

A study of Power as pain in *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri

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Abstract

This paper, A study of Power as pain in The Famished Road by Ben Okri shows the depiction of pain with cruel nature of the politicians, society, exploitation of the poor and poor condition of the protagonist. Ben Okri reveals the pathetic situation of Azaro who is unable to lead a normal life like other children. He dwells in chaos throughout the novel where he couldn't stick to one world. He also depicts the love of the father which saves his son from the torturing spirits. Power acts in many ways. The Party of the Rich raise hands only to harm the poor. Society has given them power in the name of money. The poor people are unable to decide on their own. Okri shows that power brings harm to others also. Of course, power does good things but in this novel the writer portrays power as a tool of ache. Ben Okri stresses the disadvantages and the disasters made in the name of power. He also proves that an extra power is always an alarming one. It can bring harm to the person and to others. This paper finds that Ben Okri tries to convey how power can be used for good deeds and in the development of the surroundings.

Key words: *Power, Abiku, Rich, pathos, death, love*

Ben Okri is a Nigerian poet and a novelist who focuses in enriching the poor. His famous novels are *The Famished Road*, *Flowers and Shadows*, *Songs of Enchantment* and *Infinite Riches*. His book, *The Famished Road* won Booker prize in 1991 which bought him a great fame. He uses magical realism to reveal the plot in his novels. The term magical realism is a style of literary fiction which shows the realistic side of the world by adding magical elements to it. In *The Famished Road*, he portrays how power alters the life of the protagonist and his family. The change is not a happy one. It brings disaster to the family daily.

Power is used to do things easily. With power, one can achieve anything. It takes hard work to gain physical and mental power. But sometimes it brings trouble and even causes damage to the person and the surroundings. In the novel, the protagonist, Azaro is not a normal child. He is an abiku. He is a child who can live and die. He has a very weak tie with the real world and has stronger ties with his home that is spirit world. Ben shows Azaro as a mysterious child and the things that happen around him is because of his power as a spirit child. He could see things which many cannot see. He feels ache in his spirit and his power drains his energy and age. Death is a painful truth and this causes flood in the family.

In not wanting to stay, we caused much pain to mothers. Their pain grew heavier with each return. Their anguish became for us an added spiritual weight which quickens the cycle of rebirth. Each new birth was agony for us too, each shock of the raw world. Our cyclical rebellion made us resented by other spirits and ancestors. Disliked in the spirit world and branded amongst the Living, our unwillingness to stay affected all kinds of balances (2)

He brings poverty to the family. Being a labour, his father feels every hard to bring him up. But dies in the novel nearly six times. His father couldn't spend for his funeral where their daily need is a big question. In this way, his family is financially affected. But they love him the most and do everything they could do. Their love never fades with time and fight caused by the bad spirits.

In the early years Mum was quite proud of me. 'You are a child of miracles,' she would say. 'Many powers are on your side.' For as long as my cord to other worlds remained intact, for as long as my objects were not found, this might continue to be true. As a child I could read people's minds. I could foretell their futures. Accidents happened in places I had just left. One night I was standing in the street with Mum when a voice said:

'Cross over.'

I tugged Mum across the street and a few moments later an articulated lorry plunged into the house we had been standing in front of and killed an entire family.(5)

Azaro is different from others as he faces death many times. As a child, this is very odd and fearful. He is unable to tolerate the pain that he is not normal like others. He is treated differently by other children which becomes a wound in his heart. He is often shunned by his compound friends. Some people have fear and aversion on him. This is only because to his power to see visions, die and get a new life somewhere else. Okri stresses about restructuring the world in *Dangerous Love* as, 'understand things slowly- digest thoroughly- act swiftly- re-dream the world- restructure self' (363).

The Spirits help and torment Azaro throughout the novel. This shows that power adds pain to life. He suffers mentally and finds difficult to differentiate between reality and illusion.

My feet were around my head and my neck was twisted to breaking point. I couldn't breathe and I fought the panic that washed over me in waves. The blankness of death came upon me. I shut my eyes. It was no different when I opened them. At one point I fell into a strange sleep in which the figure of a king resplendent in gold appeared to me and vanished. My spirit companions began singing in my ears, rejoicing in my captivity and in the fact that I would soon be joining them. I could not shut out their singing and I'm not sure which was worse: being bundled away by unknown people to an unknown destination or hearing my spirit companions orchestrate my passage through torment with their sweet and excruciating voices.(84)

Dad fights with spirits to save his son's life. The spirits haunt the family day and night. The home is filled with mosquitoes and sometimes strange creatures appear and disappear to spoil their daily life. The abiku child is disturbed all the time. He sees visions and follows it and then he finds himself in the deep forest. Then his parents reach there to save him.

Madame Koto treats him differently. She wants Azaro in his bar so that many spirits could visit her bar which may raise her money and status in the society. Because of her, he sees many spirits and gets fainted and his dad comes to save him. He is not allowed to school as Koto holds him in the bar.

The rats went on eating. The moth came too close to the candle flame, singed its wings, and fell into the wax. The smoke from its burnt wings was dense and didn't rise high and the moth writhed in the wax and caught fire. I blew out the two flames, took the moth from the wax, and lit the candle again.

Dad said:

'The only power poor people have is their hunger.'(50)

Political power is shown as a tool to harm and haunt people. There is no space to think and act. Their decisions are supervised by the rich people. In the name of power, the poor people are exploited in all ways. Power is used to create fire accident which really questions the value of power. The wounds of the heart fail to fade with time. People remember the stains of the past and present. By this way, power stands as the tool of pain.

The inhabitants of the street crowded round the van, hunger on their faces. Their children were in tattered clothes, had big stomachs, and were barefoot.

'What is it?' someone asked.

'Politicians.'

'They want votes.'

'They want our money.'

'They have come to tax us.'

'I saw them when I went hawking. They keep giving reasons why we should vote for them.'

‘They only remember us when they want our votes.’ The man in the van spoke for himself.
‘VOTE FOR US. WE ARE THE PARTY OF THE RICH, FRIENDS OF THE POOR...’
‘The poor have no friends,’ someone in the crowd said.
‘Only rats’(93)

With these power the writer tries to say that power should not create discrimination. Positive things can be done using power and one should use power to help and save the people.

WORK CITED

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