

Mental Health Conditions in Omobowale's *Seasons of Rage*

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Abstract

The sub-discipline of "Literature and Mental Health" is gradually gaining root in the Nigerian literary scholarship. The depiction of medical experiences in literature have enjoyed some critical patronage, especially on trauma and scriptotherapy. Earlier studies on Nigerian Literature have privileged socio-cultural and socio-political issues to the marginalization of its mental health relevance. This study examines the mental conditions in Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale's *Seasons of Rage*. This text robustly represents mental health conditions through characterisation. Freddy is diagnosed of bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder and depression. This is evident through his character, as his mental state tends to be unstable. At some points, he would behave strong, bold and confident just as he did during the board meeting. At other points, he would be broken, weak and feel defeated as shown when he heard the news of his father's death and Miriam's kidnap. Martin also portrays the symptoms of obsession, depression and anxiety. This is evident in his inordinate desire for their father's wealth and the various unreasonable means he employed to ensure that the whole wealth becomes his. The text also reveals that there is a psychological disorder peculiar to the Fezannis. This is Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). They all tend to be obsessed with taking drugs and substances. Omobowale's creative works have demonstrated capacity to embed the study of Literature and Medicine. The exploration of Literature and mental health in Nigerian literary scholarship is capable of enriching mental education and practice in Nigeria.

Key words: Mental health, *Seasons of Rage*, Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale, Bipolar Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

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INTRODUCTION

Literary and mental health studies are obviously distinct disciplines and yet mutually related, especially in their relationship with the Psychoanalytical theory. Because the study of literature encompasses the nature and culture of its society, its thematic preoccupation has come to include every issue obtainable in the society. Mayaki (2017, p.575) notes, "the sociological approach to literary evaluation has been critiqued for making literature a study of other disciplines". He further points out that because literature cannot really be separated from its society, it has not ceased to enquire into human problems, in a way suggest, or proffer solutions to tackle them. Characterization is clearly a compulsory element of literature. In order to understand a character, it become necessary to examine his or her mental state. This obviously establishes a relationship between literature and mental health studies.

The World Health Organisation (W.H.O.) (2003) views mental health as a state of health that enables individuals to see their abilities, cope with stress, be productive and fruitful so he or she can contribute meaningfully to the society. This implies that once these standards are compromised in a person, the person can be wanting in being mentally healthy. It is however painful to point out that there abound various societal realities capable of bringing about mental imbalances in the lives of the members of the society with little or nothing in their power to regulate these conditions. W.H.O. also submits that it is further complicated by the fact that in many African countries, mental health and mental disorder are not given attention like the way physical health is being

considered. W.H.O. posits further that the case is more obvious amongst the poor masses. Mental health problems do many harms to the individual and to the society. W.H.O. drew a conclusion that mental illness does not only stop there but goes further to hamper national development.

The National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) (2001) defines mental illness as formative mind issue with conventional and natural variables prompting modified circuits and changed conduct. Stein et al (2010) defines mental disorder as 'a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress or disability (i.e. impairment in one or more important areas of functioning) or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom' (p 3).

Everyone has the right to a productive life in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity but the reverse is the case for individuals with mental health problems. This could be so challenging and disheartening for them (W.H.O, 2003, p7). W.H.O further points out that a critical look at the society reveals that the leading causes of disease and disability are mental problems. Mental health conditions, which include depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorders, anxiety and so on, have grievous impact on individuals. Though the illness is not visible to others but its symptoms do not hide forever.

It is paramount to emphasize the nexus between mental health and literature. Literature is capable of enhancing its readers' understanding of mental illness and it can be a means of expression and a source of comfort for the sufferer. In Literature, mental illness is presented through various ways, including interpretation of language, point of view and characters analysis. Literature helps to understand the different people around us; their psychological states and how it conceivably influences their conduct. It encourages one to have a functional and a better understanding of people's psychological difficulties and the behavioral expectation of such individuals. This is why it is important to know that people do not just behave in a particular way without the influence of their mental state.

The interconnection of Literature and mental health is a branch of medicine that helps to understand how the world works. Creative writers use literature to interpret and understand human existence. The medical practitioners' possession of creative writing skill can help them be more competent and effective in their practice of medicine. This is because literature contributes to the absolute physical, medical and mental healing of man. Literature and medicine do not just complement each other; they also have the same goal as they both seek to proffer solutions to human problems. (McLellan & Jones, 1996)

Cawley (1993) establishes the fact that medical science does not provide a complete picture of human beings. It becomes important for doctors to have a more profound comprehension of their patients to enable them assess emotional and existential issues. Cawley opines that this can only be better accomplished by introducing a correlative study of the humanities into the curriculum of medicine.

Femi Oyeboode (2009) argued that autobiographical narratives of mental illness are unique sources of information as they give rare insights into the richness of psychopathology. He further notes that self-portraying stories of psychological instability are novel wellsprings of data and they permit therapists and other emotional wellness laborers to access an uncommon knowledge of the extravagance of psychopathology as experienced, as opposed to as drawn out and depicted by specialists. He also pointed out that the numerous rituals of psychiatry; the noxious and limiting climate of clinics and the significance of personal relationships with clinicians are completely uncovered and examined in autobiographical narratives. This makes it so obvious that therapists would profit by reading and understanding them going by Oyeboode's opinions.

Oyeboode considered the effect of autobiographical narrative with topics identified with mental health on psychiatry as he made mention of how important the personal relationships with clinicians are to the practice of psychiatry. He laid emphasis on how autobiographical narratives help in the understanding of psychotic experiences. He likewise considered authors that expounded on their insane encounters raising psychiatry issues, which incorporate the rituals of Psychiatry; absolutely on the evil treatment allotted to them, and psychopathology. He submits that it is easy to be self-congratulatory, particularly because of the absence of physical restraints and overtly punitive regimes in modern psychiatric hospitals.

Literature relates the on-goings in the society; these include the emotional states and wellness of individuals. It does not just capture the psychological condition of individuals yet in addition uncovers the outlook of the individuals towards dysfunctional behavior. Literature empowers one to comprehend what psychological instability is related to among the individuals. It likewise relates the standard individuals have set for the intellectually precarious as well as the way of life that is anticipated from them.

Fictional narrative accomplishes its points by making its characters stick out. This method of amplifying parts of characters in a novel can include the intensification of physical attributes, or the distortion of characteristics, conduct, discourse or experience. Oyeboode (2009) opines that one of the reasons insanity is of interest to writers is that already existent in the image of insanity is the implicit

difference from others. When this difference is amplified, the result can be a caricature of what insanity is actually like.

Pellegrino (1982) opines, "Literature gives meaning to what physicians see, and it makes them see feelingly" (p.20). This is to emphasize the vitality of literature in medical practices. From this statement, it is evident that physician writers will make empathetic and not only sympathetic physicians as literature helps them to see feelingly.

In addition, in literary works where characters are portrayed to be ill, the readers tend to scrutinize the role of the physicians because of their place of importance in the society (Amundsen, 1977; Donley, 1991 and Hunter, 1983). In addition, Epstein L.C. (1993) points out that physicians and medical students are exposed to the fact that act of healing encompass acts of interpretation and contemplation alongside the technical and scientific aspects of medicine by feeding their minds on medical narratives.

This study would focus on observing and diagnosing the mental challenges of selected characters in Omobowale's *Seasons of Rage*. It would explore how Literature reflects and refracts mental health realities and challenges as portrayed in the text. Its specific goal is to identify the representation of mental health conditions in the text to show how the sub-discipline of Literature and Medicine is represented in Omobowale's creative works. Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale is Nigerian's first professor of Literature and the Medical Humanities. In fact, he is the pioneer of the study of 'Literature and Medicine' in Nigeria. *Seasons of Rage* is one of his several creative works that were deliberately written to fit into the broad ambit of the medical humanities. The text revolves around the life of two half-brothers who are at loggerhead with each other. They were fighting over who takes the largest share of their father's wealth. Martin attempted severally to exterminate Freddy, his younger brother. Fortunately, Freddy was able to secure his life and the company. While, Martins, on the other hand, lost the battle and his life eventually. The text embodies several forms of mental health conditions that foreground its relevance in mental health studies.

REFLECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH IN THE TEXT

Human actions, speech, attitudes and reactions are all products of what goes on in their minds. The characters in this text can be well understood through a psychological study of their mental states, which is projected by their conscious and subconscious dispositions. Most often, unpleasant situations such as distress, anger, betrayal, sadness, war, violence and the likes, tend to influence and reveal the identity of an individual. Courage,

persistence and sagacity is an evidence of a mentally strong individual. A mentally healthy individual is self-motivated to stay true to a course regardless of how threatening or painful such a course is. This is epitomized in the character of Freddy, as he was able to scale through despite the psychological and physical torture he was subjected to all through the text. However, there is a strong probability that every mentally strong individual portrays weakness at certain points in their lives. This conclusion is drawn from the character of Freddy and it depicts why humans even adults become not so happy at the sight of medications and syringe. As much expected from every human in unpleasant situations, Freddy's mental state experiences a drastic shift from being a smart, bold and courageous man to being a depressed, anxious, and angry man at some points in the text. The fire of the mental tension was all ignited during the burial when Freddy sadly found the death of his father unbelievable:

For Freddy, the news of the sudden death of his father, whom he affectionately called 'the old man', was still unbelievable. He had had an extensive heart to heart discussion with him a day before his abduction, and he had looked very healthy (Omobowale, 2014, p.6).

One can imagine from the excerpt above the kind of uproar going on in Freddy's mental state. The sort of confusion and lack of inner peace Freddy was going through at that moment is unfathomable. This is equaled to how humans feels when they come to terms with the fact that they are about to be painfully pierced by a doctor's syringe and have their taste glands messed up by the bitter taste of pills. This is because they are in their weak moments just as Freddy has his mentally weak moments despite that he is a paradigm of mental strength.

Beside unpleasant situations, the influence of other humans can either positively or negatively contribute to the mental state of an individual. This is evident in Freddy's character as the tension between him and his half-brother concerning who would be the heir to the wealth of the late Michael Pendelton, the former chair of the multi-million dollar Pendelton Investment Company brought about different mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and anger in Freddy's character.

Furthermore, Due to shortage in facilities and personnel, most African hospitals tend to delay the process of medical attention, which does not sit down well in the patients as they are in serious pains already. This often times lead to anxiety, impatience, outburst, anger, violence and depression. Freddy portrays this as he became anxious when he had waited so long for the board members who seemed to have deliberately taken their time before showing up for such a crucial meeting. It is also obvious that the turn up of the board members to the meeting have not only made Freddy to be anxious but also put him in a depressive mood. This is evident in his reaction when Miriam, his father's former Lebanese

secretary came in. His hopelessness during the meeting also serves as a pointer to his depression:

Oh! I see,' Freddy replied sulkily. His voice sounded subdued and clouded with pessimism (Omobowale, 2014, p.10).

Someone, out of courtesy, passed a copy to Freddy, which the latter completely ignored. He felt it was unnecessary going through its contents. He already knew what was going to happen in the course of the meeting. He also knew that he would not have any control over the board members (Omobowale, 2014, p.13).

Despite that Freddy tries to keep his anxiety under control in the meeting by sinking deep into his seat, watching the board members closely as if he was there solely as an observer and also munching a piece of home-baked biscuit slowly (Omobowale, 2014, p.12), he was forced to release the rage he has been trying so hard to keep under control. In the statement he made, just as in the opening of the text, one can see that he got back his confidence that he has lost to the shock of his father's unexpected death:

This is not the place to read my father's will,' he exploded in anger. 'These people are not members of our family'. Nobody had expected the outburst and some of the board members stared at Martin quizzically (Omobowale, 2014, p.13).

This vividly reflects what goes on in African hospitals and the feeling of hopelessness patients exude. However, the fact that human's desires could lead to manifestations of different mental abnormalities ranging from anger, anxiety, obsession and depression cannot be overemphasized. This is the explanation to why patients tend to be impatient when required to wait for a long time for medical consultation and treatment. Who should then be blamed for this show of inhumanity i.e. delay in medical attention even when the patients are at the verge of losing it? The patient who is in an unavoidable need of urgent treatment and got angry because of lack of available personnel? Or medical personnel who are way lesser than the number of the patients waiting to be attended to? Obviously, the patients are not to be blamed neither the medical personnel as they both have justifications. However, medical personnel are required to operate with the understanding that the patients are way not okay mentally at the time than they are physically unhealthy.

Freddy further expressed his anger in the statement below. The statement also insinuates that the battle line has been drawn. One can notice the switch from hopelessness to hope of getting what rightly belongs to him:

Well, I don't have anything to say for now,' Freddy retorted as he stood up, fuming. 'I know this will be fake, and I will do everything within my power to prove this and to stop you from taking over this company (Omobowale, 2014, p.14).

In additions, Freddy exhibited the sign of burning rage by clenching his hands into fists and gritted his

tooth (Omobowale, 2014, p.31) which is a symptom of depression when Hussein broke the news of his fiancée's abduction. His depression though unannounced was unconsciously revealed in the statement he made when he heard the news:

I should have guessed,' he told Hussein gravely. 'Although I travelled out of town, I warned her against going to work.' Freddy found his voice shaking and he was surprised to see himself frightened by Miriam's little cousin (Omobowale, 2014, p.31).

Though silent, one can sense the aura of fear, hopelessness, regret, guilt, helplessness and subdued anger, which all form the characteristic of a depressed person in his statement above. This news woke the sleeping rage in him. This is obvious through the response he gave to Hussein when he (Hussein) tried to blame him (Freddy) for Miriam's misfortune. He as well utilized the weapon of self-defense and self-pity to announce his depression:

Point of correction, Hussein,' he growled back. 'I did not drag her into my personal problems. She walked into it herself.' He regretted the statement immediately the last word left his mouth (Omobowale, 2014, p.31).

Furthermore, Martin's mental conditions of depression, greed, hostility, anger, anxiety and obsession affected other characters in the text. Martin's action caused both physical and mental havoc to virtually all the characters in the text. The narrator referred to him as 'the perfect epitome of evil' (Omobowale, 2014, p.11). It is important to note that Martin was not just behaving the way he did but there was a force pushing him, which was his several mental health disorders. The first one is depression. According to The Department of Mental Health, Missouri, one of the major symptoms of depression is anger and rage, which is very well evident in Martin's character as projected in his statement:

You don't have any power to confront me,' Martin snarled back at him. Rising up in a fit, he flung the gavel in his hand in Freddy's direction to the consternation of the board members. 'You have nothing and have nobody to support you, yet you have the guts to make insolent remarks where you could have appealed for help! (Omobowale, 2014, p.14).

Another symptom of depression portrayed in the character of Martins is hopelessness. Martin probably does not have a strong hope in him being the sole heir to the Pendleton's company that was why he sought every means he could to make sure the company becomes his. It is clear in Martin's character that he is a manic-depressive person as his depression made him lose his sanity and made him involved himself in things that are manic. This hopelessness also ensued when he realized that he does not have access to the company as Freddy eventually was discovered the right owner of the company.

Martin also suffers from General Anxiety Disorder (GAD) according to the model given by The Department

of Mental Health, Missouri. A sufferer of GAD is characterized with chronic and exaggerated worry about life events or activities. Martin was too worried about losing the company to his half-brother. One can imagine what would be going on in his mental state at that point of losing all he had desired for to Freddy. One would then conclude that his anxiety instigated several vicious and impious thoughts in him, which he then portrayed in the role he played in every character's life. For instance, he attempted several means to execute his brother, which luckily for him (Freddy) always prove abortive. One of those attempts is hiring Faisal to harm Freddy who happened to be in the Pendelton Mansion, al Halabi, Fezzan City, where he with Mariam went to after he was caught drinking. He gave a final order to Faisal 'It has to be done tonight' (p.19). Just like the other ones, this particular attempt was not successful.

It does not only end there, Martin can also be said to be suffering from Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). OCD is characterized by repeated, intrusive and unwanted thoughts that seem impossible to control. Actually, one cannot say that the thought of having the company to himself is unwanted, obviously, it is; but it is sure that the thought is repeated and uncontrollable. Aside that, Martin is so obsessed with wealth and money to the extent that he had a relationship with a lady he knew he was not going to marry and then eventually dumped her after he felt he was done with the business between the both of them. That is also a symptom of OCD in his character. He is also obsessed with smoking cigarette.

Additionally, young people tend to be faced with the problem of instability of emotion and be bipolar in nature. At a point, they will be hyperactive and see life as bed of roses; at another point, they feel depressed and see nothing good about life. They tend not to be confident about their choices. This can then be related to why Martin was emotionally unstable and had to jilt Jennifer. The same Martin who used to treat Jennifer well as his lover now had to deny having any romantic relationship with her.

Martin, after the anxious, angry and overexcited phase of his mental condition, appeared the depressive phase after everything was dawn on him. Confusion, disappointment and feeling of defeat overwhelmed him. He had no other option than to shamefacedly walk away from the meeting. These statements below shows that he eventually became depressed.

Angrily, he pounded his fists on the table and worked up himself into a very depressive mood. ... Martin tried to speak again but he was too angry and confused to make any coherent statement' (Omobowale, 2014, p.69).

'I am going to fight this out in the law courts,' Martin promised, but again after this outburst, he made no move to stand up. He further turned morose when the company's legal adviser

collected his files and stood up to speak (Omobowale, 2014, p.70).

Eventually, Martin and his valet lost their lives. In further study, one would discover that Martin seems to be suffering from various mental health disorders but for the purpose of this study, only these obvious ones is discussed.

It is also important not to ignore the portrayal of the worker's mental disorder. It could be discovered that a good number of the workers that are working under the leadership of Martin now developed a mental illness called Social Anxiety Disorder, which is also known as Social phobia. According to World Health Organisation (2003), people with social phobia have an intense, chronic fear of being watched and judged by others, and of being humiliated by their own actions. They often worry for days or weeks in advance of a dreaded situation. Physical symptoms include blushing, profuse sweating, trembling, nausea, and difficulty talking. A good example of a sufferer of this mental health illness is Finance Director. This was clear in his disposition when it was his turn to talk at one of the board meetings. His behavior was as thus:

It was now the Finance Director's turn to speak. He stood up and tugged at the tail end of his tie. He prayed silently that he would not have a nervous breakdown before he finished what he had to say. Everybody was waiting for him to speak but he kept fidgeting as if he saw an invisible Sword of Damocles hanging over his head (Omobowale, 2014, pp.63-64).

The description above is an illustration of the symptoms of another mental illness called the panic disorder. Within few weeks, board members also became scared of him and it was obvious in their character.

One peculiar thing about human behavior is that it gets its inspiration from the mental state. One would discover that the behavior of the Finance Director changed after he got his mental liberty. At first, he was enslaved to fear and anxiety of what Martin would do to him if he fails to cooperate with him (Martin). The story then changed at the end when he gained back his sanity and his voice. The Finance Director who would always tremble before talking to Martin now became so bold that he could confront Martin. He did not stop at that. He went further to suggest that Martin should be voted out of office. This probably would not have happened if nothing has happened to his mental disposition. The height of it all is the psychosocial disorder in the text. Virtually all the characters are addicted to the use of one substance or the other. Over dependence on substance and addiction is a symptom of Addictive Disorders. Addictive Disorder is featured by a "cluster of cognitive, behavioral and physiological symptoms" associated with use of drugs including alcohol, sedatives, cold medications, opiates, cannabis, amphetamines and other inhalants.

CONCLUSION

The study of *Seasons of Rage*, reveals that virtually all the characters are suffering from one mental illness as evident in their behaviors. Some of the major sufferers include Freddy, Martin, and Jennifer Kubanyanka. Freddy is diagnosed of bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder and depression. This is evident in his character as his mental state tends to wave depending on the situation on the ground. At some points, he would behave strong, bold and confident just as he did during the board meeting. At other points, he would be broken, weak and feel defeated as shown in the part where he was welcomed with the news of his father's death and Mariam's kidnap. Martin also portrays the symptoms of obsession, depression and anxiety. This is evident in his excessive love for their father's wealth and all the means he adopted just to ensure that the whole wealth is his. He became too anxious about wealth. This led to his death. His anxiety and obsession contributed to what transpired between him and Jennifer. Jennifer who happens to be the major sufferer of mental illness in the text is schizophrenic. Schizophrenia is a brain disease that affects a person's thought and behavior. Obviously, Jennifer's behavior was affected. This was portrayed when she was driving recklessly. Additionally, a person suffering from the disorganized type of schizophrenia frequently shows little emotion just as Jennifer refused to show concern for splashing water on a passerby.

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