

Auditory Hallucinations, Planetary Drift and the Poetics of Cultural Memory: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Okara's "Piano and Drums" And Lawrence's "Piano"

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Abstract

This research explores the interplay of cultural memory, auditory imagery, and identity formation in Okara's "Piano and Drums" and Lawrence's "Piano." By applying a psychoanalytical framework, the study examines how both poets use the metaphor of music to evoke cultural nostalgia and confront the dissonance between tradition and modernity. The research investigates the psychic conflict between the collective unconscious and individual memory, revealing the deep cultural roots influencing the poets' auditory experiences and their symbolic representation of identity. In literature the writer uses his imagination and cultural memory to express his inner feelings and visional perception of the world. Since both imagination and memory are aspects of the mind, the psychoanalytical approach to the study of the mind is therefore relevant to the study of literary works. The study used literary psychoanalysis to discuss the poems of Okara and Lawrence from the point of view of auditory hallucination and environmental transformation otherwise called planetary drift. The focus of the study is on the use of cultural memory in response or reaction to the bewildering complexity of the present. The study opines that while Lawrence in his poems is able to find his direction through the primordial voice of his mother's music, Gabriel Okara could not decide on the direction to take due to the conflicting cultural voices of his music. The conclusion points to the fact that Okara's dilemma is a manifestation of the dilemma and lack of clear direction in postcolonial African literature.

Keywords: Culture, Hallucination, Planetary Drift, Postcolonial, Psychoanalysis

Introduction

In language, a performative statement is that which does not only describe an action but actually performs that action; and this is one of the major functions of language in literature. According to Stevens (1966.495): 'The power of literature is that in describing the world it creates what it describes'. In literature, therefore, there is a discernible relationship between imagination, memory and the performative language. The major concern of the creative artist is with the use of imagination to externalize his inner feelings and perception of the world both in its present reality and in the visional perceptivity of cultural memory. Since both imagination and memory are a function of the mind, the psychoanalytical approach to the study of the mind is therefore tangential, if not substantial, to the study of literature.

One would have a better, deeper understanding of the function of literature when the cannon of literary criticism, the methods and concepts of psychoanalysis as a literary discourse is added. Issues such as primordially, nativity and the environment, nostalgia for its past, obsession and fascination with life experiences, among other delusions of life, are both themes in literature and topics in psychoanalysis. Therefore, a combination of the techniques of literary criticism and psychoanalytical theories of the mind, greatly enhances the study of literature as a product of the imagination, and enriches our understanding of the intention of the writer when he puts pen on paper.

The study therefore, delves into the cultural contexts of the two poems, with Okara's "Piano and Drums" representing an African perspective on the conflict between traditional African culture and Western influence, and Lawrence's "Piano" reflecting a Western experience of nostalgia for childhood and a simpler past. Both poems, though distinct in their cultural

settings, evoke a sense of loss and displacement through their use of music as a symbol for memory.

Definition of Terms

Auditory Hallucination: In psychoanalyses the word “hallucination” is used to describe the action of an individual who appears to wonder mentally in a sensory perception of something either visual or auditory but which actually does not exist. Therefore, the adjectival phrase “auditory hallucination” refers to the complex auditory perceptions that may include music, people talking or other sounds which occur in the absence of external situation, and which are perceived, at least temporarily, as real. (google.com)

In literary psychoanalysis this mental metamorphosis is usually detected in the conduct of a character in a novel or a play, or persona in a poem. In the poems under study, this perception of the sound of music or voices result in an equally imaginary (hallucinatory) environmental shift, in both space and time, and a simultaneous sub-conscious return to the memory of the past. This visional perceptivity of transportation in time and space experienced by the persona in the poems is called planetary drift.

Planetary Drift: As a geographical term, planetary drift refers to the gradual but continuous changes in the physical environment. However, as an idiomatic expression, it refers to the imaginative displacement and transformation of the socio-spatial space through the optional perceptivity of memory. According to Bronislaw (Ingold, 2015) ‘Drift does not just have its own Semantics, it also has its own grammar and syntax. Using the concept “middle voice”, he situates the individual (in this case the poet persona) between the space that drifts and the process of the drift itself. Therefore, as a middle voice, ‘the subject (poet-persona) does “do” or have

something “done to” them, neither can they simply opt out from or reverse the action of what they are a part’. What happens instead is that; they undergo change while engaged in the interactive process from which they cannot simply withdraw (pp145-6).

In such a situation, the voice initiates in the poet-persona what Owens (1954) describes as, “a process of internalization of the shifting of the center of gravity of consciousness from the cosmos around him into the personal human being himself” (pp166-7). In the poems under study, the shifting occurs to the personae in their hallucinatory perception through memory of time and space, otherwise called socio-cultural memory.

Socio-Cultural Memory: Memory is the capacity we have that allows us to connect experiences and make sense of ourselves. In psychology, memory is defined as the faculty of encoding, storing and retrieving information that includes three important categories: sensory, short term and long term. Memory, therefore, is about one’s brain and one’s socio-cultural environment. The power of memory exerted by the personae in the poems under study emanates for both from the image of the mother and the social-cultural environment, therefore, the memory is both cultural and social. ‘Cultural memory’ is a concept often defined by scholars like Jan Assmann (2011) and Aleida Assmann (2011). According to Jan Assmann, ‘cultural memory’ refers to the shared memories of a group that are passed down through generations and are crucial in forming the identity of that group. These memories are not just individual recollections but are institutionalized and ritualized within a society, helping to maintain and transmit the group's collective identity, values, and traditions over time. Aleida Assmann expands on this by emphasizing that cultural memory involves the selective retention of past events, which are preserved in texts, rituals, monuments, and other

cultural artifacts. These memories are actively reconstructed by each generation, ensuring that they remain relevant to the current context and continue to shape the group's collective identity. Cultural memory, is the way a society remembers and constructs its past to shape its collective identity and continuity over time. Cultural memory, therefore, is a form of collective memory shared by a group of people; that is to say it is not just a personal or private experience but also part of the collective domain. It entails remembering and forgetting, and acts as a touchstone to the past both in its personal and collective capacities.

Cultural memory is, however distinct in both concept and function from social memory. While cultural memory is essentially psychological, social memory is a concept used by historians and others to explore the connection between social identity and historical memory. For Gabriel Okara the connection between the two is in the identity crisis over the choice between the voice of the drum and the wailing of the Piano, while for Lawrence is the crisis between personal and social identity.

Psychoanalytical Literary Criticism

Literary psychoanalysis provides the theoretical framework for this study, particularly drawing on Freudian concepts of the unconscious, repression, and the return of the repressed. The study also incorporates Carl Jung's ideas of the collective unconscious and cultural archetypes, as well as postcolonial psychoanalytic theory, which examines the impact of colonization on cultural identity and memory. Emphasis is placed however, much on Psychoanalytical Literary Criticism, a literary theory whose methods of literary discourse of a text is influenced by Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical study of the mind. In his paper "Creative Writing and the Day

Dreaming” (Kaplan, 1986), Freud compares creative imagination to day dreaming and presents creative writers as neurotic people. This perception of creativity and creative people has therefore expanded the scope of literary criticism beyond the actual text to the analysis of the author’s mind or a given character in the literary text. Hence, psychoanalytical literary criticism considers fictional characters as psychological case studies and apply the Freudian concepts of the Id, Ego and Super Ego, among other Psychoanalytical theories, to analyze and interpret the conduct of a fictional character in a literary work.

Sigmund Freud observed that, the human behaviour is formed through an interaction between three components of the mind: Id, Ego and Super Ego. He explained the Id as being the unconscious part of the mind that act instantaneously without giving much thought to what is right and what is wrong. The Ego, says Freud, is the logical and conscious part of the mind which is associated with the reality principle. This means it balances the demands of the Id and the Super Ego in the contest of real situation. The Super Ego is said to be related to social or moral values that an individual inculcates as the person matures. The Super Ego thus acts as an ethical constraint on behaviour and helps an individual to develop his conscience. From this perspective, therefore, emerged the psychoanalytical theory, also known as the personality theory. Hence, according to Selden and Widdowson (1993:154), psychoanalysis enters literary studies through three main emphases in its pursuit of the literary “unconscious”;

(i.) on the author (and its corollary, “Character”), (ii.) on the reader, and (iii.) on the text.

Writing about Literature and the imagination, Celine Surprenant (2006: 200) opines that:

Psychoanalytic literary Criticism does not constitute a unified field. However, all variants endorse, at least to a certain degree, the idea that Literature ... is fundamentally entwined with the psyche.

Surprenant's view has thus revalidated the adoption of Freud's theory of the mind by literary scholars to analyze and interpret literary texts. This method of literary criticism approaches the text the way Freud perceives dreams as expression of the secret unconscious desires and anxieties of the author. Hence, the literary work becomes a metaphorical and symbolical representation of the author's hidden or suppressed desires, while the creative process is considered akin to day-dreaming. The hidden desires or obsession, like dreams or fantasies, thus links the writer's literary creation to his own personal life.

Psycho-Literary Analysis of the Poems

Okara's Poem "Piano and Drum" and Lawrence's poem "Piano" are written from the point of view of memory. Both poems show similar awareness of the impact of the environment on one's memory; and the two poems may be considered romantic because of the concern with nature and nostalgia for the past. However, while Lawrence's nostalgia keeps him hankering for the past, Okara's memory of the past does not leave him in its fantasy but swiftly brings him back to the complex reality of the present. The theme of the poems can both be said to be that of the impact of music on memory.

As P. B. Shelley puts it, 'music, when soft voices die vibrates in the memory'. Okara's poem opens with a performative statement:

When at the break of day at a riverside I hear
jungle drums telegraphing the mystic rhythm,
urgent, raw... (1967:36)

The ‘soft voices’ of the drums vibrate in his memory where he experiences a further optical perceptivity of transfer of grounds from the quiet, serene riverside to the jungle where,

I see the panther ready to pounce, the leopard
snarling about to leap and the hunters crouch
with spears poised; (1967:36)

Memory can be seen in three dimensions: the personal, social and cultural. In the above quoted stanza, Okara relies on cultural memory as relates to the identity of the persona in the poem. He identifies himself with the simplicity of the jungle life, with its mystic /rustic rhythm that resonates with the environment. The persona therefore hallucinates as being ‘in my mother’s laps a suckling’ and how he was living a simple social life “walking simple paths with no innovations”, as opposed to the complexity and social encumbrances of modern life and his forlorn present environment.

Okara’s resort to memory gives him a paradigm for contrast without being judgmental about the past and the present. Thus he uses the sound of music as a synesthesia- a technique writers use to blur human senses in their memory –and allows the music to do the talking and the contrast. On one hand we hear the music in its “mystic rhythm”, on the other hand we hear its “complex ways”; another “telegraphing” and the other “wailing”. Both sounds also show contrast in time and space: one from the distant past and the other of faraway land, while the present lays forlorn in the poet’s (persona) synesthesia.

However, through a skillful use of language (verbs and adjectives) the drums become the cultural voice that rings the persona’s attention out of the forlorn present to the retrospective world of his youth. This transfer of the eco-social environment constitutes the drift from the conscious environment to the metaphorical or idiomatic environment of his sub-conscious world of early life. But, the music has a

contradictory effect on the persona which leaves him pondering in the labyrinth of its complexity, between the “mystic rhythm” of the drums and the “waiting concerto” of the piano. On the contrary however, the music in Lawrence’s “Piano” comes softly in the dark, as opposed to the cacophony of Okara’s music at dawn.

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of
the tingling strings (1918.86)

And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings Here Lawrence identifies himself with the music in spite of its setting (in the dark). And while in Okara’s poem the persona is thrown into a torrent of thoughts, in Lawrence’s poem the persona undergoes a calm and gentle optical perceptivity of the sound of the song.

Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of
the tingling strings (1918.86)

There is both the feelings of a planetary drift in down the vistas of years’ and optical hallucination of “a child sitting under the Piano” which, like in Okara’s poem, takes him back to the past. But while in Okara’s poem the persona smugly merges himself with the flora and fauna of his childhood days where he is fascinated as:

I see the panther ready to pounce The leopard
snarling about to leap and the hunters crouch
with spears poised;(1967:36)

In Lawrence’s poem the music challenges the persona’s perception of himself as to what he knows about music as he laments that,

In spite of myself The insidious mastery of song
Betrays me back till The heart of me weeps to
belong To the old Sunday School (1967:36)

Both poets exploit the psychoanalytical concept of the mind as it relates to the memory, which in this case is the sensory memory. In psychoanalysis the sensory memory drifts in three types: echoic memory, iconic memory and haptic memory (research gate). Iconic memory retains information that is gathered through sight; echoic memory retains information gathered through auditory stimulus; and haptic memory retains data acquired through touch.

Thus in Okara's poetics of the memory he uses the iconic memory of the sense of sight to visualize the eco-social space of the flora and fauna. This short term vision covers the drift back to the sensory memory of his primal youth and the subsequent drift to a distant land conjured by the echoic memory of the sound of a waiting piano:

Then I hear a wailing piano Solo speaking of
complex ways In tear –furrowed concerto
(1967:36)

On the other hand, in Lawrence's poetics, the echoic memory is employed to conjure the imaginative audio-spatial space through auditory stimuli of an evening at home,

With winter outside and hymns in the cosy
parlour, the tinkling piano our guide. (1918.86)

Finally, Gabriel Okara's "Piano and Drums" juxtaposes the rhythmic, primal sounds of African drums with the structured, melodic notes of a piano, symbolizing the auditory hallucinations of a mind caught between two worlds. The drums represent the collective memory of African heritage, deeply rooted in the poet's unconscious, while the piano signifies the intrusion of Western culture. The term "planetary drift" is employed metaphorically to describe the sense of disorientation and cultural drift experienced by the poet, as he navigates between these conflicting identities. The psychoanalytical reading reveals a deeper existential crisis,

where the poet's sense of self is fragmented, reflecting the broader postcolonial experience of displacement.

Lawrence's "Piano" triggers a flood of repressed memories of childhood, symbolizing the Freudian concept of the return of the repressed. The music transports the poet back to a time of innocence, but this journey is fraught with a sense of loss and mourning for a past that can never be reclaimed. The poem captures the universal longing for a return to one's cultural roots, even as modernity pulls the individual away from these origins. The piano, in this context, becomes a symbol of the Western cultural heritage that the poet both cherishes and mourns.

Conclusion

As discussed in this study, there is a demonstration of the difference in the way the personae are affected in their hallucinatory response to cultural memories. While Okara's poetic persona is left undecided and confused over the impact of the rhythm of his music, "lost in the ... at a dagger point", Lawrence's poetic persona finds a direction to follow with "the tinkling piano our guide". Therefore, Lawrence is able to find solution to the riddle of the music by going back in memory of the soft rhythm of his mother's music "the woman", and thus suggesting, even if nostalgically, the romantic beauty of the past. However, in Okara's case, even though he feels the same nostalgia for the past, nevertheless he is unable to extricate himself from the complexity of the present as he stands 'at dagger point'. In essence, therefore, Okara's poem is a demonstration of the bewildering impact of colonialism on the mind of the African writer, and the sense of loss and uncertainty of the road to follow in Africa's post-colonial literature.

The study concludes that both Okara and Lawrence use music as a powerful symbol to explore the complexities of cultural memory and identity. Through a psychoanalytical lens, the poems reveal the deep-seated conflicts and yearnings that arise from the clash between tradition and modernity. The research underscores the universality of these experiences, even as they are shaped by the specific cultural contexts of the poets. Ultimately, “Piano and Drums” and “Piano” are not just personal reflections but are also reflective of broader cultural dynamics, where auditory hallucinations and planetary drift symbolize the ongoing struggle to reconcile past and present, self and society, memory and modernity.

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