

The Dialogue of a Literary Artist with His Art: Creative Writing as Psychotherapy in Olu Obafemi's *Running Dreams*

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Abstract

The world of Olu Obafemi's artistry is indisputably definable within the frameworks of social functionality and commitment which fundamentally underlie artistic creativity in Africa. Specifically, his artistic commitment has been situated within the conceptual frameworks of vision and revolution; that is, the vision for a better nation believed to be attainable through measures to revolutionize the unwholesome socio-political and economic development in Nigeria. Against this backdrop, this study contextualizes the craft of Obafemi's play, *Running Dreams*, as a psychological manifestation of the playwright's frustration with the system that has reflected no significant improvement in spite of his decades of artistic commitment to the yearnings and aspirations of the populace. The writing process is, therefore, construed as a psychotherapeutic process through which the playwright is able to purge himself of the psychological disturbances from which he presumably suffers. It adopts psychotherapy in psychoanalysis, using the specific conceptual frameworks of substitute gratification and transference. The study concludes that the nationalist consciousness and "unconsciousness" (psychological) of Olu Obafemi is immense, with *Running Dreams* not only assuming the macrocosm of his unconscious (dreams) wish fulfillment for the nation but also the overall summation of his passionate commitment to having a new nation which evidently cuts across his entire creative output and scholarly works.

Keywords: artistic commitment, artistic dialogue, creative writing, psychotherapy

Introduction

Olu Obafemi is a household name in the dramatic scene in Nigeria whose artistic output has created a vast pool or resource base from which dramatic theories and practices are drawn. The entire scholarship on the playwright's works and life has situated his artistic commitment within two conceptual frameworks – vision and revolution. Indeed, the two frameworks have been specifically identified as the keys to his "theatrical aims and objectives and determine the broad dramatic forms, techniques, aesthetics and strategies" within which his works are largely definable (Bamikunle 103), this being set against the backdrop of the emergence of a new generation of Nigerian creative artists in the 80s who, upon consensus of comments and ideology, saw themselves as rejecting many elements of the works of their predecessors because they were no longer relevant in confronting and curtailing the new phase of the socio-political economic imbroglio in the country (Bamikunle 103). Indeed, in an exclusive conversation with him, Obafemi offers a comprehensive insight into the motivations of the new generation of writers:



The anger of the new generation of writers is not just against their neo-modernist predecessors, but against the thingified publishing elite, who like the ruling elite, have lost interest in the healing power and have gone after the lucre of coins found only in the profit market of curricula texts. The ruling elite had since ignored, indeed tried to curtail, the magical power of literature, the grenade and missiles of words which can enhance society's awareness of the interplay between human freedom, self-development and national development. (Anthony 17)

Against the foregoing, thus, they referred to themselves as “revolutionaries,” who were aggressively bent on proffering a “radical social vision” for the Nigerian society against the political and economic woes which have since plagued the nation from within (Bamikunle 103). In this task of new and radical vision for social justice and national development, which is strongly built on the principles of Marxism, it is evident that distinct theatricalities, meant to suit the current challenges in the country, were instituted by this crop of literary artists. Since then, consequently, the way had been paved for theatrical experimentations, as opposed to the peculiar ambiances of animism, colonial and/or independence struggle and black identity of their predecessors. Indeed, it is within this developmental context that Saint Gbileka has explored and distinctly identified what he calls “Theatricalism” in the plays of the so-called second generation of Nigerian literary artists: Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kole Omotoso, and Ola Rotimi (172). Similarly, in his own submission, with particular reference to Olu Obafemi, who equally belongs to that generation, David Cook captures the aspiration of these writers thus:

The battle is no longer primarily against outsiders but against the enemy within. The aspiration is to remould a more humane society from amidst the twisted inheritance of misplaced and misused power: the ruthless power of the gun and even more the callous power of cash. Linked to this is the insatiable lust for more and more power of every kind regardless of the suffering and deprivation of other human beings. Obafemi can be seen as one of the prototypes of the generation of playwrights who have seen the propagation of this theme as an imperative crusade. The aims of such drama are to expose social evils, to dispel the apathy and sense of helplessness of the sufferers, and to seek solutions. (46)

On the foregoing, however, for such a writer with genuine commitment to using his works to instigate a significant turnaround in such socio-political and economic travails of his nation, and who has been unrelenting in this regard for over three decades without any meaningful or considerable improvement in the ill system that has got the nation developmentally stuck, the tendency is there for such a writer to become frustrated at some points. This is because, considering the genuineness of his commitment to this course, the only gratification for him would be to have a revolutionized system that works, especially for the common people, who have long been the bearers of the huge burden of social and economic injustices in the country. This is adducible given that the human mind is considered as:

the engine house of all human activities. It is responsible for how humans think,

react, and understand things. Hence, in its process of trying to grapple with the challenges of life, the human mind can be plunged into some kind of anxiety, or unreasonable fear, and behaviour or may get stressed up as a result of the need to repeat unnecessary actions. (Awuzie 6440)

In view of this, the uniqueness of the structure and content of Olu Obafemi's *Running Dreams* (2015), when compared with his peculiar craft or style of playwriting, is construable as a remarkable signification of a psychologically frustrated and exasperated writer. Hence, the writing process is being constructed as a medium through which the playwright is particularly shedding his intensified emotional turmoil on paper. In other words, it is largely conceived in this study as an unconscious visionary and revolutionary dialogue of the playwright with his art, significantly as a form of psychotherapy to him; his art being his closest companion upon which he "repeats and presents again" his emotional troubles (i.e., the challenges of social injustice and national development in which the country is enmeshed) in order "to be master of them" (Huxley 5). Indeed, this psychotherapeutic essence is what the play is conceived to have been for the playwright, given that the specific national challenges assume the forces within which the playwright is gripped. Terry Eagleton's summation of the work of psychoanalysis within a Freudian slogan lends credence to the ultimate goal of attaining self-mastery of one's mental troubles, this being the psychotherapeutic context in which the playwright has been viewed in relation to his writing. According to him, the work of psychoanalysis "can perhaps be summarized in one of Freud's own slogan: 'Where id was, there shall ego be.' Where men and women were in the paralyzing grip of forces which they could not comprehend, there reason and self-mastery shall reign" (139).

The study therefore adopts Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, with particular focus on the concepts of "substitute gratification" and "transference," as a critical tool to examine the nature of the conceived artistic dialogue and the extent of the emotional turmoil in the psyche of the playwright in the play. This is with a view to ultimately determining the therapeutic essence of the play on the playwright's psyche, with the entire writing process presumably assuming a self-psychotherapy measure or exercise the playwright has undertaken at some point.

Psychotherapy in Psychoanalysis and the Imperative of Creative Writing

Psychoanalysis is "a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the minds" (Hossain 42). It emphasizes "the importance of intrapsychic events (i.e., events within the mind) as central to personality" (Liebert and Spiegler 53). The early development of this theory has been generally traced to the Austrian, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who is acknowledged to have "devised its technique, and based on its application made available substantial though often controversial discoveries about the human psyche" (Mowah 1). In other words, psychoanalysis is the name given to the method developed for:

reaching down into the hidden depths of the individual to bring to light the underlying motives and determinants of his symptoms and attitudes, and to reveal

the unconscious tendencies which lie behind actions and reactions and which influence development and determine the relations of life itself. (Hinkle ix)

On the other hand, psychotherapy is connotative of “the use of definitive psychological techniques designed to [relieve] demonstrable disturbances in psycho-social adjustment” (Lowry 347). According to Donald Cameron, it is “primarily a transaction between the patient and his therapist” (qtd. in Wolberg 42). This presupposes thus that psychotherapy entails the investigation of intra-psychic events that may have caused some level of emotional trouble in a person with a view to relieving, alleviating, or curing such an individual of that mental turmoil, or to enhance personality adjustment.

As an activity that has direct bearing on the human mind, creative writing has been acknowledged as having the potential to assume a psychotherapeutic exercise or process (Awuzie 6441). According to Lionel Trilling, one of the primary functions of art is to “serve as narcotic,” hence the artist “is virtually in the same category with the neurotic” (101). The very first way of viewing this lies in the fact that art or creative writing “may serve as a window into the unconscious” (Costa and Abreu 72), the underground site in the human mind where the distressing experience of the artist desires relief that can be indirectly accessed for psychotherapeutic analysis. The critical presupposition here is that there is a communicative dialogue, or series of dialogues, between the artist and their art; the creative writing in this context critically serves as psychotherapy for its client – the artist. This, indeed, is an embodiment of the “therapeutic transaction” observed above by Donald Cameron.

Further, “Substitute Gratification” and “Transference” are two psychological mechanisms identified by Lionel Trilling and Terry Eagleton, respectively, within which creative writing could assume a psychotherapeutic engagement to a mentally troubled literary artist. On the one hand, substitute gratification is regarded as a “fictional” way, a daydreaming in which the artist offers themselves a certain pleasure by imagining their difficulties solved or desires gratified within the creative work (Trilling 101). It is a psychological situation by which the creative writer perceives the creative work as an alternative route to reality or wish fulfillment. On the other hand, transference is a psychological process which involves “ascribing to others of feelings and wishes which are actually our [the artist’s] own” (Eagleton 138). In the course of treatment, this can be ascertained when the patient begins “unconsciously to ‘transfer’ onto the figure of the analyst [the literary text or the protagonist in this context] the physical conflict from which he or she suffers” (Eagleton 138). It is, therefore, believed that this process is capable of relieving the creative writer from such psychological disturbances and/or emotional turmoil.

The Structure of the Play

Running Dreams imitates the form of a dream or stream of consciousness. The result of this is a blend of memories, experiences, and absurdities wherein the central character, Yohanna, assumes a split or fragmented individual, mediating the past and the present socio-economic and political situations in Nigeria, in particular, and the Third World countries at large. The dream experience progresses through a “retrospective technique,”

to use Birgitta Steene's words (112), that aids the dramatic juxtaposition of the two phases of history – the past and the present dispensations. Ideologically, the unredeemed past is traversed through Yohanna's memory which embodies the playwright's shift of emphasis from the usual conscious characterization to the unconscious (psychical) activity of the artist. According to Sigmund Freud, "the unconscious is the true psychical reality" (607). To this end, the structure of the play is construed as a great representation of the innermost social vision of the playwright. That is, Olu Obafemi has thus again upheld in this play, as typical of him and indeed his entire generation of writers, a revolutionary vision in the play; however, the dramatic structure, that is the traversing of the unconscious realm, which assumes an apparent deviation from his usual writing style, gives the play a new and distinctly unique artistic dimension in his oeuvre.

A holistic examination of the play will reveal that the audience has been presented with an almost unrealistic human situation, in such a manner that the central character is portrayed as striving to make unconscious efforts in order to come to terms with the nation's heavily troubling situation. This is a similar sense with which the reader is also confronted, trying to strike a logical balance in the dramatization and their, say, social environment. But, because the reader can see beyond the characters, certain ideological infusions, emanating from the observed construction of the dramatic piece on visionary and revolutionary geometry, are extractable from the dramatic structure. Thus, what Olu Obafemi presents does not necessarily render these dreams (these seeming unconnected acts and conversation) void of value. It is the reader and the way the work is perceived that matters in the interpretation of the underlying ideology in the play.

The Playwright and the Challenges of Social Injustice and National Development in the Play

The theme of socio-political and economic inequity in the neo-colonial system of Nigeria is indisputably pervasive in Olu Obafemi's works. As a literary artist, he has "spread his literary tentacle to virtually all aspects of the economic, social, political, cultural and intellectual life of Nigeria" (Obaje 323). Indeed, to a considerable extent, *Running Dreams* exhibits a visionary and revolutionary interrogation of the nation's current unhealthy socio-economic and political state, vis-à-vis the past, as implicitly given in the protagonist's unconscious dialogue with the nation's founding fathers – Mallam Aminu Kano, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe. The prologue of the play discernibly paints a contemporary political atmosphere that is riddled with dishonesty and deceit, a situation whereby "the politicians go about making empty promises just to amass votes from innocent citizens" (Obafemi 12). In the context of the play, this is particularly linked to the peculiar phenomenon of god-fatherism in Nigerian politics as depicted in the character of Dr. Chief Afolabi Ojuola. The narrator's adlib, following the exit of the politicians from the stage, offers a critical insight into this unwholesome syndrome which has remained prominently the bane of the nation's democratic development and the continued social stratification.

By inference from the above, this means that for political office holders to rise to their

various aspired thrones on such paths of deceits, the tendency is that they can offer nothing substantially beneficial to the electorates in particular and the nation at large. Thus, the current socio-political and economic ambience portrayed in the play is that which has taken a paradigm shift from what was obtainable or practiced in the past by the founding fathers of the nation. That is, rather than building on the progressive blueprints of these past nationalists, the implicature from the play is that the current crop of politicians have demonstrated high levels of insensitivity to the plight of the citizenry as well as the nation's development. Hence, the hallmarks of the Nigerian society in the current dispensation are social injustice and stunted national growth.

The reader is privy to the above peculiar atmosphere in an encounter between Yohanna and a multinational company representative, Miriam, in which the former is to be interviewed and recruited to writing economic briefs for the company. The ill objective of his responsibility is explicitly stated by Miriam with an underlying motive of rendering Third World countries, such as Nigeria, perpetually bankrupt and politically and economically independent:

MIRIAM: Writing economic briefs to justify huge international loans to these countries and also bring back money to our company and other big construction projects that you yourself already know from university and professional studies make the countries bankrupt and indebted so that they are completely dependent on us. They will then be willing to oblige when we need their oil, their political support and military necessities. You are one of thousands with equal opportunities and independence. Your budget is limitless. So must your loyalty be absolute. It is a job for the global Empire. (Obafemi 33)

The above apparently indicates the leadership ineptitude of those at the helms of affairs of these Third World nations by engaging in such treacherous long-term deals with the global powers that be which have had long-term adverse effects on their respective citizens. Earlier on, Yohanna had wondered over the wild gap between the living conditions of the top government functionaries and the common people of the nation as depicted in the part of the city in which his interview has been scheduled. Having experienced the other side of the same coin, he becomes uneasy on his arrival over the huge and almost incomprehensible social stratification therein:

YOHANNA: I was just taking in the city and all its exciting contrasts. This part is so hi-tech, so well-built, so plastic, so unreal. Far out there in the valleys, there is so much difference, and so much squalor, all within the same city economy. (Obafemi 30)

Hence, by way of interplaying the past with the present condition, with a view to ultimately interrogating the social injustice of the present dispensation, the playwright is able to give weight to the challenging and troubling socio-economic and political injustice in the country that are, on the whole, perceivably problematic in the play.

A crucial point to note in the above is that the narrator is the same figure as the protagonist,

Yohanna. He is only momentarily cast to speak from the protagonist's mind, like an open book, while the latter is in a state of deep slumber. This is essentially an indication that the protagonist has been mentally troubled with the current socio-political and economic challenges of the nation. Hence, the problems are carried on to his dreaming (unconscious) state. Although this constitutes Yohanna's physically conflicting reality, it is made indirectly accessible to the reader via his unconscious. This is, therefore, the aesthetic way the play is observed to have achieved its texture; that is, by traversing the unconscious realm of the protagonist wherein the entire dramatization takes place. In other words, what the reader is presented with is the reflection of the unconscious reality of Yohanna which is largely directly linked to, and influenced by, his conscious (physical) reality.

The Play as Substitute Gratification

It is axiomatic that creative writing is a mental exercise which offers literary artists fictional avenues to engage myriad issues. In the process, presumptively, a form of dialogue is thus ascertainable between the artist and their literary creation. The enormity or seriousness of the engagement often depends, among other things, on the affectivity of the subject matter. In this way, the creative space allows the artist to undertake and explore even the obvious impossibility or things that are ordinarily unattainable in reality to the writer. When this is observed in a writer's work, especially an issue which appears psychologically troubling to the artist, it is translatable to the psychological phenomenon known as substitute gratification. That is, the likely inspiration underlying such a work or art is that the artist has simply employed such a creative world to gratify their psychological self over such unrealistic (in real life) yearnings by fictionalizing a world in which they have been accomplished. Therefore, given the psychological context in *Running Dreams*, elements of this development can be considerably accounted for in the play.

Against the above backdrop, the form of the play, which is describable as a psychological drama, is particularly significant. The play offers a fictional world whereby the protagonist is portrayed as a mentally troubled individual as a result of having observed a high and incomprehensible level of social injustice in that socio-economic and political setting of the play. Owing to his second-hand experience of the situation when that nation's founding fathers reigned, the protagonist appears to be mentally picturing the condition then, vis-à-vis the people-oriented policies pursued by those so-called great men, and then comparing them with those of the present dispensation which have simply created structural divides among the haves and have-nots, with the other side of the divide being continually impoverished. To this end, in his visionary bid to find a lasting solution to the problem, he envisages the possibility of interacting with, and interrogating, the founding fathers with a view to digging up and enlivening their policies in order that the current leaders can imbibe them to rebuild the nation. This is the mindset that Yohanna carries along with him, and because of the unrealistic and imaginative nature of such pursuits, they must have become repressed to his unconscious over time. The enormity and significance of the wish will, however, at some points, exert a certain level of force on his personality. Hence, in his unconscious, an alternative route to realizing this is being sought for, and the possible world is eventually created in his dream:

(... YOHANNA rises slowly after a loud snore which came like an earthquake. He is still in a dreary, half-awake state. The sky opens in his mind's eye. Four masquerades emerge wearing the figure Obafemi, Ahmadu, Zik and Aminu. A tongue for each of them breaks into narratives, following YOHANNA'S unconscious promptings. Dancers and singers accompany each masquerade.) (Obafemi 15)

The above apparently assumes a world in which Yohanna would have preferred to find himself in reality, as he institutes ideological dialogues with each of the founding fathers of his nation. It is from the conversations, which are replete with enormous clues on leadership, good governance, and nation building, that the reader is able to draw the significance of the protagonist's vision for his nation. For instance, a layer of this is deducible from the following conversation between him and the fictional Mallam Aminu Kano:

YOHANNA: Yes, Sir. I read your story and your famous, radical dicta. You brought up Islamic ideas on equity in your campaign trains during the First Republic. Many talakawas trouped in after you and your message of giving a platform to the Kano commoners and migratory petty traders. They joined and mannered your NEPU party. You sought to use politics to create an egalitarian Northern Nigerian society. You backed these actions up with many memorable quotes.

AMINU: Thank you, thank you. I am happy that there are youths who read up the history of our little effort – before your government cancelled history from the schools. But, which quotations are you talking about? You know it's been a long time since I left your world which has grown worse than the world of the NPC, which we opposed. (Obafemi 16)

The above conversation is significant in two respects. One, it is informative of the kind of political ideologies the nation's progenitors were being driven by; that which has the welfare of all and sundry at heart, regardless of religion and ethnicity, and is devoid of social stratification. Two, the reader is also hinted of the socio-political degeneration by which the current dispensation is characterized.

Given that the above is interpretive of Yohanna's unconscious visionary exploration of "the better past" to interrogate "the worse present" with a view to forging a new nation by taking clues from the past, his underlying optimism is derived from his conversation with the fictional Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe:

YOHANNA: As you have always done, even in 1964 after the rigged elections and the violence which you feared would make the Congo experience a child's play if not arrested. The fear of violence overrunning our polity due to power grab still looms on our political horizon.

NNAMDI: I fear still, but I know the nation can still become. It can still make it as the hub of Africa's rise to greatness in world politics. I believe it can.

YOHANNA: Thank you, Sir, for that belief in us, even as our leadership becomes more and more visionless and less patriotic ... (As YOHANNA kneels to kiss his

feet, NNAMDI slips by and vanishes and the music swells and attains a raucous crescendo. Fade.) (Obafemi 26)

Despite Yohanna's understanding of the cluelessness and meanness of the current leaders, a fact that he can adduce from the spate of the social injustice in the country, he demonstrates high hopes of a better and healthy nation. This optimism is psychologically strengthened by his unconscious promptings of one of the nation's fathers above.

The context that the reader is offered, on the whole, is that which characterizes the protagonist as an individual who has his nation's fortune and glory passionately at heart, and is now mentally disturbed over the current unhealthy state of affairs in the nation. Hence, his internalization of the problems and the fictitious mechanism towards changing the status quo; being his vision for his nation, is only being realized in his dreaming states. To this end, the unconscious realization of Yohanna's vision that is embodied in his dialogue with the nation's founders in his dream, is a significant pointer to the process by which the playwright, who is acknowledged as being exceedingly perturbed in reality over the artificial challenges of the nation, has been able to substitute his conscious wish with fictional reality. This is underscored by the possibility of conversing with the founding fathers in order to share the troubles in the country with them; that which is unrealizable in the real sense, with the fictional realization in the play. This fictional wish fulfillment is the very way in which the playwright has been perceived to have explored the creative space largely to gratify his psyche and/or relieve himself of the overall psychological troubles occasioned by decades of unyielding interrogations of the problems and vision for an ideal nation in his creative works.

The Play as Psychological Transference

The critical context that the term transference offers in psychoanalysis is conceivable as the transposition from author-context to character-context in a literary text. This implies that there exists a link between the personality of the literary artist and a persona in the text, such that the former's mindset can, to some extent, be read and ascertained in the latter, by drawing on certain real evidences about the author. When a text has this framework, the subject matter has the propensity to be considerably driven by the psychological realities of the author. On this note, the process of writing could engender some level of relief, especially in the psyche of an enraged or troubled writer. This is because, in the process, a form of psychological transference is taking place whereby the writer's distress is being unconsciously transposed onto a specific character, usually the protagonist; an exercise that is acknowledgeably capable of easing their tensed psyche.

The characterization of Yohanna in *Running Dreams*, therefore, is being burgeoned as the playwright's psychical figure, onto whom the artist has unconsciously transferred his frustration with the unwholesome socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria. This is indeed conceivable, given the context of his critically acknowledged commitment in his creative space to such a course with an undertone of strong vision for a better nation. Fundamentally, the fact that there are perceived indices of frustration being at force in the playwright's psyche, of which its structure conceivably assumes a considerable signification,

is a pointer to this critical pattern. It is a matter between the patient (the playwright) and the psychotherapist (the text) in which the creative writing process assumes the interacting (therapeutic) process between them. In this way, the playwright has been enhanced in terms of ability to recollect portions of his frustration that he has repressed, such that he is “able to recount a new, more complete narrative about [himself], one which will interpret and make sense of the disturbances from which [he] suffers” (Eagleton 139).

Particularly, the characterization of Yohanna is central to the psychotherapeutic essence of the play. The implication of this is that, as the protagonist, Yohanna now assumes a macrocosmic psychotherapy of the entire text to the playwright, having been cast in that psychologically tensed figure in such a manner that what constitutes the contents of the play are the repressed elements of distress to him which the reader is able to access indirectly via his unconscious realm. For instance, this is evident in the conversation between him and Miriam. In the latter’s address, while she lays much emphasis on certain attributes in Yohanna which have attracted him to the multinational company, Yohanna’s response is contradictory to such acknowledgment. The comment is totally disregarded and what he seems to be battling with within himself is what he rather prioritizes as response, and this assumes an indication that such an avenue entirely constitutes a stimulant for him to unconsciously pour out or purge himself of those psychical disturbances relating to social injustice:

MIRIAM: We need the soundness of your mind, the independence of your thought, the fluency of tongue. It’s the raw material upon which you will be moulded.

YOHANNA: Whatever that is supposed to mean! Anyway, I was talking about all the people these companies hire at near-slavery wages to work under dehumanizing conditions. I am talking about what the oil companies do, wantonly pumping toxins into the rain forest rivers. They deliberately kill people, animals and plants, and committing genocide among innocent cultures all over the developing world, like my country. That’s the reality of the Niger Delta, where the golden egg is laid. (Obafemi 31)

A keen observation of those qualities the company treasured in Yohanna will considerably show they are traits that are indeed creditable to the playwright in the real sense. And moving a bit away from the context of the play, furthermore, the above is also suggestive of the fact that, at a certain point in time in the playwright’s career, he might have encountered such an offer, which he would have undoubtedly turned down for obvious reasons, from the so-called multinational companies that have created large scale distress to the people of the Niger Delta in particular. On the other hand, it may also be that, peradventure, the playwright was privy to such reality which, though he was not directly involved, but constituted elemental upset for him.

Whether the above critical speculation is accurate or not, what is ascertainable is the fact that the experience that is being conveyed by the character is true to reality. Hence, it is partly symbolic of what Terry Eagleton would regard in the psychotherapeutic process as

“something of the ‘fictional’ relation to those real-life problems which a literary text has to the real-life materials it transforms” (139). On this note, it is logically establishable that the playwright has cast Yohanna in that unconscious space primarily to dissect his frustration, his conflicting psychical reality which he seeks to relieve or free himself from. This is imperative in that it assumes a creative exercise that is believed will act or prevail upon his mind, as does a psychotherapeutic process, thereby ultimately serving as a significant therapy to his psyche. Thus, hope and vision of an ideal nation remain the long-sustained phenomena which the playwright has been battling with, not just physically but also psychologically. They collectively assume a dream which, indeed, in the words of Goran Stockenström, is the “humanity’s dream” (292) of the playwright.

Conclusion

The critical conception in this study stems from the totality of the playwright’s strong and overwhelming vision for his nation. In this sense, it does not simply reflect the artist’s representation of an ailing nation but also, more importantly, the dream concerning the ill-health of the Third World countries at large. To this end, the “running dreams” in the play perceivably assume the playwright’s unconscious wish-fulfillments – strong and passionate wishes to see the nation stripped of ill-fate; a vision towards reviving humane values by means of increasing consciousness. In Sigmund Freud’s supposition in this regard, “a conscious wish can only become a dream-instigator if it succeeds in awakening an unconscious with the same tenor and obtaining reinforcement from it” (553). This interplay of conscious and unconscious wishes is evidently ascertainable in Yohanna’s personality, and is made explicit eventually towards the end of the play when he remarks that: “I have been running dreams, nightmares these many days ... Revolutionaries, from other places, other lands, even from our own history ...” (Obafemi 61-62).

In view of the above, it is clear that, for Obafemi, it is not a dream being experienced during sleep, but a waking dream; realizable artistically, that is primarily psychotherapeutic to his unconscious trouble with the nation’s socio-political and economic problems. And this is constantly fueled by the revolutionary fervor to change the nation’s ill narrative of socio-political and economic realities. Ultimately, this psychotherapeutic essence of the play is explicitly ascertained in Yohanna’s last words: “I am awake from my dreams into a NEW MORNING. Thank Goodness!” (Obafemi 69). The implication of this is that, eventually, the playwright has been able to purge himself of the psychological disturbances with the aid of his art, a process conceived in this study as “the dialogue of the literary artist with his art.” Indeed, this corroborates the assertion of the English essayist and poet, Charles Lamb, in his defense of the sanity of what is called the true genius – the artist: “The ... poet dreams being awake. He is not possessed by his subject but he has dominion over it” (qtd. in Trilling 102).

The study therefore, on this note, concludes that the nationalist consciousness and “unconsciousness” (psychological) of Olu Obafemi is immeasurably great, with the play *Running Dreams* not only assuming the macrocosm of his unconscious (dreams) wish fulfillment for the nation but also the overall summation of his passionate commitment to

having a new nation which apparently cuts across his entire creative output and scholarly works.

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