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Azaro: The Adventures Of A Spirit-Child Between Two Worlds In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*.

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Abstract:

This paper examines the path of Azaro, a spirit-child or abiku whose life is constantly torn between the spirit and human realms, resulting in a deep sense of exile and a challenge to tell reality from fantasy as he hears ghosts and comprehends animal speech. A herbalist predicted that without a specific ritual, he would continue to suffer from serious illnesses and near-death experiences brought on by his spirit friends frequent enticing songs. Azaro also faces severe poverty and difficult living circumstances, including hunger, his parents' hard work, debt, and a run-down, rat-infested house. He frequently encounters danger and violence, suffering injuries from riots and his wanderings, being physically attacked, and seeing acts of violence in the town. He is emotionally and psychologically exhausted by these supernatural and outside forces, and he experiences loneliness, fear, disorientation, hallucinations, and a sense of helplessness. In addition, governmental corruption, widespread riots, political parties' employment of thugs, and discrimination toward marginalized people are all problems in his social context.

Keywords:

Abiku (Spirit-child), Political Corruption, Spiritual Struggle and Resistance, Personal Transformation, Justice and Responsibility.

The major reason Azaro fights all the time is that he is an abiku, or spirit-child. This indicates that he has experienced numerous births and deaths and is constantly caught between the challenging human world and the cozy spirit world. His spirit buddies frequently attempt to entice him back with seductive songs. Because of this relationship, he also gets very sick a lot and almost died shortly after birth, which a wise herbalist predicted would continue until a particular ceremony was carried out. He has a strong sense of being in exile and finds it difficult to distinguish between the real and the imaginary since he sees and hears ghosts, sometimes posing as people, and sometimes understands animal speech.

Extreme poverty and extremely challenging living conditions are other major challenges for him. Azaro has extreme hunger, and his family frequently goes to bed hungry. He observes his mother working diligently selling products in dirt streets, continually fending off individuals they owe money to, and his father performing backbreaking labor hauling big loads, frequently returning home battered and fatigued. They must use cooking pots to capture water because their little house is rat-infested and has a roof that leaks

badly during rainy seasons. His parents became even more indebted after his miraculous survival as a baby consumed all of their money.

Azaro also regularly encounters danger and violence. When he gets lost, his father beats him with a cane, and Madame Koto also strikes him. A frightening character known as a Masquerade pursues him during rioting, and he is nearly abducted and sacrificed by spirits posing as people. After a lunatic attacks him, a blind elderly man who attempts to physically "see" with Azaro's eyes follows him. He sees a lot of violence in the community, such as his mother being attacked by creditors and his father being flogged by police. In the midst of intense political altercations, he nearly gets crushed and breaks his nose during a riot for free milk. He also sustains bodily wounds from his frequent wanderings, such as blisters and bleeding feet. He is put in a difficult and possibly hazardous situation when his father even wants him to spy on Madame Koto.

Azaro is emotionally and psychologically burdened. He becomes confused, afraid, and frequently experiences hallucinations as a result of the regular violence and the ongoing blending of the visible and invisible worlds. The numerous "riddles" of life are difficult for him to comprehend. He frequently feels alone since he sees things that others do not. Seeing his mother's anguish and his father's weariness, he is profoundly impacted by his parents' suffering and occasionally feels "weariness" over their hardships. In addition, he struggles with his decision to stay in the human world in spite of the spirit world's attraction and feels powerless because he is unable to shield his family from the difficulties in their environment.

Due to the extreme poverty and unfavorable living circumstances in his town, Azaro suffers numerous social challenges. His family struggles with debt and hunger all the time. Carrying huge amounts of salt and cement requires backbreaking labor, and his father suffers from tiredness, injuries, and being treated like a "donkey" by those in positions of authority. His mother endures physical suffering and disease while working long hours selling items on dusty streets, frequently earning very little money and battling creditors. Their tiny, filthy, rat-infested, and leaky roof is a reflection of their living conditions. The entire region is characterized as being "sunken in poverty," with youngsters barefoot, in rags, and with large bellies, as well as a widespread dearth of essential services like clean water, electricity, and sanitary facilities.

The violence and political corruption that are common in his community also have a significant impact on him. Azaro watches and participates in disorderly political riots, where his father is assaulted and imprisoned by the police for his involvement. Both "of the Rich" and "of the Poor," political parties, regularly use thugs who physically attack, threaten, and harass people—including his mother at the market—as well as destroy property, fostering a culture of perpetual dread. One especially heinous example is when politicians' "free milk" during a rally turns out to be bad, resulting in widespread illness and vomiting among the public. Political alignment is also enforced by society; individuals who support the "wrong side of politics" risk losing their jobs and landlords threaten to evict them for noncompliance. The mood that "Independence has brought only trouble" is a result of the wider political climate, which is said to be "spoiling everything," affecting even the most fundamental matters like who gets a job.

Azaro also traverses a culture rife with social prejudice and superstition. His sheer identity as an abiku, or spirit-child, makes him stand out in the community and causes his mother fear and suffering. People like Madame Koto are accused of witchcraft and other evil deeds by gossiping ladies, who attribute her success to evil forces, particularly as she becomes wealthy and powerful. The "new church" condemning Madame Koto's electricity as a "abomination" is another example of how traditional beliefs or new religious movements clash with contemporary achievements. Beggars and other marginalized and impoverished people are frequently ostracized, viewed as "trouble," and violently attacked. The general public views Dad's independent activities and political ambitions with suspicion and derision. Azaro's challenging experiences are greatly influenced by these prevailing society attitudes and circumstances.

Being an abiku - a spirit-child doomed to be born and die repeatedly and being torn between the spirit and human worlds is the main source of Azaro's spiritual struggle. He suffers from a profound, "inextinguishable sense of exile" while he is alive as a result of his spirit companions' tormenting songs and attempts to entice him back to their world of unending feasting and play. As was the case soon after his birth, when a herbalist warned that unless a special ceremony was conducted to break his spirit connections, he would continue to grow ill and probably die before the age of twenty-one, this supernatural pull often causes him to become very sick and experience near-death states.

His capacity to see and communicate with spirits causes uncertainty and anxiety all the time, making it difficult to distinguish between reality and illusion. Sometimes he hears their "nasal whisperings" and sees spirits in ordinary settings, such as Madame Koto's bar or the marketplace, dressed as people or animals. He is forced to struggle for his life against invisible powers as these entities—which include a three-headed spirit and a four-headed spirit—actively attempt to kidnap him again, even putting him in a sack or attempting to possess him. Additionally, he experiences hallucinations and changed perceptions, such as when the blind old man attempts to "see with his eyes," which causes Azaro's sense of the world to flip upside down, or when spirits rage inside him after he consumes sacrificial offerings.

Driven by a desire to taste of this world, to feel it, suffer it, know it, to love it and to please his mother, Azaro chooses to remain in the human world despite the incessant spiritual attacks and the attraction of the spirit world. But by making this decision, he betrays his agreements with his spirit companions, who subsequently haunt and afflict him. In addition, he battles the great "riddles" of life and death on an internal level, always trying to make sense of the mysteries that surround him. He straddles the two worlds, experiencing a deep sense of "weariness" and occasionally a dislocated sense of self due to his spiritual nature and the challenges of his earthly existence.

Due in large part to his unique status as an abiku, or spirit-child, Azaro undergoes a number of profound personal changes throughout the book. He intentionally chooses to remain in the human world at first, specifically opting to "taste of this world, to feel it, suffer it, know it, to love it" as opposed to going back to the spirit realm. The desire to "make happy the bruised face of the woman who would become my mother" is another factor driving this decision. This pivotal choice marks his departure from a passive return to an active participation in human life, signifying his revolt against his predetermined cycle of birth and early death.

Azaro gains a more profound, albeit frequently perplexing, comprehension of reality as he negotiates the fuzziness of the boundaries between the material and spiritual realms. His ghost buddies, who persistently attempt to entice him back with enticing sounds and promises of limitless feeding, torment him at first. But he becomes stronger, resolutely saying, "I do not want to die" in the face of spiritual kidnapping and turning down the spirit's plea for him to come back. He discovers that "it wasn't just humans who came to the marketplaces of the world" but furthermore "spirits and other beings" that "buy and sell, browse and investigate". As evidenced by his deliberate killing of a lizard he recognizes as a spirit-messenger or his employment of Madame Koto's fetish as a weapon against attacking spirits in her bar, this growing awareness enables him to face and even combat these spirits.

In addition to the paranormal, Azaro's reaction to the brutality of poverty and violence also demonstrates his personal development. Although he first experiences a "certain weariness" from witnessing his parents' anguish and embarrassment, he eventually assumes greater responsibility by helping to clean the room and do errands because his parents are too exhausted. He learns to "grow wherever life puts you down" by internalizing his father's resilience theory. When he confronts the man who insulted his father or actively cheers him on during the boxing battle against Green Leopard by yelling encouragement and taking his father's blows, he demonstrates courage.

Azaro eventually experiences a significant internal change in how he views and functions in his world. He began to "see things for the first time," understanding that "this world is not what it seems" and is full of "mysterious forces" and "riddles" as a result of his constant observation and assimilation of his parents' tales and wisdom, especially from his father. In addition to giving him the stated job of becoming a "spy on behalf of justice," his father also exhorts him to "look at the world with new eyes" and "look at ourselves differently." This suggests a transition from a confused youngster to one who actively tries to comprehend and possibly change his complicated reality even hoping to instruct the beggars. The realization that "the world that we see and the world that is there are two different things" transforms his personal struggles into a more profound and active relationship with life's mysteries and the potential to change his world. He uses his unique perspective as a source of strength.

Growing awareness, resilience, and a growing sense of justice and responsibility are characteristics of Azaro's metamorphosis in reaction to societal difficulties. He first notices the extreme poverty and deplorable living circumstances that afflict his family and neighborhood, which makes him "unhappy" and "certainly weary" when he sees his father's fatigue and wounds and his mother's weakness. But when his parents are too exhausted, he starts to actively respond by helping to clean the room and conduct errands,

taking on a larger portion of the home chores. He learns to "grow wherever life puts you down" by internalizing his father's resilience theory.

He also suffers with the widespread violence and corruption in politics. Azaro has a critical awareness of political tricks and the use of thugs to frighten the public after seeing violent political riots, his father being beaten and imprisoned, and the event of bad "free milk" that causes people to become ill. He becomes the victim of this violence himself, escaping from irate creditors and barely avoiding kidnapping by thugs with political affiliations. Azaro eventually accepts a new post after being influenced by his father's unwavering opposition to the landlord's party and his readiness to fight for justice. His father specifically asks him to "look at the world with new eyes" and "look at ourselves differently" in order to become a "spy on behalf of justice." Azaro eventually returns to Madame Koto's bar to "find out how to become a politician" as a result of this, actively observing and attempting to comprehend the political dynamics around him.

Azaro's transformation also entails a greater comprehension of social dynamics and biases. Realizing that "all women of the marketplace" face the same hardships as his mother, he acknowledges the universal misery that women in the marketplace experience. As his father imagines constructing a school for them, he grows sympathetic to the underprivileged, including the beggars, feeding them covertly and even hoping to become a teacher. In instances like throwing a frog at the mocking blind man or growing resentful of Madame Koto as she amasses wealth and power and becomes "wicked" and dismissive of the poor, he challenges individuals who represent societal greed and corruption. By failing to get water for her new, influential clients, he even openly challenges her authority. Azaro gains a more nuanced and frequently critical perspective on the social forces influencing his world as a result of these experiences, moving from a position of passive observation to one of more active engagement and realizing that "the world that we see and the world that is there are two different things."

One of the novel's main themes is Azaro's recovery from his spiritual difficulties, which are firmly anchored in his identity as an abiku, or spirit-child. Despite his innate inclination and agreements with his spirit companions to return to their domain, he makes the essential choice to remain in the human world at the start of his voyage. To "taste of this world, to feel it, suffer it, know it, to love it," he says, and to make his mother happy. He even buries his "magic stones" and other symbols of his spirit identity to further cement this decision, purposefully cutting off certain connections even though he can't completely cut off contact with that other world of "light and rainbows and possibilities."

Azaro suffers from severe illnesses and near-death experiences throughout the narrative as a result of his spirit companions' persistent attempts to entice him back and their ongoing torture. He has puzzling glimpses of spirits in disguise in the marketplace and is kidnapped in a sack by spiritual beings posing as people. He does, however, progressively strengthen his will and actively oppose these influences. He states unequivocally, "I do not want to die," in response to spiritual kidnapping. In order to influence the blind elderly man, he learns to identify spirits in a variety of shapes, such as the lizard he kills because he thinks it is a ghost. He even feels the "potent power burning in my palm" of Madame Koto's fetish, which he utilizes as a weapon to ward off hostile spirits. When he falls into a "dance of death" with a four-headed ghost in a desert-like realm, it marks a key turning point in his active resistance. His cries for his mother during this fierce spiritual conflict force the spirit to "evaporate into the mysteries of dance," illustrating the strength of human love as a shield and his connection to the material world.

In the end, Azaro progresses toward a more thorough comprehension of the world's underlying realities and a deeper integration of his dual existence. With fresh eyes, he embraces the "alarming mystery of reality" as a source of strength and marvels at the commonplace after a period of extreme spiritual and bodily anguish. Azaro is given clear instructions to "look at the world with new eyes" and perceive "mysterious forces everywhere" by his father, who likewise experiences a spiritual metamorphosis after defeating a deceased boxer. He gives Azaro the responsibility of becoming a "spy on behalf of justice," suggesting a need to comprehend the invisible spiritual conflicts that impact human existence. As seen by his father's demonstration of how to order a lizard—a spirit messenger—to leave their room, Azaro also gains some degree of power over the spirit world, suggesting a mastery over these forces as opposed to passive surrender. Azaro is transformed from a troubled spirit-child into a person who actively selects, comprehends, and navigates the intricate, riddle-filled tapestry of his existence as a result of his ongoing interactions with the visible and invisible as well as his developing resilience and knowledge.

Summation:

In conclusion, Azaro's story is a deep examination of an abiku's journey, marked by his early fight to balance his life between the seductive spirit world and the harsh human world, a struggle that shows up as chronic illness, a strong sense of exile, and a hazy sense of reality. Extreme poverty, widespread violence, emotional strain, and discrimination and systemic corruption in his community all contribute to his difficulties. He rebels against his predestined cycle of birth and death by making the crucial and deliberate decision to stay in the human world, motivated by a desire "to taste of this world, to feel it, suffer it, know it, to love it" and to please his mother. His decision starts a profound personal journey that is characterized by his increasing awareness, resilience, and active resistance to the temptations of the spirit world—even learning to fight spirits and comprehend their presence. Azaro develops a greater sense of justice and accountability under the guidance of his father's wisdom, turning into a "spy on behalf of justice" who can identify and confront social injustices and show empathy for the poor. He ultimately transcends his status as a troubled spirit-child in order to gain a deeper understanding and integration of his dual existence. He actively navigates the intricate, riddle-filled fabric of his life, embraces the "alarming mystery of reality" as a source of strength, and gains some degree of control over the spirit world.

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