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### Integration of the Supernatural with Mundane Life: “The Star Book”

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#### Abstract

"Starbook" by Ben Okri is a novel that captivates readers with its enchanting prose and imaginative narrative. This modern fairy tale weaves together profound philosophical and mystical themes, creating a mesmerizing literary experience. "Starbook" narrates the odyssey of a prince navigating a mythical realm where the distinctions between reality and imagination become indistinct. This poet, whose experiences are shaped by love and grief, meets a variety of extraordinary events and characters that test his perceptions of existence and creativity. Through these interactions, he delves into themes of beauty, truth, and the transformative nature of storytelling. The novel is acclaimed for its lush, poetic prose and its examination of the interplay between art and life. The narrative structure is non-linear, weaving together elements of myth, magic, and existential reflection, making it a complex but rewarding read.

**Keywords:** Magic realism, supernatural elements, chauvinism, omens, art craft

#### Introduction

Ben Okri, born on March 15, 1959 in Minna, Nigeria, is a prominent Nigerian novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist, aphorist, playwright, and writer of film-scripts. Ben Okri's novels, which expose corruption among rulers, provide a potent method for addressing and critiquing real-world issues through storytelling. Ben Okri seamlessly integrates supernatural elements into his novels, drawing inspiration from Nigerian folklore, mythology, and the oral storytelling tradition. His narrative style is characterized by magic realism, where the ordinary and extraordinary coexist. This approach allows supernatural occurrences to be presented as a natural part of the world. In his novels, prophecies and omens have a crucial impact on the characters' choices and progression of the story, serving as a link between the human realm and the divine or supernatural. Okri explores themes of identity, resilience, and the interplay between reality and the metaphysical, creating rich, multi-layered narratives that reflect the complexity of human experience and the world.

"Star Book" is a narrative told by a mother to her son that perfectly combines elements of transcendence and pain, spirituality and atheism, fraudulence and wholesomeness, death and life, and material pleasure and oneness with nature. It is told from the perspective of a Nigerian woman. Ben Okri's "Star Book" is an excellent parenting resource. Okri skillfully captures the essence of the prince's fierce struggle against evil and his transformation into a great soul; the king's love for his son and the citizens' concern for the prince; the prince's empathy for women and slaves in his kingdom; the elders' fear of losing their position; and, on the other hand, the magnificent sculptures of a unique tribe, the indigenous

craftsmanship of the maiden's father, and the true love of maidens for the prince. He employed magical realism.

Magic Realism as a narrative technique holds Subjective exaggeration, myth, history, time-ambiguous reality, and super naturalism as part of the realism storytelling approach. Eventually, these concepts are applied to the harsh reality of human existence and its events within the predetermined boundaries of the past, present, and future. The actions of the past into the present are contrasted with these concepts. While telling a story, the mother transports the kid to the past and the realm of imagination:

“Long ago, in the time when the imagination ruled the world, there was a prince in the kingdom who grew up in the serenity of all things...” 4

The Prince, an apple of king's eyes, never showed interest in politics and royal duties. He always preferred to stay with common people in the farms, harvesting corn, teasing the maidens, building huts for the frail old women of the village, splitting firewood and piping music around the edges of the kingdom. He swayed the hearts of the women and elders and moved the hearts of the kingdom but no one dared to give their daughter to him as his life is a combat between death and vital spark.

Prince was a surprise to the royal family. He was prophesied to be either king or a slave as Gautama Buddha prophesied to be a great leader. Twelve years before Buddha's birth the soothsayers predicted that he would become either a universal monarch or a great sage. To prevent him from becoming an ascetic, his father kept him with the confined of the palace.

But prince's father allows him to view the world. Prince's internal struggle to unravel the mysteries of life is beautifully presented by Okri. Prince spent most of his time:

“In the forest, around the river, in the hills, listening to the birds, searching for God to give him the answers to the question that the initiations had awoken in him like thunderous bells, or drums.” (7)

Escaping from the prying eyes that gave him no peace, wandering in forest in search of God in order to realize full enlightenment, to find the meaning of life Prince notices a woman by the river, with a pitcher of water on her head. He was not attracted by her physical appearance and he did not fall in her at first sight. But her lucid eyes gave him a ray of hope of finding answers for his internal turmoil.

Maiden's answers to all his questions astonishes prince as they seemed to be quite appropriate. He finds a sole mate in her, in his spiritual journey. Adam and Eve can't attain rapturousness until they regain their paradise they have lost once. While wandering for his maiden he comes across the slave doing menial works in his kingdom, whom he never noticed earlier. He takes pity on them and becomes furious on the evil deeds of his elders. He symbolically finds himself in them. He looks into their eyes, searching for himself as he already knows that he is part of them. He is eternally connected with everyone on the earth. Ben Okri beautifully presented the theory of oneness. As Swamy Vivekananda rightly pointed out “All differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything”. Through the Prince, Okri rebukes the practice of slavery with his brothers. Prince chides the foolish decisions of intellectuals and elders, who have ignored humanity, in his kingdom. All holy books teach the same Karma theory. As you sow, so you reap. Today with all your might you harm your brother, tomorrow you will be harmed. A mightier than you will come to confront you. Prince criticizes the evil deeds of his elders in open court.

Okri through his hero criticizes male chauvinism. Ignoring the contributions of women for their growth, men feel superior. The Prince, while wandering for his dream girl, observes the women at work and their children straddling their back, held securely with broad strip of cloth. His mother died early, when he was still a child. He finds his mother in all the women. He realizes how hard the women have been working. The women in his kingdom gets up early, before dawn, prepare food for the family, sweep their yards, clean their house, go to river to wash their clothes, go to market miles away, return home, prepare the afternoon meal, wash the utensils, then go to the distant farms again, then to the market to trade, they often come back with heavy bundles on their heads. They fetch water from wells. They prepare dinner. They attend the meeting of women. Back home they discuss family matters with their husbands and relations. They take part in the social and communal business of the village, and make their contributions to looking after the sick. Then they sleep very late at night. They are the last one to sleep in the family and first to rise. They give birth to several children and rear them. They support their husbands in all major undertakings, and be the pillars of the village and kingdom without their knowledge.

The Prince demands an explanation regarding the treatment of women, who work from dawn to dusk, and raises many fundamental questions regarding the governance of kingdom and necessary measures taken to support the pillars of their

kingdom. He tries his best to expose hidden humiliations of women in the court. It has troubled the elders in the court as never before has any royal raised many fundamental questions. He sheds tears for the victims in his kingdom. He requests his father to tell him about his mother.

Later he tries to know the mystery of life and probes on the origin of evil on the earth. He wanders in the kingdom, in forests, consult the diviners and soothsayers to know the origin of monsters, of evils and ‘of the forces that warred against the welfare of the kingdom.’(44) as Gowtham Buddha, Jesus Christ, Krishna, Muhammad tries to unveil the mystery of life. He asks the elders in the court to clarify his doubts, but it perturbs them because they are busy with imposing new taxes and collecting accumulated taxes from people. Spirits of his ancestor, diviners and soothsayers could not decipher the cause of disposition of Gods as it is more oblique.

Amid this great confusion, thinking about disposition of Gods and origin of evils the prince fell asleep. God appears to him in his dream, clarify his doubts regarding the origin of evil on earth, disobedience of an angel as described in Milton's Paradise Lost and how Satan and his gang prey humanity. Later he learns that a trap is the hidden trick of an enemy to take an innocent soul captive or prisoner. To trap wild animals, some have used a spring like device that usually has a concealed danger with an enticing lure or some type of tempting bait. Many time people would dig a big hole in the ground and cover it with branches and leaves so that others do not recognize the pit fall dangers as they travel in that area. People have walked down this path being unfamiliar with the danger and many have fallen into it and were caught. Human beings born of the earth are walking down a figurative trail in life and Satan has placed many concealed traps in their path in order to take them captive. One must learn to recognize these potential traps. In order to do recognize Satan's plots one need to become familiar with the examples found in Holy Scriptures of what Satan has used on other people. To avoid traps one should be aware of it and strong enough to avoid traps as Satan always tries to lure innocent souls as Dr.Fastus, a great scholar is lured by luxuries in Cristopher Marlow's drama Dr.Fastus. While natural traps are hidden dangers to your physical well beings, spiritual traps are hidden pitfalls that are intended for your spiritual harm. Since Satan is not physically present in this world (at least until the anti-Christ is revealed) and it is illegal for him to be in physical manifestation to harm god's children, he has adapted and changed up his attack and trap methods. Satan uses physical people in the world to set traps for other people. Satan works very hard to deceive everyone, but many times he concentrates on a select few which are easier to be deceived. These types of easy targets are usually the most ignorant of the truth found in God's word. Satan then traps them into believing his lies and then uses them to deceive the others through their enticing baited words of partial truths. Satan uses seven deadly sins; Lust, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth, Wrath, Envy, Pride, as his weapons to distract souls from God as they are fatal to spiritual progress. Dr. Fastus is lured by all these sins.

The prince dreams were completely occupied by evil forms and the ambiguous beings as he is an open soul, gives all things habitation and he is not fortified enough to resist such in-habitation. Satan always tries conjure souls as part of his ritual fortification. If the soul is strong enough it survives the attacks, if the soul fails to stand strong, it perishes. To escape from the clutches of Satan one has to be forfeited. In his

dream prince watches monsters with teeth all over their bodies, liverish spirits with snake-like legs and evil like critters eating his body, heart and brain and having discussion on how to subdue his soul. The prince slides into profound sickness as the hidden evils in his kingdom has affected him so powerfully. Even the indomitable king has been subdued by the sickness of his fragile son.

Another profound character delineated by Okri is Maiden, born in a nomadic tribe, a tribe of artists, a family of gold-shapers, bronze-workers and dreamers. They live in woodlands, faraway from cities and towns. They are dedicated themselves at creating sculptures in secret and exhibit in village market. They are good interpreters of dreams; they listen to oracles and decipher the meaning of life in their sculpture. Their sculpture is guide to human race. It is a warning of disturbances, troubles and events that happens in individual life, in family, in tribe, in kingdom and on the land. It is a peculiar tribe. Art is their prayer and confession, their rest and meditation, their play and work and their illness and cure. Art is their oxygen and food. They brawl one another with art and concur one another with art. Men and women choose their partner by their art. The work which shows greatest delicacy, patience, love tenderness resilience beauty, strength of spirit, capacity for reconciliation fruitfulness of invention and conductivity to good dreams tended to win the best husbands. People in the tribe rarely fight. Even if they have to fight, they fight spiritually and artistically. There won't be any bloodshed and their victories are not visible and public. They never feel conquered or overcome and it doesn't bring enmity among them.

Art was the source of all joy for the tribe. Art for them is a living personality just like a teacher, a guardian and a nurse. They are the messengers from God. Spirits guide them in creating art. Imperfection is a great law of the tribe. As Martin H. Fisher rightly pointed out "It is not hard to learn more. What is hard is to unlearn when you discover yourself wrong." But the great tenet of the tribe is that they always learn to unlearn, they begin as master and end as child. They study the character of a person through their art. All are specialists and born interpreters of dreams. They are the co-creators. They create bridge to the creator and all things, mysteries on the earth and in heaven with their art. Art is a doctor for them. If they are happy, they create a piece of art to express it and if they are ill they create an art of their won healing.

God has many ways to guide people. Through dreams, omen, signs etc., The artists in the tribe gifted with this rare quality. The Bible indicates that God revealed His will to selected people through dreams or visions in Scriptures such as Genesis 37:5-10; 1 Kings 3:5-15; Daniel, chapters 2 and 7; Matthew 1:20; 2:13, 19; and Acts 10:9-16; 16:9. God may communicate through dreams or visions even today, but we need to carefully check any such guidance we receive with Scripture and godly counsel to be sure it is from the Lord. Anything which contradicts Scripture is not from God. Our minds and even Satan are capable of producing great deception in such subjective areas.<sup>2</sup> Timothy 3:16-17 shows that God has revealed His will to us primarily through His word. It says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. But instead of achieving more clarity, interpret them wrongly and create more chaos. Artist helps us to know the future with his work of art.

A new revelation in the square, a great wooden sculpture of three men and a women bound together by chains at the ankles, in positions of intolerable lamentation and humiliation, and yet rendered with stoic dignity, perplexed everybody. No one knows the creator of that work. It appeared in square as a great work of art from a legend artist. The sculpture haunted and frightened everybody. Elders in the tribe tries to decipher the hidden message of that great work. The interpreters are bewildered at the too many meanings that the work suggested. Different interpreters give different meaning and warning. Even three interpreters fought over their interpretations and for the first time in the tribe one artist is brutally killed, indicated bad omen. It seems to be a destructive work, a great threat to the world. The sculpture seems to speak of a great world calamity, a tragedy of vast proportions.

Who ever tried to understand the work, died and committed suicide. A sage, who takes 14 days to decipher the hidden meaning of that sculpture, refuses to take food and dies, after understand the work.

Maiden just has a glance at the sculpture, the most significant revelation in art. It haunts her. She recognizes it to be the beginning of the end of a great cycle. She herself doesn't know what cycle that it is. She identifies that work signals the end of world. The end of world's happy days. It indicates the end of the spiritual journey of the tribe, end of the meaning and purpose of life. It appears to be a work beyond art. It is a disaster of the soul. The sculpture torments and accuses her. In her waking dream she recognizes one of the figure bounded to the chain is her father. In her waking dream her father says to her:

"My daughter, if God cracks the gourd, God leaks into it. What God breaks, God fills. Nothing is spilt from the sacred vessel that is humanity which is not filled with the sacred spirit of heaven. We break, that we may be blessed we had a choice in it, but we failed, and we suffer, because we didn't make that choice of power on earth;; and we till the earth, like animals and later, when time has flowed like blood back to the kingdom, and after many disasters, wars, suffering, folly, injustice, rage and music, my daughter afterwards the blood will flow back as the spirit of the highest, changed into the gold of the soul." (92)

His message indicated the future of their tribe, their prince, his daughter and their kingdom. To avoid clamour in the tribe, a group of elders tries to steal the sculpture to bring peace back. But the space where it used to be become more powerful than ever. Its invisible form is more powerful, majestic, tragic, sublime and heart-breaking than its visible form. Its invisible form haunted the tribe. It has begin to appear everywhere, by the river, in the farms, among cornstalks, at the bottom of well, behind baobab trees, in kitchen, everywhere. Later it vanishes among the hills. Some artists in the tribe report that the sculpture is multiplying:

"It became not four figures chained to one another, but ten, then twenty, then a hundred. It became a whole tribe, then a whole people, then a vast chain of people that stretched all across that plains and forests and savannahs and vanished into the mighty sea and was swallowed by the hallowed waves of the unnamed and feared ocean. And then after a while the people didn't see the sculpture any more. It vanished." (89)

Maiden the daughter of a good master in the tribe seems to be a different sort of girl, born in alien land. Her mother is beautiful. But unlike her mother the maiden is awkward, strange unpredictable, dreamy, moody with beetle eyes. She is not elegant like her mother. Everyone in the tribe feels that mother is a flower and girl is an insect. In spite of being clumsy, she is of the greatest Interest as a daughter of legend. The best of the tribe comes forward to earn the hand of the maiden. The artistic competition for her hand turns out to be a unique. In order to win the hand of maiden, in order win the respect of her father, a master artist they all produce work of art. Many try to win the hand of the maiden but the protagonist of the novel the Prince wins her heart.

Prince's transformation throughout the novel is symbolic of personal and spiritual growth. The journey from ignorance to enlightenment reflects the broader human experience of seeking and understanding higher truths. The "Starbook" represents ultimate knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Its elusive nature reflects the idea that the pursuit of wisdom is both a goal and a journey, often requiring one to traverse unknown and mystical realms.

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