

Theater

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again

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Olawale Gladstone Emmanuel Rotimi, popularly known as Ola Rotimi, was born in Sapele, the former Bendel State of Nigeria, on April 13, 1938 to an Ijaw mother and a Yoruba father. He was a playwright, stage director, producer, actor, critic, scholar and a teacher. In his early age, he was exposed to a traditional Nigeria heritage of arts. He was educated at Methodist Boys High School in Lagos from 1952 to 1957. He went to Boston University for a Bachelor's in Theater Arts degree where he studied play writing and directing. He later went to Yale University where he received a Master's in Arts degree after three years and returned to Nigeria in 1966. He took a job at the University of Ife, where he was a research fellow from 1966 to 1969 at the Institute of African Studies (Rotimi's Website, 2021).

Rotimi later became Head of Creative Arts and Director at the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria. He was one of the most significant dramatists in the continent of Africa. He examined Nigerian's history and ethnic traditions in his works. He was in Nigeria until his death in 2000 (Rotimi's Website, 2021).

Book Review

By challenging the usual politics after independence in most African countries and a post-independence period that was filled with corruption and looting of the treasury, *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* offers a theatrical perspective that satirizes the shortcomings in the African continent. As a satire, the text laughs at the political excesses of African politicians and it also mocks polygamy with its attendant consequences in the continent. In this exploration, the text is divided into two acts.

Act 1 pertains to how politicians in Africa see politics as simply a game of manipulation in which they play to satisfy their selfish interests at the detriment of the entire continent. The protagonist, Lejoka Brown, emphasizes the fact that politics has become everything one can think about or aspire for in life. To him, the fulfillment of life in terms of money and properties can only be achieved via politics, where one is given the privilege to partake of the national cake. This sham motivates Lejoka Brown to join politics as he tells his bosom friend Okonkwo the following: "Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life?—No, no—you want to chop a big slice of the national cake?—Na politics" (Rotimi, 1977, p. 4).

Lejoka's wife Sikira confirms his deep involvement in politics by observing that he is not only "madly in love with politics, he sleeps with politics and dreams of it" (Rotimi, 1977, p. 23). This excerpt is the view of most politicians in Africa where politicians who win elections immediately become kings and money moguls due to the wealth they obtain through shady

means. This act also discusses the use of military-style tactics by Lejoka Brown during the election which he refers to as “surprise and attack” (Rotimi, 1977, p. 50). This is not an ideal situation in politics rather in war. This tendency will definitely lead to abuse of human rights and suspension of a constitution.

Marriage is also seen as bait to win election. This is the case of Lejoka Brown who marries Sikira for the sake of his political ambition. Sikira’s mother, being the leader of Nigerian Union of Market Women, Lejoka Brown hopes that through her mother he will gain the support and the votes of the market women. He is not interested about Sikira’s welfare, except the votes he intends to win through her mother. According to him, “Her marriage is for emergency...that woman’s case is only for necessity, anyway—temporary measure. We need women’s votes, man, if we must win the next election” (Rotimi, 1977, p. 10).

Act 2 reveals Lejoka Brown lamenting over the return of his third wife, Liza, back to Nigeria. Her arrival brings a lot of negativities that affect Lejoka Brown’s political career. Also, in this act, polygamy as a system of marriage in Africa is portrayed. Rotimi dramatizes the incessant fights and arguments between Sikira and her co-wife Liza. They constantly fight each other. The relationship between the two is that of mutual suspicion and fear. Sikira fears that Liza might overshadow her because Liza is more educated than her. At the end, they become friends and join forces against their husband, Lejoka Brown. Liza encourages Sikira to become presidential flag bearer of her party in order to challenge their husband. All these developments bring to the end Lejoka Brown’s political tussle and pave the way for his return to family life and the cocoa business his father left for him. Distressed and very upset, Lejoka Brown decides to quit politics to save his life after he has been voted out by his party. He reflects on the events that brought him thus far and apologizes to Liza as follows: “...Elizabeth, I’m really very sorry for everything that has happened. I’ll go back to the cocoa business. No more money politics for me. But first, I’ll build you the clinic I promised” (Rotimi, 1977, p. 75).

Lejoka Brown and the other members of his party were disappointed, due to broken hopes and unfulfilled promises. The strength of this book can be seen in its carefulness in discussing the various issues raised: the social, political, economic and cultural problems. The shortcoming of the book is that although the playwright is critical of the ills in the continent, he is not harsh in condemning them.

Book’s Greatness

A number of reasons support my choice of the book as one of the great works written in the field of Theater by Africans. One reason is that Lejoka Brown’s household is in reality a fictional representation of what actually happens in most polygamous families in Africa. The other reason is the use of songs and proverbs which domesticate the mode of communication in order to give it an African flavor. There is also the element of credibility in the characterization such that the characters represent either a class or social group in the continent. Apart from this, the two major religions in Africa—Christianity and Islam—are portrayed via the characters. By this, the playwright is indirectly addressing the need for religious tolerance.

Another reason is that the book has received a large number of mentions. For example, a search in Google Scholar on August 20, 2021 exposed 30 citations. Also, an in-depth search on the Google engine with quotation marks on the title of the book in order to isolate only those places where it is mentioned on the same date produced almost 18,000 results in 0.50 seconds.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The foregoing analysis leads me to conclude that the book reviewed here offers an understanding of basic theatrical art forms that touches every African. Theater as an art form is also interpreted in the analysis to cover not only the conventional drama, but also paradrama and metadrama. Above all, the book pays greater attention to class and social relations between individuals and their circumstances. In digging further, the analysis bequeaths and widens the audience's creative and imaginative minds by making them see the theatrical representations in the text as real-life experiences.

By this consciousness, I make the following recommendations for future reference. First, the text reviewed can serve as part of a literature review and logical segments of future works on African Theater/drama. Second, going by the numerous functions of Theater highlighted, African researchers should build more on some of the themes embedded in the book selected and reviewed.

References

- Rotimi, O. (1977). *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Lagos, Nigeria: Oxford University Press.
- Rotimi's Website. (2021). Obafemi Awolowo University. Retrieved on August 28, 2021 from <https://oauife.edu.ng/news-events/item/343-in-memory-of-ola-rotimi>