

RE-WRITING AS AESTHETIC EXPERIMENT:  
OLA ROTIMI'S POSTMODERN HINTS IN *THE GODS ARE NOT TO BLAME*

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**Abstract**

Postmodernism is a cultural movement or plurality of movements based on a crisis of legitimization where the authoritative nature of metanarratives that the modern movement imposed is being questioned. Thus, postmodernists reject the idea that there is a separation between high art and popular forms of art and therefore blends both cultures; using slang, advertising or other aspects of popular culture to create different combinations of artistic works and, will not hesitate to critique these very same narratives if they, in turn, claim to be universal, absolute, definitive or objective. The postmodern experience is widely held to stem from a profound sense of ontological uncertainty which results in the loss of fixed points of reference by showing that neither the world nor the self any longer possesses unity, coherence and meaning: they are radically decentered and the decentering of language, its medium of expression itself, according to theorists has produced a great deal of playful, self-reflexive and self paroding fiction. Anyway, read in those terms, *The Gods are not to Blame* ('*The Gods*' will be used instead in the text) fits perfectly some theories of the postmodern play or fiction. The Nigerian playwright Ola Rotimi's artistic feat lies in his ability to fulfill the twofold aims of a post-modernist fiction, that of making first his work become a literary phenomenon and secondly act as answer to the question of evolving style that properly presents his subject matter.

In this paper, I will examine Ola Rotimi's use of innovative artistic thrust to reflect the sociopolitical and economic realities of contemporary Nigeria i.e., to develop new forms of language and structure of consciousness which offer a telling critique of authority, power as well as the complex sociopolitical contradictions of the postcolonial society. It will also offer an aesthetic appreciation of the play and as well assess it critically to point out the efficiency of the postmodernist approach to his play.

**Keywords:** authoritative, postmodernism, metanarratives, aesthetics, cultural movement, plurality, innovative,

## Introduction

Postmodernism as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century critical theory has become so prevalent in every facet of human endeavour that it is often misconstrued in theory and practice. So many critics and scholars hardly agree on an exhaustive definition of the concept; but only try to conceptualize it for the purpose of their work because it is not only elusive but is also difficult to classify. This is so because postmodernism has undoubtedly been the most widely touted term used in cultural theory today as it has tremendously influenced modernist thought in all its implications. This paper tries to survey “postmodernism” not only as a critical theory but also as an experiential tenet that has influenced modern day thought, particularly African literary theoretical framework. My concern in this paper is to unpack postmodernism as a literary and critical theory in an attempt to examine Ola Rotimi’s play *The Gods* as a postmodernist text in the playwright’s attempt to challenge the extent of the morbidity of societal ills with an innovative style that matches the predicament of his post-independence country. Sophocles’ drama text, *Oedipus Rex*, from which he has drawn, is a modernist text which guides and controls reader’s response to it; his, *The Gods* as a postmodernist one, is an open work in which the reader must, as he had done, only supply his own connections, work out alternative meanings, and provide his own interpretation (unguided) because he has used from the periscope of several theoretical frameworks which are part and parcel of postmodernist hints, thus reflecting eclecticism.

To start, I may say that modernism and postmodernism are two terms used frequently; but options are selected via user interface and therefore needs, in this context, some clarifications. Postmodernism implies a supposed break with “modernism”, just as modernism broke with tradition. Whilst modernism was “a manifesto of human self-confidence and self-congratulation; postmodernism is a confession of modesty, if not despair” (Guinness 1994:32).

Theorists or thinkers like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, Jean Baudrillard, Jean François Lyotard, and Edward Said etc., challenged the Enlightenment Programme formulated since the advent of modernity which established a tradition of rational thinking as well as organisation of society into grand norms and ideologies. These modernist norms, also regarded as metanarratives, were widely accepted and enforced by society so as to ensure values of morality, justice, discipline, order, and hygiene, to mention just a few. But these new breed of thinkers unleashed challenging ideas on this collective or totalitarian manner of thinking, believing that “grand norms”, as advocated by modernism, were merely avenues of establishing power control or privilege over opinions and identity. Consequently, the “grand narrative” of human progress of modernity has been transformed into the numerous “small stories” of peoples and cultures. The sense of universal knowledge and objectivity that the present generation grew up with is under heavy critique while people of the older generation, who grew up under the last decades of modernity, are in many ways left with a feeling of confusion and uncertainty.

The concept of grand narrative was jettisoned in favour of small stories. John Orr (1990:621) holds the view that postmodernism signifies not only the extreme practice of modernism, it involves diverse attempts to break away from the modernist form, which had, inevitably become in their turn conventional. Coming from different theoretical and personal inspirations, theorists like Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker attempt in their *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* (2005) to give the substance of the leading contentions of postmodernism. For them,

First... the ‘grand narratives’ of social and intellectual progress initiated by the Enlightenment are discredited; and second, that any political grounding of these ideas in ‘history’ or ‘reality’ is no longer possible, since both have been textualised in the world of images and simulations which characterize the contemporary age of mass consumption and advanced technologies (2005:197)

It is against the backdrop of the ongoing discussion that this paper proffers that any discussion of metafiction must pay attention to what has become known internationally as the postmodernism debate. This is essentially an argument over the political status of what Jean-François Lyotard (1984) calls postmodernism’s “incredulity towards metanarratives”. To establish his postmodernist profile, Ola Rotimi defies and subverts the conventional traditional or modern play to show that any African writer or theorist whose critical impetus and framework are continuously defined by Western critical schemas will be contemporary irrelevant. In the same token, the playwright argues that such writer’s or theoretician’s aesthetics may dwindle to a narrow artistic canvass and may therefore need quite refreshment to break from the booring stereotypes of defensive ones and gear towards a more radical offensive sensibility in treating the attitudes of African political leaders; who, aside from corruption, nepotism, ineptitude and the neglect to provide basic amenities to the paupering masses who have suffered to vote them into power. So the evaluation of the African politician should be done with caution and sensitivity. This makes it clear that the playwright’s pronouncement forces us to relate current critical debates or insights to the interrelationships, interface or the various permutations between postmodernism and postcolonialism. In the African context, postmodernism is a broad category of ideas which refer to a wide range of literary discourses and practices which have theoretically disrupted rationality, unity, and exclusivity; and is subsequently linked to the postcolonial writer’s aspiration to dismantle the realistic trend and its optimistic view of the development of emerging nations after independence. This brings out the aim of the paper whose thrust is to focus on an African drama by exploring some of the new literary techniques employed by the playwright to put his peculiar message across in his attempt to relate his own ideas to the changing perspectives on African society.

### **I. The Concept of Postmodernism: Incredulity Toward Metanarratives**

In the *Afterword* of the anniversary edition of his book, *Literary Theory. An Introduction*, the critic Terry Eagleton (2008 :201-202), opines that the typical postmodernist work of art is arbitrary, eclectic, hybrid, decentered, fluid, discontinuous, pastiche-like. He goes on to develop postmodernity as a theory whose true tenets spurns metaphysical profundity for a kind of contrived depthlessness, plyfulness and lack of effect and considers it as an art of pleasures, surfaces and passing intensities and describes it as suspecting all assured truths and certainties and considers its form as ironic and its epistemology relativist and sceptical. Terry Eagleton presents postmodernist art as ‘rejecting all attempts to reflect a stable reality beyond itself and exists self-consciously at the level of form or language’. ‘Knowing its own fictions to be groundless and gratuitous’, he claims, ‘it can attain a kind of negative authenticity only by flaunting its ironic awareness of this fact, pointing wryly its own status a constructed artifice’. He contends that nervous of all isolated identity, and wary of the notion of absolute origins, postmodern art draws attention to its own ‘intertextual’ nature, its parodic recyclings of other works which are themselves no more than such recyclings. For Terry Eagleton, part of what it

parodies is past history—a history which is no longer to be seen in linear terms as the chain of causality which produced the present, but which exists in a kind of external present so as so much raw material torn from its own context and cobbled together with the contemporary. Finally and perhaps most typically of all, he states that postmodern culture turns its distaste for fixed boundaries and categories on the traditional distinction between ‘high’ and ‘popular’ art, deconstructing the borderline between them by producing artifacts which are self-consciously populist or vernacular and which offer themselves as commodities for pleasurable consumption (2008 : 201-202).

Boehmer (1995:86) sees postmodernism as, “signifying interest in the provisional and fragmentary aspects of signification; its concern is said to be with the constructed nature of identity”. Sanchez contends that, “postmodernist fiction privileges postmodern playfulness and magic realism, and it can be used for political purpose” (1997:48). Thus, the postmodernist fiction or drama attempts to articulate postmodernism; its ideas, themes and methods. To a greater extent, it attempts “to subvert the mainstream conventions of narrative structure, characterization and destroys or toys with the audience’s suspension of disbelief” (Alemany-Galway 2002:39). Typically, “such [plays] also break down the cultural divide between high and low art and often upend typical portrayals of gender, race, class, genre, and time with the goal of creating something different from traditional narrative expression” (Hayward 1996: 302-305).

In fact, postmodern critical approaches cross in their concern with marginality and ambiguity; thereby disintegrating binaries and all things are parodied, mimicked and borrowed. To strengthen Boehmer’s critical insight, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin declare that, “there is an intertextual link between postmodernist and post-colonial texts” (1989:122). For Allan, “we have left the former paradigm, but have not arrived fully at a new paradigm. This period in ‘the desert’ is a period of liminality; the very term, “post-modern” indicates this in-betweenness” (1997: 31). Postmodernism is in many ways interested in the liminal space that would be typically ignored by more modernist or traditionally narrative offerings. The main idea is that the meaning is often generated most productively through the ‘spaces’, ‘transitions’ and ‘collisions’ between words, moments and images. This means that the cornerstone of conventional narrative structure and characterization are changed and even turned on their heads in order to create a work whose internal logic forms its means of expression. By making small but significant changes to the conventions of the play or novel, the artificiality of the experience as well as the world presented is emphasized in the audience’s mind in order to remove from both of them the conventional emotional bonds they have to the subject matter and to give them a new view of it.

Both postmodern and postcolonial theorists, very critical of the imperial ways, question the racist assumptions which have for a long time sustained the imperial ideology. In this context, the term ‘hybridity’ starts to acquire political significance. Although the word, “race,” may on an uncritical approach refer to a way to identify physically different peoples, no scientific study has been able to ascertain the concept of different races. In fact, an essentialist conception of culture leads to the erection of social, cultural and racial barriers; while the acceptance of mobility in a hybrid context allows for tolerance of blending and crossing cultures. Such barriers are arbitrary ideological formations: metaphors, discursively constructed. Thus, for Pieterse (2001:219-220) “hybridity becomes a key concept within postmodernism as a political statement that comes to problematize boundaries”. In this sense, the concept is subversive against the background of an alleged essential purity since hybridity implies “flexibility, openness, adaptation, ambiguity, contradiction and irony” (Stoddard, 1999: 331- 338) as one of the trademarks of postmodern art.

Ola Rotimi's play, *The Gods are not to Blame*, which is an adaptation of classical Greek play, Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex*, offers a critical perspective on the various permutations of both postcolonialism and postmodernism with the view of establishing points of convergence as well as divergence; which will lead us to understand the playwright's contributions to raising the awareness of the people about the chaos and disorder he observes in his society. This is exactly what the reworkings or the rewriting of Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex* text aims at. In fact, the play is replete with thematic and structural signifiers of postmodernism as well as postcolonialism. In this sense the play may be regarded as an attempt by the playwright to defamiliarise the remote convention of realism inherent in African plays. His experimental postmodern aesthetics produce a different type of postcolonial aesthetic, a Nigerian literary hybridity that embraces both Western and African traditional knowledge. Rotimi's overarching concern is the multilayered facets of power formation at a variety of interfaces raging from political, colonial, racial, class and gender power hierarchies of Nigerian to Western cultural hegemonies. An important concept in postmodernism's view of language is the idea of "play" text. In the context of postmodernism, play means changing the framework, which connects ideas, and thus allowing the trooping, or turning, of a metaphor or word from one context to another, or from one frame of reference to another. Since in postmodern thought, the "text" is a series of "markings" whose meaning is imputed by the reader, and not by the author, this play is the means by which the reader constructs or interprets the text, and the means by which the author gains a presence in the reader's mind. Play then involves invoking words in a manner which undermines their authority, by mocking their assumptions or style, or by layers of misdirection as to the intention of the author. In other words, since postmodernism rejects the depth models of reality as well as the metanarratives, a lot of seriousness previously associated with different versions of modernism, has also been jettisoned and this results to its being drawn in many different areas to the notion of play: the play of meanings, the play of images, the play of language, and the play of structural forms. Thus, Ola Rotimi's play is marked, both stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humour and authorial self-reference. Like Ola Rotimi, most postmodern authors reject outright meanings in their plays, novels, stories and poems, and ; instead, highlight and celebrate the possibility of multiple meanings, or a complete lack of meaning, within a single literary work. Because of the polygonal dimension of the postmodernist framework, I have resorted to some examples of stylistic techniques and themes as understood by theoreticians such as Ihab Hassan, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Gerald Graff and Terry Eagleton.

Therefore in this paper Ola Rotimi's play, *The Gods* inconnection with some of the most established parameters of postmodernism offers a discussion of more technical qualities like pastiche, the taking of various ideas from previous writings and literary styles and pasting them together to make new styles; intertextuality, the acknowledgment of previous literary works within another literary work, metafiction: the act of writing about writing or making readers aware of the fictional nature of the very fiction they're reading, temporal distortion : the use of non-linear timelines and narrative techniques in a story, minimalism: the use of characters and events which are decidedly common and non-exceptional characters, maximalism: disorganized, lengthy, highly detailed writing, magical realism : the introduction of impossible or unrealistic events into a narrative that is otherwise realistic, faction: the mixing of actual historical events with fictional events without clearly defining what is factual and what is fictional, reader

involvement: often through direct address to the reader and the open acknowledgment of the fictional nature of the events being described.

Through a close-reading of the play, subjects like pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, temporal distortion, minimalism, magical realism, faction, reader involvement, as explained above, will be explored. One of postmodernism's most important goals is to question and destabilize assumed truths, for instance the ones that concern language and literature. This results in a new artifact or literature which reflects a new consciousness that has been undoubtedly inspired in part by the breakdown of culture, traditions, and social structure. The play is rich in examples of intertextuality, and this is interesting in connection with parody because certain uses of intertextuality can also be parodic. Parody has often been connected to ridicule and satire, but Linda Hutcheon's notion of postmodern parody is more connected to intertextuality and metafiction. One of her definitions reads: 'Parody is [...] repetition with critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity.' In a parody, an author looks to the history of literature, appropriates certain aspects that he or she finds (Hutcheon refers to this as the parodic code), and presents them in new ways. It is easy to see how parody is a subgenre of intertextuality. She further on precises that '[t]he parodic representations expose the model's conventions and lay bare its devices through the coexistence of the two codes in the same message'. This quote shows the close connection between metafiction and parody. As parody is most definitely related to both intertextuality and metafiction, the decisive difference between parody and the other two concepts must be made clear. What makes parody stand out as a genre of its own, is the manner in which it repeats its material. In connection with *The Gods*, Josie Campbell defines intertextuality as 'the relation between two or more texts. It is used to indicate a more diffuse penetration of the individual text by memories, echoes, transformations of other texts.' (1998 : 36).

From the preceding statements, it becomes obvious that with Terry Eagleton's explication of postmodernism, it is interesting to consider how all these references influence the reader. As the reader's mind is also drawn to think of the subject of literature instead of simply staying inside the reality of the story, intertextuality may have what is called a metafictional effect. Critic Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as 'a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality'. In other words, metafiction aims to reveal, or put on display the 'falseness' or fictive nature of a work of art. As a postmodern writer, for very valid reasons; his captivating play draws from a modern narrative entitled *Oedipus Rex* written by Sophocles. In this work, I believe that there are certain aspects of this work that may be discussed as going through a period of stylistic or (better artistic) innovation in its effort to become a literary phenomenon and, for that matter, carry the weight of imparting the chaos and disorder the playwright observes in his society.

In many ways, postmodern literary styles and ideas serve to dispute, reverse, mock and reject the principles of modernist literature. For example, instead of following the standard modernist literary quest for meaning in a chaotic world, postmodern literature tends to eschew, often playfully, the very possibility of meaning. The postmodern novel, play, story or poem is often presented as a parody of the modernist literary quest for meaning. Thus, Ola Rotimi's play *The Gods* is a perfect example of this. His work could be judged as postmodernist given the background that, "postmodernism... involves diverse attempts to break away from the modernist form, which had, inevitably, become in ... turn conventional" (Orr, 1990 : 619-630). Jencks shares the same views with other critics when he writes that, "postmodernism means the end of a

single worldview, and by extension, a war on totality, a resistance to single explanations, a respect for existence and celebration of regional, local and particular (1987 :11).

In this postmodern drama text, Odewale, the protagonist's constant quest for knowledge and understanding results ultimately in confusion and the lack of any sort of clear understanding of the events that transpired. Ola Rotimi insists that the reader of his postmodernist text must actively participate in the interpretation of the work in its contextual eclecticism to better appreciate it. The paper thus briefly examines the inadvertent and innocuous influences of postmodernism on African literary genres, the novel, poems, and particularly drama in this context; its narrative techniques, carving of characters and thematic postulations. In the course of the analysis, the paper further identifies the basic features of postmodernism and its application to the writing of the drama text as well as the characteristics of postmodernism on narratives and its impact on the reader as well as on the critic.

The finding of this study so far reveals that to the postmodernist, it is no longer essential to look for the meaning of arts; but at the pragmatic use of language, and narrative formulae to make an impact on consumers and concludes that not only have some postcolonial writers like Ola Rotimi, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and Efua Sutherland, been influenced by postmodernism but also by the content of their discourse (cultural hybridization) in their effort to promote globalization and meta-narrative of cultures as the tenet of postmodernism. My attempt is to show that Ola Rotimi's play is a nice piece of postmodern narrative. This feat is achieved in his ability and ingenuity to reject the grand narratives that envisioned society in favour of metanarratives, to carve characters who do not move from one period to another but possess depth and motivations through a new characteristic structure in his narrative. The blending of modern narrative techniques and oral narrative aesthetics to put his message across shows that postmodernism challenges western modernist erecting of borders between different theories, opinions, classes of people and different literary as well as cultural identities.

## **II –Cultural Hybridation: Postmodern Aesthetics in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame***

By aesthetics, I mean the value, characters, properties, focus and meanings in literary creations. In his "Denotation and Aesthetic Appreciation of Literature", Robert J. Yanal (1978:472) posits that:

Acts of aesthetic appreciation are performed by readers (or hearers) of literary artworks. They usually issue in a result an interpretation, an explication, etc., and the result of an act of aesthetic appreciation shall be called an aesthetic of judgement.

In this section I intend to show through textual analysis that Ola Rotimi's *The Gods* is a postmodern playfulness with significant postcolonial implications. The work picks from Sophocles' play some of the recurring features of postmodern aesthetics and looks, at the same time, at the value, meaning as well as the realization of postmodern poetics from the periscope of many theoretical frameworks which are part and parcel of postmodern hints. In the light of all that has been said so far on postmodernism, it follows that postmodernism is not a single monolith body of ideas. Despite its various critical proclivities, one tends to agree that the

adaptation of Sophocles text by Ola Rotimi conforms to the definition of postmodernism as offered by Terry Eagleton in this paper. Corroborating the assumptions, pronouncements and opinions of theorists like Brooker (1992), Boehmer (1995), and Bill Aschroft et al (1989), it is obvious to claim that in aesthetic terms, postmodern narrative is a richly, textured, nuanced, multifaceted, and transgressive and even subversive to status quo's (modernist) organization theory simply because the modernist narrative is a 'grand one', totalizing all story into one story, told in one voice, as if paradigms and concepts do not change over time and sees the fragmented narrative as a recurring leitmotif.

Lyotard (1984) argues that each new way of telling a story, is a way to erase another way of telling. In short, postmodern narrative refuses to choose between competing stories, eschews one-sided interpretation, is critical of people who tell stories of progress, and does not believe anyone knows the whole story anyway. Ricoeur (1999 : 8) believes that "we can not tell a story without eliminating or dropping some important event according to the kind of plot we intend to build". Postmodern narratology shatters living story into many disembodied fragments called petit or local stories. In fragmented narrative we never get told the whole story. People experience the world as fragmented, sometimes contradictory, and on occasion a bit senseless. In postmodern theory, the idea that technology and reform always leads to progress is questioned because the postmodernism is not out to promote any wholesale world recommendations or demands horrible human sacrifice towards building a better world.

It is therefore against the foregoing positions, pronouncements, theories, and opinions that I examine the pertinent influence of postmodernism on Ola Rotimi's dramatext. Postmodern literature is a form of literature which is marked, both stylistically and ideologically, by a reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humor and authorial self-reference. Postmodernism manifests itself in African plays and novels and approaches to them are eclectic in terms of idea(s) and techniques as well as African narrative styles and Western concepts of playwriting. In fact, the blend of culture in the play, in aspects of costumes, properties, themes/ideas, concepts, lighting, languages, etc., is considered as postmodernist concepts or influences. Ola Rotimi takes his adaptation from the perspective of the causes and evils of civil war with the recurring motif of fighting against systems of domination and oppression involving advantage of ambiguities within the system of ethnicism.

Such postmodern aesthetics are central to the work of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971), who has often, as many postcolonial writers, expressed his frustrations towards reductive interpretations of some literary works. Thus King Odewale parodies the tradition of King Oedipus' stories in Rotimi's play *The Gods*. With this the author subtly uses, then distorts or subverts the conventions of the original play *Oedipus Rex*. The plot of this play, far from being a comparative work, may call on the audience to understand the original of which a parody is written to fully get the joke. Like in many satires the playwright makes use of parody to produce his witty or biting effect on postcolonial leaders. Rotimi is an obscure writer who tries to take on the style of Sophocles, a famous author, both to earn a little more attention or even practice in the art of writing. Thus, he uses the conventions of a famous writer not in order to criticize or mock, but simply in recognition that these conventions exist but can be altered to suit postmodernist thrusts. In one of his parodies, Odewale comes upon a group of warring neighbours, the Kutuje and the people of Ijebu and thereafter gets involved therein. He fought on behalf of the Kutuje and won the war for them and was thereafter entroned for his bravery on the battlefield. He ruled them for eleven years having a Kutuje wife and four children, raised and

bred in the customs and beliefs of the land ; but still, Odewale, just as the Kutuje people, considers himself different from them : these two groups stand in for the different ethnic groups of Nigeria, and thus are a parody of the endless ethnicity rivalries. In a broader way, however, the entire play is an excellent parody example, as it uses the conventions of play narratives.

According to Ezekiel Mphahlele (1967 :187), every writer is committed to something beyond his art, to a statement of value not purely aesthetic, to a “criticism of life”. In this sense, I may say that the theatre of Ola Rotimi grapples with issues of power, politics and postcolonialism in its approach to history, its experiments in absurdism and happenings, and its handling of tragedy and satire. Rotimi’s work took traditional Yoruba myths, songs, and other traditional African elements, and applied it to the Greek tragedy structure as shown by the Greek classic Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex*. His work is influenced by Yoruba culture because he had an immense knowledge and interest in African cultures, as indicated in his ability to speak several ethnic languages such as Yoruba, Ijaw, Hausa, and even pidgin English as well as the standard English language. This play could be best described as a ‘pastiche’ or varying themes that have become relevant in contemporary political discourse. Related to postmodern intertextuality, pastiche means combine, or ‘paste’ together multiple elements. Greek myths were charged with ideological meanings in the ways they were taught to the Africans. So the adaptations of these, when re-interpreted within the African cultural framework, are revitalised and given a new meaning. Like most of the literature of the colonized, Rotimi’s plays are written and performed in English. However, he incorporates Nigerian Pidgin English, African idioms and proverbs, with Yoruba religious rituals and traditional ceremonies. His plays explore mythical and historical themes with emphasis on political and societal problems that have resulted from the encounter with colonial domination.

Rotimi's play, re-written from a Greek tragedy, was first performed in 1968 at the Ife Festival of the Arts in Nigeria during a time of profound social, political and economic upheaval, exacerbated by the ravages of war, one itself partly unconditionally fuelled by some of the first world countries. There was a blatant corruption in every level of government, coupled with distrust and animosity among the various tribes of Nigeria. Ola Rotimi writes Nigerian tribes into the center so as to recontextualise them from marginal spaces allocated by traditional histories, exposing thus that, what is known as history is itself a narrative discursive construction that is not founded on definitive truth. It is itself a story, one of the multiple stories, told from different points of view. The focus here is on the proposition that language and power are inseparable and that literature provides an open site for an examination of this relationship. The dramatic texts of Rotimi (Soyinka and many others) are based on the reality that ideology is produced through language; and by changing language, ideology can in turn be forced into new directions. Although Rotimi’s adapted Greek plays are written and performed in English, the playwright has deliberately transformed and reinterpreted the plot to lend authenticity and legitimacy to his African history and culture which has suffered from the fictional representation of its inhabitants (blacks) in the eighteenth and nineteenth century western texts. By incorporating pre-colonial African myths and rituals, the dramatist provides an ethnocentric framework for his plays ; that is, a kind of discourse on the existence of an indigenous African culture prior to colonization which is vital to the understanding and appreciation of significant aspects of modern African drama.

This is a critical analysis of *The Gods* with a view to establishing the influence of colonization and western education on modern Yoruba drama, demonstrating how a rewriting of a canonized western text contributes to postcolonial theory and to the examining of how drama

has become an ideal medium for social and political expression. The act of changing children's names and forbidding them to speak their tribal or vernacular languages were an integral part of the colonization process which attempted to alienate them from their culture. Rotimi's preference for the use of African name, Ola, instead of Emmanuel or Gladstone, suggests his breaking away from the colonial practice of adopting the master's names as well as his religious beliefs. A number of African writers rejected their Christian names, to revert to their African ones. For example, Chinua Achebe dropped his first name, Albert, and the anti-colonialist East African writer, James Ngugi, changed his name to the more comprehensive one, Ngugi wa Thiong'o. At the prestigious Methodist Boy's High School which was established by British missionaries in Lagos, Rotimi, just like African writers, was exposed to various texts in the western canon including classical Greek, Roman and Shakespearean drama, as well as the works of Plato and Aristotle. As a student in a missionary school, he would have been also exposed to Christian Medieval drama, the cycle and Morality plays that were taught and performed as part of the Christmas and Easter celebrations at school. In *The Gods*, the combination of both western and African cultures is seen in the portrayal of the tragic plot and of Odewale as a tragic character. While he adheres to western theories of tragedy, Rotimi creates a tragic character who not only fits into the traditional West African setting, but also tries to reflect the sociopolitical environment of contemporary Nigeria. His concern is to voice political concerns and like Euripides, give instructions to citizens on the realities of national institutions and practices, the political process, and the rights and duties of the members of the community.

Like Greek tragedians, Ola Rotimi and Wole Soyinka do not write political tracts. Rather, they examine the effects of political activities and policies on the lives of the individuals who are governed and the conditions under which they live and die and that of the governors to the common citizens as well as outsiders. Rotimi, in response to the Nigerian Civil War, says that the root cause of the strife and bloodshed among Nigerians, was in their lingering mutual ethnic distrust sustained by the West which, eventually, culminate in open hostility. He says that in postcolonial Africa, much of the blame over the suffering incurred by native Africans was the result of the attitudes of colonial powers. To this, Rotimi argues that while some of the sufferings may have been the result of attempted colonial conquests, the lingering animosity that is felt and dispersed among fellow Nigerians, by fellow Nigerians, cannot be blamed solely on an outside party. He felt that the future of Nigerian culture cannot continue to be blamed on forces from the past much like Odewale would blame the suffering of his people, in his kingdom, on the sins of the old king, Adetusa. But as this paper has been able to prove, Rotimi has successfully adapted the play for the African theatre by making it put a special message across. First of all, *Oedipus Rex* is mainly concerned with increasing faith in the gods and with ensuring that people pay obeisance to the gods. Oedipus commits the sin of hubris by seeking human solutions to a divine problem, and so his suffering is justified. Rotimi is not interested in drawing his people nearer to God or to the gods. Rather, he wants to draw them away from their superstitions and general lack of initiative and hard work. Besides using the play to address Nigeria's numerous problems at independence, Rotimi also brings in a lot of changes in the original Greek play. He dispenses with the chorus, in their place ; and relies on the narrator and on the chiefs of Kutuje. The playwright replaces Greek chants with African songs ; he employs proverbs, riddles and other embellishments of language that are peculiar to the Yorubas. Besides, he introduces Yoruba incantations and black magic, especially in the mime where King Odewale kills his own father King Adetusa and married thereafter his mother unknowingly. In this instance, he used painted images of figures and objects depicted in surrealistic manner to depict the fight between

unknown father and unknown son. In this episode the reader is given a taste of a fusion of fabulism with magic realism in the play.

The fight highlights the development or juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastical or the bizarre and the use of myths, the horrific and the inexplicable. For instance the magical resistance or protection displayed in the fight at Ede farm and the subsequent death of the king of Adetusa killed by his own son is a vindication to the gods, the deities as well as the oracles. This play includes magical and/or supernatural elements as part of the plot, setting, or theme. Yoruba mythology and folklore play a strong part in the play and presents an internal consistency to the magical elements in a work and a logic that is understood to be reality by the characters featured in the work. The playwright combines the real world with a fantastical reality, such as in the episodes in which the protagonist grows up in another environment and outwits his unknown father when introduced to the world of magic at a tender age. Drawing on the special effects of magic realism, Ola Rotimi is able to express his view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement. Thus, he combines the supernatural with local legend and imagery derived from European colonialist cultures to represent societies which have been constantly unsettled by invasion, occupation, and political corruption. In general, magical realism is a means for African writers to express a non-dominant perspective from a postcolonial or rural standpoint. This postmodernist skill is a powerful tool or weapon in the hands of an African writer. Brenda Cooper (1998:29) testifies this when she explains that, 'magical realism and its associated styles and devices is alternatively characterized as a transgressive mechanism that parodies authority, social institutions and the law, and also as the opposite of all of these, as a domain of play, desire and fantasy for the rich and the powerful'. Today postmodern literature's celebratory mode of experimentation found new impetus with the usage of parody and pastiche. While a parody imitates the manner, style or characteristics of a particular literary work/genre/author, and deflates the original by applying the imitation to a lowly or inappropriate subject, pastiche literally means to combine, or "paste" together, multiple elements.

Pastiche, thus, can be seen as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic, or information-drenched aspects of postmodern society. Both pastiche and parody, are intertextual in nature. Pastiche, in postmodern literature, is a homage to or a parody of past styles. Though pastiche commonly refers to the mixing of genres, the work may include elements like metafiction and temporal distortion. Rotimi includes in his drama elements from fiction, myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles, etc., and war fiction, songs, pop culture references; fictional history mixed together; real contemporary and historical events and stories from his agrarian society as well as fictional cultures and concepts. The majority of magical realist writing can be described as postcolonial. That is to say much of it is set in a postcolonial context and written from a postcolonial perspective that challenges the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude. As we can see from our discussions of transgressive, crosscultural and postmodern magical realism, these variants seek to disrupt official and defined authoritative assumptions about reality, truth and history. Essentially, it refers to the political and social attitude that opposes colonial power, recognizes the effects of colonialism on other nations, and refers specifically to nations which have gained independence from the rule of another imperial state.

Ola Rotimi's play takes *Oedipus Rex* and reused it in a different context. And through pastiche and parody he makes new styles. Through pastiche, he intentionally replicates or mixes together many disparate kinds of styles and ways of writing into the same play and through parody as well, he draws irony from styles to make new ones. This is what Susan Hayward called 'simulation'. Similar to this is the prefabrication which the playwright uses. This draws

even closer to already existing and noticeable scenes, and reuses them in his narrative as well as dialogue. In his endeavour he uses intertextuality which is similar to pre-fabrication. In clear terms, prefabrication draws from other texts, i.e. a blatant remake, and finally bricolage which consists of building like collage of different drama or play styles and genres with a self-reflexivity of technique that highlights the constructed nature of the image in ways that directly refer to its production and also by explicit intertextuality incorporates or makes references to other texts. The deconstruction and fragmentation of linear time and space or clear cut plot, well-defined characters and rational language as well is also commonly employed to highlight the constructed nature of what appears in the play. This reflects the collapse of the distinction between high and low art styles and techniques and texts and is also an extension of the tendency towards pastiche and mixing. The play typically extends to a mixing of techniques that traditionally come with value judgments as to their worth and place in culture and the creative and artistic spheres. In literature, 'pastiche' is usually a light-hearted imitation that is jocular while celebrating the original. Therefore, a pastiche is always an example of intertextuality, because the text cannot occur without the original that is being imitated. In this context many examples of pastiche rely on many mimic sources : orality, written texts, music, songs. Understandably, intertextuality is the way that one text influences another no matter the source.

In Rotimi's case, his borrowings are more indirect and includes parody, pastiche, allusion, or translation. Since the function and effectiveness of intertextuality can often depend quite a bit on the reader's prior knowledge and understanding before reading the secondary text; parodies and allusions depend on the reader knowing what is being parodied or alluded to. For instance, cultural imperialism reflected in imperial domination of the world is maintained through the dissemination of cultural products. This shows that the globalization of communication is a result of this domination. Traditional cultures and the intrusion of Western culture best highlights this. Postmodernism as an art movement is a skeptical interpretation of culture which questions why things are the way that they are and aims to reinvent and redesign things from the past and this can be seen in many different forms from cinema to architecture and from posters to pieces of art.

Ola Rotimi, who died in 2002, is an acclaimed Nigerian playwright. He has written and published several plays namely, *Our Husband has gone Mad Again* (1966/1974), *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971), *Kurunmi* (1971), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), *Holding Talks* (1979), *If* (1983) and *Hopes of the Living Dead*. But in this paper, *The Gods* has been selected because it offers a ground to focus on the philosophical issues, themes, and theories of postmodernism and concerns itself with life at its most elemental level; bare and bony, totally demystified and demythologized, raising questions at the existential plane, without any attempt to seek a delightful escape or magic solution to the problems of existence, all interpreted in an innovative language and shocks by defying social and moral conventions in an absurd world where man is forced to accept his unheroic status which seems to have been assigned to him and; in which he is condemned to live. In postmodernist literature, drama and theatre inclusive, there is no sequence except the reader's/audience's sequence, no identities or events except those involved in reading/watching the text/performance. Thus, *The Gods* is a story of king Odewale who, at birth, is divined by the oracle to kill his father, King Adetusa and marry his mother, Queen Ojuola. To avoid this unsavoury incident, Odewale is ordered to be killed as a sacrifice to the gods. But Gbonka, the palace messenger, fails to follow the instructions of killing the baby boy. Rather, he hands the baby over to the barren couple, Ogundele and his wife Mobike, to foster. When Odewale is fully grown up, the message of the gods are once again delivered to him at

Ijekun Yemoja, in another setting of course. Mistaking his foster parents for his biological ones, Odewale runs away from them to avoid the fulfillment of the prediction. In his hideout he achieves fame and royal feats at Kutuje, where he lives to fully act out unwillingly and unknowingly the wills of the gods by marrying his biological mother, having inadvertently and unknowingly killed his father over a piece of land he had bought at Ede.

In fact, Ola Rotimi's play is a very elusive work, not only because of its fragmentary state but it can be labelled simply as a parody of the Greek play because it involves a wide range of intertextual practices. All in all, it is a very successful adaptation. In it, Oedipus becomes Odewale, the setting changes from Thebes, (Greece) to Kutuje (Yorubaland) and all other names are changed to Yoruba equivalents. The Greek culture becomes a metaphor in this sense. In this innovative exercise a new text is formed which addresses African issues but with Greek's slight structural underpinnings. It should be emphasised that *The Gods* has become Ola's new artifact as well as consciousness is a result of artistic and linguistic eclectism, a mixture of genres, the amalgamation of different styles from different time periods. In 1968, at the onset of the most traumatic phase of the civil war in post-colonial Nigeria, Ola Rotimi staged a production of his new play *The Gods*, which is, amongst other things, an adaptation of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*. Although this play, like virtually all of Rotimi's dramas, is theatrical on a grand scale, it possesses a considerable literary dimension insofar as it adapts the highly literary source of a Greek tragedy and ; insofar as, its very success in the theatre transformed it, ironically, into a dramatic text. In Ola Rotimi's *The Gods*, the playwright uses Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex* to explore the causes (and effects) of the Nigerian civil war which claimed several lives. In this play, the playwright's uses of bits and pieces of older artifacts to produce a new or original work of art blurs the traditional distinction between 'high culture' and the so called 'popular culture'. This idea of bricolage brings forth the blurring of high and popular culture distinctions and divisions which were fundamental to modernism in many art works. In adapting Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, Ola Rotimi's play can be seen to be a postmodernist work in many respects as it denies originality, is eclectic, self-reflexive, uses appropriation bricolages, breaks down barriers between high and low culture and places emphasis on the surface rather than the content. This recalls Jameson's (1983 :113) theory of the impossibility for originality. For him, 'in a world where stylistic innovation is no longer possible all that is left is to immitate dead styles to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum'. This is legion in Rotimi's play on the adaptation of Sophocle's original text.

The playwright does not make any attempt to write a play that is very innovative ; rather, he places emphasis on Sophocle's original text by adhering to Aristotle's three unities, fate and destiny and mostly the world of Gods, deities, myths and oracles. The idea of eclectism is shown in his refusal to be faithful to the original play the way some modernist writers have done in many ways ; but by profoundly recontextualising the original playtext. In this case, he morphs the old of the original into a Nigerian setting which brings the elements of bricolage into the remake by juxtaposing a very old play with popular culture (or Yoruba elements) such as the use of Yoruba songs, poems, proverbs, costume, drumming, singing, beating gong gong, magic, and charms. Once again the play text can be seen as a text which breaks down the distinction between high and low culture by eclectically bringing forth old and new elements and positioning them together. Through a new era, Sophocles' work has been artistic and stylistic eclectism, a mixture of genres as well as the amalgamation of different styles from different time periods which has no doubt disrupted the modernist binary vision of cultures. The playwright brings art history together with literary studies to show that African art has been a powerful engine of — and not

simply a passive inspiration for — modernist and contemporary literature. Although the relationship between African art and modernism has long been remarked, conventional histories often describe African craft as an inanimate source for the lively innovations of early twentieth-century Europeans. In the late twentieth century, this story continues to be relevant because post-independence African writing is often characterized as a belated inheritor of colonial modernism.

In the light of all these considerations, it makes sense to say that Ola Rotimi's play is replete with some of the thematic and structural signifiers of postmodernism. Textual analysis shows that Rotimi's work display postmodern playfulness as having post colonial implication. Through the postcolonialist nature of his work, he is calling attention to the postcolonial tribulations of his nation. It is a fact that Rotimi draws on a literary tradition called postcolonialism because as a young student, as was said earlier on, he has been an eye-witness of many sociopolitical tribulations in his own country. His imagination was deeply affected or shaped by reading stories of many modernist writers at school and thereby imbibed a lot of problems facing newly independent countries. Many things have been said about these 'new leaders' by political analysts, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and creative writers. They have in their writings criticise new 'leaders' and the 'led' ; the former for their corruption, ineptude, misgovernance, and betrayal of trust and the latter for not only for their complacency but also for their gullibility. With this play the playwright has been able to make his own literary contribution to the discourse of sociopolitical and economic problems of Africa.

In an interview (2007 :84) the playwright believes that his play, *The Gods* does not refer to the mythological gods or mystic deities of the African pantheon. Rather, it alludes to national and political powers such as America, Russia, France, England, etc., who dictate the pace of world politics. For the playwright, the title implies that these political 'gods' shouldn't be blamed or held responsible for our own national tribulations, frustration, failings or predicament in one word. It could be recalled that during the Nigerian civil war the Biafrans blamed Russia and Britain for aiding Nigerian Federalists in the attack against them. The Federalists, on the other hand, blamed France, and to a greater extent the USA, who, through their charity organizations abet the Biafrans' cause of secession. But the root cause of that strife of the bloodshed or calamity was Nigerians (Africans) own lingering mutual ethnic distrust which culminated in an open hostility. For the playwright, so long as this monster [god] is allowed to wax and incite disharmony among Africans, they must not blame external political powers for their initiative in seizing upon such disunity for the fulfilment of their own oppressive and exploitative interest. That's the strange message the play attempts to impart to its audience or readers. The play has been able to imaginatively chronicle the disorienting effects and aftermaths of colonialism on the continent. Ola Rotimi relies on postmodernist aesthetics in his literary reconstruction of the postcolonial pangs with the view to show that there is an interface between postmodernism and postcolonialism.

It is important to note that the human condition portrayed in the play is eradically the theatre of the absurd and this condition is adequately presented in a postmodernist style which is, as was discussed earlier on, innovative as well as experimental. The playwright believes that man lives in an anomic world in which communication is impossible to the extent that illusion is preferred to reality. In this play, he abandons linear plot, plausible character development and rational language which are the hallmarks of the convention of modernist plays and tries as much as possible to set his play in postcolonial African contexts. With his postmodernist plays, Rotimi is an established or accomplished writer who integrates the content and form of his fiction in such a way that it becomes a unified artistic expression of reality and does not allow commitment to

overwhelm its artistic merits at all. This play exhibits some stylistic and philosophical assaults of postmodernist techniques. It features characters like Alaka and Gbonka, who despite their anguished burden to observe, record and make sense of the chaos of their society. For instance, Alaka's failure to disclose the real parents of Odewale earlier on in the play and Gbonka's failure to stick to the instruction to kill 'baby Odewale' in the evil forest highlight this.

To some extent Rotimi's play from the perspective of postmodernism, presents a society devoid of purpose, a society which is cut off from its orthodox religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots. Thus in the society he portrays, 'man' is lost because all his actions become senseless, absurd and useless. The society he depicts is not conducive to the progress and the emancipation of citizens; but presents the characteristics of a society where peoples' hopes are shattered down. This has an impact on all the characters featured in the play. What the reader gets from the play is that the playwright has eschewed the conventional forms of fiction with a clear cut plot as its basis with well-depicted characters acting and revealing the absurdity of the lives of their own without being aware of the basic existential realities of life. This situation makes the reader feel deadness and mechanical senselessness. In the play Odewale is involved in patricide and incest as had been predicted by seers : at birth he is destined to '*kill his father and marry his own mother*'. This is awkward and absurd a situation ; and thereafter, tries to reveal human condition in a world that has been denied the basic tenets of faith due to the decline of some religious beliefs and moral integrity.

Another postmodernist technique used by Ola Rotimi in his play is the stream of consciousness used to foreground the endemic neocolonial contradictions. The play is unique for its complex and unconventional point of view and its extended use of introspection. In this play Rotimi uses a complex plot structure that is replete with stories within a story. This type of digression recalls the idea of fragmented narration. In the play we have the prologues which acts as an introduction to play. It is dramatised in the form of words, actions and background music with drumming and dancing. These words are said by the narrator and actions are mimed and music provided by a group of singers, drummers and dancers. The prologue enriches the cultural values of the play with the singing, miming, drumming, dancing accompanying the narration as an African story telling practice. At the same time it exhibits African cultural practices and beliefs and gives the play a local colour by creating suspense ; the alarming note at which the prologue ends sends signals of a kind of trouble and therefore creates suspense to sustain the interest of readers. As far as narration is concerned, not only does the prologue prepare the atmosphere for an impending tragedy but it also, among other things, links the reader to the main play by providing for its being easily understood ; it is a compressed summary of the background events that shape the course of action in the story. With this the narrative looks like a collection of reminiscences. The play has no organic plot structure but is rather episodic. As the story unfolds many flashbacks ensue. One of these manifold ones is the enactment of Odewale's account of his encounter with the oldman on the farm of Ede that led to his killing the oldman. In this episode the reader is introduced to the fighting incident between Odewale and the Oldman who claims ownership of the land he bought to till. Because of his strange behaviour, that of being hot tempered, impatient, rash on decision making, proud and overconfidence and as a person who is full of tribal prejudice, Odewale responds wildly to the provocation of the oldman what leads to his killing of an unknown man ; who unfortunately turns out to be his own father, King Adetusa. Baba Fakunle confirms this flaw by telling Odewale the truth plainly : 'your hot temper like a disease from birth is the curse that brought you trouble' (29).

Within the main story the reader comes across certain issues like Odewale's monumental assistance to the people of Kutuje freeing them from the Ikolus and the consolidation of his reign for eleven years. Through digressions and flashbacks, Ola Rotimi is able to comment on the betrayal of the people who break their tradition to make a stranger their king: the elders allow themselves to make bad decisions based on ethnic nationalism and prejudice. Ignoring the greater good of the community, they endanger the community. His use of this postmodern device or strategy enables him to depict a period of great crisis in the society as every one is suffering from a big mistake they made : epidemic. Everybody is complaining of having been infected with one form of sickness or the other. The stream of consciousness technique is another postmodern technique used by the playwright to give us adequate background information on the events which have happened at the palace of Kutuje from the era of the birth of Odewale till he ascends the throne of Kutuje. The narrator penetrates into the mind of Odewale to point out how frightened he was by the gravity of his offense and runs until he reaches Kutuje after crossing seven rivers. Through this device the reader is able to understand King Odewale's disgust at the hatred he had for himself on knowing that 'he had killed his father and married his mother'. He therefore offers himself as a sacrificial lamb when it became obvious he was the cause of the plight of the people of Kutuje. He gouges his own eyes as vowed and thereafter banishes himself from Kutuje and his family.

Ola Rotimi uses the stream of consciousness as a literary weapon to expose some socio-political and economic contradictions inherent in the post colonial society he was born and raised. In this play we encounter long passages of introspection. In a postmodernist novel or play, the narrator enters the minds of some characters, commenting freely on their thoughts and thought process. In other words, these narrative styles or techniques of writing that try to capture the natural flow of a character's extended thought process, often by incorporating sensory impressions, incomplete ideas, unusual syntax, and rough grammar. It is often non-linear in a few key ways that define the style. In addition to the use of unusual syntax and grammar, the playwright uses associative leaps, repetition, and plot structure so as to help convey the main character's gradual descent into madness. The narrator penetrates into the minds of Odewale, his wife the Queen mother, Baba Fakunle, Alaka and the chiefs to tell us more about their comments on the allegations of Odewale as he swears before Ogun the god of iron to deal with the culprit. Out of fear, suspicion, and anger the king promises to met out an agonising death to the murderer. Right from the beginning of the play to the end, the reader is subtly told that the search of Odewale to know who the culprit is brings him to discover that he has unknowingly fulfilled the mission or curse given him by the gods. The playwright uses this postmodernist strategy to allow the reader understand and capture the the flow of Odewale's mental processes. This flows in terms of memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations. Even at the end of the play when it dawns on the reader that Odewale was the culprit he carries his own cross alone and asks the population not to stop him on his way into exile led by his own sons Adewale and Adebissi.

In this play the playwright rejects the conventional system of total realism and attempts to make things new. The work is full of surrealism and realism. He relies on magical realism to write a work which is full of themes and subjects that are imaginary and fantastic with some dreamlike quality. The use of this style supposes the mingling and juxtaposition of realistic and the bizarre, skillful time shifts, myths and fairy tales and an abrupt shock. Throughout the play the playwright makes some unusual incidents appear more credible. It a common artistic fact that in a world where traditions are not held in high esteem, the attention of the reader is drawn on the

consequences of being suspicious and afraid of others around in the same setting. In this play some evidence points out to the fact that there is a great price to pay if man allows negative tendencies like suspicion and unwarranted fear to guide him in dealing with his fellow man. In the world of dreams and suspicion anything can happen. Suspicion of foul play and blackmail have been the stock in trade of King Odewale. In hearing that the murderer of King Adetusa is not only alive but also in their midst, Odewale declares, 'My people, I fear and I tremble. Suspicions, heavy suspicions fill my heart... When the frog in front falls in a pit, others behind take caution. It will be me next (1971 :23). With this the playwright is able to foreground some contemporary sociopolitical issues. Odewale's accusation levelled against Baba Fakunle implies that he has received bribe from the murderer of the late King to tell lies and out of fear he accuses his biological brother Aderopo for trying to overthrow him.

The use of magic in the fight between the Oldman and Odewale on the issue of a piece of land tries to remind readers of some recognizable historical realities in post independence African societies. In this episode, the reader is told that during the big fight what led to the death of the King, Odewale pulled out his tortoise shell talisman, pointed it towards his attackers and mesmerised them. Odewale's opponent pulls out his own charm of dried eagle's skull, vulture's claws, bright red parrot-tail feathers, holds the bizzare stuff in front of him and begins his conjurations. During the fight some magical spell of hot exchanges ensues between him and the Oldman, who later on, turned out to be the father the oracle ordained that he was going to kill and marry his own mother. An obvious display of supernatural force, power and divinities were at work and in the end of the demonstrations and with the inspiration of Ogun, the god of iron, Odewale managed to struck the oldman with a hoe and killed him on the spot. Ola Rotimi's use of magic realism tries to show that he negotiates, as most postmodernist playwrights, a boundary between myth and modernity. His text, in this context, is a postcolonial text because in its articulation, it means that neocolonialism is the other side of the coin of colonialism: responding to a sort of cyclical theory of history. Since postmodernism presents a decentered concept of the universe in which individual works are not isolated creations, much of the focus on the study of post modern literature is on intertextuality: the relationship between one text and another or one text within the interwoven fabric of literary history. This is what critics point out as postmodernism's lack of originality and reliance on clichés. Intertextuality in postmodern literature can be a reference or a parallel to another literary work, an extended discussion of a work, or the adoption of a style.

In this play intertextuality is effectively used by the playwright so as to put emphasis on the shortcomings of some sociopolitical institutions in contemporary societies. This device is informed greatly by the postmodernist aesthetics as far as stylistic promiscuity and indeterminacy are concerned and constitutes in itself a significant and enduring feature of African oral narratives which are fraught with myths and legends. From the onset, is a call for African writers to return to oral sources to rewrite for postcolonial purpose. This comes in the forms of borrowing as well as influences. In this case for the postmodernist writer like Ola Rotimi, the printed text of his literary work should not be regarded as the work itself ; rather, it should be regarded as a mere representation of the work itself. Thus, *The Gods are not to Blame*, is constructed as a mosaic of quotations ! In the spaces of the texts, several items and utterances, taken from other texts, *Oedipus Rex*, traditional myths, legends, and proverbs assemble and neutralise one another. Reading postmodernist text does not lead to the construction of a 'model' or 'structure' or poetic law ; but 'reveals', according to Oyegoye, 'a lot of fragments, views from other texts, codes which disappear and reappear'. The postcolonial African writer in his attempt to examine

the particularist and universalist outlooks of sociocultural and political contradictions of his country, has often resorted to intertextuality what gives his work the sense of homogenisation and globalisation of human experience; which leads to the total erosion of the barrier between high and low culture. Inevitably, this allows man to live in a mass culture or a global village. Ola Rotimi takes the images, narratives and their formulations of his desire to and measures them against his real experiences of the existentialist problems of neocolonial African societies.

Code-mixing is another form of stylistic promiscuity used by the playwright in his play. This involves the amalgam of two or more languages in a speech act. In this regard, one finds at least two or more functioning side by side simultaneously. He is one of the post colonial writers who are unable to write in their mother-tongue because they were indoctrinated at an early age and who have but to manipulate the European language in such a way as to serve their own purposes. In this play, Rotimi makes use of such a style. He mixes English, Yoruba dialects for stylistic and thematic effects. This is what postmodernists call linguistic eclecticism. This postmodernist poetics abounds in the play. For instance, this speech is a mixture of English and Yoruba languages : *'I even added dogo-yaro leaves to it'* (p.13) ... *Asufe eiyé leaves...* (p.13) to attempt curing the sickness. The use of this instance is not inadvertent. It is a signifier of the instability and indeterminacy which still plagues African societies and constitutes an artistic solution to the problem of extreme multilingualism in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. The use of code mixing and switching aims at reaching a wide range of audience because the level of literacy in Africa is very low. The playwright does not believe in idealism; but as a realist, he manages to communicate freely with the oppressed people in their own indigenous language sustained by proverbs. The fifty-three proverbs (Monye 1995: 251–262) featured in the play have sociopolitical functions. The social ones are situated in the events of the outbreak of epidemics in Kutuje, divination/riddle of birth concerning Odewale and the contest between Odewale and King Adetusa over a piece of land in Ede. The political ones are found in scenes where Aderopo brings a message from Baba Fakunle, where the killer(s) of King Adetusa is sought, and where Baba Fakunle makes physical presence and when he has departed. Really the playwright is concerned with language experimentation. In this play, the playwright deviates from the conventional lexico semantic, graphological, and syntactic structures of the English Language he has learnt at school. In fact, these experimentations carried out by many African novelists and playwrights show as an avant-garde one and proves very innovative. The language and style of the play are intensely poetic and obscure. In these some grammatical items are used by the playwright to portray the fragmentary and complex nature of the society. Rotimi transplants the Greek original into pre-colonial African soil and utilizes Yoruba namings as well as places with historical significance. By replacing the characters' names with those of mythological and folkloric significance, Rotimi tries to valorize the traditional ritual elements in the Yoruba culture. He integrates Yoruba metaphysics, customs, idioms, proverbs, songs, and linguistic codes, recognized by the audience, to make an appreciation for their cultural heritage. Although he writes mostly in standard English, the official medium of communication in Nigeria, he integrates Nigerian pidgin, Yoruba poems and songs, and idioms, proverbs and parables. He combines poetry and prose and uses customary gestures, such as, prostrating before the king or elder, and biting on the sword of Ogun in taking an oath.

In *The Gods*, Rotimi makes several changes to the Sophoclean tragedy while keeping the main idea that in ignorance a man killed his father and married his mother. These changes are significant to an analysis of the play because they reveal, to a greater extent, Rotimi's commitment to the African world view while using the European knowledge he has acquired at

the prestigious Methodist Boy's High School which was established by British missionaries in Lagos back then. Rotimi's use of language in this play, reflects his commitment to reaching a wide audience in his performances. Western education in the colonies coupled with the knowledge of the colonizer's language, which accompanied the imperial enterprise, have been employed by postcolonial writers as a source of empowerment in their fight against eurocentricism.

Rotimi's choice of names of characters acting in a peculiar setting and using a peculiar language reflects a certain historical quality. For example, when the citizens come to King Odewale, one of them says : 'When rain falls on the leopard, does it wash off its spots ?' (10). In some instances, Rotimi explains the proverb to make its meaning understandable to a non-African audience by allowing the character itself to give a translation in a close approximation to the English language. Through the medium of drama, Rotimi contributes to the postcolonial agenda of rearticulating and revising colonialist texts in ways that challenge, resist and subvert eurocentric ideologies about the colonized.

In this play language is at times given a subordinative role and reduced to meaningless fragments. This technique connotes a breakdown of communication between the reader and the implied author. It is a pointer to the meaninglessness of language and phatic communion in modern society. Parody is a postmodernist technique, just like the satire, used by the playwright for a corrective purpose. In the play one of the best examples of parody is in the scene involving Odewale, Aderopo and the chiefs. In the play Aderopo depicted as a parodist ; his forte is to create a comic relief in the midst of tension, anger and pestering, the tense atmosphere in one word. This might seem strange to understand ; but the fact of the matter remains that the double discursive nature behind this is that when Aderopo refuses to divulge the message from Orunmila openly and decides to offer greetings instead. In the fold the chiefs mimic the messenger and tell him that they did not send him all the way to Ille-Ife to bring them greetings. In this parody, Aderopo is tactful. When he returns from the oracle of Ille-Ife with a message full of damaging effects, he meets with the pressure of the chiefs. This technique allows the playwright to depict man as an absurd being living in an absurd world and as an actor who is forced to make choices in an essentially meaningless milieu that functions like a cruel theater of the absurd. The use of this technique is also meant to portray the emptiness, corruption and meaninglessness of the society. Postmodernist fiction or play does not present the reality of existence under any illusion but strives to present the true vision of life. Thus this play focuses on the Nigerian body politic in particular and African's in general. This highlights the rivalry between two biological brothers namely Odewale and Aderopo. The hunt for power, one of Africa's foibles, is illustrated through the relationship between the citizens : the link between Baba Fakunle and Aderopo on the one side and Odewale on the other side. In an attempt to find the murderer of King Adetusa so as to curb the disaster that befalls the community, Baba Fakunle the Ifa priest discloses that King Odewale is the 'murderer and the bedsharer'. In clear terms, Odewale is the person who has committed patricide and incest. Initially the priest's assertion was dismissed as the people take him as a madman or one suffering from defects of old age since it has been established according to an eye-witness that the late king was murdered by robbers. This deepens the suspicion and mistrust Odewale has developed towards Aderopo and the chiefs as he accuses them of conniving with the Ifa priest to plot his downfall. Odewale accuses them of prejudice :

‘just because I am Ijekun man, and do not belong to your tribe, the sight of me as your King gnaws at your liver, and rips your heart asunder, so you go round me, bribe that blind bat to com to point his finger at me as the cursed killer of your father. Tell me now, is that not the act of crawling, cunning tortoise ?’ (34).

The atmosphere here thus becomes polluted. Rotimi uses the scatological imagery as an artistic weapon used for satirising the rush for power in African societies. In this instance the playwright is able to foreground some neocolonial palavers such as political insanity, general indecent behaviour, intolerance, religious bigotry, tribal antagonism, corruption and stealing of spoils all expressed with features of drama and poetry. During the nigerian civil war when military leaders divided the country into regions based on ethnicity, ethnic strife, mistrust, antagonism, betrayal undermined not only the central authority of the government but also the unity of the nation. In fact, a nation which initially accepted leaders either military or civilians as leaders of different ethnic group found themselves as a nation or people of distrusted and alienated leaders who on their part did not trust the people they are governing because of their different ethnic background or difference. In this play ethnic nationalism is a flaw or harmatia over which post colonial society is constructed. This society is presented by the playwright as representing chaos, a pluralistic or information drenched aspects of postmodern society.

What Rotimi really meant by tribalism or ethnicism is closely related to ‘racism’ and this is what prevails in contemporary African countries. This is really the playwright’s assessment of the role and values of the group in post-independence Africa as far as democratic values - political parties and the electoral process advocated by the Gods are concerned. Even Odewale is full of prejudice and has killed for that when he claimed the Oldman insulted his ethnicity and mocked his tribe. Now he has become a victim of ethnic prejudice. During political campaigns candidates rely on the ethnic and tribal allegiance of their ethnic group to run for elections. This suggests that loyalty to the clan and the tribe which make up constituencies is far better than to any particular party or any overriding political allegiance or social program. This strategy as used by politicians is meant to push candidates into their own entourage and convince them by using their own mother tongue to convince their constituency in terms elections. The playwright demonstrates that ethnic-based identity is a big plague and this shows in the plague that has befallen Odewale’s kingdom. Through the characters and events unfolding the history of Nigeria is presented to the reader through mime, stage pagentry and verbal narration. The cause of the plague is not inadvertant; rather, it is a signifier of the instability of and indeterminacy plaguing contemporary African societies as a cancer and eats deep into its fabric or matrix. It is also an artistic solution to the problem of ethnicism in Nigeria. Ethnicity tends to involve a variety of social practices, rituals and traditions in identifying different collective groups and are today used as grounds for discrimaination. The playwright uses the images of this for his story and their formlations as well and measures them against his real experiences of existentialist problems of neocolonial states where certain ethnic groups or tribe might find themselves disqualified from certain positions of power.

In the play we are told that Gbonka’s and Alaka’s stories about the murder of King Adetusa are ‘truthful lies’. This is also a postmodernist technique often used to shock the reader into awareness and to familiarise him or her from the story. This shows that there is no originality or rigid structure in art and tries to efface any boudary between art and everyday life. The reader is shocked to hear that Odewale is still alive though he was condemned to be offered as a sacrifice to the gods and even more shocked when Alaka, Odewale’s childhood friend arrives on

time at Kutuje and makes some revelations which have gone a long way to confirm truth in Baba Fakunle's verdict. Alaka, who on his arrival was called a 'madman' because he came from a different tribe, reveals to Odewale, that his (Odewale's) father died peacefully in bed in Oshokun. Odewale relieved at the news given by his childhood friend, announces to the crowd that 'the gods have lied' (59). Through a flashback he relates that a priest of Ifa told him he would kill his father and marry and marry his mother. Therefore, the death of his father proves the oracle wrong thus defying the oracle. Though in the previous chapter it has been proven that the oracle of the gods and ancestors are never wrong because of the tragedy which has befallen the community. In *The Gods* the comical character Alaka, for example, represents Odewale's childhood friend whom he had warned never to look for him until the death of his parents for the oracle told him that he would kill his father and thereafter marry his own mother. Odewale mistakes Ishokun village as his own in the play and his step parents as his biological ones running away in the bid to escape the curse. Ola Rotimi privileges the metafictional form of literature. Metafictional in the sense that the playwright consciously and constantly tells the reader that he is reading a piece of fiction with its myths and legends.

McHale (1987 :39) asserts that one of the features of the postmodernist [novel or] play is the focus it displays on its own structure, that its self-reflexivity. Self-reflexivity is another characteristic of postmodernism. In the postmodern play or novel self-reflexivity is itself a metaphor for the ontological questioning, discussion, and anxiety of the present age. By drawing attention to its being an artefact, postmodern fiction or play self-consciously opens the relationship between reality and fiction to question. This means that it is self-reflexive, a reflection on itself— a commentary on its own narrative and/or its own linguistic identity. Fantasy is a device used in self-reflexivity. In self reflexive texts, like Ola Rotimi's playtext, the reader is directly told that the referents of the text's language do not correspond to his experience or the empirical world, in the covertly self-reflexive texts, the fictiveness of the referents is absolute. This is a confrontation between the real and the fictional, i.e., the possible and the impossible ; the reader creates his/her own literary constructs/novelistic universe. In this sense, the postmodern novel or play is a fantasy ; a fictional world, not the exact copy of the external world. There is no relation of signification between the signifier and signified. One signifier is what it is because it is not something else. The 'otherness' of the other gains importance in this sense. That's the distinctionness of the real and fictional worlds. What is created in fiction is not the real world but the 'other' world. In the postmodern fiction, which is self-reflexive, the reader's attention is drawn not only on what is narrated but to how it is narrated. In this context, plot is only a part of intertextuality, the process of narration matters more than the content. The fictional presence of the writer as a character reinforces this transformation of the traditional narrative from the story told to the storytelling, the functioning of language and the use of narrative structures. Consequently, new demands are made on the reader or consumer. Firstly, he is called upon to know that what he reads is a text, which self consciously presents its own creative process. In this type of fiction reading is no longer an easy task for the reader is asked to participate in the creative process. Since the self reflexive state of the playtext denies its existence as a 'realistic narrative of something outside itself' (Hutcheon, 1980 :13), the reader's attention is drawn not the projected world, but to the text's linguistic medium. This play is unique because it aspires to the metafictional status.

In the play we encounter playfulness, rather than seriousness in the play thus erasing the link between art and everyday life. In some instances, the reader feels like watching a melodramatic piece. The technique of playfulness is actualized through the use of an alldurated

form of the English language: pidgin. This technique allows him to mock sociopolitical issues of his postcolonial society. This technique serves as a strategy for most postcolonial writers to gear towards evasion. In this context Ola Rotimi is endowed with freedom not to dwell on the problems and history of his country in a very direct way. Things have degenerated to the extent that certain people prefer dying abroad to living in illusion. Ola Rotimi has used the postmodernist method of evasion to comment on post independence disillusionment as well as erasing the boundary between everyday life. In his enabling society, the playwright makes profuse references to contemporary sociopolitical contradictions or issues.

#### Conclusion :

This paper has used postmodernist poetics in a broader frame of reference to show that the playwright in his endeavour is a postmodernist writer who posits that postmodernism is such a broad concept that cannot facilitate extensive discussion under the present context, but could best be discussed and understood in through the periscope of several theoretical frameworks which are part and parcel of its hints thus reflecting its eclecticism as its basic characteristics. The use of manifold theoretical frameworks as an approach to the play has provided the reader with the necessary materials towards his/her understanding of the play as a post modernist work because it an open work in which the reader is expected or supposed to supply his own connections, work out alternative meanings, and provide his own interpretation (unguided) as opposed to modernist works. Thus, the paper discusses postmodernism as a critical theory and movement where Critics and cultural historians have debated the term as one which is variously used to describe a widespread current in art and literature as well as an entire worldview.

While some see it as the continuation and development of modernist ideas, others see in postmodern art a radical break with classical modernism as a response against dogmatic following of Enlightenment thinking and Modernist approaches, mostly to literature. Of these tough issues, the most obvious are those concerning the innovative artistic thrust of African writers in their attempt to reflect the socio-historical realities of their society in changing the semantic contents privileged in western hegemonic culture by transforming the figures that bear them; because postmodernist tenets hold that all thought and all meaning is discursive and narrational. When a reader enters into social debates over the shape of the “new world”, s/he merely trades stories and offers contending narratives. Any change in turn would merely be the success of one narrative over the other. Since literature reflects the moods of its age and enabling context, it has been established throughout this paper that the Nigerian playwright’s artistic feat lies in his ability to eschew modern or western narrative formulae which relies heavily on fixed ideology, form and structural patterns. The play *The Gods Are Not To Blame*, derives its postmodern aesthetics from the fact that, though theatrical, it is endowed with a remarkable literary dimension in its attempt to signify the anomic nature of contemporary African society. This paper has tried to examine the play through a postmodernist lens or characteristics and showed in the process how Ola Rotimi has endeavoured to make his play contemporary relevant. His rewriting or rereading of hegemonic literature may be regarded as an instance of canonical counter-discourse in its effort to seriously negotiate its independence from the European canon.

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