

**EVIL AND SUFFERING IN OKRI'S
TWO PROSE NARRATIVES: *THE FAMISHED ROAD*
AND *THE STAR BOOK***

**A PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
LITERARY STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS IN
LITERARY ARTS**

BY

UNODIAKU ANTHONY A.

PG/MA/06/40973

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA**

MARCH, 2009.

CERTIFICATION

I, Unodiaku Anthony Arochukwu, a postgraduate of the Department of English and literary studies, university of Nigeria Nsukka, have satisfactorily completed the requirement for the requirement for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts (comparative literature) in English.

This work is original, and has not been submitted in part or full for any degree of this or any other University.

Prof. Damian Ugwutikiri Opata
Supervisor

Prof. S. M. Onuigbo
Head of Department

External supervisor

DEDICATION

To my friends; Ugboaku, Mmachi and Chiebuka

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thoughts cannot be represented exactly in language. However, what I intend to achieve here is to appreciate the efforts of all the lecturers through whom I have received the knowledge which I have yearned for over a decade.

I thank Mr. Okoro Fidelis for his friendship and love, Dr. Amadihe Ezugwu for playing the role of a mentor, Prof. A. N. Akwanya for insisting that I get the best, Dr. S. M. Onuigbo for understanding the needs of those under him and Prof. Damian Opata for providing me with light.

In a very special way, I thank an old and reliable friend Mr. Livinus Anieke for providing me with books and for proof-reading my thesis. I also thank Mr. Ajaino Lucky and Omajuwa Peter Ekakitie for their love and for providing me with aids during my tour of Uhrobo land in Delta state.

ABSTRACT

Man misrepresents the gods because of his pride and greed. He does a lot of harm to himself and to others around him through his actions that are not governed by good reasons. He commits a lot of evil against his fellow men in order to attain greatness and happiness. Unfortunately he accuses the gods of his hideous evil acts.

This essay therefore intends to free the gods of the wrong accusations brought upon them by greedy man. It attempts also to present the gods as innocent creatures who are incapable of evil because they are noble and perfect. Evil is an imperfect act perpetuated by man who is an imperfect being.

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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The misrepresentation of the gods as either causing evil or interference in human activities is evident in many literary texts as well as in many African folk stories. Man tries to run away from the consequences of his actions by blaming the evil which he perpetrates on the gods as if though they (the gods) have not given him the freedom to choose. Rather than abandoning his tragic path of freedom and heroism, man continues to accuse the gods as being responsible for the disaster that buffet him daily. Evil comes to man because of his actions that fall short of reason not because the gods are evil. The research problem here therefore, is to place evil and its sources on man and evil spirits and to represent the gods the way they are. In the nature of the gods, evil does not exist.

METHODOLOGY

Part of the research work involves oral interviews conducted among some elders in certain chosen communities in Igbo-Etiti L. G. A. of Enugu state as a background study on the origin of evil, the nature of the gods and that of man. Interviews were also conducted based on the above among some elders in Uhrobo, Delta state, the home town of Ben Okri whose works are being used as the major reference materials. Included as part of the tools of analysis are some African literary texts and a folk-tale.

For a balanced view of evil, references are also made to some western scholars' opinions. However, the major tools used here are the two prose narratives, that is, *The Famished Road* and *The Star Book*, hence the approach is formalism.

Introduction

The *Star Book* and *The Famished Road*, apart from coming from the same author Ben Okri, are also related in their perception and representation of evil and suffering. Evil in the two

prose narratives come from man. The characters that cause evil in the two works do so by either making others suffer or by supporting those who cause it.

Evil in the two prose narratives is represented in different forms and levels of conflicts. Each level of conflict gives rise to one evil or the other. For example there is conflict between the sexes, there is resistance and struggle within the social context, there is conflict between the proletariats and the bourgeois and there is conflict between the intellectuals and the professionals. Through these levels of conflicts, evil manifests.

The research work is divided into four chapters. Chapter one which is the introduction discusses the notion of evil in some selected communities in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State as well as the notion of evil in Uhrobo land of Delta state. It explores also the notion of evil in African Oral traditional as well as in some African literary texts. Also explored in chapter one is the Western notion of evil which is represented by the opinion of some Western scholars, Chapter two which is the analysis of the two works explores evil in different dimensions and the way it causes suffering. The chapter also explores the different ways through which evil and suffering manifest. Chapter three which is the literary analysis of the texts discusses some of the literary tools that are employed in the works. Such tools include mythology and oral tradition technique, language, (Satire) humour and irony. Chapter four of the work which is also the conclusion insists that the gods are innocent of the evil charges leveled against them by men who are themselves the causes and sources of evil.

1.1 ORAL INTERVIEW

Although, there are little variations among the elders that were interviewed in some selected communities in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State on the nature of the gods, there is however one significant view that is held by all of them. Their common view is that all the gods are innocent, that they cannot be bribed or driven to harm the innocent. They also have the same notion that no god is evil and that they are incapable of initiating any evil.

One of the elders from Ochima in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State Mr. Enyi

Mathew has this to say on the nature of the gods:

No god is evil, no god is capricious, no god is violent and no god is tricky. The gods are strict and vengeful on the account of the behaviour of men. Those who do not offend the gods live peacefully and die peacefully. The wicked, the evil doers are tied to a stake in sickness until the day of their death.

The gods penalize the living for lesser offences. When they get angry with the living on the account of their conducts, sacrifices are offered and the person or people who are involved in evil is/are cleansed. There are however great evil acts which the gods do not forgive. Such offences are willful murder, stealing of already planted yams, abduction of the weak, diversion of what is meant for others, casting of spell on people to prevent them from attaining their destinies and murder of pregnant women.

When a person loses his property to a thief or to the greedy, he complains to the gods who must surely punish the offender. The gods defend the oppressed and the weak. Those who are sold in slavery are avenged and fought for by the gods of their land. The gods worshipped by the weak avenge for them. Here the oppressor may experience evil in many forms. When evil manifests as a form of punishment for an offence committed, the gods are not to be seen as originating evil: the gods can only express their grievances and disappointments. The gods punish those who break their rules. Whatever evil they bring upon the wicked does not signify that they are evil or wicked. It is also a testimony that they can be relied upon, for if they do not punish offenders evil will soon over power the world.

Odeke Ori, an elderly man from Diogbe also in Igbo-Etiti L.G.A has this to say while reflecting on the nature of the gods:

I do not believe that any god can create a wicked person. Evil manifests in children as they grow up. The gods hate the wicked and that is why they do not withdraw them from the earth in haste. The gods do not want both the wicked and the evil doer to be close to them. Sometimes to curtail the excesses of evil doers, they are tied in sickness for a very long period of

time. Such people remain in their sick bed until they die. There is no such thing like a wicked god; the gods are strict and not wicked.

From Oral tradition there is another version on the nature of the gods. This aspect presents the gods as a little flexible and a little inconsistent yet strict. This version believes that the gods obey some negative demands by their priests. One of the most elderly men interviewed said that the gods whose priests are paupers are encouraged by such lazy priests to demand for sacrifices. These gods in obedience to their priests demand for sacrifices. The gods in this instance can only approach the innocent because they abhor the wicked and the evil doer. According to the elder, (Odo Ugwu) this is one of the reasons why the innocent suffer. Such gods can cut a man's climbing rope while he is climbing a palm tree, they can cause a sudden sickness or even snake bites. When any of the mentioned incidences occur, people will go to the (dibia) diviner to seek the face of the gods. The 'dibia' who mediates between the gods and men will reveal whichever god that is responsible for the evil that has occurred and the sacrifice that is to be made. As soon as the innocent victim offers the prescribed sacrifices the evil is removed from him.

This sort of evil is symbolic. For one thing, the victim must be innocent, on another hand he must be a man who is loved by the gods and thirdly, such evil is not a punishment but a renewal of friendship between the gods and men. Through this relationship between the innocent victim and the gods the lazy chief priests find what to eat and the wine to drink. This is also another instance where the gods are represented as partial and loving at the same time. Sometimes the gods on their own volition may decide to enrich their priests. Such gods cause shocks among the people they love and cherish. When sacrifices are made to such gods their priests get enriched. The gods do this so that their priests will not steal. Those who offer such sacrifices become happier when they learn from the 'dibia' that the gods have meant no harm but an extension of friendship.

The two instances where the gods favour their priests at the expense of the innocent is not necessarily evil since the gods offer protection and favour to those through whom they maintain their priests. The gods are also presented as strict and innocent as they do not hesitate to punish their priests whenever they are offended. Many priests have been known to have suffered severely for neglecting their gods or for breaking their rules.

The gods also get angry when their shrines are not kept clean or neglected for a longtime. When such a thing happens the gods visit the people with what may appear to be evil. The gods who no longer feel human presence around them threaten their loved ones so that they pay them more attention. Such evil brought by the gods that seek the attention of their people is not evil in the strict sense of the word. The gods cannot speak to us as humans do, so they give signs, they whisper, when they do these things the wise hear and understand. The gods who like praises and human attention can only communicate to us when something a little unpleasant happens to us. What the gods do to the innocent can never be viewed as evil as it is a way through which the gods and the ancestors assure us of their presence. When the peace of the innocent is invaded by unknown forces, he rushes to the 'dibia' and makes peace with the gods after which he becomes more confident.

The gods certainly punish evil doers especially those who swear falsely before them. Those who kill their sacred animals experience various forms of adversity. The gods when provoked extremely can cause blindness, madness or even kill an offender. When the offenders are punished in any severe way, the gods should not be presumed wicked. They are just and innocent as they do not in actual sense punish the innocent. They only demand sacrifices as a symbol of love and unity. Evil doers know what they do in hiding; they are afraid of the gods who they know must punish them here on earth or when they die. From all the observations made so far, one can conclude that there is no evil in the nature of the gods. As a result the gods

themselves are incapable of initiating any evil hence they hate and punish evil doers. We can now go on from here to question the meaning of evil and perhaps its origin.

The traditional ruler of Ochima (Ezebinagu 1 of Ochima) tells the story of creation in a very amazing way:

The gods arrange children like books in a shelf but they are not conscious because they do not have life in them. It is from this shelf that the gods release children to women during pregnancy. But before a child is released, he is given a morsel of food that contains three major elements. The major element is life; others are the knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil. With these elements a child is sent into the world. He then grows up to know what is good and what is evil.

Through the knowledge obtained from the gods men are able to identify for themselves what is good or what is evil. Through the knowledge already in us, we identify certain things as evil. They are so numerous, so all we can do is to make references to the major areas. For example, it is evil among the Igbo people for a man to shed the blood of a relation. This is a direct offence against the earth goddess. Children born within an extended family unit are placed on the ground by the eldest man in the family. Sacrifices are made on such occasions as a sign of re-dedicating the child to the earth goddess. This is why blood is a sacred thing especially among people who are related. This is also why close relations are not allowed to marry.

Incest is also an evil since both the man and the women who are involved were re-dedicated to the earth goddess by the same elder. The gods get angry at such acts and children who are products of such a union usually die young or in mysterious circumstances. The gods do not favour them with long life so that they do not live to inherit the family staff. Those who sell those they are related to commit the same offence as those who kill people that are related to. Other things which are identified among the Igbo people as evil include seduction of a man's wife, stealing of kola nuts and stealing of already planted yams.

According to Odo Ori:

The gods are afraid of the evil doer. This is why evil doers live longer. The gods hit the evil doers with long sticks in their sick beds to weaken them completely before arresting them eventually. The gods are afraid of the evil doer because they know that the evil doer can cause trouble among them, this is why they make sure that the evil doer is completely weak before they go for his arrest. When arrested he is tied to a stake in a poor house where he suffers endlessly. He is never released.

It is evil to steal already Planted yams, accepting bribe in order to side a wrong view, diversion in any means what belongs to other people, murder through any evil means, abortion, telling lies, refusal to bury the dead or desecration of the dead in any form. From the wisdom obtained from birth, man is able to distinguish between good and evil.

Having seen what constitutes evil, we shall go on and look at its origin. Ugwu Nwatama from Diogbe traces the origin of evil to greed. He narrates:

In the beginning, people ate from the same pot and drank with one cup. Then there was love and death was rare. As time progressed, those that became rich decided to eat alone, the rich also started killing the poor and ceasing the little they had. As things got worse, everybody started to think and to act differently. Evil originated from the first man who deviated from the family union established by the ancestors. This is the origin of evil.

Here evil is traced to greed, to the man who became rich and decided to lord it over his brothers. He was led astray by the love of material things. Through him came murder, stealing and others things associated with evil.

Odo Nwori also from Diogbe like Opata and Arinze traces the origin of evil to evil spirits who were once humans. Evil or wandering spirits are spirits of those that did what was evil while they lived on earth.

Odo Nwori narrates:

Those who did evil are denied peace and rest in the spirit world. They roam about among the rivers, in the forests, in the market places, along the roads and whenever they can cause mischief. They can cause sickness and kill animals that belong to their relations. They cannot intercede for any body. They are usually angry and hostile. They harass and torture the living. They are never worshiped and those who offer sacrifices to them offer them rags.

At death, the dead is interviewed. Some of the questions which the gods pose to the dead are highlighted by Ani Nwenyi from Ochima, he has this to say: The dead faces a panel of the gods. The questions they are asked include: Do you have a house?, do you have a wife?, have you celebrated the funeral rites of your father and mother?, and have you left any fortunes behind you?

According to Ani Nweyi a witness appears immediately before the gods finish their questions. This witness is the dead man's shadow. The dead does not talk as his shadow responds to the questions. Those who fail the interview by the gods are actually those who failed in life. They are therefore driven away by the gods. Being unable to remain in the spirit world with the gods they come back to the human world as wandering spirits. They turn their agony and frustration to harming others; they cause accidents and sickness wherever they can. They are the sources of evil among men apart from evil doers.

On the possibilities of averting the wrath of evil spirits, Odo Ugwu from Ukehe notes:

Nothing is ever enough for them. They bring harm to whoever they want; they can go to any length to keep people unhappy. Whatever sacrifices that are made for them are for a temporary time. They are wicked in their present time as they were as human beings. The only solution is to trace out where such people were buried and exhume whatever bones that could be found. The moment this is done, the evil spirit ceases to disturb its human relations.

Of good men who have died, the elder says;

They are remembered in various ways. Children are named after them. They usually come back as children to their loved relatives. Widows of such men dedicate their love to them in some nights when they do not admit any of their lovers. In this way, they relate and honour their late good husbands. Good dead men are benevolent spirits, their children prosper and weeds do not overgrow their graves. They are intercessors. They are invoked by their relatives in times of trouble. They are part of every meal in their various families and always part of every meeting held by the 'Umana' (a kindred group).

While evil spirits remain in ever lasting suffering and agony, benevolent spirits have options of either re-joining the human world or remaining as spirits. When elders pray for children, they ask the gods to give them children that will behave in similar ways to their good dead relations.

When children are born, the 'dibia' is often invited to say which of the good dead relation of the family has come back. Most often such children are named after those who are believed to have come back. Sometimes there are physical birth marks through which parents could identify their relations who have come back without having to invite the 'dibia'.

During the course of this project report one elder said that the population of any given family is determined by two variables: the number of good men that have come from that family and by the number of evil men that have also come from there. He attributes large population, harmony and prosperity in most extended families to the reward of good conduct among distant dead men. In families that experience constant disasters as pre-mature deaths, poverty, disunity, various forms of ill-health and even madness he attributes to the activities of evil doers in the past. To free such families an honest 'dibia' has to be employed to proffer solutions.

1.2 ORAL TRADITION

There is an oral tradition which narrates an encounter between the Tortoise and his 'Chi' personal god. The story explains that what might be mistaken for an evil omen by men may be a good gesture from the gods. The tale represents the gods as jealous lovers who cherish the companionship of those they love. They become jealous if those they love jilt them through acts of negligence. The folktale tells of the Tortoise who neglected his personal god for six years. In the seventh year while tapping his palm tree for palm wine he had a sudden fall. After crashing, he remained calm for some time praying silently to the gods to protect his bones.

After drawing a heavy breath he rose gradually still praying. To his greatest surprise he discovered that he sustained no injury. Early in the morning the next day he rushed to the 'Dibi' (diviner) to ascertain the reason for the accident he experienced the previous day. The 'Dibia' asked him to pay the usual consultation fee. The tortoise paid immediately without his usual tricks because he was exceedingly afraid. Having received his price the 'Dibia' promptly began

his divination. After a while, he stopped, took a look at the cowries on the ground, took a look at the tortoise who has started panting heavily. The moment was tense and the wind steady.

Gradually, the 'Dibia' relaxed his face and focused on the Tortoise that has turned pale. Listen, I said you should listen said the 'Dibia'. Then he continued; "Your chi" is not happy with you; you have neglected him for full six years without sacrifices. What you experienced yesterday was his usual jokes with you. Go home and make peace with him". The tortoise opened his mouth to ask questions but was unable to utter a word. He tried a second time but the 'dibia' was no where to be found. A shock ran down his spine and he hurriedly left for his home blank. When he finally got home, he tried to recall his observations on the road but remembered nothing. He tried to recall if he met anybody or group of people but nothing came to his mind.

After spending some hours in his hut he came out with four lobes of kola nut representing the four native days, Eke, Oye, Afo and Nkwo. He placed two lobes on each hand and stretched both hands to the sun and said; 'Chi m' my god, it is true that you love me and joke with me, but please do not pull me down from any height next time should I break any of my bones". He however made some prompt sacrifices to appease his 'chi'. What the Tortoise failed to understand just like every other person was that his 'Chi' never meant to harm him. What appeared to the Tortoise as evil was in the actual sense a riddle from his personal god, a means to draw him closer. This story is represented here to reflect on the notion that what may seemingly appear as evil to the uninitiated may be a quest from the gods to interact with those they love. The gods actually love good men and hate the wicked.

1.3 AFRICAN LITERARY TOOLS

From the activities of greedy men which have already been mentioned, the presence of evil spirits shows that the gods are just, that they hate evil and cannot originate evil. The notion that a god or gods is/are wicked simply translates that they punish offenders. Evil spirits are manifestations of this fact.

The wicked activities of the evil spirits are noted by Arinze in his work:

Sacrifice in Ibo Religion

Their capacity for evil is manifold. They are capricious to the extreme; and delight in torturing the innocent. These spirits fly about and do untold harm. They stay by the roadside by day and by night and wait their marked man. When he comes on the scene they give him a blow. He either falls or dies once, or more often he gets acute fever and almost incurable headache which will probably cause his death if he does not take strong measures: (56).

In their death, evil spirits continue what they started as men, thus evil spirits are evil men in transition. The gods that detest them as men also reject them as spirits. In the two, that is evil men and evil spirits are the two sources of evil identified by this research work. The gods are just, holy and innocent. They punish evil doers and originators of evil.

In *Death and the king's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, evil is translated through sexual greed. Elesin who is the king's Horseman pollutes himself while on a sacred and divine mission. He fails in his divine duty due to his excessive sexual urge. On sighting a beautiful virgin girl on his way to the ancestor, Elesin gets distracted and asks Iyaloja:

Iyaloja, who is she? I saw her enter
your stall. All your daughters I know well.
No, not even Ogun-of the farm toiling
Dawn till dusk on his tuber patch
Not even Ogun with the finest hoe he ever
forged at the anvil could have shaped.
That rise of buttocks, not though he had.
The richest earth between his fingers
Her wrapper was no disguise.
For thighs whose ripples shamed the river's
coil around the hills of Ilesì. Her eyes
were new laid eggs glowing in the
dark. Her skin ... (19)

Iyaloja's attempts to dissuade him and to remind him of his sacred mission do not have any affect on his evil cravings. The knowledge that the virgin was already betrothed to a young man was not reason enough for Elesin to have a re-think. Iyaloja also warns him against the

consequences of the evil he intends to commit but he pays no attention. When Iyaloja has exhausted every known logical reason to dissuade Elesin, she says to him:

You wish to travel light. Well the earth is yours.
But be sure the seed you leave in it attracts no course
(23).

Despite this warning Elesin goes on shamefully to have a sexual relationship with the virgin in a market place. Through this act of evil Elesin dishonours himself thereby attracting the wrath of the gods. Through greed Elesin also dispossesses a young man of his wife, another evil. He is haunted by this evil until his son Olunde takes over his sacred and spiritual responsibilities. Having failed himself and the gods, the gods will surely place their sanctions and punishment on him. The gods cannot be held responsible for whatever evil he suffers as a result of his self pollution, a man versed in evil (Opata). Elesin who is an evil doer here on earth will surely translate to an evil spirit, both being sources of evil.

Akukalia initiates evil through greed in Emeka Nwabueze's *Guardian of the Cosmos*. Being driven by the love of power and money Akukalia disregards the voices of the ancestors and calls Ezeudu a polluted man with a polluted past (22). In his quest for the chieftaincy throne Akukalia refuses to listen to the ancestors that have said: 'No man should be called a stranger in the land of his mother's kinsmen' (26) Through greed Akukalia plans and murders Ezeudu when it became obvious to him that the people will vote for Ezeudu. In Akukalia's opposition that Ezeudu is qualified to contest for the chieftancy title among his mother's kinsmen Akukalia insists; "The ancestors don't understand contemporary politics. They do not understand the exigencies of the computer age" (927). Evil is here captured through akukalia's greed and disobedience to the gods. Such spirits like that of Akukalia and Elesin are such that become evil spirits that cause trouble among the living because the gods close their doors on them. These evil spirits can never be appeased as they themselves lack peace, so they can not give out to others what they themselves lack – peace.

In a work entitled *Ekwensu in Igbo imagination*, D. U. Opata gives more insight into the nature and modes of operations of those wandering spirits. He notes; “Evil spirits are the spirits of the unburied people, of sacrificed persons; of useless or lazy un-married people who during their time had no children, no savings, no decent homes, of people who were versed in crime and wickedness” (20). Here also evil is attributed to men and evil spirits which are the indications that the gods hate evil and those who perpetuate it. The gods punish men on the ground that they do evil. Whatever harm they bring upon men for the evil they do should not be interpreted as evil but as a penalty for an offence committed.

1.4 EVIL IN URHOBO LAND, THE HOME OF BEN OKRI.

Part of this research paper involves Oral interview conducted among some elders in Urhobo land, the home town of the author of the two books under study, *The Famished Road* and *The Star Book*. This part is an attempt to get at the meaning of evil and the notion of the gods in Urhobo land. It contains also a brief history of the people and the things they view as evil.

Urhobo land is made up of ten kingdoms. They are: Abraka, Agbon, Okpe, Jesse, Oghara, Ugheeli, Udu, Agbaraha, Agbarho and Uvwie kingdoms. Each of the ten kingdoms is governed by an Ovie and his cabinet chiefs. Uhrobo people migrated from Benin as a result of evil practices and settled in their present location in Delta state. The two major evil practices that led to their migration include murder and abduction of the weak. Those who could not withstand the pressure had to migrate to places where they could be safe. Some of the minor evil that they encountered in Benin includes land disputes, oppression and cheating.

THE NOTION OF EVIL

Uhrobo people believe that evil started from greed. Evil is a personal greed that generates a lot of things. Evil started as an act of man; that is selfishness and hatred. There is no external

factor or influence that propels man to commit acts of evil. Evil originates from man because of his greedy nature. Evil manifests as a result of human wickedness.

THE GODS IN UHROBO LAND

Okwonu Friday from Orogun clan in Ugheli North L. G. A. of Delta State says of the gods;

There are three major gods in Uhrobo land. They are Urapele known as Sapele – god of breeze, Ndichie and Onelu. Ndichie is a god that oversees every thing, while Onelu sees the day to day activist of man. Urapele is harmful on the account of human wickedness. When this god is offended, it carries away roof tops using the strength of breeze. All the gods punish those who steal from the weak and those who fight old people.

The gods in Uhrobo land punish evil doers on the accounts of their evil deeds. None of the gods is either associated with evil or evil doers. They all keep the record of human activities and reward them at the end of the day. They punish every evil act committed during the day or at night because they are ever present and always attentive.

THINGS VIEWED AS EVIL IN UHROBO LAND

There are many things considered as evil in Uhrobo land. However the major ones are represented here.

STEALING.

Ndichie, the god that oversees everything attacks a thief by crippling him. At this point the culprit becomes weak and the more he denies of an act that he has carried out the more Ndichie attacks him. If the culprit confesses, the chief priest will carry out sacrifices and Ndichie will release the victim.

ADULTERY

The secretary general of Abraka traditional council Chief Ajaino J.Macaulary says of adultery:

The same Ndichie is Omnipresent. When a man commits adultery with a man's wife, Ndichie will not attack the man. It will rather attack the woman's children starting from the youngest child. The symptom is feverish condition. If the chief priest of Ndichie is not consulted on time the child dies eventually. If the woman refuses to confess at the death of her child, her children keep dying one after the other. The sequence of deaths must force the elders to seek the face of Ndichie. If the woman refuses to confess at the death of all her children, the woman dies eventually. After her death, her fellow adulterer will die. If the woman confesses on time, a libation will be made to Ndichie and she will be freed. After the woman's confession, the man who committed the evil act with her will be fined or banished from the community, but a libation must be performed to the gods.

The husband of an adulterous woman dies if he continues to eat any food prepared by the woman without sacrificing to the gods. To save himself, he stops eating and sleeping in the same bed with her.

POISONING AND ACCUSATIONS

Poisoning and wrong accusations are some of the evil that are common among Uhrobo people. If a person is wrongly accused he complains to Ndichie. Someone who is poisoned also complains to him. Ndichie punishes offenders who refuse to confess after four months. If the greedy chief persists who accept bribe turns the decision of Ndichie by offering sacrifices in secret on behalf of an offender, the aggrieved will appeal to onelu who will surely kill the offender if he refuses to confess after a period of grace which is usually four or six months.

WITCHCRAFTS

Ndichie attacks those who use witchcrafts on others. Witchcrafts cause numerous evil ranging from sickness, abortion, bareness, impotency, accident, death and even poor yield in farms. If a suspected witch confesses, sacrifices are made and the witch is forgiven. If he however refuses to confess, Ndichie will attack him with severe sickness. The type of sickness which the gods bring upon witches who refuse to confess their evil deeds are so pronounced that they are either forced to confess or face instant death.

LAND DISPUTES

It is a serious evil in Uhrobo land for the rich to confiscate a poor man's land or to sale it by force to another person. If a man's land is taken from him by force, Ndichie will surely punish the offender. If the elders judge in favour of the rich, Ndichie will punish all of them.

DESECRATION OF SACRED PLACES AND ANIMALS.

Sacred places and animals belong to the gods. The sacred places are where the gods live and where they are served. Anybody who desecrates such places or kills any of the sacred animals that belong to the gods takes the risk of going mad. Once an offender goes mad, he remains so until he dies. The reason for this is that the gods always give periods of grace for the offender to confess. The gods punish those who belief that they can outwit the gods.

PUNISHMENT FOR EVIL

Death and madness are not the only ways through which the gods bring evil upon evil doers. Those who persecute others through exploitation, poisoning or any other evil are always visited by greater evil sent by the gods. Ndichie fights for the oppressed without being invited. On the other hand, Onelu has to be consulted for him to avenge the wrongs done the weak.

The gods also bring evil upon greedy chief priests who misrepresent them. Omajuwa Peter Ekakitie says this of priest who cheat the gods:

Chief priests who misrepresent the gods have periods of warning. Where they continue, the gods will destroy them without further warning. If the next chief priest who replaces the dead one continues in evil way, the gods will also slay him. Where the choice of a chief priest is hereditary the gods will keep killings them if they keep misrepresenting them until that family loses the opportunity of producing the chief priests for the gods. If Onelu kills an evil doer, all his property is taken to the evil forest because the gods are against injustice and evil.

Another way through which the gods punish evil doers is by directing that their corpses be thrown into the evil forest together with what belongs to them. Such people are not given befitting burial ceremonies as nobody inherits their property. The greatest punishment for evil doers is being thrown into the evil forest to fatten beasts and birds.

REWARD FOR GOOD CONDUCT;

The gods reward the innocent through good children, good health and through riches. The gods also appear to the innocent in dreams. Through such interactions the gods give valuable advice to the people who offer themselves to be governed by reason and wisdom. The notion that the gods bless the innocent with wealth does not imply that those who are poor have committed evil or that those who are rich are innocent. Poverty and wealth are acts of man. There are people who are rich because they have stolen from others. There are others who are poor because of their honesty. Such people in spirit pass their wealth to their children without knowing it. This is one of the very reasons why families of late honest men become suddenly prosperous after such men have passed on. However, the gods in their infinity wisdom and vision bless the innocent through bumper harvests, animals and child births.

1.5 WESTERN NOTION OF EVIL

In the analysis of evil as a theme in the two works, the western notion of evil is noted. Plato for example, finds the origin of evil in man. He calls this 'the beast within'. He is of the view that man originates evil out of his own will and instincts. Evil to Plato is not something that man comes across. It is there right inside him. As a result of this view he writes in book 9 of *The Republic* concerning man's unpleasant desires,

...When the gentle part of us slumbers... Then the wild beast in us full-fed with meat and drink ... In phantansy it will not shrink from intercourse with a mother or anyone else, man, god ... it will go to any length of shamelessness and folly; *Beast and Man* (96 – 97).

Plato's beast has its roots and origin in man. It is the evil that originates within man. Man expresses this evil through various actions as in when he interacts with his society. He fights, kills fellow men, goes to war, plunders, rapes and steals in a bid to satisfy the beast in him. The beast filled with evil passion advocates for absolute freedom. In Plato's view, man had the freedom to choose between good and evil; he chose evil and fell. He has to blame himself for the evil he carries out knowingly. He cannot sacrifice the gods as the cause for his actions.

Quispel shows that evil for Gnosticisim is an almost physical reality that infests from outside. Evil is external, it is body, thing and world, and the soul has fallen into it. Evil infests by contact; *The conflict of interpretation: (272)*. Evil here has a past. It has already taken place and since man did not initiate it, he can only continue its perpetuation as he implicates himself in it. Evil comes from outside man, he is not the originator. Evil is a situation where man is incapacitated, where man sinks low, where he becomes a prisoner, it is a kind of importance. It is misery to be polluted in evil. Evil manifests through the first man – Adam. He is not an author of evil but a vehicle through which evil proliferates to other men.

Paul Ricoeur explains further; “Contrary to every individual initiation of evil, inheritance is a question of a continuation, a perpetuation which is like a hereditary taint is transmitted to entire human race by a first man who is the ancestor of all” (272). Man is bound and held captive by the power of evil. It is a situation where man is trapped. He finds evil already there outside himself and before himself. Pelagius views evil as something that is already there before any responsibility is taken. By birth therefore man is already implicated in evil. Evil is already in the past, has already taken place and can be traced back.

In presenting his argument about evil, James A. Gould states clearly that the universe itself is good, that it is creation of a good god for a good purpose. Evil is therefore a virus, a parasitic upon good, disorder and perversion in a fundamentally good creation (445). He traces moral evil or wickedness to human freedom. Man sometimes acts wrongly because he is free from god’s dictation.

God is not to blame for what people do for he has given them the freedom to choose for themselves between good and evil. If he compels man to always act correctly all the time, then he has made him a puppet. Gould says:

The idea of a person who can be infallibly guaranteed always to act rightly is self contradictory. There can be no guarantee in advance that a genuinely free moral agent will never choose amiss ... The origin of moral

evil lies forever concealed with the mystery of human freedom. (445 – 447).

He traces human suffering such as poverty, oppression, persecution, war, injustice, indignity and inequality to humanity and incompetence of mankind. These evils stem from human failures and wrong decisions (447) man therefore suffers the consequences of his actions. Concerning other types of suffering such as earthquake, hurricane, storm, flood, drought and blight which cannot be traced to human folly or misapplied freedom, Gould admits that God allows them for specific purposes. For example, if all were well in the world, the human soul will not grow to perfection. His encounters here on earth steer him to work, to act and to think. If all were well, he will not fear the consequences of either not working or thinking. He will simply become an object incapable of thinking and the world would be the worst of all possible worlds (449)

Gould argues:

It would seem, then that an environment intended to make possible the growth in free beings of the finest characteristics of personal life, must have a good deal in common with our present world. It must according to general and dependable laws; and must involve dangers, difficulties, problems, obstacles and possibilities of pain, failure, sorrow, frustration and defeat if it did not contain the particular trials and perils which – subtracting man's own very considerable contribution – our world contains, it would have to contain others instead (449)

Gould's argument here centres on God's justification for allowing certain kinds of evil to exist. This claim does not rule out the omnipotency of God but that he allows evil for the purposes of man's perfection and possible ascent to paradise. The purpose of evil that God allows is strictly for "Soul-making" (450)

Evil to Étienne Gilson is located at the centre of human imperfection. Man is both imperfect and deficient through his actions. He performs acts that draw him away from his end and brings him into lesser conformity to a given standard (259).

Man who is governed by reason is expected to uphold some standard. He writes; thus, when a human act includes something contrary to order of reason, it falls by that very fact into the species of bad action” (259). Evil manifest therefore through the wrong actions of man. When he goes contrary to good reason through, his actions, he brings about evil. Acts that do not conform to reason are viewed as evil.

Gilson judges human acts in terms of intentionality. That is, an action is supposedly evil if the intention of the person who performed it is evil and good if the intention is good. He says;

When the intention is evil, the act is irremediably bad because each one of its constituent parts has been called into existence in the service of evil. When, however, the intention is good, such initial orientation of the will toward good cannot fail to impregnate the entire act which follows ... (261)

Here evil is heavily dependent on the intention of the mind. Even when a good intention brings about an evil, the act is still to be seen as good irrespective of its eventual outcome. Human actions are judged evil when there is no virtue in them.

Nicolas Berdyaev traces evil to freedom, that is, freedom of knowing good and evil and choosing between them. Evil he says is the price of freedom. The freedom which is spiritual has brought with it 'the fall', pain and suffering. He writes:

Man is bound to follow the path of tragedy and heroism. The return to original wholeness, to paradisiacal 'nature' means forsaking the path...pain, misery, suffering are the result of sin. There was bliss in the garden of Eden before the fall We who live in a world of sin are ruled by its laws and bear its stains ... (281 – 291)

Despite his earlier mistakes, man has continued to follow his promptings, his evil ways that bring nothing but pains. Man has led himself away from the truth into bondage where only the grace of God can free him. Man, definitely, cannot liberate or raise himself from his wickedness. Man's freedom has led him into a deep bondage.

George Santayana sees evil as an absence of beauty; as an absence of good. 'The absence of aesthetic good is a moral evil; the aesthetic evil is merely relative, and means less of aesthetic good than was expected at the place and time' (34) To Santayana, evil must not necessarily give pain. Evil can cause shock as when someone beholds an ugly sight, say a decomposing human body in a street. Though this does not give such pain as earthquake or imprisonment, however, it brings much displeasure because it lacks beauty.

CHAPTER TWO

Analysis of The Star Book and The Famished Road

2.1 EVIL

Different forms of evil are employed by those who perpetrate it to get to hold of power and money. One of such means is greed. The socio-economic status of the urban poor is sharply drawn against the affluence of the rich around them. The rich who live far away from the ghetto dwellers enjoy expensive cars and cloths. There is gap in the food taken by the rich and that of the poor. While the rich enjoy their beer, the poor go on dry gin 'ogogoro'. By contrasting the urban poor and the urban rich, one is able to link suffering to evil.

The poor suffer various degrees of torture and deprivation. They are unable to take care of their children and others around them. There is suffering in the type of houses they live in, there is suffering in the cloths they wear, there is suffering in the type of food they eat, there is suffering in the type of work they do. There is also suffering in the way they think. The rich who are not governed by a desire that will make society better are influenced by irrational love for their personal happiness. Their greed for money and power bring suffering to others. In an attempt to acquire wealth, they step on the rights of others. Greed as evil is represented in the two narratives under study through various ways.

In *The Famished Road*, evil is represented through the actions of madam Koto who soon coverts her bar parlour to a brothel at the moment of attainment to wealth. She suddenly graduates from selling palm wine to bear and eventually buys a car.

In *The Star Book*, one of the ways through which evil is represented is through false accusation. The maiden who by destiny must pass through some rites is accused by her failed suitors of having an illicit sexual affair with an unknown animal. Unable to win the love and heart of the maiden the Mamba resorts to rumour. He goes as far as informing the parents of the maiden that an outsider and a dangerous figure spies their daughter and could ruin her chances in

marriage. The Maiden through this evil which manifests as rumour quickly loses most of her friends. We are told; The Mamba did two peculiar things. First, he put it about that the maiden was having an illicit relationship with a horned animal near the river. “Nothing travels faster than an evil rumour; and rumours are the easiest things to create ...” (186). In her loneliness, the maiden dreams on and on. Suitors come from far and near but none is able to move her soul which is in sorrow. They bring with them musicians, story tellers and gifts of art work but the injured soul remains the same. In her sorrow and suffering, she falls in love with the river from where she believes her lover would come.

Evil is represented also as deceit in *The Famished Road*. The inhabitants of the Slum are given gifts of fake milk by politicians during electioneering campaign by the party of the rich. This act of evil brings more pains to parents as they spend all the money they have in hospitals to save the lives of their children who were fed with the adulterated milk. The children of the ghetto dwellers who are already slim and weak encounter a greater health hazard that drains the little energy they have.

Slavery is another process through which evil is represented in *The Star Book*. The Chiefs in the kingdom perpetuate evil by enslaving women, children and war captives. The greedy chiefs who profit by evil keep the slaves where neither the prince nor the king will see them. When the prince quizzed them over keeping slaves they quickly deny. The king who listens to both his son the prince and the greedy chiefs knows that the chiefs do not tell him the truth, he knows that they keep slaves where he will not see them. The king knows all the gaps in his kingdom. It is said of the prince who is moved by the evil in the kingdom.

He wanted to know if there were better ways of living, of governing, of improving the life of the people. The elders were silent as the prince spoke; but the king when he heard the avalanche of questions, laughed and laughed as if there were nothing funnier than seeking knowledge: (349).

The king is moved to laughter because of the innocence of the prince, because of his lack of information about evil on earth. The king knows full well that the chiefs will not say anything

because they know that the prince has spoken the truth. It is for this reason, the reason for the presence of evil that the prince seeks solace in nature, where there is neither pollution nor human presence.

In both narratives, that is *The Star Book* and *The Famished Road*, one of the ways through which evil is represented is exploitation. Through long period of exploitation, those who are enslaved acquire the mentality of complete and unconditional obedience to the rich. No one is ever moved again, no one questions why the poor should suffer, no one questions the ways of the rich. A greeter tragedy here is the attitude of parents towards their children. Apart from being exploited, children through the faulty psychology of their parents also acquire the defeatist attitude of serving the rich. Of an old man who is among the load carriers Azaro tells us in *The Famished Road*:

When they resumed work again, I noticed that among them was an old man, his son and grand children who could not have been older than me. Among the grand children was one who has just started carrying loads that day. He kept crying about his neck and his back and he cried all through the carrying but his father wouldn't let him stop and drove him with his tongue, saying, he must be a man (148).

The exploitation of the masses by the rich is here being extended to their children and grand children. Here three generations are exploited at once. The old man tells his grandchild to be a man through the exploitation he is undergoing, not by lifting his spirit to higher things of beauty. The masses here accept without questioning the condition they have been forced into for the fact that they have experienced exploitation for a long time. A grandfather who still carries load with his children and grand children is not far removed from the waste land. Exploitation has weakened the hearts of the masses, keeping them thoughtless and wretched. They stay where they are to gaze perpetually at the distorted images of themselves which were created by the rich and get absorbed by those images. Having found themselves at the dark side of the affairs of the world, they lay lame and uncertain about themselves and the future of their children.

Evil is also represented in *The Famished Road* through political thuggery. In the narrative, thugs are employed by members of the party for the rich to intimidate non supporters of the party. Jeremiah the photographer and Azaro's father who openly challenge the dubious actions of the members of the party for the rich are attacked by party thugs. Jeremiah is tormented by party thugs because he exposes their evil and Azaro's father because he refuses to join them. Jeremiah's photo studio is broken by the thugs who actually wanted him dead. After escaping death, he went underground for fear of being caught and killed. Through thuggery and intimidation, politicians prey on the masses and indeed on their children.

In *The Star Book*, the greedy chiefs also initiate evil through ill-will and attempts of assassination on the Prince. The chiefs collude with the step mothers of the Prince to poison him. Whenever poison is added to his food, a dog or an unknown being eats up the food. The Prince who meets empty plates without food usually concludes that the gods do not want him to eat. Through the dogs and other animals, the gods are able to protect the Prince from being assassinated through the evil-will of the chiefs.

Evil is also represented through murder. Among the slaves in the kingdom are murderers running away from justice. In an attempt to run away to a land where they will not be identified with the evil they have committed, they are arrested and enslaved by the chiefs in the kingdom. Another evil manifests here as the chiefs who arrested the murderers convert them to their personal property rather than hand them over to the kingdom for prosecution and punishment. In the hands of the chiefs, the murderers become slaves who stand the chances of being sold out to whoever cares to buy them.

Apart from enslaving those who are guilty of murder and those who are bought with money by the greedy chiefs, evil is also represented through the ways the chiefs enslave women, the weak and children from the kingdom. They are only interested in advancing their fortune and that of the members of their families. They convert the king's palace as an instrument to acquire

wealth and power. With their position they block justice, steal from the weak and tell lies to the king.

2.2 SUFFERING

In *The Star Book* and *The Famished Road*, different forms of suffering are represented. In *The famished Road*, suffering is identified with the ghetto dwellers and identified with women, children and slaves in *The Star Book*.

In *The Famished Road*, one of the ways through which suffering is represented is hunger and poor diet. The Azaros as well as other families in the ghetto are presented as always suffering from hunger. Azaro's mother who is a petty trader rarely makes enough that can help her prepare a good pot of soup. His father who carries loads for others, earns so little that most of the times, he ends up spending his income in the beer parlour. 'I am not much better than a donkey' (81). This is the voice of Mr. Azaro, a man who works from dawn to dusk but goes to bed in an empty stomach.

Suffering manifests also through the cloths which the ghetto dwellers wear. While the men and the women wear faded cloths, children are dressed in rags. In the market place where Azaro's mother goes to sell her wares, every woman like Azaro's mother is presented as having faded wrappers as Azaro's mothers. The faded cloths they wear depict the faded life they live.

Through physical labour among the poor in *The Famished Road*, Suffering is also explored. The poor are those who carry heavy load in the market places, they are the people who trek long distances to the market, they are those who are forced to move from one place to another shouting their wares in the market places because they do not have shops to shelter them. After his daily routine of carrying heavy loads, Mr. Azaro goes home broken in spirit and body. This is why he flares up at the least provocation. His spirit rebels against this burden through his most often erratic and unexplainable behaviour.

Suffering is also identified in *The Famished Road* through the poor housing conditions of the ghetto people. The ghetto dwellers live in one room apartment with rats that make it difficult for them to sleep at night. When they open their windows for fresh air, they are invaded by mosquitoes and when they close them, they are choked by heat. At night when it rains, it rains both inside and outside their rooms. Holes created in the walls are inlets through which water invades the tiny rooms of the inhabitants. When this happens, Azaro who sleeps on a mat spread on the ground is forced to move from one part of the room to another. This poor environment is contrasted with the other part of the town where the rich live in houses surrounded by high gates and decorated with flowers. There, there are no rats and no heat. They enjoy the day and sleep soundly at night.

Suffering in the two narratives under discussion manifests to some extent as poverty. Through industrialization and bureaucracy politicians and capitalists clamp the poor into positions from where they can not compete with them. The politicians take decisions that do not consider the interest of the masses while the capitalists who employ them as labourers pay them only enough to stay alive. Through these institutions the ghetto dwellers are kept in perpetual poverty and want. This affects their eating and drinking habits, Azaro's father for example drinks 'Ogogoro' dry gin instead of beer. Despite the cheapness of this drink, Azaro's father sometimes drinks on credit. Due to poverty the Azaro's encounter various forms of humiliation. A good example is an encounter between the landlord and Azaro's mother over non payment of rent. In that encounter we read:

Why do I have to come and pester you for my rent, eh? When you wanted the room you came and begged me. Now I have to come and beg you for my rent, eh? "Things are hard", mum said. "Things are hard for everybody. All the other tenants have paid. Why are you different, eh?" (297).

The consequence of this type of experience is usually troubled mind, and perhaps sleepless nights. No one will ever wish to be addressed in the way that Azaro's mother is addressed.

Low self esteem is another form of suffering which the characters suffer. The masses in the narratives are mute not because they do not know that they are humiliated and exploited. They keep mute because they perceive a difference between them and others. Their low self esteem keeps them looking down the earth rather than into other men's eyes. In an attempt to get out of this chain and bondage, Azaro's father adopts an approach that is both mechanical and bizarre. In an encounter with some imagined object Azaro says;

“Dad boxed all over the ground. He always fought several imaginary foes, as if the whole world were against him. He fought those foes unceasingly and always knocked them out ... for me then, he was the king of the ghetto nights” (353).

It is obviously clear that Azaro's father has some psychological problems. He knows that he is not respected, he also knows that there is a gap between him and the rich; he actually knows that the whole world is against the poor. Through boxing which is an outward expression of strength, he hopes to achieve honour and respect.

Suffering is also translated in the texts through the gullibility of the masses. They are easily moved by the face value of things. They suffer in their passivity and readiness to accept things the way the rich will them. The politicians who gave them adulterated milk know that the people are gullible and would happily accept the dirty offer. They know that they are gullible that rather than apologise for the evil they committed denied it and quickly point an accusing finger at the opposition party – the party for the poor. The people are gullible partly for insufficient education and partly because they are poor.

Suffering is also explored in the *Famished Road* through prostitution. The young girls who offer themselves sexually to the politicians are not doing the best of business. Madam Koto capitalizes on the gullibility of the girls who are both poor and uneducated to attract customers and to entertain her political male friends. By putting the young girls to this type of illicit use, the

capitalists symbolized by Madam Koto and the top rank politicians exploit their future, wisdom and strength. Unfortunately, the girls are made to believe that prostitution is a way of making money rather than a way through which suffering permeate their lives.

Suffering is another way through which evil is represented in the two narratives. In *The Star Book*, for example, the maiden is deserted by her friends after being accused of an involvement in an illicit sexual relationship with an unknown animal. The very few that remain close to her do so to keep up appearances. The truth is that they all deserted her in spirit. We find also that during her period of initiation into womanhood and the goddess, she dwelled alone in the cave in transformation. In her loneliness in the cave, she experiences great difficulty in not finding anyone to allay her suffering.

The prince experiences loneliness as he is driven out of the palace by the evil around him. Having been termed 'mad' by the greedy Chiefs, the Prince is forced to wander in loneliness in search of comfort from nature. The more he runs away from evil in the kingdom the greater the distance between him and others and the more his loneliness and exile.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERARY ANALYSIS OF *THE FAMISHED ROAD* AND *THE STAR BOOK*

3.1 MYTHOLOGY AND ORAL TECHNIQUE

In the two narratives, Okri dwells heavily on mythology which involves a wide range of frightful images, forms, ghosts, strange animals, bizarre shapes and spirits. There are spirits with multiple heads but with only one eye, those that float in the air and those who have the capability of passing through individuals, deformed beasts and watery image. Some of the characters like Azaro in *The Famished Road*, the Prince in *The Star Book* also have mythic powers of being able to drift between the two worlds of man and the under world. What they see and encounter are different from what other characters encounter.

In *The Famished Road* for example, Azaro encounters images of darkness as either encircling him, as giving birth to monsters or as making him wander endlessly. He also encounters ghosts that are able to speak without voices as well as dogs with two legs rather than four.

In *The Star Book*, the Prince in his 'sickness' and dreams encounters strange beings and spirits. In his dreamy state he meets old men and women who live in separate huts in his forest. When he greets them, they only smile back at him. He sees the gods and the shrines as they fly in the air. He sees images of slavery in shapes of figures with metal chains and images of slave drivers in shapes of coloured men with hats on their heads. His mother's spirit and other spirits also educate him in his dreams.

The characters and events in the two prose narratives are developed through mythic approach of drawing images from the world of the spirits and the gods. Okri's use of Azaro who is a spirit child as a narrator in *The Famished Road* and the Prince who has spiritual powers as the major characters, help him explore the underworld.

Another prominent feature of the two works is the oral narrative technique. In this tradition characters are capable of achieving unnatural feats. The mythical power which the two major characters possess is a property of oral literature. Through such characters, events that are related to the spirit world are brought into human world. For example, Azaro is capable of seeing spirits and ghosts, as well as he is capable of fighting with them. He detects evil forces and those who are responsible for them. He wanders in spirit to different places where no one else knows. He and others who have mythical powers are able to circumvent disastrous events that are capable of bringing them to harm. The technique of representing heroes who are infallible in wisdom and strength is typical of oral narrative heroes. They cannot be manipulated by any power or force except their personal gods 'chi'.

Such heroes are immunized by the gods from being trapped by forces, especially forces characterized by evil and treachery. In *The Star Book*, the raven would always eat up the poisoned food kept for the Prince. In his human interpretation of the empty plates which he usually notices, he would conclude that the gods do not want him to eat. The truth is that the gods protect him from negative forces and evil. While the Prince uses his mythical powers to commune with the spirits, Azaro uses his to attract customers to Madam Koto. When he stops going to her shop, she says to Azaro, I want you to come back ... since you stopped coming, the bar has been empty: *The famished Road*. (2005) Madam Koto's plea for Azaro's return portrays Azaro as a hero who has positive powers of attracting customers.

3.2 LANGUAGE: SATIRE HUMOUR AND IRONY

The message of evil is conveyed through parodies of events that take place. For instance, the same party chiefs and thugs of the party of the rich who tell lies, the same evil doers who poison children through adulterated milk during an electioneering campaign are the same people that accused the party of the poor before the masses whose children have been poisoned for impersonation. This event exposes those who package the activities of the party of the rich as

people who are not definitely clever. The peasants themselves are satirized here as people who are not only weak but lame. Their inability to react against this evil act against their children shows how deeply they have been pushed underground by the upper class.

Although the events represented in *The Famished Road*, especially those that concern the poor are serious, however, the distortion of events provide some kind of comic relief. By representing facts this way, the two narratives show their contempt for the realities and the absurdities of their worlds. By distorting facts, by making events worse than they are, the two narratives represent evil in a way that they seem worse. For example, in *The Star Book*, the chiefs deny in the presence of the king and the Prince of ever keeping slaves in the kingdom. Their denial proves that they know that slavery is evil, yet they indulge in it for personal gains. This technique of indirect exposure of the chiefs and their greed creates laughter and distaste. *The Famished Road* through the representation of the party chiefs and their activities indirectly condemns them without obviously saying so.

Both novels mock the ruling class by representing them as greedy and untruthful. The thugs in *The Famished Road* are employed by the party chiefs to torture and intimidate opponents. Azaro's mother is refused a space in the market because her husband is opposed to the activities of the party of the rich. On one occasion, the thugs actually fought her in the market place. In *The Star Book*, political corruption is represented through the chiefs who are greedy and in their intention to assassinate the Prince by poisoning his food through his step mother. To worsen the evil situation, the chiefs already have some slaves while waiting to inherit the throne. Apart from the satirical point of view of the two novels, they also depict a lack of values, class conflict and the tyranny of the rich. The landlords in *The Famished Road* are represented as people who suck the blood of the weak peasants. They are also represented as people who rely on their economic powers to intimidate their tenants through increased house rents without taking care of the dilapidated roofs and walls. Some of the walls have holes in-between them that

people passing along the street can see those sitting inside. Sometimes, the tenants use rags to cover the gaps. Unfortunately they pay heavily for these poor houses.

In its further exposure of evil, *The Famished Road* contrasts the political class with the intellectuals who are represented by Jeremiah who combines the work of a photographer and a journalist. Through his photographs he exposes evil in society, especially to those who cannot read. One of such exposures is the picture of the heaps of adulterated milk and women who dumped them. He also took pictures of children who became sick after being fed with the poisonous milk. In this studio, he displays pictures that cover the activities of the thugs. He snaps them when they beat up women, he snaps them when they torture political opponents, he haunts them every where they commit evil. His studio is the local world press centre of the community where any information is available. As a result of his activities, he is prevented from further exposure of evil by those who conspire to cheat others. As a representative of the educated class, he denounces corruption and evil that govern his society. As a result, the mischief makers burnt his studio and would have gone further to kill him had they caught him in their furry.

Jeremiah's eventual expulsion from active social participation through which he presents to the people the realities of their world is a satire on the political system and a further exposure of evil. His commitment to social values comes to an abrupt end as soon as he goes underground to save his life. Having identified him as a thorn in their flesh, those who pervert social order for their private gains resolve to get rid of him. By pointing out evil in this way, *The Famished Road* indicates what is good or evil. The pattern of the works exposes the socio-political environments of their individual world and how the individual is affected. Those who keep calm are never heard, they are only seen while those who are heard are silenced and chased into hiding. Whereas the Prince seeks refuge and protection against evil and the politicians in the forest, Jeremiah relies on the protection of darkness which becomes a fortress against evil and those who pursue him.

Irony

The major irony found in *The Famished Road* comes as a result of Mr. Azaro's belief in himself. Mr. Azaro who intends to proffer solution to social ills worsens his own personal problems. He fights with both imaginary and real enemies. For example, he fights with police men, he fights with party thugs, and with greedy neighbours. Also in his mental confusion he fights with spirits and beasts. Fights that he stages against opponents worsen his financial status as herbalists charge exorbitant prices in treating him after each fight. His fights against Yellow Jaguar, Green Leopard and with the Man in white suit push him to huge financial loses.

It is an irony that after suffering so much in trying to make society better, Mr. Azaro still believes that he alone can correct all the evil in his society. Unfortunately, he lacks support from the masses he protects. Another incident that is deeply ironic in *The Famished Road* is Mr. Azaro's decision to help beggars. He brings beggars to his family not minding that his only son, Azaro, sleeps on a mat on the floor. By bringing beggars in, he increases starvation and suffering which have already taken deep roots in the family. The beggars occupy the only space by the door and the little food that the family can provide. At night it becomes very difficult for Azaro to sleep as the beggars are noisy and dirty. They swelled in large numbers that the door has to be kept open till morning, thus increasing the population of mosquitoes that invade the family every night from dirty gutters in the streets. Through the interminable noise and demands which the beggars make, Mr. Azaro discovers that he cannot control the very people he has chosen to protect. Having failed in this project of helping and rehabilitating the poor, Mr. Azaro fails to realize the symbolic meaning of the beggars' indifference to his struggle. He fails to realize that the beggars are part of society.

Ironically, Mr. Azaro who fails in his project of helping the beggars goes on to fight for environmental sanitation. It is in this second project that the masses show their lack of commitment to order and health related issues. The refuse which Mr. Azaro clears up, quickly

return again. He quarrels with the inhabitants who dump the refuse but no one listens. He fights them but the refuse becomes bigger and bigger. He clears the rubbish and dumps it in the swamp and people will quickly litter the places he has cleared up. Ironically, he fights the people for dumping their refuse where they should not. These are those who would have voted for him. As a result they withdraw their support and encouragement. Mr. Azaro, at the end is rejected by those who suffer with him.

The major irony in *The Star Book* is represented in the contest among the suitors of the maiden. The strongest that is also the most brutal of all the suitors who won the contest was eventually rejected by the maiden. She rejects the validity of the contest and opts for whoever tells her the best stories and solves riddles.

We find another irony in the fight between the Mamba who has the muscle of glistening brass and the slender Prince who is slender and frail. In their fight for the love of the maiden, the Mamba charges at the slender prince like a brutal beast but misses all his blows as the prince takes the form of shadows. In his confusion the Mamba shouts at the Prince to be still and fight. In his hurry he wounds himself severally and eventually sinks down in prostration. The prince who does not strike a single blow eventually wins the contest. This is perhaps the greatest irony in *The Famished Road*.

It is a big irony that the maiden who was born without beauty has grown up to become an object of attention, one who can cause the ruins of talented young men. The irony here is that her beauty is eternal; in her creative and spiritual powers. We also find a situational irony that the very day the maiden promises to obey a voice from the river is the same day she is sent away uniformed by her parents. Here her agony is not because of the suddenness of her journey away from home but because of her believe that she has been given an appointment by a water spirit. We however know that the voice from the river comes from the Prince and not from a spirit.

HUMOUR

Okir covers a very deep sense of humour by contrasting Madam Koto's size with that of the poor masses. We are also told that the back door of her shop has to be expanded in order to accommodate her excessive size. The quantity of bangles and necklaces which she wears according to Azaro seems to weigh her down. By representing her as being over decorated, a sense of humour is created through her excessive greed for fame and material things. The narrative also tells us that she has to change her pattern of walking to reflect her new status. Here, one can imagine a fat woman of about sixty years trying to imitate the cat walk of a girl of fifteen.

There is humour also in the blind old man's reaction when Azaro hits him with a hardened lump of food, as Azaro's father who is nicknamed Black Tyger takes on Green Leopard in a boxing bout. Azaro decides to hit the blind old man for not supporting his father. The man sits by playing his musical instrument in support of Green Leopard. The old man believes ironically that the attack has come from the spirits and intones: "Take me away from here. The spirits have started attacking me in broad daylight" (400).

Part of the humour here is that like most people, the blind old man also accuses the innocent gods who are not interested in what is going on.

In *The Star Book*, humour is created through the representation of the elders' attitudes after being invited over the existence of gaps in the kingdom. The elders are said to have gone around at night with lanterns to tap at things. They tapped the walls, buckets, floors, buildings to see if they could find any hollow spaces. The elders who are said to be wise have through this action presented themselves as inexperienced.

There is humour also in the behaviour of the chiefs towards the Prince. The Prince who sees chaos, disorder and gaps among the people once summons the elders to enquire from them why things happen the way they do. The elders rather than accept that their society has some

defects, decide to accuse the Prince of having some mental troubles. One of the elders said to the Prince: “But you have not been well ... and you are looking at things too hard from your convalescence. Maybe the gaps are in you”. (275).

Here rather than accept the reality of things, the elders who perpetuate evil quickly accuse the Prince of having a kind of malady; a sure way to hide the truth.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Evil is an act of man. Man who is the author of greed is also the author of evil. In Uhrobo land as well as Igbo land, the gods protect the weak by punishing evil acts. Some greedy chief Priests who thwart the decisions of the gods are not left unrewarded according to their evil deeds because the truth they conceal from other men are seen by the gods. Those who carry out evil deeds at night when no one is awake are seen by the gods who never goes to bed. The reward for evil deeds also comes to them at night when no one can rescue them, for one Igbo proverb says; “Those who try to cheat both men and the gods have their footprints printed on the stones”. Literally this means that the cleverest person is a child before the gods and those who try to outwit them are usually disgraced in market places (publicly).

Man is responsible and reasonable. Worried about evil acts which result from scientific inventions, Lewis Mumford quoted in *The search for personal freedom* laments:

Today, all the normal mischances of living have been multiplied, a million-fold, by the potentialities for destruction, for an unthinking act of collective suicide, which man's very triumphs in science and invention have brought about. In this situation the artist has a special task and duty; the task of remaindering men of their humanity and the promise of their creativity.

The pain in Mumford's heart arises from man's pursuit of personal freedom and his neglect of human values. Man's freedom leads to various evils which humanity suffers in general. Being motivated by so many desires, man transgresses against his fellow men and the supreme gods he should revere. He brings chaos, disorder, disaster and evil into a world that was peaceful and quiet before his conception because he wants to be rich and free. Tragedy and misery befall him because of his error of judgement. He disregards the gods and replaces them with wealth when he attains great reputation and prosperity. In his position as a prosperous and wealthy being, he forgets and discards the gods and their secrets.

In *The Star Book*, the Prince withdraws from the fortunes in his father's palace into lonely places by the river and the forest to increase his knowledge, contemplation and understanding of the world. He does what is contrary to the ways of most men who disregard divine knowledge in pursuit of material things. In his spiritual awakening and exercise he understands more about the secrets of the gods and of creation. In his spiritual state he understands events before they take place, he understands the realities of things through his internal experience.

Unlike the Prince, man tears himself away from the gods through selfishness and greed. The joy and the wealth he derives from his actions are all evil because he centers upon himself the whole universe. The joy which other characters derive from what they have accumulated in *The Star Book* is different from the joy which the Prince derives as a result of his meditation and apprehension of the fate and destiny of all things. The posture of the Prince towards the wealth in his father's kingdom and the nature of the Chiefs who bath themselves in it indicate clearly that evil originated through greed. Man follows his greedy desires and his conducts are always evil. In his tendency to dominate others and the universe, because he has refused to discipline himself, the evil which he commits is limitless.

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APPENDIX

Some of the questions that were asked concerning the gods, man and evil include:

1. What is the origin of evil?
2. What is the extent of involvement of the gods
3. Is there any known god that is wicked, evil or violent?
4. To what extent is man either involved or implicated in evil?
5. What is an evil spirit?
6. How do the gods reward the innocent and the guilty?

Does anyone know the question Ben Okri was attempting to answer when he wrote the book? And if so, what is the answer to his show more okay, I've got to write a paper concerning the book "The Famished Road" and I cannot even begin to understand it. I'm totally lost with all the spirits and weird situations. Does anyone know the question Ben Okri was attempting to answer when he wrote the book?Â This turning out and movement away from conventional contexts is mirrored in Okri's next two books, both collections of short stories which develop the nightmare visions of nocturnal landscapes, filling them with the bodies of spirits, living and dead. Incidents at the Shrine is a slim volume of eight stories, each one a strong but unemphatic marvel.