Tragedy and its Cathartic Effect in Tiv Praise Poetry: A Reflection on Misery and Death in the Praise Poetry of Obadiah Kehemen Orkor

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There is an ironic sense of fatalism in the Praise Poetry of the Tiv people which is created to elicit honour, heroism and success. It is an art form that evokes extreme emotions but also purges them in a manner that puts the reader or hearer in control of himself.

This paper examines a selection of oral poems by Obadia Orkor from Ukum district of Benue State to prove that Tiv art is a secular craft that seeks rational interpretation of man’s tragic fate in the same manner Greek tragedies did in classical times.

THE ART OF TRAGEDY

The mere mention of the word, tragedy, conjures the image of catastrophe, death, destruction, loss, despair or misery. Whether we have control over our fate or not, or whether we believe our destinies are governed by a supreme deity or not, somehow, human beings sooner or later succumb to the inevitable hands of death and mortality. Of course, lesser tragic events come our way every now and then but it is our final demise through death that engages us in intense imagination and confusion. Death therefore becomes the much dreaded phenomenon to which poets and philosophers attempt to mitigate with intellectual candour.

Right from its inception in classical Greece around 533 BC as an art form, tragedy has been associated with special occasions and people and has been used to depict the fate of famous men and women who were clearly above average in their societies. In “tragedy has always been a precious word that confers dignity and value on violence, catastrophe, agony and bereavement (1), thereby giving us an impression that for each of these encounters, there is something exceptional behind it.

Because life on earth is full of misfortunes, we are regularly assaulted by one tragedy or the other. The news of automobile accidents, collapsed buildings, drown individuals, armed-robbery attacks, lost elections and so on have their differing degrees of impact on the audience (or listener) as well as his filial space with incidents and knowledge of characters involved in the tragedy. The philosophy behind Aristotle’s Poetics, especially his theory on tragedy is to ensure that adequate rational explanation is given for tragedy with a view to learning lessens of life. Hence it is expected that the emotions of fear and pity are excited and also expunged in a process of catharsis. The art of tragedy therefore seeks to explain the
imperfections of man and gives reasons why human beings are constantly engaged in misfortunes and how the effects of these catastrophes are cushioned so that life continued. In this regard, we find Poole’s poetic but commonplace explanation in the following passage very useful:

News headlines fade and so does our sense of tragedy in real lives and deaths. Tragedy is the cry we now hear when the news first breaks. Why? Because we don’t yet know enough, especially about who or what is to blame – though we certainly want to. We don’t yet know about the past nor do we know how the story will develop as the investigations proceed. As the shocking event becomes absorbed into something called history, the analysis, explanations and counter-explanations proliferate. The raw emotions cool. The tears dry. The flowers wither. In a year’s time or two, we may wonder why so many people got so disturbed. (12-13)

Poole’s explanation here stresses the factor of time as a teleological process of catharsis; the fact that trauma, no matter how grave, is mitigated in the course of time when “raw emotions cool.” However his idea of analysis or explanation and counter explanation is really what constitutes the art of tragedy as was enunciated by Aristotle and other scholars with the view to alleviating emotional devastation. However it is Jennifer Wallace’s conception of the aesthetic of tragedy as operating more effectively on stage and in poetry performances that is most central to this study.

Tragedy is the art form created to confront the most difficult experiences we face – death, loss, injustice, thwarted passion, despair. From the ancient Greek theatre up to the most recent plays, playwrights have found in a tragic drama, a means to seek explanation to disaster. Questions about the causes of suffering, which are raised in each culture, are posed powerfully in tragedy. Indeed, the rules and conventions of tragic drama arguably make the dramatisation of those questions possible. (1)

Two assumptions are obvious from Wallace’s explanation above. Firstly, a work of tragedy must develop a befitting catharsis to accommodate the extreme emotional trauma that arises in the tragic happenstance in a work of art, hence the reader must be helped to overcome his excruciating pains. Secondly, the events in the work of art must be dramatized or at least presented with the thoroughness that requires the audience to come to terms with it. These two assumptions ultimately imply that tragedy thrives in its ability to provoke the audience’s response; which makes Wallace believe that tragedy has been originally contemplated for the stage where there is a direct physical contact between the writer of the play or the performer and his audience.

As an oral performer, the Tiv Praise Poet naturally falls in the category of a dramatist whose art brings him face to face with his audience. However, what rational interpretation does the Tiv praise poet give in his treatment of the themes of death and misery which are so prevalent in his poetry? Does Tiv literature really operate in the secular realm, distinct from the religious beliefs of the people? What cathartic effect does Tiv oral poetry have on its audience? I have proposed to answer these questions through my analysis of the songs of Obadiah Orkor from Ukum district of Benue State.

THE TIV AND THEIR ORAL POETRY

To most non-indigenes, the mention of Tiv nostalgically evokes a picture of a war-like people racing through the savannah grassland of Northern Nigeria, chanting war songs. To the Tiv themselves, they embody more than this attribute of
milicancy to protect their rather vulnerable grassland. They are indeed fiercely egalitarian in their outlook about life and hence are natural believers in the norms of democracy, justice, equity and human liberty.

On the present political map of Nigeria, the Tiv occupy the South-Eastern half of Benue and the Southern parts of Nasarawa and Taraba States. Their main occupation is subsistence agriculture in yams, cassava, cirrus and cereals as well as hunting. Politically, they are an acephalous society living in small autonomous patrilinear compounds (20-30 people on the average) scattered all over the land. Each is headed by an Orya and is identified gerontocratically by their clans and the district entities. Centralized chieftaincy institution in Tiv land was only introduced in 1946 when the British Colonial Administration enthroned the first Tor Tiv. Due to the late arrival of literacy in the land, the Tiv are not fairly or adequately represented in books of sociology, anthropology and literature. The few that exist were written by European Administrators and Missionaries who perhaps, only wanted to proclaim their scandalous allegation of a people without culture. Charles Keil, for instance wrote that the “Tiv have no pan-Tiv polity, no laws, no myths, no religion, no art.” (22). He explains that “words like arts, ‘beauty’ ‘symbol’ ‘aesthetics’ ‘creation’, and ‘music’, are not concepts that translate easily in Tiv.” (43), so he believes the entire concept of art is non-existent. It is needless to respond to these allegations so late in the Twenty-first Century as many scholars and researchers have taken up the task in their published works that prove the literature of the Tiv can be appreciated in its thematic and aesthetic finesse. Notably, Toryina Jenkwe’s *Yamuel Yashi: A Study of Tiv Oral Poetry* [1998]; Apegba Ker’s *Tiv Poetry and Politics* A Study of Tarker Golozo [2002]; Iyorwuese Hagher’s *The Tiv Kwagh-hir* [1990]; Gowon Doki’s *Traditional Theatre in Perspective; Signs and Signification in Igbe, Givinya and Kwagh-hir* [2006]; Godwin Yina’s *Semiotic of Tiv Oral Poetry* [2011]; Leticia Mbaiver Nyitse’s *Form and Content of Tiv Songs* [2006]; Ayem Shoja’s *Aesthetics and social Vision in Tiv Oral Poetry* [2010] and many other articles in reputable journals all provide ample argument for efficacy of Tiv Oral Literature.

In the Tiv society, art does not only arise unconsciously or passively as products of everyday life, a view that gained prominence among earlier scholars like Hagher and Tor Jenkwe [1998]. To them, poetry generally manifests in almost all social activities in the land and all activities with a sense of motion like dancing, beating of drums, hoeing, love-making, weaving, pounding, grinding, scooping of water, petting a baby and travelling along the path. According to Hagher:

Tiv poetry is then to be found in daily life, and also especially in proverbs and riddles, various kinds of songs, religious secular ballads, dance and songs rituals chants, folktales dances and the Kwaghhir theatre. (48)

This view certainly overstretches the definition of poetry as an art form created by a recognized creative individual for aesthetic and social effect in society. The praise poetry of the Tiv, for example is a specialized art form that is created and performed by professionals, who like his Western counterparts aspire for excellence. Of all these sources of poetry listed by Hagher, only lullabies, poems from folktales and few other lyric poems that cannot be ascribed individual authorship. Social organisations, dance groups and recently the Christian religious groups who have no composers for their poetry contact specialists for their needs. The elders, the rich, and aspirants to greatness also patronise poets to have their successes...
extolled. The praise poet is therefore an important functionary in the Tiv society. He is recognised as a moulder of public image, an interpreter, a critic, a counsellor, an entertainer and a functional ideologue in the Tiv traditional society.

Although Tiv poetry deals with themes from a wide spectrum of life, it is predominantly concerned with death and misery, while the poets eulogise wealthy individuals for their virtues, generosity and strength of character, as well as criticize others for their indulgence in vice and disrespect for societal norms. They also position themselves strategically in their songs as participants in the tragedy. In doing this, most Tiv praise poets deliver their poems fictionally in the first person, assuming the place of beggars or the bereaved who seek to elicit the emotions of pity and fear of his audience. Jenkwe, however, unwittingly observes that:

The most evidently recurrent theme in Tiv philosophical poetry is undoubtedly that of poverty, this reflects the nature of the society which is poverty-stricken. (138)

While it is doubtful what yardstick against which Jenkwe measures his “poverty” of the Tiv, it is rather being too simplistic and superficial to imagine that the poet’s concern for poverty and misery were essentially over his own personal conditions. These songs afford the composer the opportunity of expressing his feelings on an issue; feelings which he knows the entire society shares. Besides, it is not because a praise poet is poor that he sings. Even when a praise poet traces his history of the motivation of his credit to an unhappy beginning like losing his parents or other relations, he invariably remarks that he had started composing poetry because he wanted condolence not wealth. Two prominent oral poets Kuji Yum and Obadiah Orkor disclosed to me in separate interviews in 1987 that they actually starting composing poetry after traumatic events of bereavement, even though neither of them created an impression that the creativity was lacking in him before the incident. The loss of their beloved relations only triggered off their talents.

The craft of praise poetry has been institutionalised in Tiv-land. The poet recites his poetry at social gatherings like burials, marriages, title-taking ceremonies, ‘burukutu’ bars and at his patrons’ homes by special invitation. He is therefore essentially an itinerant poet. The decentralised social and political organisation of Tiv accounts for their attitude of the poet. The main preoccupation of the Tiv poet therefore is not just to provide recreation, but to establish a “Tiv polity” or highlight common features that bind the Tiv society together – its history, beliefs, aspirations and innovations in the land. Regardless of their multiplicity, some of who turn to be more specialist than universal, the “soul” of Tiv poetry is essentially perpetuated, the kinship Spirit excited, emotions raised and expunged by the poet who should have the tact to do that.

The first two genres of praise poetry were Gercham (literally, call and response song) and Ibiamegh (songs of greatness), both of which are variants of Ballad. The Gercham was sung mainly after victory in the wars fought by the Tiv while all other poems recited to express calamity, pleasure and beauty of the land were in the category of Ibiamegh. Further breakdown of the genre over the years has given birth to others like aluibiiam (literally, child of ibiamegh) meaning eulogising, as well as ishongo or ange which means criticism or insults.

The Tiv praise poet craves for originality and excellence by incorporating new ideas and styles in his craft. Indeed, every crisis or remarkable development in the history of the Tiv features as a theme and consequently becomes a distinct genre in poetry or dance. Similarly, an object (like a
musical instrument or trickster animal in folktales) could form the basis of a poetic genre.

The poetry of Tondo Kumbur may be classified under ange or ishongo which is a genre for point-blank criticism. Tondo Kumbur’s poetry is more occasional than philosophical. He was always prompt at commenting on topical issues, sandwiching his comments with laudations an appeals to his patrons and prominent people in the land. Another poet, Youghur Ute personalises his genre and calls it imar (the flute). Although he does not blow a real flute he feigns one as a device for voice-manipulation or signature-tune. His poems are also very occasional but less critical. They try to mould public image and mostly serve as an interpreter of public programmes to the governed.

Some other genres like the ichegher (melon), the Nyinya (horse poetry to commemorate the ownership of a horse) are sub divisions of the ibiamegh and gercham genre. However, few artists in the land still maintain the orthodoxy of Gercham and ibiamegh. Kuje Yum, for instance clearly maintains the ibiamegh style like Hemen man Dondo, but still insists on personalizing his genre as Kwäregh (literally, yelling). The ichegher song of Iorkimbir Ajabu is a good example of a gercham poem where the call and response technique is employed to heighten the joy of his patron, Aper Aku’s victory at the polls. Similarly, Tondo Kumbur’s poem on the Biafran civil war, had the gercham style in which the Federal troops chanted victory songs at the rhythm of trotting guns. Obadiah Okor and Yamuel Yashi are of the aluibiam clans. Their focus had been on the society-criticising and advising with the aim of correcting ills.

The Tiv praise poet has no need for formal training in his craft. He goes straight into the art and perfects himself through active participation as well as the feedback from his audience. He usually goes about with a partner or more who interestingly, has a voice similar to his; and renders their presentation to sound like the voice of a man with many vocal cords.

The Tiv praise poet has no single definite place of performing his art. He could be found in all social gathering in the land, sometimes uninvited. There is hardly any “burukutu” drinking bar in the land that lacks a poet at anytime of the day. Wealthy individuals, and aspirants to greatness send special invitations to them, which is termed mir or imo (literally, soaking a song), a pun on the word “soak” used to represent the process of brewing beer. At that occasion, local beer is brewed in abundance. The patron also kills a goat or a cow, depending on his capability and the impression he wants to create on his age-group. This is, undoubtedly, the most formal of all occasions of performance, with a large audience in attendance.

The audience at a performance is always conscious of its critical role. Members disagree and approve of any piece of poem, with courtesy and politeness. When a poet finishes a particular poem and is found not to be good enough, Aande Amende testifies in Charles Keil’s book that:

The audience will call you and tell you to sing others. They will, however not directly scorn at you or drive you away or even remark that the poem is not good enough. The audience can only tell him their favourites and ask him to repeat them. When the repetition is done for three or four times they start learning to sing and consequently join the poet in areas that are less difficult. (52)

Some songs, especially in the Gercham genre have the call and response device which require audience participation as in Tondo Kumbur’s poem on the civil war.
At the end of a performance, the audience might react vaguely that the artist sings doo (well), or tsembelee (brilliantly), or vindi-vindi (constructively), or lugh-lugh (comfortably), or baver-baver (violently). These ideophonic descriptions help to emphasise that not only is the poet expected to deliver meaningful poems, but indeed to do so in a manner that is captivating and befitting of the mood and the circumstance being described. Since most of these songs deal with the tragedy of misery and death in the land, the Tiv oral poetry is expected to deploy words and logic to help mitigate the emotional devastation his audience might have experienced in the course of recreating such events.

OBADIAH ORKOR’S POETRY OF MISERY AND DEATH

In her study of the oral poetry of most other ethnic groups in Africa, Ruth Finnegan concludes that the poetry that evokes the sense of death or misery was not necessarily meant to be elegiac poetry. Which means that death and sorrow were predominant themes in poetry irrespective of which genre is being considered. She says:

There is also, however, a sense in which elegiac poetry also includes poems which take death or sorrow as their general themes without being connected with funerals or actual mourning. In this sense, elegiac poetry in Africa does not often seem to be a distinctly recognized genre. (281)

The prevalence of death in Tiv praise poetry is as a result of Tiv’s belief that death is caused not by God but man. They believe that whatever evil befalls a fellowman is caused by someone else who may have acquired some Tsav mystic power or by Akombo which are mystical elements created by human beings and represented in “cultic emblems like pottery, feathers, bones of animals or carved images” (Yina 47)

The Tiv people believe that by nature (Gba-Aondo) man is supposed to die, and by invoking the name of God (Aondo) as a transcendent essence of nature, the Tiv believe in God as a supreme deity. This fact is affirmed by Akiga [63] as well as Wegh and Moti [15-18]. Ushe Mike says that the Tiv people believe that the death of all human beings are caused by both supernatural and human agents which include the following:

God the creator of the world (Aondo), witches and wizards (Mbatsav) Spirits (adzov), magical powers (Akombo) traditional medical practitioners (ior mba akombov) and diviners (ior mbakpehenishe) (35)

However, Ushe, like most scholars of Tiv cosmology seem to overstate the spirituality of the Tiv man. Hagher’s conceptualization of the Tiv spiritual status is drawn principally from J.B. Pratt, a European ethnographer who like Charles Keil are unable to draw a distinction between secular activities and religious worship in African traditional societies. Moti and Wegh are even more explicit as they state their case in the following words:

In Tiv worldview, it is the sacral character that unifies human experiences and homogenizes Tiv cultural institutions. Economic life cannot be separated from religion, neither can legal injunctions be divorced from morality... The dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the supernatural, and the natural which is so characteristic of western worldview is strikingly absent in Tiv worldview. (101)

The above statement certainly cannot be sacrosanct especially in examining the Tiv oral poetry where a great deal of individual craft and secular consciousness are involved. In determining the cause of death
among Tiv in their poetry, Ushe’s categorization of the 5 agents of death as quoted above, for instance are basically human-induced except God (Aondo). The idea therefore is that the Tiv believe deaths are caused by human factor through Tsav and Akombo. Certainly, it is not the Almighty God that engages in these practices.

In one of his songs, “Joseph Daa”, collected and published by Godwin Yina, the poet describes a melancholic situation to explain the foolhardiness of people indulging in witchcraft (Tsav) to cause the death of their relations, an evil which had brought misery and poverty in Tivland:

I sojourned the wide world
Where I saw a lonely man.
In a deserted homestead
Wearing a solemn look
Pensive mood, sad
Haggard and withdrawn
With his face lowered
He had no sister
No relation. He sat in
Quiet desolation
Contemplating over the many graves,
The graves of children
Those of their mothers, the graves
of other family members
(He was a pitiable sight. (112)

This poem narrates a tragic story of the poet’s encounter with a man who had lost all his relations and was living alone in misery and poverty. With this terse but graphic account of his solitary livelihood among the graves of his family members, the reader is overcome with the emotion of fear and pity. We are left to imagine what epidemic that might have swept the extended family of this decrepit man. This situation, like all situations of tragedy presents itself with the urgent need to assign blame. While we sympathize or empathize with the sad man who has lost all members of his family and buried them at his derelict homestead, the first reaction could be to blame God or other supernatural forces for the epidemic that might almost wiped off the family. The poet-persona puts a question across to the tragic character in the ballad so as to elicit an explanation for his predicament and his response is as follows:

Out of curiosity
I said to him,
“My elder, let me ask you something
What really has happened?
…He told in ancient tongue
That my refusal to snap my fingers
(while taking drawl soup)
Is to blame for my
present state
Who else do I blame?
There is no game at home
It is only we, the humans
The driver has swung (his vehicle)
Avoiding a dog
But has killed many people instead.

The man vaguely admits culpability leaving room for his audience to speculate what really had been the ideas about his “refusal to snap his fingers” while taking drawl soup. In Tiv worldview, privileged people eat their pounded yams with meat and non-drawl soup. Those who cannot afford to buy meat or hunt for animals for their meals end up eating drawl phlegmatic soup and snapping their fingers. By implication, the man admits that he had killed his relations as a replacement for the meat of animals through Tsav and Akombo, the twin supernatural forces which are manipulated by men, and not God. His predicament is as a result of a rational decision taken by him to eliminate all his relations and inherit their possessions and acquire powers. This symbolic representation of greed and avarice in society is captured as act of cannibalism, a practice abhorred by all civilized societies.

In the Tiv society, God is omnipresent, but He is not far away in heaven. The rational man manipulates him either through Tsav
Akombo and inflicts harm on his fellow man or society at large. The striking metaphor of a car driver swinging his car while dodging a dog but crashing into a crowd and killing many people shows how one man’s mistake or misjudgement becomes the calamity of the society at large. This is what Aristotle calls hamartia or tragic flaw and it is concerned with the action of a human being rather than a god. However, we don’t see this tragic situation completely bereft of beliefs of the supernatural. There appears to be grave consequences for such dastardly acts of murders and spiritual manipulations. There is instant retributive justice. The man in the poem sinks deeply into the abyss of misery and hopelessness, which also explains why a great deal of our emotions of fear and pity are considerably reduced. However, as explained aptly by Yina, the Akombo itself is not completely negative, for it is also used in sustaining useful processes in society and administering medications to naughty sicknesses. Yina explains further: Akombo on its part, constitute a religious system of rites, rituals emblems and incantations representative of specific, supernatural agencies, which are liable to interfere with the natural functioning of things. Akombo are mystical forces represented in cultic emblems… Akombo are manifest in the emblems that represent or symbolize each force, and in the diseases that each creates. Thus an Akombo known as Igbe inflicts a kind of illness, which causes chronic dysentery. Igbe is said to catch (Kor) someone when he defecates continuously. (47)

Another poem by Obadiah Orkor, “One day I might finish hoeing” describes the misery and poverty in the land as self-inflicted since people willfully and consciously work to pull down others. This particular song explains the unhealthy relationship between the poet and his maternal people at Mbaterem, who had pulled him down to retard his progress as a farmer and poet. He calls on his patrons to forbid such actions hence they were also aware of specific individuals responsible for these nefarious acts.

My life is shendegh-shendegh (delicate)
I’ll not hide from you, Ityulugh.
Children of Mbaterem Ukum pulled me
Onto my heels, tenge-tenge
My mother’s people
When you have a child that beats people
Condemn such
It’s not only the paternal people
But all round the world.

Although the pull-down syndrome is prevalent in Tivland, the poet-persona vows to remain steadfast in his vocation to succeed or possibly die in active service. He obviously believes in individual determinism in the circumstance of misery. He expresses his belief in individuals dictating their destinies in spite of the jealousy and hatred among his people. To Obadiah Orkor, the tragedy of an average citizen should better be explained by what he engages as a livelihood instead of spiritual determinism. Tragedy in this sense must be seen as self-inflicted or as a necessary hazard in once preoccupation.

I had regretted long ago
But I swore to sing, so let me continue.
If one day I finish hoeing
If one day I fling the hoe against the mound
A drop dead on the ground
I’ll shall be happy
I’ll shall be happy, my wife
The well-excavator has died in the well Mbagum
A thief has died on the guinea-corn granary
I shall die in my field
…I will wrestle with Mbaavav Gurem
Let them soak my meat in water
So that flies will disperse.

In the last phase of the song, the poet bemoans the situation of misery in his land arising from the persistent struggle for supremacy among the citizens with
witchcraft and *Akombo*. It is then the duty of the poet to console his patrons who are also victims of the misery by painting a picture that transcends individual calamity. The emotions of fear and pity are lessened on realizing that the misery has universal application.

Don’t cry, Tyokase
Ugbegher Ager Tsebo refused the land of Mbayenge
Jootar, the land has turned you a slave
The land of Mbaterem is (gloomy) *tsum tsum tsum.*
I am also (gloomy) *tsum tsum tsum* Tyokase
I’ll blame those who console you
Their condolence messages mention me.
That’s why I (cry) *ayuuu*
Tsebo you have forsaken me
A nurse does not sleep with the child
The one from far away has snatched him away.

Having correctly established that poverty and misery were pervasive phenomena in Tiv land, Obadiah Orkor’s poetry ostensibly indulges in attack on witchcraft as a way of pacifying the menace. Jenkwe [1998] misses the point when he alleges that “Obadiah is too obsessed with the iniquities and detriments of witchcraft to the extent that other issues never cross his mind” (13). Obadiah autobiographical rendition of his encounters with misery occasioned by witchcraft laden kinsmen and his choice to expose witchcraft is a way of rationalizing a phenomenon that had hitherto thought very complex. In one of his poems, eulogizing Mr. Daa he relates the desperate situation of witchcraft-induced poverty and his response using the metaphor of the law enforcement agent:
That’s why my kinsman, James Daa
Decamped with his people and sat in the land of Mbaiyar

Where has the good part of the homestead

Ever collapsed and become silent in this manner?
Utee left
 Shortly the goat woman also left
And the daughter of Nongo started yelling
The daughter of Adam cried *Ayoo! “An infant has died!”*
I sat mournfully.
Iornum Zaki has also gone to his ancestral home
Children of Mbaiyar, who would tell Mbazum
My heart boils against you
I am a policeman in my mouth
I dispense justice myself.
I have a prison in my mouth
Peter Tserga Ayua Datsu is snot ignorant of this
Ate once heard me judge even the police
And convicted them
I imprisoned them also in my mouth.

Here, far from the image of a beggar depicted of him by Jenkwe and Nyitse, the poet reveals his identity as watchdog of society. By exposing crimes committed through witchcraft and apportioning blames like a “judge”, he claims he is, Obadiah Orkor reduces the metaphysical complexes of tragedy in Tivland to a rational, man-made phenomenon which can as well be prevented or mitigated. This approach certainly approximates the idea of harmatia which apportions blame for tragic events to individual actors directly affected. It is significant to recall here that Obadiah Orkor has been one of the leading Tiv poets that is often dismissed by scholars as a singer of witchcraft and metaphysical events. It is however, a credit to his craft and excellence in poetic rendition that spiritual events are so successfully given rational explanation to underscore the individual determinism in the tragic deaths and misery in the land.

**CONCLUSION**

The idea of the tragic is a common everyday phenomenon in all human society
and has been a dominant theme in Tiv poetry irrespective of the genre being discussed. This has created the tendency for scholars in Tiv cosmology to associate the mystery of death with various religious practices, as well as define the Tiv social practices as bereft of secularism. The confusion is further compounded by their inability to do the obvious – to ascribe the power of Tsav and akombo to the individual rather than to God. This twin instrument of manipulating individual destinies has been copiously depicted by Obadiah Orkor as tools used by prominent characters in his ballads to cause emotional havoc as well as bring consolation to the hearers of these songs. We realise that Tsav and akombo were merely arbitrary manipulations of human beings and not necessarily the divine interventions. This certainly should put paid to the needless Eurocentric complaints about the over-simplicity or spirituality of African oral art. It is obvious from this analysis of the oral prize poetry of Obadiah Orkor using the aesthetics of tragedy that most literary questions asked elsewhere in the world are also applicable to genres of African oral literature. The ballads of the Tiv people may not appear to have elaborate plots or character developments as either the Greek tragedies or Epics, but they are works composed to be performed before live audiences like the classical tragedies and have both immediate tragic and cathartic effects on their audiences. These songs go a long way to not only providing recreation to the hearers but also consoling them on the many incidences of deaths and miseries in the land.

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