tragedy as a genre. Comparative references to Western tragic models, particularly Aristotelian theory, will only be made to clarify the structural or conceptual distinctions that define African interpretations of tragedy.

1.3 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method grounded in literary and textual analysis. Primary data will be sourced from the two selected plays while secondary data will include critical essays, scholarly journal articles, theoretical works on tragedy, and cultural analyses related to African drama and narrative structure. The methodology involves close reading of the texts, with attention to character development, dialogue, plot construction, and symbolic devices.

The research also adopts a comparative framework in order to identify both similarities and differences in how Zifa and Odewale are positioned as tragic figures. Their character trajectories will be examined in light of their moral decisions, psychological conflicts, social contexts, and eventual downfall. Emphasis will be placed on the convergence of internal flaws and external forces, particularly as these align with or challenge the conventions of classical tragedy. The study will draw interpretive strength from the interplay between character and culture, with particular interest in how African cosmology and indigenous values influence the tragic structure.

1.3 Theoretical Background

This study adopts Sociological Literary Theory as its guiding interpretive framework. Sociological theory, when applied to literature, is concerned with how literary texts reflect,

respond to, and critique the social conditions, cultural structures, and institutional dynamics of the world in which they are produced. It posits that literature is not created in an aesthetic vacuum, but emerges from—and converses with—the ideological systems, economic orders, belief structures, and historical forces that shape human experience. Thus, a literary text becomes both a product of its time and a mirror of society.

The intellectual roots of sociological criticism stretch back to the philosophical writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, whose view of literature as a reflection of material realities, class ideologies, and economic structures shaped early conceptions of literary sociology. In their view, the superstructure—culture, religion, literature, law—was largely determined by the base, that is, the economic structure of a society. While this foundational idea was later nuanced and challenged, it provided the premise that literature is deeply implicated in the social world.

Georg Lukács, writing in the early 20th century, was one of the first to apply sociological principles to literary form. In *The Theory of the novel*, Lukács argued that the novel reflects the disintegration of community in modern capitalist society. His work inspired a generation of literary critics who saw in fiction and drama the coded expressions of collective social discontent, ideological tension, or moral compromise (Lukács 72).

Later, Lucien Goldmann expanded sociological criticism through his concept of genetic structuralism, which holds that a literary work expresses the worldview (or *vision du monde*) of a social class. For Goldmann, literature is meaningful only insofar as it relates to the collective consciousness of a group in history—whether a feudal class, a colonised people, or a marginalised community (Goldmann 87).

In Britain, Raymond Williams brought sociological theory into conversation with cultural studies, arguing that literature is best understood as part of the “structure of feeling” of a

historical period. In *Culture and Society*, he shows how drama, especially, expresses shifts in societal values and gives voice to the anxieties of a people navigating social transition (Williams 51). Williams' contributions are crucial for understanding theatre as a living social form, especially in colonised or transitional societies.

In the African literary landscape, Sociological Literary Theory gained prominence in the post-independence period as scholars began to interrogate how African literature reflected the turmoil of colonialism, the promise of nationalism, and the crises of identity, corruption, and disillusionment. In this context, the theory evolved to include oral traditions, communal aesthetics, and the interplay of myth, history, and performance.

Abiola Irele, for instance, argued that African literature must be seen as a creative negotiation with the forces of modernity, and as a critical re-imagining of society itself (Irele 105). He emphasized that African writers often portray the individual as a symbolic vessel for communal trauma or ethical reflection. Similarly, Biodun Jeyifo, in *The Truthful Lie*, posits that African drama is a radical site where society critiques itself, where the collapse of characters often signifies the deeper fracture of the social body (Jeyifo 99).

More recently, contemporary African literary scholars have continued to apply sociological approaches to African drama and fiction, especially in relation to gender roles, generational conflict, political breakdown, and postcolonial disillusionment. Critics such as Ato Quayson, Molaria Ogundipe, and Tanure Ojaide have all pointed to the deep sociological embeddedness of African literary texts, where social structures are not background details but central agents in the fate of characters.

This framework is particularly suited to the study of tragic heroes in *Song of a Goat* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. In *Song of a Goat*, Zifa's tragedy cannot be understood without

examining the cultural weight placed on fertility, masculinity, and honour in his Ijaw community. His impotence becomes a public catastrophe, and his inability to fulfil his social role triggers a psychological collapse that is both personal and communal. The chorus, a distinctly African dramatic tool, reinforces the sociological dimensions of his failure by constantly invoking the expectations of lineage and continuity.

In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Odewale's downfall is orchestrated by forces larger than himself—namely, a prophecy that has been institutionalised by the belief systems of his society. He is both a victim of fate and a tragic emblem of a society that trusts too deeply in its metaphysical frameworks. His kingship, his ignorance of his parentage, and his marriage all exist within a cultural and religious structure that renders his personal agency meaningless. His tragedy is thus a commentary on the dangers of blind cultural faith and the sociopolitical consequences of inherited destiny.

By employing sociological theory, this study will explore how both playwrights represent the tragic hero not as an isolated figure of moral failure, but as a product of intense societal pressure, cultural burden, and structural limitations. The sociological approach allows us to see Zifa and Odewale not merely as characters in fiction, but as symbols of fractured societies, their personal downfalls echoing national or cultural crises. Their tragedies, viewed through this lens, become collective lamentations, pointing to the contradictions and vulnerabilities embedded within African communal life.

Thus, Sociological Literary Theory offers the tools for a culturally responsible and historically aware reading of both plays. It not only attends to the content and structure of the texts, but also positions the characters within the living, breathing dynamics of African tradition, modernity, belief, and the pursuit of human dignity.

1.5 Literature Reviews and Justification

Over the years, *Song of a Goat* by J. P. Clark and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi have attracted a breadth of scholarly attention across Africa and beyond. However, the majority of these studies have concentrated either on their aesthetic qualities, mythic structures, or symbolic content, with comparatively little attention paid to the sociological dynamics that frame the tragic hero within the fabric of African communal life. This section surveys the most relevant scholarship on both texts, identifying strengths, evaluating limitations, and justifying the necessity of this study through the lens of Sociological Literary Theory.

Abiola Irele, in his broader discussion of tradition and modernity in African literature, touches on Clark's *Song of a Goat* as a bold experiment in fusing classical tragedy with African oral sensibilities. He identifies Zifa's fall as emblematic of the disruption of communal life and the disintegration of manhood. While Irele rightly acknowledges the thematic weight of tradition, his analysis largely foregrounds the lyrical and ritualistic form of the play, offering only a surface reading of the societal pressures that determine Zifa's impotence and shame (Irele 117). Similarly, Oyin Ogunba, writing on ritual in African drama, finds in the chorus of *Song of a Goat* a powerful symbol of communal morality. His interpretation enriches our understanding of the play's cultural grounding, yet he treats the community as a passive background rather than an active participant in Zifa's tragic demise (Ogunba 134).

Dan Izevbaye reads Zifa's condition as a metaphor for political dysfunction in post-independence Africa. Though he raises compelling parallels between personal impotence and national stagnation, his politically charged reading tends to flatten the emotional and social complexity of Zifa's domestic despair (Izevbaye 56). Ezekiel Mphahlele, in *The African Image*, dismisses Zifa's tragedy as "too internal" and "underdeveloped." This critique overlooks the deep

communal resonance that Clark embeds in silence, shame, and social alienation. Obi Maduakor's essay on Clark's themes and forms credits the compact structure of the play, but his focus remains formalistic, largely avoiding how fertility and lineage are politicised in Zifa's household and community (Maduakor 73).

Other critics such as Emenyonu Ernest and Tanure Ojaide offer valuable but limited insights. Emenyonu describes the play as a portrait of modern identity crisis, while Ojaide praises its psychological realism. However, both treat Zifa's struggle as a singular inner torment, rather than as a manifestation of broader communal and patriarchal expectations. Biodun Jeyifo, in *The Truthful Lie*, gestures towards Clark's tragic vision but confines his analysis to a general remark about moral fragmentation. Likewise, Gbilekaa Solomon critiques Clark for being too apolitical, failing to appreciate how personal fertility in *Song of a Goat* is, in fact, deeply politicised by the family unit and cultural protocols. Even Chidi Amuta, who is known for ideological readings of African texts, bypasses the sociological anatomy of Zifa's community, preferring instead to examine modernist alienation. Across this body of scholarship, one finds consistent admiration for Clark's formal artistry and symbolic subtlety, but only fleeting attention is paid to how societal definitions of masculinity, legacy, and sexual potency form the crucible of Zifa's tragedy.

In a similar vein, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* has received extensive critical treatment as a masterful adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. Ola Rotimi himself, in his preface to the play, frames his work as a cultural transposition of Greek myth into a Yoruba setting. While this provides essential authorial context, Rotimi's own reading remains primarily literary, not sociological. The play has often been read through the lens of myth, performance, and leadership allegory, yet its social institutions—kingship, prophecy, taboo, inheritance, kinship—remain largely under-examined.

Isidore Okpewho, in his work on myth in African literature, recognises the role of prophecy as a cultural construct, but he stops short of analysing how belief in prophecy becomes an instrument of communal governance and behavioural control (Okpewho 122). Ayo Akinwale views the play as a tragedy rooted in Yoruba cosmic order, wherein Odewale's fall is the inevitable result of divine justice. While spiritually compelling, such a reading marginalises the social institutions that reify prophecy and sustain its power over individuals. Obafemi Olu's reading of the play as a metaphor for post-independence failure opens up rich political interpretation but tends to reduce Odewale to a symbol of the failed African state, thereby overlooking his personal entrapment within cultural systems of law, secrecy, and taboo (Obafemi 98).

Molara Ogundipe, writing from a gendered perspective, notes how patriarchy functions within the narrative, particularly as Odewale tries to assert dominance within the court and family. Yet her focus leans more toward gender imbalance than the broader sociological dynamic of kingship and fatalism. Toyin Falola and Tejumola Olaniyan both approach the text through the lens of memory and performance. Their analyses help us understand how Rotimi stages cultural memory and colonial trauma, but they often treat the tragic hero as a metaphor rather than a subject caught in real, embodied social constraints. Even in Wole Soyinka's philosophical treatise on myth and tragedy, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* features peripherally, and when mentioned, the focus lies squarely on the metaphysical rather than the structural. Finally, Kwame Gyekye's philosophical analysis of African destiny provides valuable insight into the worldview that governs Odewale's choices, but he discusses belief as abstraction rather than as embedded in institutional practice.

Taken together, these critical contributions confirm that both plays are widely celebrated as examples of African tragic drama. Yet they also reveal a persistent critical tendency to frame Zifa and Odewale as either existential symbols, ritual figures, or political allegories. What remains relatively unexamined is how each man is shaped, constrained, and ultimately destroyed by the institutional and cultural systems within which he must operate—systems that define manhood, honour, fertility, kingship, and legitimacy in deeply prescriptive terms.

This study enters the conversation by situating both protagonists within the sociological context of African community life, asking not simply what flaw leads to their downfall, but what structures trap them, what expectations judge them, and what beliefs sanctify their destruction. Through the lens of Sociological Literary Theory, this study approaches both texts as dramas of social entrapment, where personal tragedy cannot be separated from the collective pressures of tradition, lineage, morality, and fate. Unlike existing studies that focus on symbolism or adaptation, this research will attend to the social mechanisms of tragedy, exploring how institutions—family, community, religious law—shape the tragic journey and render these men tragic not because they are flawed, but because they are human within a system that demands perfection.

1.6 Thesis Statement

This study contends that Zifa in *Song of a Goat* and Odewale in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* are tragic not solely because of fate or personal failing, but because they are shaped and destroyed by rigid social systems that define manhood, lineage, and destiny—revealing African tragedy as a communal indictment disguised as personal collapse.

CHAPTER TWO

ANALYSIS OF THE TRAGIC HERO IN *SONG OF A GOAT*

Zifa in *Song of a Goat* is not just a man in pain—he is a man emptied out, stripped of pride, speech, and standing. His fall is not sudden, not dramatic, but steady, humiliating, and public. His body is the first to fail. His strength—once tied to his net, his sea, and his wife—slowly disappears. The sea does not answer him anymore. His nets return empty. His house becomes quiet.

“The fault is in me, Orukore. I can do nothing. Not even the fish now

Know my hands as before.”

This is not a metaphor. This is a man watching himself decay in full awareness. He does not rage. He does not pray. He simply declares his failure like a man who has rehearsed the words alone in the dark. The sea, which once gave him life, now ignores him. He is becoming invisible to everything—even to nature.

His impotence is not private. In his society, manhood is tied to ability—to seed a woman, to plant a child. Without this, a man is no man. Zifa knows this. So does his wife. So does the community. The moment he cannot make a child, his status shifts from husband to problem. Even Orukore, the old seer-woman, feels the need to confront him with what is obvious but unbearable.

“You have gone dry, Zifa. You have no sap left. The goat

You tied has eaten the roots of the tree.”

She says it plainly. Zifa is not just weak—he is dry, like old wood, like land with no rain. The metaphor of the goat chewing the root means that his past sins or neglect have now destroyed

his strength from the ground up. And worse still, others can see it. It is not hidden. The chorus knows. The village knows. His wife, Ebiere, knows.

Zifa's fall deepens when his wife is driven to seek life elsewhere. She is not presented as wicked. She is simply reacting to the demands of the community. A woman must bear fruit. A man must give seed. When this bond breaks, she turns. Not out of lust, but out of pressure. And when Zifa finds out, he says only this:

“You have given your thigh to a brother, and laid waste my name.”

This sentence holds the weight of the whole play. The betrayal is not just sexual. It is cultural. It is generational. She has not just hurt him—she has undone his name. In their world, name is not just reputation. It is legacy. It is bloodline. And Ebiere has broken that chain with one act.

Zifa's tragedy is not just that he was betrayed. It is that he was expected to be betrayed. The community had already prepared for it. Even the chorus begins to speak of him as someone gone, forgotten, faded.

“His seed lies cold. His house is a tomb. His voice echoes in emptiness.”

Zifa is still alive, but his life has been taken from him by silence, by shame, and by the structure of the society he lives in. He becomes a shell. He moves less. He speaks less. His body weakens. His presence thins out.

And when Tonye—his own brother—becomes the new seed-bearer, Zifa is not only replaced but erased. He is not even given space to fight back. His role as man, as husband, as elder—all are handed to someone else. He is allowed to remain, but only as a shadow.

His fall is tragic because it is quiet. There is no great war, no downfall from kingship. Only slow erasure. His house becomes silent. His wife turns from him. His brother takes his place. The sea forgets his hands. The chorus stops singing for him.

“Zifa’s net has holes. His words fall through. His strength is spent, and no one listens.”

This is the full picture of a man who has been hollowed out by culture, by shame, and by time. Clark does not make him grand. He makes him honest. That is what makes Zifa a tragic hero—not because he was powerful, but because he was human, and in his world, that was not enough.

In *Song of a Goat*, fertility is not just a private matter. It is public. It is sacred. It is what gives a man his voice, his honour, and his name. Fertility, in Zifa’s community, is not a gift—it is an obligation. A man is not measured by his words, or his work, or his wealth, but by the children who carry his name forward. When that seed fails, the man is seen as having failed at life itself.

Zifa’s inability to father a child is not treated as an illness but as a shameful weakness. The entire community sees his condition not just as unfortunate, but as disgraceful. He is not merely pitied—he is judged. Even he begins to define himself by what he cannot give.

“I can do nothing. Not even the fish now
Know my hands as before.”

His voice is already resigned. His worth, in his own eyes, is gone. And this begins with his body—his failure to produce. He links his virility to his fishing, to his strength, to his identity. The failing of one is the failing of all.

The play makes it clear that fertility is not about love or affection. It is duty. It is legacy. It is survival. That is why the community does not stay silent. They speak. The chorus speaks. The old woman speaks. His wife feels it. And his brother takes action.

Orukorere, the seer, brings it all to light:

“The goat you tied has eaten the roots of the tree.

There is no leaf left, Zifa. No flower. No fruit.”

In this image, Zifa is the tree, and the fruit is his child. The line is direct and painful. There is no hiding in metaphor. The tree is dead. No one has patience for a fruitless man. Orukorere says it clearly—nothing grows from him now.

Fertility is also tied directly to lineage. In the world of the play, a man must leave something behind. Not land. Not wealth. But blood. A child. A line. That is what continues the name. That is what gives a man rest when he dies. Without a child, a man’s spirit has no home to return to. The chorus reminds the audience of this law:

“The house that has no cry of a child

Is already a tomb.”

This is the harsh truth. A home without a child is already dead. Even though Zifa is alive, his house is treated as a grave. This is what drives Ebiere to act. This is what pushes her into Tonye’s arms. It is not about desire. It is about lineage. She says it not in anger, but with tired honesty.

“I waited, Zifa. I waited for your root to break the soil.

But my womb cannot wait forever.”

There is no malice in her tone. Only frustration and despair. A woman in her world is not free to live barren. She must bear children. Not for herself, but for the name. For the home. For the community.

Zifa's brother, Tonye, understands this too. He does not seduce. He steps in. The line must not die. Someone must plant. The act is done in secret, but it is not hidden in shame. It is shameful only because Zifa remains alive to witness it.

“Your blood would not answer, Zifa. So I gave the house
A child in your place.”

Tonye says this not with pride, but with finality. It is done. The line will continue. The house will not be a tomb anymore. But Zifa's place has been erased. This entire conflict—this slow, tragic unravelling—rests on one thing: the inability to produce a child. Fertility is not one part of manhood in the play. It is all of it. Without it, Zifa is no longer useful. No longer respected. No longer necessary.

His final silence is not because of heartbreak. It is because he understands. He has been judged. And found lacking. And in his world, there is no mercy for a man who cannot carry the line forward.

“Even the sea listens for the voice of the unborn.
My net brings up nothing. My name brings up nothing.”

Zifa's tragedy is sealed. Not by hate. Not by violence. But by the quiet law of lineage. His manhood has been measured. And it has been found empty. Ebiere, is not just Zifa's wife. She is the woman through whom his name was meant to live on. Her womb is the waiting ground for his legacy. But that legacy never arrives. Ebiere becomes the silent battlefield of the tragedy—torn between her role as a loyal wife and her duty to the lineage that must not die.

From the beginning, we see that Ebiere has been patient. She waits. She hopes. But she is also watching the quiet in her home become louder with shame. The community expects her to carry a child, and the longer she waits, the more the silence eats at her. She does not speak in bitterness. She speaks in truth.

“I waited, Zifa. I kept my bed for you.

But even the moon has gone full many times.”

This is not a woman scorning her husband. This is a woman keeping count of the months. Every cycle without conception becomes another reminder that her body has been faithful, but unfulfilled. Her waiting turns into pressure. The womb, empty, becomes a source of tension, not only in her marriage, but in her standing as a woman.

The community says little directly to her, but the chorus speaks on behalf of tradition, and Ebiere knows what is expected. A home without a child is seen as cursed, and a woman without children is whispered about. This pressure is not voiced directly, but it hovers in every line of dialogue she speaks. She begins to act not out of desire, but out of duty.

Her decision to sleep with Tonye is not an act of lust. It is an act of submission to a greater law—the law of lineage. She does not rejoice in it. She does not flaunt it. She simply breaks under the pressure of waiting. And when Zifa finds out, she does not deny it. She owns it.

“I went to him, Zifa. I lay with him, but I thought of you.”

This is one of the most painful lines in the play. It holds contradiction. She is confessing the act while trying to hold on to the emotional bond she still feels with Zifa. She did not cheat in spirit—only in body. But in their world, the body is everything. The spirit cannot save her from what she has done.

And yet, what makes her role tragic is that her action is both a betrayal and a sacrifice. She breaks her husband to save his name. She disrespects him to preserve the lineage that should have come from him. It is a cruel paradox.

Zifa's response is sharp and unforgettable.

“You have given your thigh to a brother, and laid waste my name.”

In that line, all of Ebiere's effort to protect the house collapses. What she saw as duty, Zifa sees as destruction. Her body was meant to carry his child, not another man's—even if that man is his own brother. Her womb, once a hope, becomes the site of Zifa's shame.

But Ebiere is not destroyed. She speaks her pain. She tries to explain. She is not a villain in this play. She is a woman caught between loyalty to her husband and loyalty to a tradition that will not wait forever. Her voice remains firm, but it carries sorrow.

“I bore the silence until it burned.

I bore the empty nights.

I bore the chorus that sings behind closed doors.”

This is the most honest cry in the play. She names her suffering—not just the physical longing, but the social silence, the whispers, the judgment. She is as much a victim of tradition as Zifa is. They are both bound to a system where a woman must bear children and a man must plant them. When either fails, the house breaks.

Ebiere's tragedy is that she chooses survival over loyalty. She chooses the name over the man. And in doing so, she loses both. She is not punished directly. No one curses her. But she loses the only thing she was trying to protect—her marriage.

Her voice is not silenced by guilt. It is silenced by consequence. In the end, she stands in the house with the child in her womb, but the man she once loved now emptied, and the house itself no longer a home.

Ebiere does not die. But what she becomes is no longer wife, no longer lover, no longer innocent. She is the woman who broke the silence, and in doing so, broke her husband.

Tonye enters the play quietly, but his presence soon becomes the turning point in Zifa's tragedy. He is not a stranger. He is not an enemy. He is Zifa's own brother. And yet, he becomes the one who replaces him—in the house, in the bed, and in the line. His role is not marked by aggression but by silence. He does not take what is not his. It is given. And that is what makes his act both necessary and unforgivable.

Tonye does not come with words of power. He comes with youth, strength, and seed—everything Zifa has lost. The family needs a child. The line must continue. And when Zifa's body fails, the pressure falls on the next man in the bloodline. That man is Tonye.

But there is no open request. No ritual. No announcement. It happens in the shadows. And Zifa is left to discover the betrayal after it has already taken root.

“You went in while I was still alive.

My bed had not gone cold, and yet you lay in it.”

This is Zifa's cry. The pain is not just about the act. It is about timing. About honour. About brotherhood. The betrayal is made worse by the fact that it happened while Zifa was still in the house, still breathing, still hoping. It is not death that made room for Tonye. It is weakness. And in their world, weakness is as good as death. Tonye does not deny the act. He explains it, calmly. He speaks with the tone of a man who believes he has done what had to be done.

“The seed had to be planted.

The tree would die if the soil stayed dry.”

His words are rooted in necessity. There is no emotion. Only purpose. Tonye sees himself not as a thief, but as a saviour of the house. To him, he has not broken a code—he has fulfilled a duty. He believes the line was in danger, and he answered the call. But that call had a cost. Tonye’s act breaks the bond between brothers. In a culture where lineage is everything, where brothers are expected to protect each other’s names, Tonye becomes the one who removes Zifa’s name from the child to come. The blood is shared, but the honour is not. And Zifa sees this clearly.

“You are my brother, Tonye.

And now you are the father of my wife’s child.

What is left for me?”

This is the question that hangs over the rest of the play. What is left for a man who has been replaced by his own blood? Tonye’s tragedy is different from Zifa’s. He does not fall. But he does fracture the bloodline. He ensures it survives biologically, but not morally. The house gains a child, but loses a man. Even the chorus does not bless Tonye. They do not celebrate the act. They observe. They record. But they do not sing for him. There is no triumph. No applause. Only silence. And in that silence, Tonye stands alone. He is not a villain. But he is not innocent. He is the answer to a problem, and yet, by answering it, he creates another. His role shows that in this world, duty can be cruel, and family can be the site of betrayal. Not out of hate. But out of obedience to law.

The tragedy here is not in Tonye’s desire. It is in the structure that allows a brother to replace another in the name of lineage. In a culture that values the child above the man, Tonye becomes the solution, and Zifa becomes the sacrifice.

“The house has its heir.

But the house has lost its name.”

This is the crisis of brotherhood. A seed has been sown. A future has been secured. But at what cost? The house will live on. But the bond between brothers dies quietly in the space between silence and duty. The chorus in *Song of a Goat* is not just background sound. It is the voice of the people. It is tradition speaking. It is judgment with rhythm. It does not simply observe the tragedy—it participates in it. It does not call for blood, but it calls for order. And in Zifa’s world, order means lineage, fertility, and strength. Anything less is failure. Anything outside it is a stain. The chorus begins with murmurs. They observe Zifa’s quiet house. They see the silence stretch. They hear no child’s cry. And they begin to speak—not with hate, but with that ancient rhythm of communal pressure.

“The house is too quiet.

The bed makes no creak.

The woman walks with dry hips.”

These are not insults. They are social signals. Warnings. Alerts. The community is watching. The man is not producing. The woman is not bearing. And the house, which should echo with life, echoes with shame. The chorus does not confront Zifa directly. But their words surround him. He cannot escape them.

As the play unfolds, the chorus grows bolder. They no longer speak in observation—they begin to issue judgment. They hold Zifa responsible for his silence, for his inaction, for allowing his wife to dry up with him.

“A man whose net brings up no fish

Must not blame the tide.

Let him mend the holes.”

Here, the chorus moves from sympathy to instruction. They are telling Zifa: fix yourself. Fix your house. Do not blame the sea. Take action. But Zifa cannot. His silence deepens. His shame grows. And so does the chorus’s disapproval. When Ebiere turns to Tonye, the chorus does not act surprised. They almost seem to have expected it. To them, the house must live. The name must continue. And if Zifa cannot carry it, someone else must.

“Better a brother than a stranger.

Let the blood remain clean.”

This is perhaps the most brutal justification in the play. The chorus accepts Tonye’s act not as betrayal, but as preservation. They choose bloodline over brotherhood. They are not interested in Zifa’s feelings. They are interested in continuity. But the chorus is not heartless. In their closing tones, they begin to speak more like mourners. They see Zifa fading. They see his silence. And they begin to recognise that something has been lost—not just a man, but a part of the communal soul.

“He walks, but no longer with us.

His shadow runs ahead.

His name is now a stone.”

These lines mark the final phase of communal judgment—not correction, but exile. Zifa is still alive, but to the community, he is already gone. The man who could not carry his line forward is left behind by tradition. There is no legal trial. No public stoning. Only silence. Only absence.

The chorus in *Song of a Goat* is the quiet executioner. It does not raise a sword. It raises expectations. And when those expectations are not met, it turns away. That turning is more

powerful than any curse. Zifa dies not by hand, but by judgment. By the rhythm of voices that once spoke for him, and now speak over him. This is the final tragedy. A man who lives in a world where the people do not need to kill you—they only need to stop singing your name.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF THE TRAGIC HERO IN THE *GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME*

From the very beginning of *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Odewale's life is not his own. His path is already drawn by the lines of a prophecy that no one dares to ignore. He is born into royalty, but with a curse trailing behind him. Before he can speak, the oracle speaks for him. The elders hear it. The king and queen obey it. And the boy is marked—not as prince, but as patricide and incest-bearer.

“The child is cursed. He shall kill his father and marry his mother.”

This sentence is the seed of the entire tragedy. Odewale is not given a chance. His name is not yet formed, but his fate is already sealed. He becomes a threat to the palace, not because of who he is, but because of what he is told to become. The king and queen, terrified, send him away. The prophecy becomes law. As the play unfolds, Odewale grows in ignorance of his true past. But that ignorance does not protect him—it only guides him unknowingly into the jaws of destiny. He believes he has escaped. He believes he is free. But freedom in this world is a lie when the gods have spoken. When Odewale flees the man he thinks is his father to avoid the prophecy, he runs straight into it. He kills a man on the road—not knowing it is King Adetusa, his true father. He marries the queen of Kutuje—not knowing it is his birth mother. The prophecy does not chase him. It waits for him.

“I ran away from Ijekun-Yemoja to avoid killing my father,
and killing a man, I now hear, was my real father.”

This moment is Odewale's cry of realisation. There is no triumph in it. Only despair. The prophecy he ran from found him by way of fear. It was not ambition that destroyed him. It was ignorance met with fate. The irony is sharp and cruel. His attempt to avoid the gods' word led him into its fulfilment. Odewale is a hero, yes—but a hero made tragic by forces that are already set. The prophecy becomes a weight that follows him like a shadow. Even in the height of his

kingship, when he speaks like a ruler, when he commands men and settles disputes, there is an invisible thread pulling him toward collapse.

“All the while I sat on the stool, I sat on fire.”

He speaks these words not in poetry, but in regret. His rule was not a reign—it was a waiting. A slow burning. The fire was already there. The prophecy was not just a line spoken by a priest. It was a social belief that shaped every move made around him. Even the people believe in it. And in that belief, his fate is made communal. Odewale’s tragedy is that he lives inside a system where prophecy is not a suggestion. It is a verdict. It does not ask to be fulfilled. It forces its way into fulfilment. The prophecy does not kill Odewale. It builds the walls that lead him to kill himself—spiritually, emotionally, socially. He is a strong man. He is brave. He is just. But none of these qualities matter when the gods have spoken and the people believe it. The more he tries to be king, the more tightly the prophecy winds around him.

“They said I was a curse. I said I would not be.

But my hands are red, and my bed is shame.”

Here lies the burden. Odewale never chose this life. But he was born into it. And the gods did not give him a way out. The tragedy is not only that the prophecy came true. The deeper tragedy is that Odewale believed he could escape it. And in that belief, he lost everything—his father, his mother, his wife, his name, and his kingdom. NO dewale is not ruined by his pride. He is ruined by the weight of what was spoken before he could speak. The prophecy becomes the spine of his fate. Every choice he makes leads him back to it. Every act of freedom is a step deeper into its hold. And when the truth breaks open, there is no fight left. No defence. Only silence. Only collapse. Odewale’s tragedy does not begin with crime. It begins with not knowing who he is. His fall is not from arrogance but from absence—absence of truth, absence of origin,

absence of self. When he flees Ijekun-Yemoja, he believes he is escaping a fate tied to his supposed parents. But he does not know those are not his real parents. He is a man trying to outrun a prophecy with the wrong map.

The greatest weapon against fate would have been knowledge, but Odewale is never given that. And because of this, his identity is not built on truth—it is built on a lie he believes is protection. That lie becomes the foundation for the worst choices he will ever make.

“I did not know. How could I know? The old man
Said nothing. My mother said less.”

This is the centre of the tragedy. Not evil. Not pride. Just silence. His adoptive parents, trying to protect him, hide the truth. But that protection becomes poison. They do not lie to hurt him. They lie to spare him. But fate does not work with silence. Fate fills in the gaps with disaster. Odewale believes he is acting wisely. He avoids his parents to avoid the prophecy. But he is only avoiding the wrong people. He becomes king. He becomes powerful. He becomes a husband. But all of it is built on a name that was never his. When the messenger begins to reveal the truth, Odewale fights it. Not because he is wicked, but because his whole life will collapse if that truth stands.

“You say I was born here? In this town?
That I was not picked from the bush?”

He is not defending a crown. He is defending his entire understanding of himself. The name he carried. The bed he laid in. The people he ruled. If he was born in Kutuje, if he is truly the son of Adetusa and Ojuola, then everything he built was a lie. Not by choice, but by circumstance. His ignorance is not innocent—it is dangerous. It leads him to kill his father unknowingly. It leads

him to marry his mother unknowingly. And worst of all, it makes him speak with confidence when he should have been asking questions.

“Let the man who killed Adetusa be found,
And let him be punished without mercy!”

This is where ignorance becomes tragic. Odewale curses himself with his own mouth. He does not know he is the killer. But the gods know. The people will soon know. And when the truth arrives, there is no defence. His own oath becomes his execution. In a society where identity is everything—where lineage defines your place, your honour, and your safety—Odewale is a man who doesn't know his own origin, and so he is always in danger. Not from others, but from himself. He is not trying to defy destiny. He is trying to live rightly. He believes he is making the right choices. But he is choosing in the dark. And every step in that darkness takes him deeper into the prophecy he meant to avoid.

“I lived well. I ruled well. But I was a stranger to myself.”

This is Odewale's most painful truth. He did all the right things, but from the wrong place. He was a stranger to his name, to his blood, to his history. And because of that, every good act led to ruin. The tragedy of Odewale is not that he failed. It is that he never knew who he truly was—until it was too late.

In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, kingship is not a reward. It is a burden. For Odewale, the throne is not a place of rest, but the very ground on which his fate begins to move. He becomes king not through bloodline but through fate, and yet the same fate that lifts him up is the one that breaks him. The tragedy is not just that he wears the crown, but that he wears it without knowing what it costs. When Odewale becomes king of Kutuje, he steps into the very life that was

supposed to destroy him. He marries the queen. He gains a people. He speaks with authority. But the throne is already burning beneath him.

“I sat on that stool, but I sat on fire.

It warmed me, yes. But it burned deeper every day.”

He says this after the truth is revealed, but the metaphor was real from the start. The stool—the symbol of power, of rule, of order—is also the very tool of fate. The irony is painful. The higher he rose, the closer he got to his doom. What he saw as honour was a slow walk into disgrace. Odewale takes his role seriously. He judges wisely. He defends the weak. He wants peace. But even as he works to protect the people, he is the danger they do not see. The curse follows him into the palace. His fate is not private—it is a matter of the state.

“The land is sick, they said. A curse lies in the palace.”

At first, he thinks the curse is from outside. He does not suspect himself. He calls for truth. He demands that the traitor be found. He offers justice without knowing that justice will fall on him. In that moment, his duty to the throne clashes with his ignorance of himself. The role of the king, in this society, is not simply to rule. It is to maintain cosmic balance. If a crime is hidden in the palace, the land suffers. If the king is guilty, even unknowingly, the gods send disease, famine, or war. And so, Odewale’s personal sin becomes a national curse. His fate becomes everyone’s fate.

He declares with firm resolve:

“Let the one who brought this shame be cast out.

Let him walk blind into the bush.”

These words come back to him with brutal precision. Once the truth breaks, he becomes the man he cursed. His kingship becomes the cross he must carry. He does not resist the judgment. He understands. He speaks it himself.

“Take me out. The gods have spoken. The stool must be clean.”

This is where Odewale becomes fully tragic. Not in the moment of discovery, but in the moment of acceptance. He does not fight for the throne. He does not plead with the people. He removes himself. Because in his society, the king must not be polluted, and he now sees himself as pollution. His final act is not to defend himself, but to restore order. He blinds himself, not out of madness, but out of recognition. The eyes that saw too late now see too clearly. The king removes himself so that the land can heal.

“The stool is empty. May it stay pure.

But my name is ruined. Let me walk alone.”

In this moment, kingship, fate, and duty meet. Odewale was never a wicked man. He was a man born into a crooked road. His greatest crime was trying to walk straight on a path that had already been cursed. The climax of Odewale’s tragedy is not political—it is personal. The revelation that he has married his mother and killed his father is not just a twist in the plot. It is the moment where all the pain, silence, prophecy, and identity collapse at once. The incest is not just shocking because of what it is. It is tragic because it was unknown, unintended, and yet inescapable. When the truth finally reaches Odewale, it does not come through magic or dream. It comes through human testimony. The old man speaks. The palace guard confirms. The pieces fall together. And what was once fear becomes fact.

“Adetusa was my father.

Ojuola is my wife.

My wife is my mother.”

These three lines are not spoken as poetry. They are spoken as confession. Odewale is not seeking sympathy. He is stating the facts that destroy him. The man he killed was not just a stranger—it was his father. The woman he loved was not just his queen—it was his mother. His sons are also his brothers. His throne is a graveyard. The betrayal here is layered. It is not just Odewale who is betrayed. The people are betrayed. The palace is betrayed. The ancestors are shamed. And Ojuola, his mother-wife, suffers the worst emotional break. Her womb carried him, raised him, and then held him again as a husband. When she hears the truth, she cannot speak it. She responds not with words, but with death.

“She ran into the chamber.

The queen has hanged herself.”

Ojuola’s death is not just a response to shame—it is the ultimate escape from an unbearable truth. She loved her son. Then she loved her husband. And they were the same man. The horror is not in the act, but in the realisation that she was living a lie written by fate. Odewale’s collapse is total. His body does not fall. His status does. His name does. His vision—both literal and symbolic—does. He takes a knife and blinds himself. Not because he wants pity. But because the truth is too much to look at.

“Let my eyes not see again.

They have seen what should not be seen.”

This is not madness. This is clarity. The truth is now permanent. And in a society where shame is worse than death, he chooses blindness over vision. Collapse over confrontation. The chorus does not shout. The people do not riot. There is only quiet. Because in this moment, they see that the gods have won. The prophecy, spoken years ago, has found its full shape. No one can

deny it now. The incest is not a private scandal. It is a communal stain. The man they crowned was the curse. The woman they loved was both queen and mother. The house they lived in was a nest of fate. And now, all of it falls. Odewale is not cast out by force. He walks out alone. He chooses exile. Because he knows that to remain is to poison the land. And his voice, broken but honest, says it all.

“I go where no one knows my name.

Let my sons not call me father.”

He loses everything. His crown. His family. His eyes. His name. Not because he is evil, but because he was born into a prophecy and lived without the truth. That is the real collapse—not from power to weakness, but from certainty to unbearable knowledge.

Odewale is not destroyed by emotion. He is destroyed by the cultural logic of a world built on belief in fate, respect for taboos, and unquestioned obedience to the gods. His tragedy is not personal misfortune—it is what happens when a man lives in a world where everything is already decided, and nothing is to be questioned. From the beginning, the society in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* believes in prophecy. Not as an idea, but as a fact. The oracle’s word is treated as law. The people act on it. The king and queen send their child away because of it. The priest interprets events through it. And when disaster strikes the land, the people return to it for explanation.

“The land is cursed. Blood must be found.

A wrong has been done in the house of the king.”

This is how the play shows us that truth is not decided by evidence, but by tradition. The gods do not need to speak twice. Once is enough. And if you try to escape it, you only prove its

power. Odewale thinks he can walk free. But the logic of his culture is that what is foretold will come to pass.

In this world, taboos are boundaries, not suggestions. Incest is not just immoral—it is spiritually defiling. Patricide is not only illegal—it is a cosmic offence. The land itself becomes ill when these acts are committed, even if no one knows the culprit. Odewale violates both, even without intent. And once the truth is revealed, there is no room for forgiveness. The logic of the culture is fixed. He must go. The gods must be appeased. The stool must be clean.

“You are our king, but you are the cause.

The river does not flow. The wombs stay dry.”

These words are not accusations. They are verdicts. Odewale is no longer a man. He is a problem. And the logic of his world says: remove the problem, restore the order. There is no debate. No reconsideration. Even Odewale accepts this. He knows that the culture will not bend. That is why he blinds himself. That is why he walks into exile. He does not resist, not because he is weak, but because he understands. The system is larger than him.

“Let the gods see I have paid.

Let the people breathe again.”

This is not a man seeking pity. This is a man fulfilling a sentence written before he could speak. In this world, destruction comes not only from guilt, but from alignment with a prophecy. And once it is fulfilled, the hero must fall. That is the cultural logic. The society does not weep for him. They accept the outcome. The chorus does not beg for mercy. They close the story with a quiet truth.

“The gods have spoken. The king has fallen.

The land will heal.”

Odewale is tragic because he believed he was free. But in the end, his life belonged not to choice, but to a structure—a system of belief, of taboo, of silence, of divine judgment. The man collapses, but the culture stands tall. And that is where the tragedy lies deepest.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARISON OF THE TRAGIC HEROES

Tragedy in African drama shows how individual failure is tied to family and community. Both J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* present heroes who are respected at first but fall under the weight of forces greater than themselves. This chapter compares the two tragic heroes, Zifa and Odewale. It points out the ways their stories are similar and the ways they are different. The chapter also shows how their lives and deaths reveal African ideas about family, manhood, and destiny.

The two plays tell different stories, but the heroes share the same tragic shape. Both men begin in honour and end in ruin. Both are husbands, expected to protect their homes and preserve their family line. Yet in both cases, forces beyond their strength decide their fate.

In Clark's *Song of a Goat*, Zifa is a fisherman who loses his worth in the eyes of his people because he cannot have children. His wife Ebiere turns to his brother Tonye, and Zifa's silence deepens into despair. His fall begins when his manhood is replaced within his own house. Zifa laments, "You went in while I was still alive. My bed had not gone cold, and yet you lay in it" (Clark 32).

These words show his pain. The betrayal is not just the act but the timing. He is alive, but already treated as dead. The tragedy grows not from weakness but from shame enforced by family and community. In Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Odewale is a king who seems powerful and just, but his life is marked from birth by prophecy. He tries to escape it, but in fleeing, he fulfils it.

He cries, "I ran away from Ijekun-Yemoja to avoid killing my father, and killing a man, I now hear, was my real father" (Rotimi 45).

Like Zifa, Odewale does not choose his fall. His tragedy comes from forces outside his control. He realises the truth only when it is too late.

Finally, both plays show how personal tragedy spreads into the community. In Clark's play, the chorus mourns Zifa's silence, turning his fall into a communal judgment. In Rotimi's play, the entire land becomes sick, demanding the cleansing of the palace. The people declare, "The land is cursed. Blood must be found. A wrong has been done in the house of the king" (Rotimi 51).

Both plays prove that in African tragedy, no man suffers alone. The fall of the hero becomes the fall of the house, the land, and the community. Although the two plays share many similarities, the key difference lies in how fate and human choice shape the downfall of each hero. Zifa's tragedy in *Song of a Goat* comes mainly from human weakness and social pressure, while Odewale's fall in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* comes from the power of destiny. Zifa is not cursed by the gods. His downfall is tied to his inability to father children, which in his society questions his manhood. His silence and pride stop him from seeking solutions or forgiving his wife. In this way, Zifa has some measure of choice. He could have spoken, he could have fought, but he remains withdrawn. His suffering grows from within the home rather than from the heavens. Zifa tells Tonye, "You went in while I was still alive. My bed had not gone cold, and yet you lay in it" (Clark 32). His pain comes from betrayal and from a culture that values fertility above all. His fall is human and social.

By contrast, Odewale's downfall is driven by prophecy. From birth, the oracle declares his fate. His parents try to kill him to stop it, but he survives. He himself flees to avoid it, but in fleeing, he runs straight into it. Unlike Zifa, his choices cannot save him. Odewale cries out, "I ran away from Ijekun-Yemoja to avoid killing my father, and killing a man, I now hear, was my

real father” (Rotimi 45). His effort to escape only proves the strength of fate. His tragedy is that no matter his courage, wisdom, or good heart, he cannot outwit what was already spoken.

The difference is clear. Zifa’s tragedy grows out of his silence, his wounded pride, and the social shame of childlessness. His fall is caused by human weakness and cultural expectations. Odewale’s tragedy, however, is not a result of weakness or error, but of prophecy. His fate is fixed before he even understands it. This contrast shows how Clark and Rotimi treat the idea of tragedy. Clark points to social forces and human failure, while Rotimi insists on the unstoppable weight of destiny. Together, they reveal two faces of African tragedy: one built from culture and choice, the other built from fate and prophecy.

Tragedy in both plays is never private. The downfall of the hero affects not only his family but also the wider community. This shows the African view that the individual is tied to the community and that personal failure shakes the whole society.

In *Clark’s Song of a Goat*, Zifa’s inability to father children is not just a private matter. It becomes a family shame, and the chorus serves as the voice of the community. They remind the audience that the man’s weakness has consequences beyond his own house. The chorus declares, “There is no man in the house, and the woman cries alone” (Clark 28). This statement shows how society sees Zifa’s silence and weakness as a failure of his entire family line. His tragedy becomes communal because the family name and continuity of bloodline are destroyed.

In Rotimi’s *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Odewale’s tragedy extends even further. His personal sin of patricide and incest is believed to poison the land itself. The people link the fertility of the soil and the health of the community to the purity of their ruler. The people cry out, “The land is cursed. Blood must be found. A wrong has been done in the house of the king” (Rotimi 51). Here the hero’s private error becomes a national crisis. Crops fail, wombs dry up,

and the society cannot rest until the truth is revealed and order restored. This difference is important. In Clark's play, tragedy is contained within the family but judged by society. In Rotimi's play, tragedy spreads into the land and the entire people suffer. Yet both plays agree that the hero cannot fall alone. The fall of the hero is the fall of the group.

These plays show how African tragedy functions not only to tell the story of one man but also to reflect the values and fears of the community. The suffering of Zifa and Odewale teaches that personal failure carries collective consequences, and that society itself demands resolution when tragedy strikes. Both plays show that manhood in African society is judged by fertility, strength, and the ability to protect the home. Without children or authority, the man is seen as incomplete, and this belief becomes central to the fall of both Zifa and Odewale.

In Clark's *Song of a Goat*, Zifa's weakness lies in his inability to father a child. His manhood is measured not by his work as a fisherman but by the continuation of his bloodline. Ebiere's frustration with his weakness reflects this cultural expectation. Ebiere cries, "If a man cannot plant his seed, should a woman's womb grow cobwebs?" (Clark 21). This line shows how manhood is linked to fertility. Zifa's silence and failure to meet this standard strip him of authority in his own house, leaving room for Tonye to take his place. His downfall is tied directly to the cultural link between children and masculine worth.

In Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Odewale's strength and fertility at first confirm his manhood. He becomes king, he fathers children, and he rules with confidence. Yet the very children who prove his manhood also prove the prophecy true. When the truth is revealed, his authority collapses instantly. Odewale laments, "My children are the children of my loins, and yet they are the children of my mother" (Rotimi 63). This paradox destroys both his manhood and his

authority. His fertility, which should give him honour, instead condemns him as incestuous and cursed.

The two plays, though different, point to the same lesson: manhood in African society is not only personal but also social. Zifa's childlessness removes his authority, while Odewale's cursed fertility destroys his kingship. In both cases, children and power are inseparable from the definition of what it means to be a man. Furthermore, in both plays, the community does not remain silent. The fall of the hero is watched, judged, and recorded by society. The voice of the people becomes part of the tragedy, reminding us that the hero is never alone in his suffering.

In Clark's *Song of a Goat*, the chorus acts as the conscience of society. They see what Zifa refuses to speak, and they give voice to the shame of his household. Zifa himself remains quiet, unable to defend his honour, but the chorus fills the silence with communal truth. The chorus chants, "The fisherman has no fish, the house is empty, and the sea laughs at his net" (Clark 34). Here the community mocks Zifa's weakness. His silence leaves space for society to judge him openly, and his failure becomes a public story.

In Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the people also act as judges. They see Odewale as a ruler whose sin has brought disaster upon the land. Even though he is king, he cannot silence their demand for cleansing. His authority collapses before the collective voice of the people. The citizens cry, "The land is cursed. Until the wrong is named, we shall know no rest" (Rotimi 50). This shows that the society itself calls for truth and punishment. Odewale cannot hide behind power or silence because the voice of the people insists on revelation. Together these plays reveal that silence is fatal to the tragic hero. Zifa's refusal to speak leads to betrayal, and Odewale's

ignorance keeps him blind until the truth bursts forth. In both cases, the community becomes the final judge, making tragedy not only a private fall but a collective memory.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY

Chapter One serves as the backbone of the study because it sets out clearly the reason for choosing the subject, the boundaries of the work, the method used, the theory that guides the reading, the voices of other scholars, and the central claim of the project.

Chapter Two provides a full analysis of J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* and treats Zifa as the tragic hero. The chapter shows how Zifa's downfall is slow, painful, and caused not by the gods but by human weakness and cultural pressure. The study of this play is divided into different aspects so that every part of Zifa's fall is seen clearly. The first thing discussed is **Zifa's fall**. The chapter explains that Zifa begins as an ordinary fisherman, a man who is expected to care for his home and continue his family line. His tragedy begins with his inability to have children. In his society, a man without a child is considered incomplete. Zifa's silence in the face of this problem only worsens his shame. His words to Tonye reveal his pain: "You went in while I was still alive. My bed had not gone cold, and yet you lay in it." These lines show that Zifa feels displaced, as though his existence has already been erased while he still breathes.

The next is **fertility, lineage, and masculine worth**. The chapter highlights how Clark presents a culture that values men only when they can father children. Ebiere, Zifa's wife, complains bitterly, saying, "If a man cannot plant his seed, should a woman's womb grow cobwebs?" Her words show how society places a heavy burden on women too, because a barren house is seen as a curse on both husband and wife. Fertility becomes the measure of manhood, and Zifa's failure in this area makes him a broken man in the eyes of his people.

The third is **the role of Ebiere**. The chapter explains that Ebiere is torn between loyalty to her husband and the pressure to bear children. She is not simply a disloyal wife. Rather, she is a woman caught between love and duty to family continuity. Her affair with Tonye, Zifa's brother, is not presented as pure betrayal but as a desperate act to meet the demands of culture. Still, this act shatters her bond with Zifa and becomes a turning point in the tragedy.

The fourth is **Tonye and the crisis of brotherhood**. Tonye becomes the replacement of Zifa, not out of open malice but because of family and cultural logic. His act of lying with Ebiere fills the gap left by Zifa's impotence, but it also destroys the natural order of kinship. Brotherhood becomes rivalry. The chapter points out that tragedy arises when the bonds of family are twisted by social needs that cannot be ignored.

The last thing discussed is **the chorus and communal judgment**. The chapter shows that the chorus is the mouthpiece of society. They interpret Zifa's silence, they mock his weakness, and they push the play toward judgment. The chorus chants lines such as, "The fisherman has no fish, the house is empty, and the sea laughs at his net." In these words the society condemns Zifa. His personal weakness becomes a communal story. His tragedy is therefore not private; it is collective. The community itself declares his worthlessness and makes his silence the proof of his ruin. In the end, Chapter Two concludes that Zifa is a tragic hero because his downfall is caused by forces larger than himself. His silence, his inability to father children, his wife's betrayal, his brother's intrusion, and the society's harsh judgment all work together to break him. Zifa does not fight fate like a Greek hero; he sinks under the pressure of shame and social scorn. His tragedy is therefore an African tragedy: not a battle with distant gods, but a struggle with family, community, and the crushing demands of culture.

Chapter Three turns to Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and analyses Odewale as the tragic hero. The chapter shows that unlike Zifa, Odewale begins in greatness. He is strong, respected, fertile, and chosen to be king. Yet from birth his life is trapped in prophecy, and this prophecy becomes the tool that destroys him. The study examines different stages of his fall so that the tragedy is fully understood.

The first stage is **the burden of prophecy**. From the very start of his life, the oracle announces that Odewale is fated to kill his father and marry his mother. This pronouncement shapes everything that follows. His parents try to defy the prophecy by abandoning him as a child, but their actions fail. Instead of removing the curse, their choice sets the prophecy into motion. The chapter explains that in this play, prophecy is not just prediction. It is destiny. The society believes it as truth, and so every attempt to avoid it leads to fulfilment.

The second stage is **ignorance and mistaken identity**. Odewale grows up far from his true parents and never learns his origin. He thinks he can shape his own life by leaving home when he hears rumours about killing his father and sleeping with his mother. His decision to run away seems wise, but it is actually what leads him into the arms of fate. The chapter shows how ignorance and secrecy combine to trap him. His lack of knowledge becomes the very soil of tragedy.

The third stage is **kingship, duty, and the weight of leadership**. Odewale becomes king through courage and is admired for his sense of justice. He fights off threats, fathers children, and earns the respect of his people. Yet in this culture, kingship is more than power. It is a sacred role. If the king is guilty, the whole land suffers. The chapter shows how Odewale's private fate spills over into public disaster. His sin, hidden at first, soon spreads as sickness and infertility across the kingdom.

The fourth stage is **the revelation of incest and patricide**. This is the turning point of the play. Odewale learns that the man he killed in the heat of anger was his true father and that the woman he married, with whom he has children, is his mother. His children are at once his sons and his brothers. This shocking truth makes him a cursed man in the eyes of society. He himself cries out in horror when the knowledge falls upon him.

The fifth stage is **self-punishment and downfall**. Odewale does not resist the truth once it is revealed. He accepts it, curses himself, and gives up his throne. The chapter explains that his fall is complete because he loses not only his crown but also his honour, his family, and his future. His children are now marked with shame, and the land must be cleansed of his presence. In this way, his tragedy is total. The final point of the chapter is **the role of cultural logic**. The play insists that destiny cannot be fought. Human choice exists, but it is locked inside a prophecy that cannot be broken. Odewale tries to run, but running is itself the fulfilment of the oracle. His tragedy is that his courage, strength, and leadership mean nothing in the face of destiny. The society does not question the prophecy; it simply accepts it as law. Thus, Odewale's fall is inevitable, and his greatness only makes his ruin more painful.

Chapter Three therefore concludes that Odewale is a tragic hero whose life proves the power of fate. Unlike Zifa, who is undone by social shame and silence, Odewale is destroyed by prophecy and the cultural faith in divine order. His fall teaches that no matter how powerful a man is, he cannot escape what the gods have already declared.

Chapter Four brings the two plays together in a comparative analysis of their tragic heroes, Zifa in *Song of a Goat*, and Odewale in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. The chapter explores the ways in which the plays are similar in their tragic structures, and the ways in which they differ in their handling of fate, choice, manhood, and community. This chapter shows that both works

adapt the form of tragedy to African cultural and social contexts, but each highlights different forces that destroy the hero. The first point of the chapter is similarities in the tragic storylines. Both plays begin with men who are respected by their families and communities. Zifa is known as a fisherman and head of his household; Odewale is celebrated as a warrior and chosen king. Both characters, however, end in ruin. Their tragedies are not hidden within the home but spread outward into the community. In *Song of a Goat*, the chorus comments on Zifa's weakness, making his shame public. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the people link Odewale's guilt to the sickness of the entire land. In both cases, the tragedy of the hero becomes the tragedy of the community.

The second point is differences in fate and human choice. Zifa's tragedy comes from social and human forces. He is unable to father children, and his silence allows betrayal to take root in his house. His downfall is tied to human weakness and cultural expectations of fertility and masculinity. In contrast, Odewale's downfall is tied to prophecy. From birth, he is destined to kill his father and marry his mother. No choice he makes can escape that fate. While Zifa's tragedy grows from shame and silence, Odewale's tragedy grows from the unbreakable hold of destiny.

The third point is the social function of tragedy in both plays. Both Clark and Rotimi use their plays to reflect the fears and values of their societies. Clark shows how communities put pressure on families to produce children and how silence can destroy relationships. Rotimi shows how societies that accept prophecy as unquestionable truth can trap individuals in destiny they cannot resist. Both plays warn that tragedy is not only the story of one man but a lesson for all who live in the society.

The fourth point is manhood, children, and authority. In both plays, manhood is tied to fertility and power. Zifa's failure to father a child makes him powerless in his home. Ebiere's frustration shows how his worth is measured by his ability to continue the family line. Odewale, on the other hand, is fertile and powerful, but the very children who prove his manhood also expose his sin. His authority collapses when the truth of his incest is revealed. Both plays show that manhood in African culture is fragile because it depends so heavily on family and community approval.

The final point is communal judgment and the silence of the hero. Neither hero falls alone. Zifa is judged by the chorus, who turn his silence into a public sentence. Odewale is judged by his people, who demand truth and cleansing of the land. Silence and ignorance only make the tragedies worse. The plays agree that the community always has the final word, and that a hero's fall becomes part of collective memory.

Chapter Four therefore concludes that Clark and Rotimi both create tragic heroes who show the power of social and cultural forces in shaping human destiny. Zifa is broken by social shame and silence; Odewale is crushed by prophecy and fate. Yet both plays show that tragedy in Africa is never private. The hero's fall shakes the family, the community, and even the land itself.

Conclusion

This study has shown that tragedy in African drama is shaped by forces larger than the individual. Both J. P. Clark in *Song of a Goat* and Ola Rotimi in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* present heroes who at first seem capable and respected but whose lives are torn apart by conditions they cannot master. These plays prove that the tragic hero in African drama is not a lone figure who battles personal flaws, as in classical tragedy, but a man whose downfall is tied to the rules, beliefs, and expectations of his society.

Zifa's fall demonstrates the weight of social shame. His tragedy grows out of silence, sterility, and betrayal within his own household. He becomes a man erased not by the gods but by the unforgiving judgment of his family and community. His suffering reflects the cultural idea that manhood is inseparable from fertility and that silence in the face of crisis can destroy both self and lineage.

Odewale's fall, by contrast, shows the inescapable grip of fate. His story proves that strength, wisdom, and courage mean nothing when prophecy has spoken. From birth, his path is already set. His tragedy is not in weakness but in the cruel irony of destiny: in fleeing to avoid the oracle, he runs directly into its fulfilment. His downfall teaches that societies which place absolute faith in prophecy leave no space for human freedom.

Together, the two plays show the double face of African tragedy. On one hand, it exposes how social values such as fertility, lineage, and manhood can crush the individual. On the other, it demonstrates how belief in divine order and prophecy can trap even the strongest of leaders. In both cases, the hero's suffering spreads outward to the family, the community, and the land, reminding us that in the African worldview, no man falls alone.

The conclusion is therefore clear: Zifa and Odewale are tragic heroes not because of single personal errors but because they live in societies whose rules, expectations, and beliefs create tragedy. Clark and Rotimi succeed in adapting the tragic form into African drama by rooting it in cultural realities. Their plays remain powerful reminders that the fate of the individual is bound to the fate of the community, and that tragedy serves as both warning and mirror for the society that creates it.

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