

Chapter 4

Treatment of the Constructs of Time and Space in the Selected Works of Ben Okri

The fourth chapter, “Treatment of the Constructs of Time and Space in the Selected Works of Ben Okri” delves into an analysis of Ben Okri’s selected works, focusing on how he explores and manipulates temporal and spatial constructs within his narratives. This chapter initiates with an overview of Okri’s works, delving into their thematic depths, intricate plot developments, and compelling storylines. It then delves into the pivotal role of narrative in shaping the characters, events, and incidents within Okri’s narratives.

The exploration of time in Okri’s works reveals a multidirectional and multidimensional treatment, challenging the conventional notion of time as unilateral or unidirectional. This chapter critically examines how Okri’s portrayal of time adds layers of complexity and depth to his narratives. Similarly, Okri’s treatment of space is dynamic, revolving around events rather than being fixed to a specific locale. This dynamic treatment infuses Okri’s narratives with variety and dynamism, offering readers a rich and immersive experience.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the various constructs related to time and space as crafted by Okri in his selected works. It evaluates how Okri’s approach subverts traditional notions of time and space found in literature, employing literary devices such as symbolism, metaphor, and intertextuality to offer fresh perspectives. Through these devices, Okri weaves a rich tapestry of meaning, inviting readers to explore alternative dimensions of reality within his narratives.

Okri’s works, characterized by dream-like sequences, delve into profound philosophical explorations and life trajectories. For instance, in *The Famished*

Road, Okri presents time as a collection of “moments, hours, and days outside the linear temporal process, while space encompasses both imaginary and real realms, blending the real with the spirit world” (Anasiudu 24). The motif of ‘revolving’ in the novel symbolizes cyclical movements and completion of circular journeys, adding depth to the temporal aspect.

In works like *Astonishing the Gods* and *The Songs of Enchantment*, Okri continues his exploration of time and space, intertwining traditional ideas with magical elements to create a surreal yet realistic narrative landscape. These narratives employ temporal descriptions that enhance the fluidity and complexity of time within the storylines, challenging readers to engage with time and space in unconventional ways. Overall, Chapter 4 invites readers on a journey through Ben Okri’s imaginative realms, where time and space are not mere backdrops but integral components that shape the narrative’s essence and offer profound insights into the human experience.

4.1 Temporal and Spatial aspects in *The Famished Road*

The Famished Road delves into the intricate interplay of time and space within Ben Okri’s mesmerizing narrative. In this chapter, we explore how Okri masterfully weaves these fundamental elements not merely as storytelling devices but as dynamic forces that shape the existential reality of his characters, particularly focusing on Azaro’s abduction by spirits. This pivotal event serves as a gateway to unraveling deeper thematic layers, such as metaphorical constraints, Bakhtin’s (1920) concept of the ‘chronotope’, and the symbolic significance of *The Famished Road*. Through a philosophical lens, *The Famished Road* invites readers to embark on a profound inquiry into the nature of reality, human existence, and the mystical realms that intertwine with our everyday experiences.

4.1.1 Narrative Framework

The narrative structure of Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* is a rich and intricate tapestry that skillfully blends historical truth with fantastical components to produce a story that is both profound and mysterious. The narrative’s format is

examined using a range of perspectives, such as the way in which narrative time and space are manipulated, the significance of anachronism, and the important use of flashbacks and foreshadowing. The intricate weave each of these narrative devices serves to both improve the storytelling and increase the reader's involvement with the book. Traditional literary forms are put to the test by *The Famished Road's* narrative framework, which also encourages a more active dialogue between the reader and the text.

4.1.1.1 Narrative vs. Narration

In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri employs a distinctive narrative style that intertwines the acts of narration and narrative structure, reflecting the complex interplay of temporal and spatial elements. Genette distinguishes between “narration (the act of telling a story) and narrative (the structural manifestation of the story itself)” (56). This distinction is pivotal in understanding how Okri crafts a narrative that both tells a compelling story and engages with the metaphysical themes prevalent throughout the novel. The narrative structure of *The Famished Road* is intricately woven with layers of spiritual and physical realms, presenting a non-linear progression of events that reflect traditional African beliefs about the cyclical nature of life. Okri's narrative does not merely advance through the chronological unfolding of events; instead, it meanders through various temporal dimensions, integrating past, present, and future in a fluid, dynamic manner. This approach challenges conventional Western narratives that are predominantly linear and progressive. Narration in Okri's work is marked by its multiplicity of voices and perspectives. The protagonist, Azaro, narrates most of the novel, providing insight into both the spiritual and the corporeal worlds he navigates. However, Okri also employs omniscient narrative interjections that offer broader philosophical and cultural commentaries, thus enriching the reader's understanding of the narrative's thematic depth.

4.1.1.2 Applying Genette's narrative framework in Okri's *The Famished Road*

Events as per the sequence of narration	Events as per actual occurrence
1. Azaro's recalls the history of his family members	D
2. Azaro's dream where he faces dilemma	A
3. Azaro recalling about his experiences in the spirit world	C
4. Azaro's entry and exit in the spirit world	B
5. Azaro's visit to madam Koto's bar	E
6. Azaro back to the living world and his encounter with Black Tyger	F

1(D), 2(A), 3(C), 4(B), 5(E), 6(F)

These events arranged as per the sequence of the flow of narrative in the text have been described in next few sections:

Foundational Narrative Structure (Section A)

The narrative begins with Section A, serving as “the autonomous baseline for the story” (Genette 3). It introduces the primary setting and characters, establishing the normative temporal and spatial settings from which the story will diverge. This section is crucial for setting the stage for the novel's exploration of time and space as fluid, overlapping constructs.

Retrospective and Subjective Narrative (Section B)

Following the establishment of a narrative baseline, Section B delves into a retrospective view “that is inherently subjective” (Genette 4), capturing Azaro’s personal memories and experiences as in “he remembered...” (Okri 22). This section is temporally subordinate to Section A, providing background and depth to the present narrative by reflecting on past events from Azaro’s perspective. This retrospective layer enriches the narrative, offering insights into the protagonist’s internal and external conflicts.

Return to Present Narrative (Section C)

Section C marks a straightforward “return to the present narrative trajectory established in Section A” (Genette 22), advancing the story without introducing new temporal layers or perspectives. This section emphasizes the ongoing developments in the plot, anchoring the narrative’s temporal flow.

Dual Narrative Focus (Section D)

In contrast to the previous sections, Section D revisits the past but shifts the focus from Azaro to the narrator. This section highlights the dual challenges faced in both the spiritual and real worlds, illustrating the layered complexity of Azaro’s experiences and the broader metaphysical themes of the novel as in the narration of Azaro where he says “Constant shift between the two worlds makes me sweat and staggered to death” (Okri 68).

Emergence from the Past (Section E)

Section E uniquely returns to the present but views it through the lens of the past, thereby creating a narrative continuity that ties the present to historical and metaphysical contexts as in the description of “Abiku cycle of life and death” (Okri 72). This approach shows the present as a direct consequence of past actions and events, reinforcing the cyclical nature of time in the narrative.

Re-establishment of Previous Narrative Points (Sections F, H, and I)

Sections F, H, and I serve to re-establish previous narrative points, reinforcing the cyclical and repetitive nature of the narrative structure. Section F returns to an earlier point similar to Section C, Section H revisits a past point similar to

Section D, and Section I cyclically returns to the narrative point, emphasizing “the repetitive and layered structure of the narrative” (Genette 22).

Objective Anticipation (Section G)

Section G introduces an anticipatory element from an objective standpoint, contrasting with earlier subjective anticipations. This shift highlights the external influences on the narrative trajectory, providing a broader perspective on the potential futures within the story as in the “the transformation of Azaro’s dad and Madame Koto’s bar” (Okri 290).

4.1.1.3 The Chronotope in Narrative Structure

The sequence of events as per the narration versus their actual occurrence in *The Famished Road* illustrates Okri’s sophisticated use of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘chronotope’, where “time and space form an intrinsic unity that shapes narrative action and character development” (22). Okri’s portrayal of time as intertwined with space—where “characters move from highways to gutters, reflecting their metaphysical journeys” (Okri 9)—demonstrates the inseparability of these dimensions, as Bakhtin suggests.

This intricate narrative structure not only aligns with Genette’s theoretical perspectives but also vividly embodies Bakhtin’s chronotope, making time and space fundamental elements of the story’s structure and thematic depth. Through this, Okri not only challenges conventional narrative forms but also enhances the reader’s engagement with the text, offering a rich, multidimensional experience that reflects the complexities of human life and existence within the post-colonial context of Nigeria.

In Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road*, the narrative’s structure is a masterful embodiment of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, which articulates the “inseparability of time and space in literature” (11), molding not only the aesthetic and thematic essence of the narrative but also profoundly influencing character development and the reader’s understanding of reality. Over the span of this exploration, Okri utilizes the chronotope to weave a complex tapestry that challenges traditional narrative forms and invites readers into a multifaceted exploration of reality, enriched by the spiritual and cultural heritage of Nigeria.

4.1.1.4 Narrative Techniques and Temporal Shifts

Okri's use of flashbacks, visions, and dreams disrupts the traditional flow of time, weaving a complex narrative fabric where different temporalities coexist. This approach reflects the nonlinear ways "individuals experience life, where past memories and future anticipations continuously interact with present realities" (Umrigar 21). Okri's narrative technique is reflective of African storytelling, which often embraces a more holistic and integrated approach to time and experience.

The Famished Road is a compelling narrative that uses temporal and spatial constructs not merely as narrative strategies but as essential elements for deepening the philosophical and existential inquiries of the novel. Okri's manipulation of these elements invites readers to engage with the text on multiple levels, challenging conventional interpretations and encouraging a deeper understanding of the complexities of human experience. Through Azaro's eyes, readers experience a world where time and space are fluid, and "reality is a continuum of experiences that challenge the boundaries of the physical and spiritual realms" (Okri 22).

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* provides a profound exploration of the dynamic interplay between the tangible and the ethereal, offering a narrative that oscillates between the physical experiences of its protagonist, Azaro, and the mystical realms he traverses. This narrative intricacy is not merely thematic but structural, influencing the very form and function of the story, and challenging conventional perceptions of time and space as linear and unidimensional constructs.

Okri employs a complex narrative structure that incorporates flashbacks, visions, and prophetic dreams, disrupting the linear flow of time and allowing historical, present, and futuristic elements to coexist within the 'Narrative space' (Panassenko 12). This technique enriches the narrative, mirroring the non-linear way individuals experience memory and time, particularly within the African cultural context, which does not strictly segregate history from the ongoing present or the anticipated future.

4.1.1.5 Narrative Fusion and Cultural Exploration

The narrative adeptly uses Madame Koto's character and the bar setting to delve into themes of power, survival, and cultural superstition amidst economic hardships. Madame Koto's bar encapsulates both physical and metaphysical aspects of community life, becoming a "focal point where temporal and spatial dimensions intricately shape characters' actions and societal dynamics" (Lefebvre 38). This fusion of narrative and 'Cultural space' (Ryan 12) within Okri's work unveils a nuanced exploration of community dynamics through Azaro's perspective and Madame Koto's enigmatic presence, highlighting ongoing struggles of identity and power in a society undergoing rapid transformation.

The narrative episode within Madam Koto's bar exemplifies Okri's mastery in intertwining time, space, and narrative intricacies. The fluidity of spatial shifts, the temporal progression of events, and the symbolic significance of spaces reflect the novel's thematic depth and philosophical inquiries into human existence. Through these spatial and temporal constructs, Okri invites readers to explore the interconnected dimensions of identity, culture, and narrative agency, creating a narrative landscape that transcends traditional boundaries and offers profound insights into the human condition. Both culture and narrative address space as a major theme, however most of the "time space in culture can be understood as Newtonian Absolute Space" (Halverson 18).

4.1.1.6 Thematic Depth and Narrative Structure

Through the incorporation of different narrative strategies, Okri challenges conventional literary forms, urging readers to reconsider the nature of reality and narrative. He portrays time not as a "sequential thread leading from past to future but as a layered tapestry" (Slemon 2) where different epochs coexist. This approach not only enriches the story's texture but also aligns with African perspectives on time as a broader, more inclusive element of life.

In essence, *The Famished Road* is a compelling exploration of how personal and collective histories are intertwined with the characters' present realities. Okri uses the narrative to probe the enduring effects of colonial legacies and the ongoing struggle for identity and autonomy in a world where the spiritual

and the material are inextricably linked. The novel stands as a profound critique of postcolonial conditions, offering insights into the struggles for cultural and political independence and the “quest for a renewed sense of self in the face of persistent external influences” (Quayson 9)

Through Azaro’s eyes, readers are invited to navigate a world where reality is multilayered and complex, reflecting the broader challenges of a society at the crossroads of tradition and transformation. Okri’s narrative is a vibrant tapestry of life, death, and rebirth, presenting a nuanced understanding of the human condition through the lens of magical realism and rich African cultural heritage. In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri masterfully interweaves temporal and spatial elements into a narrative that transcends conventional storytelling, creating a rich tapestry that reflects the cyclical nature of time and the fluidity of space. Through the eyes of Azaro, an ‘Abiku’ or spirit child, the narrative navigates between the physical and spiritual realms, uncovering the layers of cultural, historical, and metaphysical themes embedded within.

4.1.1.7 Spatial Dynamics and Narrative Structure

The depiction of various locales within *The Famished Road*, from “expansive compounds to the confined spaces of hallways and bathrooms” (Okri 154)—illustrates how Okri perceives space not just as a physical backdrop but as an active, dynamic participant in the narrative. These settings do more than just contain the action; they interact with and shape the narrative’s temporal flow, challenging traditional notions of space as static or purely geographical. Instead, Okri portrays space as a fluid construct, deeply intertwined with the characters’ experiences and the broader thematic explorations of the novel.

4.1.1.8 Symbolism and Setting

Okri uses specific settings symbolically to enrich the narrative’s thematic concerns. Places like the “bustling markets and mysterious bars” (Okri 191) are more than mere backdrops; they are imbued with cultural and political significance, serving as arenas for social and spiritual conflicts. These settings reflect the socio-political turmoil of Nigeria and the personal quest for belonging and identity among the characters, particularly Azaro, who finds himself perpetually caught between two worlds.

4.1.1.9 Duration vs. ‘Narrative Time’

The concept of duration within Okri’s novel pertains to the time span events are depicted to last in the narrative world. Okri stretches and compresses these durations to serve thematic purposes, often reflecting the protagonist Azaro’s perception of time in both the physical and spiritual realms. For instance, a single night in Azaro’s spirit encounters can unfold over several chapters, suggesting a drawn-out experience laden with symbolic and literal interactions that are rich in detail and significance. This technique of elongating the narrative duration of events is pivotal in conveying the ‘Timelessness’ (Hawley 6) and liminality of the spirit world where traditional temporal markers lose their conventional meanings. The contrast between the duration of events within the story and the ‘Narrative time’ (Panasenکو 12) experienced by readers serves multiple functions in “The Famished Road.” Firstly, it accentuates the mystical elements of the story. The extended duration within the narrative, as experienced by Azaro during his supernatural experiences, contrasts sharply with the swift, often abrupt transitions back to the physical world, highlighting the stark differences between these realms. Secondly, this contrast reinforces the thematic exploration of the spiritual versus the material world. In the spiritual world, time is dilated—a reflection of its eternal nature. In the material world, time seems constrained and fleeting, mirroring the transient struggles and joys of physical life. Okri uses this dichotomy to explore deeper philosophical questions about existence, destiny, and the cyclical nature of life and death, which are central to the novel’s narrative arc.

4.1.1.10 Narrative Devices and Metaphors

Okri’s use of vivid imagery and metaphor enriches the narrative, transforming the “descriptions of cars and houses into symbols of the larger socio-political upheavals” (Okri 74) taking place in Nigeria. These metaphors not only serve to vividly paint the setting but also act as commentary on the state of Azaro’s community, grappling with the remnants of colonial impact and the chaos of its own self-governance. The narrative’s rich metaphoric layer invites readers to look beyond the surface, engaging with the text in a manner that considers the broader implications of each element.

4.1.1.11 Azaro's Perspective: A Childlike Innocence and Supernatural Insight

The primary focal point of *The Famished Road* is Azaro, whose unique perspective as an Abiku affords him insights into both the physical and spiritual realms. This dual perspective is crucial for conveying the magical realism that Okri weaves throughout the narrative. Azaro's observations, though often imbued with a childlike wonder, reveal profound truths about the "poverty, political unrest, and spiritual life of his community" (Okri 89). For example, his "interactions with spirits and mystical beings" (Okri 29) provide a layer of understanding and commentary that goes beyond the mundane experiences of his parents and neighbors.

4.1.1.12 Shifts to Parental and Community Perspectives

Occasionally, Okri shifts the narrative focus to Azaro's parents and other members of the community. These shifts are crucial for providing context to Azaro's experiences and for presenting a more rounded view of the community's struggles. For instance, when focalization shifts to Azaro's father, the narrative delves into his thoughts and feelings about his political ambitions and his deep desire to improve his family's circumstances. These moments expand the narrative scope beyond the spiritual and personal challenges faced by Azaro, highlighting the socio-economic and political dimensions of the story.

4.1.1.13 Cultural and Narrative Dynamics

The interplay between the 'Narrative space' (Panasenکو 12) and 'Cultural space' (Ryan 12) enriches the narrative by providing a layered understanding of the characters' interactions with their environment. This dynamic is crucial for understanding how Azaro and other characters navigate their social and spiritual worlds. The cultural space "within the home, for instance, is not just a backdrop but a living, breathing aspect" (Okri 72) of the narrative that actively shapes and is shaped by the events that unfold within it. This space, with all its cultural connotations and physical manifestations, influences Azaro's actions and reactions, illustrating how deeply embedded cultural norms and expectations are in the physical spaces people inhabit.

4.1.1.14 Philosophical Inquiry and Narrative Depth

Okri's adept manipulation of time and space invites readers into a philosophical inquiry about reality, human existence, and the mystical forces that govern our lives. Through the interplay of these elements, Okri deepens thematic exploration and offers a layered narrative that resonates with broader cultural and existential inquiries.

The interplay of time and space in *The Famished Road* showcases Okri's narrative prowess and his ability to craft a rich, multi-dimensional story. By weaving together temporal distortions, metaphorical constraints, and philosophical undertones, Okri creates a narrative tapestry that invites readers to contemplate the complex interplay between reality, perception, and the forces that shape our existence.

4.1.1.15 Integration of the Supernatural with the Sociopolitical

Okri's use of magical realism serves as more than just an artistic flourish; it acts as "a crucial narrative mechanism that integrates the mystical with the everyday realities" (Hawley 14) of Nigerian life. The supernatural elements, such as "the recurring motif of the three-headed ghost" (Okri 212), are seamlessly woven into the fabric of Azaro's world, serving as metaphors for the multi-layered struggles that the characters face. These spirits and visions are not distractions from reality but rather deep reflections of the political and social upheaval surrounding the characters.

4.1.1.16 Human Agency and Environmental Influence

The character of Azaro's father exemplifies the themes of resilience and adaptability, which are central to Okri's narrative. Despite his blindness, he embodies a potent form of agency, actively shaping his identity and role in response to the shifting landscapes around him. His evolution from "a family man into a political figure" (Okri 309) reflects the novel's deeper commentary on the potential for personal and collective transformation in the face of challenging circumstances.

4.1.1.17 Symbolic Characters and Their Roles

The character of Azaro's father, the 'Black Tyger', symbolizes the fight against oppressive societal forces. His transformation from a "concerned parent into a boxer and a politician" (Okri 310) mirrors the broader narrative of struggle and resistance within the community. Each bout in the boxing ring symbolizes a confrontation with the colonial past and the corrupt present, illustrating the "ongoing battle for autonomy and dignity in a post-colonial world" (Slemon 27).

Madame Koto represents another facet of this new identity struggle. Her dual role as both ally and antagonist to Azaro and his family highlights the complex interplay between traditional values and the emerging political realities of independence. Her character embodies the tension between historical spiritual beliefs and the encroaching forces of modernity, illustrating the multifaceted challenges facing individuals in newly independent African nations.

4.1.1.18 Interweaving of Multiple Perspectives

The narrative's depth is further enriched by the interweaving of multiple perspectives. While Azaro is the primary narrator, Okri occasionally shifts to other characters' viewpoints, providing alternative insights into the novel's events. For instance, the perspectives of Azaro's parents highlight the daily struggles and the harsh realities of life in a Nigerian shantytown, which contrast with Azaro's more mystical experiences. These shifts in perspective not only deepen the reader's understanding of the characters' lives but also "emphasize the socio-economic and political themes of the novel" (Okri 93).

Furthermore, the incorporation of folklore and traditional beliefs into the narrative adds another layer of depth. These elements are often presented through stories told by other characters, enriching the cultural backdrop against which the novel's events unfold. This technique not only preserves these cultural narratives but also "highlights their relevance in shaping the community's worldview and responses to their challenges" (Ryan 22).

4.1.2 Temporal Constructs

The constructs that are present in the different temporal layers are called temporal constructions. These ideas help readers focus on a variety of past, present, and future topics.

4.1.2.1 The Temporal Framework

Okri disrupts linear time progression through Azaro's repeated deaths and rebirths, reflecting the traditional African belief in the cyclical nature of life. Each cycle Azaro undergoes adds layers of meaning to the narrative, reflecting changes within the community, shifts in personal relationships, and transformations in Azaro's own understanding of his dual existence. This portrayal of time challenges Western narratives that emphasize progression and finality, offering instead a view of time as endless, where past, present, and future intertwine and influence each other continuously.

4.1.2.2 Temporal Settings and Non-linear Time

The events under "the crescent moon" (Okri 13) illustrate the non-linear conception of time in *The Famished Road*. The moon itself is a powerful symbol in many cultures, often associated with cyclical change and the passage of time. Its presence during these supernatural encounters underscores the fluidity and cyclical nature of time in the novel, which moves back and forth between the past, present, and future, often in ways that disrupt traditional Western narratives of time as a linear progression.

4.1.2.3 Temporal Complexity

Okri eschews a linear temporal progression in favor of a cyclical conception deeply rooted in African cultural perceptions of time as fluid and recursive. This narrative choice disrupts Western linear narratives of progress and finality, presenting time as an endless loop where past, present, and future are intertwined and mutually influential. Each of Azaro's returns to the physical world, while repetitive, introduces variations that enrich the narrative with new insights and experiences, emphasizing the non-linear and layered nature of time. The integration of flashbacks, visions, and prophetic insights allows historical, present, and futuristic elements to coexist within the narrative, challenging readers to perceive time beyond a mere chronological sequence.

Azaro's illness is a pivotal narrative element that Okri uses to explore 'Narrating Time' (Haqshenas 25), a concept where time is experienced and recounted through personal narrative rather than measured by clocks. This form of time unfolds dynamically as Azaro narrates his "ongoing struggle with illness, connecting past afflictions with his present condition" (Okri 87). Such subjective temporality, marked by physical and emotional states, offers a stark contrast to the objective, chronological progression of time, presenting a multi-layered reality that mirrors Azaro's liminal existence between the worlds of the living and the spirits.

4.1.2.4 The Cyclical Nature of Time

Aristotle's concept of time involves the 'now' as not static but a point of transition, a juncture that both separates and connects the past and the future (Aristotle, "Physics"). In *The Famished Road*, Azaro's repeated births and deaths embody this dynamic nature of the 'now.' Each return to the physical world is not just a repetition but a continuation, where the 'now' serves as a transient moment that links his past experiences with his potential futures. This portrayal highlights the fluidity of time, where the past, present, and future are seen not as discrete entities but as interconnected segments of a continuous flow (Okri). In Okri's narrative, time is portrayed as cyclical rather than linear, reflecting traditional African beliefs in the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. Azaro, as an 'Abiku' or spirit child, is caught in a perpetual cycle of birth and rebirth, which challenges Western narratives that emphasize progression and finality. Each return to the physical world enriches Azaro's experiences, adding depth and complexity to the novel's exploration of existential themes. Azaro, a spirit child or 'Abiku', is caught in a "cycle of perpetual rebirth" (Okri 4), making the concept of time in the novel inherently cyclical rather than linear. This 'Cyclical time' (Bakhtin 9) challenges Western narratives of progression and finality, embodying traditional African views of time as a continuous loop where the past, present, and future are interconnected and influence one another. Each of Azaro's rebirths does not merely repeat the cycle but adds layers of complexity and depth, allowing Okri to delve deeper into the existential and spiritual questions that define Azaro's experiences.

4.1.2.5 Subjective Experience of Time

In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, the representation of subjective experiences of time plays a crucial role in character development and the unfolding of the narrative. J. Hillis Miller, in his seminal work *Time in Literature*, explores the complex interplay between "narrative time and character consciousness" (24), providing a useful framework for analyzing how Okri manipulates "subjective time to deepen the reader's understanding of character and thematic expression" (Miller 32).

'Subjective time' (Miller 32) in *The Famished Road* is primarily experienced through the protagonist, Azaro, an Abiku or spirit child who exists between the worlds of the living and the spirits. Azaro's unique existential condition allows Okri to explore time not as a linear progression but as a cyclical and often fragmented experience that reflects the "non-linear and cyclical perceptions of time found in traditional African cultures" (Okri 12). Azaro's repeated departures from and returns to life mean his perception of time is inherently disjointed and non-sequential, which profoundly impacts his understanding of the world and his place within it.

4.1.3 Spatial Constructs

Spatial structures provide a way to convey space, its meaning, and its development inside a story. These literary devices help readers understand how places are changed to meet the needs of the characters in the book.

4.1.3.1 Fluidity of Space

In Okri's narrative, space is depicted as fluid and expansive, blending the physical with the spiritual. Azaro's journey through varied settings—"his home, local bars, and mystical realms" (Okri 136)—does not merely represent physical movement but signifies deeper spiritual and existential crossings. These spaces are not fixed; they transform and respond to the characters' internal states, reflecting their struggles, dreams, and transformations. This fluidity of space is crucial for depicting the novel's rich tapestry of experiences that transcend simple geographical or physical limitations.

Space in Okri's work is depicted as fluid and transformative. It transcends mere physical geography to become a landscape of mind and spirit. This portrayal emphasizes the novel's magical realism, where the settings— "be they markets, forests, or bars" (Okri 78), become arenas of spiritual reflection and social interaction. These spaces are charged with symbolism and significance, reflecting both the socio-political landscape of post-colonial Nigeria and the internal journey of the protagonist.

In Okri's narrative, space transcends its conventional geographic and physical constraints, evolving into a realm where the tangible and metaphysical coalesce. The settings, "streets, markets, homes" (Okri 122) are charged with symbolic significance and are central to the characters' journeys. These are not static backdrops but 'Dynamic spaces' (Umrigar 24) that reflect and influence the characters' internal and external explorations. Spaces fluctuate between reality and mysticism, mirroring the spiritual and emotional landscapes of the characters, and acting as conduits for deeper existential explorations.

4.1.3.2 Symbolism of Spatial Settings

Okri uses specific settings not merely as backgrounds for action but as symbols of broader existential and philosophical inquiries. The streets, markets, and bars are realms of spiritual reflection, social interaction, and political contestation, reflecting the instability of the post-colonial state and the protagonist's quest for identity and belonging. These spaces are charged with symbolic meaning, each locale offering "insights into the socio-political and spiritual upheavals that the characters navigate" (Adorjan 12).

In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, space is not merely a physical entity but a construct imbued with social, historical, and cultural significance. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's concept from "The Production of Space", this analysis explores how the spaces within Okri's novel are "socially produced and represent various intersections of historical and cultural narratives" (12). Lefebvre argues that "space is a product, constructed by social practices, and reflects the complexities of the societies that create and use it" (67). In *The Famished Road*, spaces such as the marketplace, the bar, and the roads are not only settings but active elements in the narrative that contribute to the thematic exploration of identity, spirituality, and postcolonial struggle.

4.1.3.3 Symbolism of the Forest and Supernatural Encounters

The forest, as depicted in Okri's narrative, functions as a 'Critical space' (Guignery 5) of enchantment and danger, representing a threshold between the known and the unknown. It is more than a mere setting; it is a "liminal space where the boundaries between the physical and the spiritual blur" (Guignery 8), reflecting the constant interplay between these realms in Azaro's life. The forest swarms with unearthly beings, making it a site of constant supernatural activity that mirrors the tumult of the human world Azaro navigates. This space is representative of traditional African spirituality, which often views natural settings as alive with ancestral spirits and elemental forces.

4.1.3.4 Mythic Dimensions: Witchcraft and Supernatural Influence

Furthermore, Madame Koto's portrayal with elements of witchcraft adds layers to the narrative space, blending 'Mythic time' (Rau 19) into the bar's atmosphere. Villagers' beliefs in her supernatural influence embed the bar within a narrative of mysticism and moral ambiguity, highlighting its role as a place of both material and mystical exchanges.

Madame Koto's versatile actions—from culinary tasks to healing endeavors—mirror her complex role within the community and the dual nature of her space, oscillating "between social gathering and supernatural intrigue" (Okri 177).

4.1.3.5 The Road as a Symbolic and Historical Space

The roads in *The Famished Road* are emblematic spaces that carry deep symbolic and historical meanings. For Azaro, the spirit child, roads represent paths between life and death, the physical and the spiritual worlds. These roads are spaces of transition and transformation, reflecting the journey of the Nigerian people toward independence and beyond. According to Lefebvre, the road can be seen as a representation of the state and the public, a "place where the hegemony can impose its power but also a space of revolution and change" (Lefebvre 27). Okri uses the road to explore themes of destiny and choice, weaving historical narratives of colonialism and post-colonial identity into the physical journeys of his characters.

4.1.3.6 Spatial Dynamics and Literary Space

The spaces in Okri's narrative—be they Azaro's home, the bar, the marketplace, or the ethereal realms he visits—are depicted as much more than mere settings. They interact dynamically with the temporal elements of the story, influencing and being influenced by the cyclical events of Azaro's journeys. These spaces are laden with symbolic significance, serving as battlegrounds for cultural, spiritual, and political conflicts and as sites of personal and collective transformation.

The 'Familiar space' (Okri 78) that Azaro returns to, which initially confounds him, highlights the theme of memory and recognition in the novel. This space, infused with the "ethereal voices of children and the idyllic imagery of gardens and flowers" (Okri 22), stands in stark contrast to the harsh realities of Azaro's urban environment. It symbolizes a return to innocence or a retrieval of a lost past, encapsulating the novel's exploration of identity and belonging through spatial metaphors. This aligns with Lotman's theory (2015) that literary space can reflect a model of the world, illustrating how spatial representations in literature can encapsulate complex themes and character developments.

4.1.3.7 The Disturbing Encounter: Symbolism and Narrative Space

When Azaro visits Madame Koto "to update her on his mother's critical health" (Okri 105), he is confronted by a scene where "Koto wrestles with a large chicken in her backyard" (Okri 107). This moment symbolizes her struggle to maintain control over her livelihood and identity, illustrating how space within the narrative can embody deeper narrative dimensions—a concept encapsulated as 'narrative space', where characters like Madame Koto are shaped by societal norms.

Madame Koto's identity as a bar owner and alleged witch is deeply intertwined with her establishment, serving as a microcosm reflecting the village's cultural dynamics. The bar, "steeped in cultural and patriarchal values" (Okri 87), forces Madame Koto to navigate a complex role as both nurturer and perceived threat.

4.1.3.8 Cultural Significance of Dark Zones

The dark zones that Azaro is drawn into are laden with cultural significance. These areas, characterized by their obscurity and association with danger, are metaphorical representations of the unknown challenges and perils that Azaro must navigate. The “spirits’ laughter and the general sense of unease” (Okri 88) that pervades these dark spaces serve to heighten the sense of mystery and danger associated with the spiritual journeys that Azaro undertakes. This not only adds a layer of suspense and intrigue to the narrative but also deepens the reader’s engagement with the spiritual themes of the book.

4.1.3.9 Transitioning Between Realms

The shift from the bar, a ‘Social and Communal space’ (Lefebvre 9), to the forest, a “place of solitude and supernatural encounters” (Okri 96), highlights the fragmented yet interconnected nature of the spaces Azaro inhabits. This transition is reflective of his role as a bridge between different worlds, navigating complex social dynamics and profound spiritual experiences. Each space Azaro enters is not only a physical location but also a stage upon which the larger narrative of his life and the lives of those around him plays out, replete with challenges, transformations, and revelations.

Ben Okri crafts a narrative that is as much about the physical journeys between spaces as it is about the spiritual and temporal journeys between different realms of existence. This intricate interweaving of time and space serves not just to propel the narrative but to deepen the thematic core of the novel, exploring issues of identity, spirituality, and the impact of cultural and historical legacies on individual and collective consciousness.

This integration of narrative and cultural space in *The Famished Road* serves as a profound commentary on the impact of environmental and cultural conditions on individual experiences and identities. The spaces in which Azaro finds himself are charged with cultural significance and narrative potential, influencing his perceptions and interactions. These spaces are not passive; they actively participate in the narrative, contributing to its thematic depth and complexity.

4.1.3.10 The Significance of Confined Spaces

The ‘Confined space’ (Osha 85) of the room, where Azaro awakens, is emblematic of the limitations and constraints imposed by his cultural and physical environment. This space is described in detail, focusing on its cramped and uncomfortable nature, which metaphorically reflects the restrictive aspects of Azaro’s life and the lives of those around him. The detailed description of the physical setting “its uneven floors, the creeping insects, and the general sense of disarray” (Okri 19) serves as a microcosm of the larger societal and existential issues faced by the characters.

4.1.3.11 Magical Realism and Spatial Ambiguity

Magical realism is another crucial device that Okri uses to blur the lines between different realms of existence, creating spaces that are both real and surreal. In *The Famished Road*, the everyday environment is infused with elements of the supernatural, making ordinary settings become arenas of mystical significance. For instance, the marketplace is depicted as a place where the “living can encounter spirits and otherworldly beings, transforming a common public space into a site of magical encounters” (Okri 178).

This blending of the real and the fantastical enables Okri to explore deeper metaphysical themes such as destiny, spirituality, and the nature of reality. It also allows for a richer, more complex portrayal of the Nigerian setting, reflecting the “cultural belief in the coexistence of multiple spiritual dimensions alongside the physical world” (Finn 3).

4.1.3.12 The Marketplace as a ‘Social Space’

The marketplace in *The Famished Road* serves as a quintessential example of socially produced space. It is a bustling hub of activity where economic, social, and supernatural elements converge. This space is depicted as a microcosm of the community where traditional African life blends with the impacts of modern economic forces. Here, the marketplace becomes a site of cultural exchange but also of “exploitation, reflecting the historical impacts of colonial economic policies” (Njoku 9). As Okri describes the interactions within the marketplace, it becomes evident that this space is shaped by the collective needs, fears, and

hopes of the community. The marketplace is thus not just a place for buying and selling but a space where communal relationships are enacted and redefined.

4.1.3.13 The Role of Space in Thematic Exploration

Okri uses space to explore themes such as identity, belonging, and transformation. The fluidity and ambiguity of the spaces in *The Famished Road* reflect the fluid nature of identity and the constant transformation that defines the human condition. Azaro's interactions with these spaces "ranging from the tightly confined interiors of his home to the expansive, mystical realms of the forest" (Okri 109) highlight his quest for understanding and belonging. These spatial experiences are integral to the thematic exploration of the novel, providing a rich, textured backdrop against which the story's deeper meanings are unveiled.

In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri masterfully crafts a narrative where space and time are not merely settings or chronological backdrops but are integral components of the story's structure and meaning. The novel's intricate interplay between narrative and cultural space showcases Okri's profound understanding of the role of environment in shaping human experience. Through Azaro's journey, the novel invites readers to consider the ways in which our spaces, both physical and cultural—shape our identities, actions, and perceptions. The dynamic and symbiotic relationship between space and narrative in Okri's work not only enhances the story's depth but also challenges readers to think more deeply about the spaces they inhabit and how these spaces influence their own lives.

Okri's narrative in *The Famished Road* delves deeply into the interconnectedness of time, space, and narrative events, showcasing how these "elements merge to create a rich tapestry of experiences and meanings" (Slemon 29). The incidents inside Madam Koto's bar serve as a microcosm of this intricate interplay, where spatial shifts mirror temporal changes and characters' identities are reflected and influenced by their environments.

4.1.3.14 ‘Narrative Space’ as a Reflection of Identity

Madam Koto’s identity as a bar owner is intricately linked to the ‘Narrative space’ she occupies. The bar becomes a symbolic representation of her role in the community and the values associated with it. The shift in space from the bar to Azaro’s home and back again emphasizes the narrative’s fluidity and the interconnectedness of events across different spatial settings.

4.1.3.15 ‘Perceived Space’

‘Perceived space’ (Warnes 16) refers to the physical and material aspects of space that can be empirically observed and experienced. In *The Famished Road*, the tangible environment of the Nigerian shanty town where Azaro and his family live is a prime example of perceived space. This setting is vividly described by Okri with bustling streets, chaotic markets, and ramshackle homes, which not only serve as “a backdrop for the narrative but also as a fundamental component of the characters’ daily realities” (Okri 32). The materiality of these spaces is intricately portrayed, with detailed descriptions of the sights, sounds, and smells that define the community’s physical landscape. This empirical detailing helps to ground the magical realism of the novel with a strong sense of place, “anchoring the supernatural elements within a recognizably real world” (Warnes 12).

4.1.3.16 ‘Conceived Space’

‘Conceived space, according to Lefebvre, is “the space of representations” (2). It encompasses the ways in which “space is imagined, planned, and ideologically conceived, often by those in power, such as urban planners, architects, or politicians” (Lefebvre 13). In *The Famished Road*, conceived space can be seen in the political rhetoric surrounding the community’s development, where “politicians promise infrastructural improvements and economic upliftment as part of their campaigns” (Booker 8).

These promises and plans, often unfulfilled, shape the inhabitants’ expectations and perceptions of their environment. The contrast between the politicians’ grandiose promises and the stark reality of the community’s living conditions creates a dissonance that is keenly felt by Azaro and other characters. This

aspect of space is critical for understanding the broader socio-political commentary Okri weaves through the “narrative, critiquing the failures of governmental and civic systems in post-colonial societies” (Cooper 18).

4.1.3.17 ‘Lived Space’

‘Lived space’ (Panasko 6) pertains to the space as directly experienced and modified by its inhabitants, encompassing the physical and mental space of daily life. It is a combination of perceived and conceived spaces but is deeply influenced by the “personal and cultural meanings that individuals attach to their surroundings” (Panasko 11). In *The Famished Road*, lived space is most vividly embodied in the spiritual interactions that permeate the characters’ everyday experiences.

Azaro’s encounters with spirits and his journeys between the spiritual and physical realms exemplify lived space in that they are deeply subjective and reflective of personal and cultural beliefs about the spirit world. These experiences, though fantastical, are integrated into the “routine of daily life, thus blurring the lines between the ordinary and the supernatural” (Finn 11). The way Azaro and other characters navigate these interactions highlights the deeply ingrained spiritual traditions of the community, illustrating how cultural beliefs and practices shape their understanding and experience of space.

4.1.4 Conglomeration of Time and Space

Both time and place are interdependent and cannot exist as independent entities in any narrative; this is what gives the story its cohesive elements.

Time functions as a secondary construct that shifts alongside the spatial dynamics. The progression of events, from “Azaro informing Koto about his mother to her subsequent actions” (Okri 129) and the treatment of Azaro’s mom, illustrates how time is woven into the narrative fabric. This interconnectedness of time and space creates a cohesive narrative universe where events unfold in parallel with temporal shifts.

Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope is evident in the narrative’s treatment of space and time. The space between Azaro as the narrator and Madam Koto as a

bar owner represents a specific chronotope where identities, beliefs, and societal perceptions intersect. The description of Koto's history of witchcraft and her bar's reputation adds layers of meaning to this chronotope, highlighting the temporal depth embedded within spatial constructs.

4.1.4.1 Temporal and Spatial Dynamics

The narrative's use of time and space extends beyond conventional structuring. By employing flashbacks, visions, and nonlinear progression, Okri disrupts the traditional flow of time, allowing historical, present, and future elements to coexist within the narrative. This approach reflects the non-linear ways in which individuals experience life and memory, especially within cultures that view time as a more holistic and cyclical entity.

Through *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri not only tells a compelling story but also offers a deeper understanding of the human condition as shaped by the interplay of time and space. His innovative narrative techniques challenge readers to reconsider traditional structures and engage with the text in a way that reflects the complexities of life and existence. Okri's work is a profound contribution to contemporary literature, providing insight into African spiritual traditions and postmodern narrative forms, and inviting readers into a richly textured world where the boundaries of time and space are not boundaries at all, but fluid dimensions that shape and are shaped by human experiences.

In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri constructs a narrative that transcends mere storytelling to delve into the profound complexities of time, space, and identity within a post-colonial Nigerian setting. This novel, through its intricate blend of the physical and supernatural realms, offers not only a narrative journey but also a deep thematic exploration of "societal and spiritual complexities that characterize contemporary African societies" (Okri 56). Okri's portrayal of time as cyclical and space as fluid is pivotal in depicting the narrative's depth. The non-linear progression of time, where past, present, and future intertwine, reflects the cyclical nature of historical and personal events, suggesting that progress is not linear but an ongoing dialogue with history.

4.1.4.2 Interdependence of Time and Space

Okri intricately links time and space, showing how they coalesce to shape the narrative's structure and the characters' perceptions. Time in *The Famished Road* is non-linear, echoing the "characters' internal rhythms and the cyclical nature of the spirit world" (Hawley 22). Spatial changes often correspond with shifts in temporal perception, affecting how characters understand their place in the world. This interdependence is a key aspect of Okri's narrative technique, allowing him to explore complex themes such as identity, memory, and reality.

Okri masterfully interweaves time and space to shape his narrative. In *The Famished Road*, these elements are not isolated; they interact dynamically, influencing how characters perceive their reality and destiny. Changes in spatial understanding often lead to shifts in temporal perception, which impacts the characters' actions and the narrative's progression. This relationship highlights the complexity of Okri's storytelling and his ability to meld traditional African and postmodern narrative techniques.

Okri portrays time and space as interconnected dimensions, each shaping and reshaping the other within the narrative framework. This interplay affects how characters perceive their realities and their roles within them. As time is cyclical, "spaces are revisited and reinterpreted, enriching the narrative with a complex dialogue between time and space" (Bakhtin 18). This relationship is pivotal for exploring themes of identity, memory, and belonging, as characters navigate a world that shifts around them.

The Famished Road is not merely a story about navigating between two worlds but a profound exploration of the complexities of time and space. Okri's use of magical realism "expands narrative possibilities, exploring themes of life, death, and existence" (Fulford 12) in ways that challenge the traditional confines of storytelling. Through Azaro's journey, Okri comments on the human condition within a post-colonial context, reflecting on the continuous cycles of life and the quest for understanding and connection in a changing world.

Okri's narrative invites readers to rethink their understanding of reality, offering a vision of time and space as fluid constructs that define and are

defined by human experiences. The novel's rich narrative structure and thematic depth make it a significant work in contemporary African literature and postmodern narrative practice, providing profound insights into the spiritual and cultural dynamics of African life and the universal search for identity and belonging in the face of historical changes and challenges.

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* offers a profound exploration of the fluid dynamics of time and space, presenting a narrative that weaves through the tangible experiences of Azaro and the mystical, often intangible realms he navigates. This interplay between the physical and spiritual worlds is central to understanding the novel's deep narrative structure and thematic richness, which challenges conventional perceptions of time as a linear progression.

Space in *The Famished Road* is depicted as a fluid and expansive entity, interacting dynamically with the novel's portrayal of time. Azaro's movements through various "locales—be it his home, the local bar, or the mystical realms" (Okri 187) he visits—do not just signify physical movement but are deeply tied to his spiritual and temporal journeys. These spaces are imbued with cultural and metaphysical significance, acting as conduits for exploring deeper existential themes. The settings, therefore, transcend their geographical definitions, becoming spaces where spiritual and temporal dimensions converge.

4.1.4.3 Merging point of Temporal and Spatial Constructs

In Okri's narrative, time and space are portrayed not as isolated dimensions but as "interconnected entities that influence and reshape each other" (Bakhtin 11). Changes in spatial understanding correspond to shifts in the perception of time, affecting how characters perceive their realities and destinies. This relationship is particularly evident in how spatial transformations in the narrative often lead to altered perceptions of time, thereby affecting the characters' interactions with their world and each other.

Through his intricate weaving of time and space, Okri not only crafts a compelling narrative but also offers a profound commentary on the nature of existence, identity, and community within the context of Nigerian society. The

novel's exploration of these themes through the lens of Azaro's experiences invites readers to consider the broader implications of time and space in shaping human experiences. Okri's innovative narrative techniques and his philosophical exploration of time and space challenge readers to move beyond conventional storylines and engage with the text in a manner that reflects a more complex, intertwined reality.

In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri intricately weaves the concepts of time and space into the fabric of his narrative, challenging conventional storytelling and engaging deeply with philosophical questions about human existence. Through the experiences of Azaro, an 'Abiku' or spirit child, Okri explores the fluid nature of these dimensions, depicting a world where the physical and the spiritual are inextricably linked.

In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, the integration of spatial and temporal elements is a pivotal narrative strategy that enhances thematic expressions and character interactions. This synthesis reflects James A.W. Heffernan's exploration of the relationship between space and time in literature, as detailed in his work "Space and Time in Literature and the Visual Arts," where he argues that space and time are not only interrelated but also co-constitutive in narrative forms (Heffernan). Okri's novel, rich with magical realism and African mythic tradition, exemplifies this dynamic, using the interplay between space and time to deepen the narrative's philosophical and existential questions.

4.1.4.4 Time, Space and Reader Engagement

Okri's narrative strategy involves using time as both a structural and thematic device, influencing the reader's engagement with the text. The novel's structure, with its complex interweaving of events across different temporal and spatial dimensions, compels readers to question linear time and static space. This engagement is enriched by the "transformation of Azaro's father into the 'Black Tyger' (Okri 221), symbolizing his response to the changing times and his evolving role within both his family and the wider community.

4.1.4.5 Azaro's Spiritual Encounters

One of the most vivid chronotopic moments in *The Famished Road* occurs during Azaro's spiritual encounters. For instance, when Azaro visits the spirit world, the normal flow of time ceases to apply, and the "space around him transforms into a realm filled with symbolic imagery and ethereal presences" (Okri 58). These episodes are not confined to a specific location or time frame, illustrating Bakhtin's concept where time gets "merged and becomes responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history" (Bakhtin 12).

4.1.4.6 The Night Masquerade

"The night masquerade scene" (Okri 167) is another chronotopic moment where the festival, traditionally held to connect the community with the spirit world, becomes a space where past, present, and future merge. Here, Azaro sees spirits and real people interacting, which disrupts the conventional separation between different realms and times. This event exemplifies how Okri uses the chronotope "to blur the boundaries between the supernatural and the mundane, reflecting the coexistence of multiple realities".

4.1.4.7 Azaro's Rebirths

Each of Azaro's rebirths represents a significant chronotopic moment. These events are spatially located in the physical world but are heavily laden with temporal implications that resonate with the spiritual world. His returns from death signify not just the continuation of life but also the cyclical nature of existence, a key theme in the novel that challenges linear perceptions of time and "highlights the interconnectedness of temporal cycles with physical spaces" (Finn 7).

4.1.4.8 Metaphysical Implications of Time and Space

The confluence of the physical and spirit worlds in Azaro's experiences serves as a critical narrative junction where time and space are both separate and unified. Okri uses these moments to blur the boundaries between different realms, enhancing the narrative's complexity and inviting readers "to contemplate the metaphysical implications of such depictions" (Anasiudu 13). These interactions not only deepen the narrative but also resonate with broader existential themes, exploring the nature of reality and human perception.

The Famished Road stands out not only as a story of a spirit child navigating between worlds but also as a profound philosophical exploration of the constructs of time and space. Okri's innovative narrative techniques and the depth of his thematic exploration make the novel a significant work in contemporary literature, offering new ways to understand the complexities of life and existence. Through Azaro's journey, Okri articulates a narrative that transcends the physical, reaching into the spiritual and existential, and in doing so, redefines our understanding of reality.

In *The Famished Road*, Ben Okri's narrative exemplifies a profound application of Gerard Genette's (1980) theories from Narratology, crafting a story where the "temporal and spatial sequences are interwoven with remarkable complexity" (42). The narrative unfolds non-linearly, reflecting a sophisticated manipulation of time and space that aligns seamlessly with Genette's framework. This analysis explores the relationship between various segments of the narrative, highlighting their temporal and spatial attributes and how they relate to one another within the story's broader thematic and structural context.

4.1.4.9 Understanding the Chronotope in *The Famished Road*

Bakhtin's chronotope refers to the way literature connects time and space into a single continuum, "where time thickens...takes on flesh...becomes artistically visible" (12); likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the "movements of time, plot, and history" (28). In *The Famished Road*, this concept is vividly illustrated as Azaro, the spirit child, navigates through his "cyclical existence between the spiritual and material realms" (Okri 37), revealing the fluid nature of both time and space as dictated by his experiences and existential struggles.

Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope is evident in the narrative's treatment of space and time. The space between Azaro as the narrator and Madam Koto as a bar owner represents a specific chronotope where identities, beliefs, and societal perceptions intersect. The description of Koto's history of witchcraft and her bar's reputation adds layers of meaning to this chronotope, highlighting the temporal depth embedded within spatial constructs.

In *The Famished Road*, time and space are portrayed as interdependent dimensions, each shaping the other. Azaro's journeys across different locales are not mere physical movements but are deeply entwined with his spiritual and temporal explorations. This relationship is highlighted during scenes where shifts in the "narrative's temporal structure correspond to transformations in spatial perception" (Okri 167), thereby influencing how characters perceive and interact with their world.

4.1.4.10 Symbolism and Thematic Depth

Okri uses the chronotope not only as a narrative technique but also as a thematic tool. The fluidity of time and the expansiveness of space in the novel serve as metaphors for post-colonial Nigeria's socio-political landscape and the existential questions facing its people. The novel's spaces, especially those that bridge the real and the spiritual—such as the "bar owned by Madame Koto or the mystical forest" (232)—function as symbols of the characters' internal and external conflicts, reflecting the complex interplay of history, culture, and spirituality.

4.1.4.11 The Chronotope's Impact on Narrative and Reader

The cyclical and layered nature of time in *The Famished Road*, coupled with its dynamic spatial representations, compels readers to engage with the narrative on multiple levels. It challenges them to reconsider not only the linear progression of time but also the conventional understanding of space as static and contained. Through this engagement, Okri fosters a deeper contemplation of existence beyond the tangible world, inviting reflections on the metaphysical implications of his depiction of time and space.

Through the elaborate use of the chronotope, Okri's *The Famished Road* transcends traditional storytelling to offer a profound commentary on life's cyclical nature and the fluid boundaries between the spiritual and the physical. This narrative strategy enhances the novel's philosophical depth, providing a rich, multi-dimensional experience that reflects the complexities of human life and the enduring impacts of cultural and historical forces. The chronotope, thus, is not merely a backdrop against which the story unfolds but a crucial

component of the narrative's very essence, shaping every aspect of the novel's structure, themes, and character development. Through this innovative narrative approach, Okri not only tells a story but also invites readers to explore a world where the constructs of time and space are vividly reimagined, offering new insights into the nature of reality and human existence.

In *The Famished Road*, the dynamics between the natural, social, and mystical realms are brought into sharp focus through Ben Okri's masterful narrative techniques. These transitions are not just shifts in geographical location but are imbued with deep symbolic meaning, reflecting Azaro's complex interactions with the worlds he inhabits and the fluid nature of his reality.

4.1.4.12 Temporal Dynamics: Interplay of Time and Action

The swift transition of Madame Koto from "handling the chicken to attending to Azaro's mother" (Okri 108) highlights the narrative's seamless integration of time, reflecting life's urgent challenges and responses. This scene resonates with Mikhail Bakhtin's 'Chronotope,' where "space is infused with temporal movements, creating charged environments pivotal to the narrative" (32).

4.1.4.13 The Road: A Space-Time Continuum

The road in *The Famished Road* serves as a literal and metaphorical pathway, representing both a journey through time and a traversal across spaces. It embodies Panasenکو's idea that narrative space can be "constructed through temporal dynamics" (Panasenکو 11). As Azaro wanders these roads, they depict not just his physical journey but also his passage through "various life stages, reflecting the intertwined paths of destiny and choice" (Okri 32).

This space-time continuum is crucial for expressing the novel's thematic concerns with fate and free will. The roads lead to encounters that influence Azaro's future, showing how time (future outcomes) is inextricably linked to space (the road and its destinations). This relationship between time and space highlights the transformative potential of travel and movement within the narrative, underscoring the road's role as a catalyst for change and discovery.

4.1.4.14 Intricate Relationship of Time and Space in *The Famished Road*

Ben Okri's novel *The Famished Road* delves into the intricate relationship between time and space, utilizing them as fundamental "elements that shape both the narrative structure and thematic depth" (Bakhtin 32). One notable passage in the novel, where Azaro "experiences abduction by spirits" (Okri 67), serves as a microcosm of Okri's mastery in intertwining these dimensions to create a compelling narrative.

A Dance of Time and Space: The passage that vividly portrays Azaro's abduction through his tumultuous journey through "bustling roads, capturing not just his physical disorientation but also his profound existential turmoil" (Okri 219). The spirits' manipulation of time and space compresses and stretches these dimensions unnervingly, reflecting Azaro's lack of agency and control over his surroundings.

4.1.4.15 The Politician's Rally

Political events, such as the rally, serve as chronotopic moments where historical time intersects with the narrative present. During these rallies, the political history of "Nigeria and its impact on the characters' lives are condensed into the speeches and actions of the politicians" (Okri 389). These scenes reflect the socio-political landscape and its influence on the community's physical space, thereby encapsulating Bakhtin's idea of the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" (12).

4.1.4.16 The Bar Episodes

Madame Koto's bar is a recurring setting that epitomizes the fusion of time and space. It is a social hub that reflects the changing dynamics of the community but also a place where different temporal layers of the community's history are revealed. As the bar transforms from a modest local spot to a thriving center of political activity, it mirrors "the broader socio-economic transformations occurring in the nation" (Okri 92).

The bar becomes more than a physical location, becoming a 'Charged space' (Bakhtin 9) where past, present, and future converge through community interactions. Bakhtin's concept of 'Narrative time' (Panasenko 12) shaping

different spatial types is evident, as the bar becomes a nexus for the community's emotions and conflicts.

4.1.4.17 Metaphorical Constraints:

The Bag and Time Distortions: Azaro's "confinement in the spirits' bag" (Okri 214) acts as a metaphor for his constrained movement through both literal and metaphorical spaces. The narrative's distortion of time creates a disoriented state, mirroring Azaro's physical restrictions and emotional turmoil.

4.1.5 Conclusion

The title *The Famished Road* serves as a potent metaphor for desire and destiny, embodying themes of desire, lack, and the ceaseless pursuit of fulfillment. Its network of paths symbolizes life's choices and intersections with fate, challenging conventional notions of temporal constraints and destiny. As Azaro navigates the spiritually charged road of 'Liminal Realm' (Freeman 17), reality and the supernatural coalesce, shaping each other in profound ways. The road transforms into a labyrinthine entity where past, present, and future converge and diverge, highlighting the fluidity of time and space.

In conclusion, *The Famished Road* exemplifies Okri's mastery in intertwining time, space, and narrative intricacies. The fluidity of spatial shifts, the temporal progression of events, and the symbolic significance of spaces reflect the novel's thematic depth and philosophical inquiries into human existence. Through these spatial and temporal constructs, Okri invites readers to explore the interconnected dimensions of identity, culture, and narrative agency, creating a narrative landscape beyond the traditional boundaries by offering profound insights into the lives of human beings.

4.2 Treatment of Time and Space in *Astonishing the Gods*

Astonishing the Gods is a novel by Booker Prize winning author Ben Okri. This dream-like narrative of Okri transports the readers undergoing the journey through an enchanted island, in which the philosophy of life is explored through the different encounters by the narrator and experiences in a quest to discover the secrets of visibility and invisibility. Ben Okri wrote this novel while he was on a fast. The descriptions of the book read like a Biblical manifestation of

heaven as “roads adorned with jewels, angels, and emerald-horned unicorns” (Okri 280). The Readers’ attention is captured by the writer’s use of surrealistic imagery that scratches the surface of the vision. This is a short novel but with a huge scope.

The protagonist of this novel is an anonymous personality who identifies himself as invisible and after much traveling recovers himself at a mysterious port that he treated as the starting point of his journey into the meaning of his self-existence and the philosophy of life. In this book, Ben Okri draws the outstanding and magical pathway of a man tormented by finding out why he was invisible. The man in this discovery of self encounters dangers, the temptations and the advice of the spiritual attendants along the way.

The novel *Astonishing the Gods* designates the fluid interplay of time and space through which there is an incorporation of ‘magical’ or ‘supernatural’ elements like mythical elements, spirits, several dimensions, etc in a real-world setting. Brenda Cooper rightly states that in order to illustrate the paradox of the unity of opposites, magical realism attempts to subvert polarities such as “history vs magic, the precolonial past versus the post-industrial present, and life versus death” (1). Being able to capture these borders between spaces means existing in a third space, in the rich spaces that exist between these extremes of space or time. The novel *Astonishing the Gods* portrays the interplay of time and space in which time is rather imaginary and space is something man-made. The narrator of the novel in search of the secrets of visibility often collides between this nature of time and space and that is what represents the vast horizon of a magic realistic text.

4.2.1 Narrative Framework

Astonishing the Gods is a deep and intricate narrative structure that skillfully weaves together historical facts and fantastical elements to produce a story that is both profound and intriguing. The narrative’s structure is examined from a number of angles, such as how the story’s time and space are manipulated, the significance of anachronism, and the use of flashbacks and foreshadowing. Each of these narrative devices is skillfully combined to improve the storyline and increase the reader’s involvement with the text. *Astonishing the Gods*’s

narrative structure questions established literary conventions and encourages a more lively dialogue between the reader and the text.

4.2.1.1 Narrative vs. Narration

In Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, the distinction between narrative and narration emerges as a critical element, offering a meta-narrative commentary on storytelling. This distinction, as elucidated by Gerard Genette (1930) in his seminal work on narratology, underscores the complexity of Okri's narrative techniques and the profound thematic layers they reveal.

Narration in literary theory refers to the act of telling a story, including the narrator's voice, the textual strategies employed to convey the story, and the relationship established with the reader. Narrative, on the other hand, pertains to the "structural composition of the story, including the events and characters that populate the text" (Genette 32). Okri's novel employs a unique approach to these elements, intertwining them in a way that challenges traditional narrative forms and encourages a deeper engagement with the text.

The novel's narrative structure is not linear but rather a complex weave of memories, visions, and experiences that transcend conventional temporal and spatial boundaries. This structure reflects Okri's use of what Genette describes as "narrative levels and the narrative voice's shifts" (Genette 80). The primary narrative unfolds through the "eyes of the protagonist, an unnamed man on a metaphysical journey" (Okri 2), but this is layered with multiple sub-narratives comprising myths, legends, and philosophical reflections, which are often presented through various narratorial perspectives.

This layering of narrative voices allows Okri to explore the concept of invisibility—not just as a physical state but as a metaphysical and narrative phenomenon. The separation between the protagonist's internal monologue and the external narrative voice highlights the theme of visibility and invisibility that is central to the novel. The narrative voice often steps back, allowing the story to unfold through "the protagonist's experiences and interactions, thereby shifting the focus from the act of narration to the narrative itself" (Okri 7).

The novel also reflects on the nature of storytelling through its meta-narrative elements. Okri plays with the idea of the narrator as both a creator and a participant within the narrative. This dual role is explored through the narrator's self-awareness and his reflections on the act of storytelling. The narrative voice in *Astonishing the Gods* often comments on its limitations and possibilities, drawing attention to the “constructed nature of narrative and the role of the narrator in shaping reality” (Okri 13).

The interplay between narrative and narration in Okri's work can be analyzed through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, which highlights the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships in narrative” (11). Okri's narrative transcends physical and temporal constraints, creating a chronotopic amalgamation where time and space are fluid, thereby reflecting the novel's thematic exploration of transcendence and transformation.

Furthermore, the novel's approach to narrative and narration can be contrasted with traditional Western narratives, which often prioritize a clear, linear progression of events and a stable narrative perspective. Okri's style is more reflective of African storytelling traditions, which frequently employ cyclical time and a “communal narrative voice, aspects that can be seen in his blending of narration and narrative structure” (Cooper 19).

4.2.1.2 Enhancing Narrative Depth

The visual descriptions are not merely decorative but serve to deepen the narrative's thematic explorations. Time, in Okri's narrative, is a fabric woven with threads of reality, dreams, and spiritual journeys. The detailed and often surreal visual elements—such as “a tree that ages backward or a river that flows in reverse” (Okri 19) —invite the reader to reconsider their understanding of time as a linear or fixed concept.

Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods* is a profound exploration of time and space through the lens of visual and literary artistry. The novel's use of visual descriptions to illustrate the passage of time and the movement through space not only enhances its ethereal quality but also enriches the reader's engagement with the narrative's deeper philosophical questions. Okri's approach allows for

a unique interpretation of time, one that is as visually striking as it is conceptually profound.

4.2.1.3 Multi-Layered Narrative Structure

Okri's text is replete with symbolism that operates on multiple levels. The invisible protagonist represents themes of alienation and the search for self, which resonate on a personal and societal level. Symbols such as "mirrors, masks, and shadows" (Okri 11) not only enrich the narrative but also challenge the reader to consider the ways in which identity can be constructed and deconstructed. This symbolic complexity encourages a deeper engagement with the text, inviting interpretations that consider the psychological, spiritual, and existential dimensions of human experience.

4.2.1.4 Function of the Multi-Layered Structure

The multi-layered narrative structure of *Astonishing the Gods* serves several critical functions in the novel:

Enhances Thematic Depth: Each layer adds a new dimension of meaning, enriching the thematic exploration of visibility, identity, and transformation. The layers interact to produce a complex picture of the protagonist's journey and the philosophical questions the novel raises.

Engages the Reader: The complexity of the narrative structure challenges readers to engage actively with the text, piecing together the symbolic, temporal, and spatial clues to form their interpretation of the story.

Mirrors the Protagonist's Journey: The narrative's complexity mirrors the protagonist's internal complexity and his quest for understanding and enlightenment. As readers navigate through the layers of the narrative, they parallel the protagonist's journey through self-discovery and transformation.

Creates Resonance and Ambiguity: The interplay of different layers allows for ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings, which invites multiple readings and discussions, enhancing the text's richness and longevity in the reader's mind.

4.2.1.5 Visual Arts as a Narrative Tool

The novel employs visual arts as a narrative tool to enhance thematic expressions. Okri's use of descriptive, almost painterly language to detail scenes imbues the narrative with a visual art quality that invites readers to visualize the temporal progression within a seemingly static spatial depiction. For example, Okri describes scenes in which the protagonist views "paintings that appear to change and evolve as he watches..." (Okri 22), suggesting a fluidity of time within the fixed space of the artwork.

4.2.1.6 Focalization

In Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, the deliberate shifts in narrative perspective, or focalization, play a critical role in shaping the reader's understanding and emotional engagement with the narrative and its characters. 'Focalization' (Genette 28), a concept central to narrative theory, refers to the "lens through which narrative events and characters are perceived" (Genette 29). Okri employs various focalizers to create a multi-dimensional understanding of the protagonist's experiences, thereby deepening the narrative's complexity and emotional depth. Narrative theorists like Gerard Genette describe focalization as the filter through which "perceptions, thoughts, and events are presented in a narrative" (Genette 30). In *Astonishing the Gods*, Okri transitions between internal and external focalizations to juxtapose the protagonist's invisible internal state with the visible external world. This technique allows readers to access the protagonist's personal reflections and to see how "he is perceived by the external world..." (Okri 24), thereby enriching the narrative's emotional and psychological layers.

The use of internal focalization is evident when the narrative delves into the protagonist's introspective journey to understand his invisibility. Through this focalization, Okri enables the reader to experience the protagonist's personal and existential dilemmas intimately. This internal perspective is crucial for building empathy and for providing insights into the protagonist's struggles and revelations. As Fludernik suggests, internal focalization can turn the narrative into a "space for experiencing a character's consciousness, thereby fostering a deeper emotional connection with the reader" (19).

Conversely, Okri employs external focalization to depict how other characters interact with and respond to the protagonist. This shift not only contrasts with the internal focalization but also highlights the protagonist's impact on his environment and the other characters within the narrative. The external focal point often reveals societal reactions to the protagonist's journey, offering readers a broader perspective on the cultural and social settings of the narrative.

The dynamic shifts between these focalizations are strategically used by Okri to manipulate the reader's alignment and allegiance with the protagonist. According to narrative theorist Mieke Bal, such shifts are instrumental in "guiding the reader's judgments and affective stances towards characters" (Bal 26). In *Astonishing the Gods*, the shifts are particularly effective in scenes where "the protagonist encounters mystical beings or faces existential challenges" (Okri 38). Here, the focalization shifts help to underscore the surreal and often ambiguous nature of the protagonist's experiences, enhancing the novel's themes of visibility and invisibility.

4.2.1.7 Symbolism and Metaphor: Merging the Concrete with the Abstract

Symbolism is pivotal in Okri's narrative, where physical objects and settings carry deeper metaphysical meanings. For example, the "frequent appearances of mirrors and water surfaces symbolize the thresholds between the visible world and the invisible" (Okri 73), reflecting the protagonist's dual existence in both realms. These symbols are spatially concrete yet suggest temporal depth, embodying memories and future possibilities, thus merging time into spatial constructs.

4.2.1.8 Narrative Pace and Rhythm: Modulating Temporal Perception

The modulation of narrative pace and rhythm in *Astonishing the Gods* also plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's perception of time and space. Okri often slows down the narrative during descriptions of mystical or surreal scenes, which enhances "the spatial depth and stretches the moment in time, making it seem eternal" (Panassenko 13). Conversely, during moments of revelation or clarity, the pace quickens, collapsing time and sharpening spatial focus, propelling the protagonist forward on his journey.

4.2.1.9 Intertextual References

The text is rich with references to and echoes of other literary works, philosophical ideas, and historical events, weaving a dense inter-textual network that adds to its thematic complexity. These references create a dialogic engagement with various cultural and literary traditions, enriching the reader's understanding of the novel's themes and resonating with Yuri Lotman's (1990) concept of the semiosphere, where "the text is seen as a living dialogue among various cultural texts and contexts" (Lotman 19).

4.2.2 Temporal Constructs

Temporal constructions are the constructs that exist inside the various temporal layers. Readers can concentrate on a range of past, present, and future subjects with the aid of these concepts.

4.2.2.1 Temporal Structures

Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods* is an exemplary work where the use of non-linear temporal structures, such as flashbacks and flash-forwards—plays a crucial role in shaping the reader's perception of the narrative. These narrative techniques disrupt the traditional linear progression of time, creating a complex and layered reading experience that reflects the novel's exploration of memory, identity, and metaphysical realities.

In traditional narrative forms, the sequence of events typically unfolds in a chronological order, which allows the reader to form a coherent understanding of the storyline and character development. However, Okri deviates from this method by employing a narrative structure that folds time upon itself, creating a tapestry of experiences that defy simple chronological order. This method is particularly effective in "exploring the themes of memory and identity, as it mirrors the often non-linear and fragmented nature of human memory" (Genette 80).

The use of flashbacks in *Astonishing the Gods* serves multiple functions. First, they provide depth to the protagonist's character, revealing his past experiences

and the memories that shape his understanding of invisibility and existence. These flashbacks are not merely retrospective glimpses but are integral to understanding the protagonist's current journey. As Bal notes, flashbacks connect the past with the present, allowing the reader "to see the cause and effect unfolding over non-linear time, thereby enriching the narrative depth" (Bal 19).

Flash-forwards, on the other hand, disrupt the narrative flow to offer glimpses of possible futures, contributing to a sense of anticipation and speculative reflection about the protagonist's fate and the thematic resolutions of the novel. This technique enhances the metaphysical exploration of time and existence, suggesting the fluidity and multiplicity of potential outcomes. According to Currie, the speculative nature of flash-forwards invites readers to consider "the implications of actions and events within the broader philosophical context of the narrative" (Currie 10).

Okri's narrative strategy also involves blending these temporal disruptions seamlessly into the fabric of the text, which challenges the reader's perception of time as a linear or fixed entity. This approach is resonant with Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, where time simultaneously with space becomes "charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history" (13). In *Astonishing the Gods*, time is not a mere backdrop but a dynamic character that interacts with the people and events, influencing the narrative's progression and the reader's understanding.

4.2.2.2 Time as a Narrative Device

Okri utilizes time not merely as a backdrop for events but as an active narrative device that shapes the story. This approach is in line with Miller's concept of time as a construct that is "always bound up with narrative" (13). The temporal shifts in *Astonishing the Gods* are crucial for unveiling the inner life of the protagonist, allowing the reader to experience "his transformations and realizations" (Okri 89) in a manner that traditional chronological storytelling could not achieve.

4.2.2.3 Disruption of Linear Time

The narrative's frequent shifts between different time frames serve to disorient and reorient the reader, mirroring the protagonist's own dislocated experience. This technique effectively embodies Miller's idea that narrative time can "distort, reorder, reverse, and manipulate time in a thousand ways" (16). By employing flashbacks and flash-forwards, Okri not only disrupts the linear flow of time but also enhances the mystical and ethereal qualities of the novel's setting, emphasizing the non-linear path of spiritual and self-discovery.

Through the use of detailed and dynamic visual descriptions, Okri transcends static storytelling. The depiction of a "sunset that lasts hours or a night" (Okri 106) that stretches beyond its conventional time frame serves to dilate the reader's perception of time. This technique mirrors the narrative's themes of visibility and invisibility, suggesting that time itself may be hidden from view or revealed in unexpected ways.

4.2.2.4 Duration vs. Narrative Time

In Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, the contrast between the duration of events within the story and the 'Narrative time' (Panassenko 12) it takes to read them highlights a central tension in the narrative structure that profoundly affects the reader's experience. This disparity between story duration and reading time serves as a literary device that either expands or contracts perceived time, thereby enriching the reader's engagement with the text.

Okri manipulates narrative time to create a sense of timelessness within the events of the story, which often seem to unfold outside the usual constraints of time. This technique is not merely a stylistic choice but a thematic exploration of time as a subjective and malleable experience. In literary theory, the distinction between 'Story time and Discourse time' (Panassenko 12) is crucial for understanding how narratives control temporal perception. Genette's concept (1980) of 'narrative duration' explains how narratives manage the pacing of a story by expanding or compressing "the time it takes to narrate an event compared to the time the event would take in reality" (Genette 80).

For instance, in *Astonishing the Gods*, “moments of introspection or spiritual enlightenment” (Okri 56) may unfold over pages, despite representing mere moments in the protagonist’s life. This dilation of narrative time encourages readers to dwell on these moments, suggesting their profound significance to the protagonist’s journey. According to Ricoeur, the configuration of time in narrative enables the reader to experience time in ways that are impossible in real life, through “techniques such as pausing, slowing down, or speeding up the narrative flow” (14).

Conversely, significant events or periods may be summarized in a few sentences, contracting the narrative time and altering the reader’s perception of their duration. This narrative compression forces the reader to re-evaluate the significance of these events, viewing them through the lens of their impact rather than their temporal length. Fludernik elaborates on this point by suggesting that such temporal manipulations challenge the reader’s conventional understanding of causality and the flow of time, pushing them “to perceive time not as a chronological sequence but as a network of meaningful moments” (16). In *Astonishing the Gods*, “the island’s timeless realm” (Okri 78) exemplifies the point where physical and metaphysical spaces merge, and time becomes a palpable force shaping the protagonist’s experiences.

The discrepancy between the time events take place within the story and the time it takes to read them also mirrors the novel’s themes of visibility and invisibility. Just as the protagonist navigates “a visible and invisible world, the reader navigates through narrative layers” (Okri 81) that reveal and conceal at different paces, suggesting a deeper commentary on the nature of perception and reality.

The narrative deftly interweaves various temporal dimensions, incorporating flashbacks, visions of possible futures, and mythical histories that transcend linear time. This treatment of time enhances the novel’s thematic exploration by illustrating how past, present, and future are interconnected and how personal history and ancestral legacies shape individual destiny.

4.2.2.5 Temporal Dislocation and Identity Formation

Okri uses temporal dislocation to reflect the protagonist's quest for identity and understanding. The narrative's frequent shifts between past, present, and future challenge the conventional flow of time, mirroring the protagonist's nonlinear path toward self-discovery. This technique, suggested by Miller as a means of emphasizing "the fluid nature of time in literature" (8), allows Okri to portray time as a construct that is as "malleable and ambiguous as the protagonist's quest for visibility and invisibility" (4).

Okri uses rich, vivid descriptions to evoke a sense of the supernatural and the otherworldly. His portrayal of landscapes and scenes often blurs the lines between reality and fantasy, as seen when the "protagonist navigates through a city that continuously evolves and shifts" (Okri 43), reflecting the non-linear progression of time within the narrative. For instance, the city's architecture, with "buildings that breathe and streets that grow or shrink" (Okri 37), not only creates a visual spectacle but also suggests the passage of time in a non-traditional sense.

4.2.2.6 Bridging Time with Character Consciousness

Through dialogue and interior monologue, Okri bridges temporal gaps and connects different spatial settings. The protagonist's inner thoughts often reflect on "past lessons or future anxieties, bringing together different times and spaces within a single narrative moment" (Okri 95). This technique not only enriches the character development but also integrates the temporal and spatial dimensions of the story.

Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods* is a testament to the power of literary craftsmanship in merging time and space through narrative techniques. The seamless integration of these elements enhances the mystical and ethereal quality of the novel, inviting readers to explore a world where the "boundaries between the visible and invisible are blurred" (Okri 67). Okri's use of symbolism, repetition, narrative pacing, and internal monologue effectively combines temporal and spatial constructs, creating a unique literary experience.

4.2.2.7 ‘Subjective Time’ and Character Consciousness

Okri’s narrative structure in *Astonishing the Gods* often departs from objective chronological time, instead delving into the protagonist’s personal perception of time, which fluctuates based on his emotional and psychological state. This approach aligns with Miller’s observation that in literature, time often does not flow uniformly; rather, it “expands and contracts in accordance with the inner states of characters” (Miller 17). In Okri’s narrative, moments of introspection and mystical experience stretch time, making moments feel eternal, while moments of action or decision pass quickly, reflecting the protagonist’s varied engagement with his world.

In Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods*, the representation of ‘Subjective time’ (Miller 13) is central to the narrative’s exploration of character consciousness and development. Drawing from J Hillis Miller’s concept of “Time in Literature”, which focuses on the subjective experience of time as portrayed through literature, Okri’s novel intricately weaves temporal perception into the fabric of the protagonist’s journey.

4.2.2.8 The Role of Memory in Subjective Time

Memory plays a pivotal role in shaping the protagonist’s experience of time. Past experiences are not linear but emerge as layers that interact with the present, influencing how the protagonist views his journey and identity. This nonlinear representation of time through memory underscores Miller’s point that time in “literature can be manipulated to highlight the complexities of human consciousness” (3). For the protagonist in *Astonishing the Gods*, memory is a gateway to “reevaluating past lessons and visions, each recollection adding depth to his understanding of himself and his mystical environment” (Okri 93).

4.2.2.9 ‘Psychological Time’ and Metaphysical Exploration

The protagonist’s journey is marked by a deep metaphysical exploration that transcends physical time and space, venturing into realms of ‘Psychological and Spiritual time’ (Bergson 21) where conventional measurements of duration lose significance. Okri crafts scenes that defy temporal logic, such as timeless

dialogues with mythical beings or encounters in spaces that defy earthly constraints, to emphasize a time that is “deeply subjective and reflective of the protagonist’s inner transformations” (Bergson 20).

4.2.2.10 Time as a Reflection of Emotional and Spiritual Growth

Throughout *Astonishing the Gods*, the protagonist’s emotional and spiritual growth is intricately linked to his experience of time. Moments of clarity and enlightenment are often described as timeless, where the protagonist reaches “a state of understanding that seems to suspend the usual passage of time” (Okri 63). Okri uses this depiction of time to highlight key developmental milestones in the protagonist’s life, aligning with Miller’s assertion that “literature can use time to signify personal change and evolution” (23).

Ben Okri’s portrayal of subjective time in *Astonishing the Gods* serves as a profound exploration of how time can be experienced and represented in ways that reflect the inner life of characters. By aligning the flow of time with the protagonist’s psychological and spiritual journey, Okri not only adheres to but also expands upon Miller’s theories, offering a narrative that is both a temporal and existential exploration. This subjective handling of time allows readers to engage deeply with the protagonist’s ongoing metamorphosis, making Okri’s work a vivid example of the intricate relationship between time, consciousness, and literary expression.

4.2.2.11 Psychological and Philosophical Implications of Time

The handling of time in *Astonishing the Gods* also reflects the psychological and philosophical explorations central to the novel. By blending time periods, Okri invites readers to ponder existential questions about the nature of being and the constructs of time and reality. This aligns with Miller’s observation that time in literature often “transcends simple chronology to explore more complex temporal and existential issues” (12).

Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods* presents a sophisticated manipulation of narrative time that reflects the complex interplay of past, present, and future, thus challenging the reader’s conventional understanding of time. Through this intricate temporal structure, Okri not only narrates a story but also invites deep

engagement with the philosophical and existential questions it raises. The novel exemplifies how narrative time can be a “profound element of literary art” (Okri 92), enriching both the story and the themes it seeks to explore.

4.2.2.12 Aristotelian Time in Narrative

In Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods*, the concept of time transcends the mere ticking of a clock, embodying “a deeply philosophical and existential dimension” (33). This interpretation is closely aligned with Aristotle’s understanding of time, particularly his definition of time as the “number of change in respect of the before and after” (42). This paper explores how Okri’s portrayal of the protagonist’s cyclical experiences and the transformation of the ‘now’ encapsulates Aristotelian time, illustrating time as an “intrinsic measurement of change and an existential journey” (Okri 22).

Aristotle’s exploration of time emphasizes its dependence on motion and change (44). In *Astonishing the Gods*, the fluidity and often surreal experiences of the protagonist highlight this dependency. The narrative does not simply progress linearly but evolves through a series of “transformative experiences that redefine the protagonist’s now” (Okri 104). Each chapter marks not just a temporal shift but a significant alteration in the “protagonist’s understanding and perception of himself and his surroundings” (Okri 101).

4.2.2.13 Cyclical Experience of Time

The cyclical nature of the protagonist’s journey, where episodes of enlightenment, confusion, and re-discovery recur, mirrors Aristotle’s concept of time as cyclical and constantly in motion. Aristotle posits that time is not an entity in itself but a reflection of the “sequential order of events in the natural world” (51). Okri utilizes this notion to structure a narrative where the protagonist’s repeated encounters with mystical elements and invisible realms serve as markers of temporal progression and personal transformation.

4.2.2.14 Transformation of the ‘Now’

The ‘now’ in Okri’s narrative is a fluid concept, frequently reshaped by the protagonist’s experiences and revelations. This aligns with Aristotle’s description of ‘now’ as not fixed but as a “potential dividing point that

continuously shifts as time progresses” (53). Each new ‘now’ in the novel encapsulates a distinct phase of the protagonist’s psychological and spiritual journey, highlighting the Aristotelian view that “time is intrinsically linked to the phenomena it measures” (77).

4.2.2.15 The Future Interacting with the Present

In a unique reversal of narrative expectations, Okri often portrays the future as a force that influences the present. This method, which Miller describes as “anachronous” (13), allows the future possibilities and outcomes to cast shadows back onto the present, enriching the “protagonist’s current decisions and experiences with the weight of future consequences” (Okri 77). Such a technique deepens the narrative’s exploration of destiny and free will, themes central to the protagonist’s quest.

4.2.2.16 Time as Measurement of Change

Aristotle’s assertion that time is the measure of change finds a vivid expression in the narrative structure of *Astonishing the Gods*. The changes the protagonist undergoes are not just internal but are also manifested in his interactions with “the ethereal and often surreal environments he navigates” (Okri 121). This measurement of change is not quantified by hours or days but through the protagonist’s evolving understanding of visibility and invisibility, presence and absence.

4.2.2.17 Temporal Framework and Reader Engagement

By grounding the narrative in the observable movements of celestial bodies, Okri provides readers with a temporal framework that is both comprehensible and relatable. This strategy ensures that the novel’s more abstract themes do not alienate readers but rather draw them deeper into the philosophical and existential questions it poses. The familiar passage of “days marked by sunrises and sunsets” (Okri 106) offers a contrast to the protagonist’s transcendental experiences, making the narrative more tangible. Okri’s integration of Platonic time through the “depiction of celestial bodies” (Okri 37) serves as a critical narrative technique in *Astonishing the Gods*. It not only grounds the fluid and mystical experiences of the protagonist but also enhances the thematic

exploration of time as both a physical and metaphysical entity. This approach allows the novel to engage with deep philosophical questions within a structure that remains accessible and resonant with the reader.

4.2.3 Spatial Constructs

Within a story, spatial structures offer a means of expressing space, its significance, and its evolution. These literary devices aid readers in understanding how locations are altered to suit the demands of the book's characters.

4.2.3.1 Social Production of Space

In Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, the concept of space as a socially constructed entity is pivotal to understanding the protagonist's journey through invisibility and self-discovery. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space, Okri crafts "settings that are imbued with historical and cultural meanings, deeply influencing the narrative and the protagonist's experiences within it" (49). These spaces are not passive; they actively engage with and shape the protagonist's journey, reflecting Lefebvre's idea that "space is produced and reproduced through social practices, perceptions, and interactions" (26).

The novel begins with the protagonist stepping into an invisible realm, a space socially constructed by the collective beliefs and myths of his culture regarding what is seen and unseen. This threshold acts as a gateway, shaped by societal narratives about invisibility, which hold that it is both a curse and a gift. This space sets the stage for the protagonist's exploration of his own identity in relation to the visible world and the unseen realms of knowledge and existence.

The Marketplace of Dreams: The protagonist encounters a "marketplace where dreams, visions, and prophecies are traded like commodities" (Okri 74). This setting illustrates Lefebvre's concept of space as a social product, where even the most "intangible aspects of human culture—dreams and visions" (52)—are commodified and given spatial representation. This marketplace reflects the cultural and historical practices of bartering and exchange, highlighting how societal values can shape and construct spaces that reflect collective ideologies and economic practices.

The Garden of Histories: In this garden, the protagonist walks through different eras of human history, each path revealing different epochs. This garden is a socially constructed space where time and history are “spatially organized to allow for a physical journey through what is traditionally temporal” (Okri 114). The significance of this garden lies in its ability to make history tangible and navigable, thus embodying Lefebvre’s idea that space “encompasses more than the physical; it is steeped in the layers of meaning” (12) imparted by those who create and perceive it.

The Sea of Forgotten Memories: Here, the protagonist “sails across a sea where memories submerge and resurface” (Okri 114). This sea represents a social space of collective memory, shaped by the cultural practices of remembering and forgetting. It challenges the protagonist to confront and reconcile with past experiences, illustrating how space can be a medium for processing and storing collective social memories.

The City of Mirrored Realities: This city, with its “buildings and streets made of mirrors” (Okri 89), confronts the protagonist with reflections of multiple realities—his own and those of others. The city is a space constructed by societal obsession with self-image and reflection, a critique of modern vanity and the pursuit of superficial appearances. It highlights how urban spaces can be socially engineered to reflect and reinforce cultural norms and values about identity and perception.

4.2.3.2 Spatial Layering

Space in *Astonishing the Gods* is not merely a backdrop but an active element of the narrative. The settings—from “the mysterious island to surreal and dream-like landscapes” (Okri 29) —are layered with meaning and significance. These spaces are both real and metaphorical, providing a stage on which the protagonist’s journey unfolds while symbolizing various states of consciousness and existential conditions. This spatial arrangement aligns with Henri Lefebvre’s notions of perceived, conceived, and lived space, emphasizing how “space is experienced and how it interacts with time to create meaning” (Lefebvre 41).

4.2.3.3 ‘Perceived Space’

‘Perceived space’ (Lefebvre 46) refers to the physical and directly observable world that individuals navigate daily. In *Astonishing the Gods*, the physical journey of the protagonist across an invisible landscape is symbolic of perceived space. For instance, as he traverses the island that cannot be seen on maps, the protagonist “interacts with tangible elements of this world—paths that appear, buildings that materialize, and faces that come into view only when understood” (Okri 128). This direct interaction with the spatial elements of the island mirrors Lefebvre’s concept of the perceived, where space is shaped by “physical navigation and sensory experiences” (47).

4.2.3.4 ‘Conceived Space’

‘Conceived space’, according to Lefebvre, encompasses the mental representations of space, “conceived by architects, planners, and administrators” (46). It is the space of designers and visionaries. In the novel, the “invisible cities and landscapes the protagonist encounters” (Okri 67) are representations of conceived space. These are the spaces envisioned by the cultural and spiritual leaders of the protagonist’s community, designed to teach and transform him. The “layout of the island, the structure of its trials, and the esoteric architecture of its buildings” (Okri 102) (which challenge ordinary perceptions of physics and reality) are manifestations of conceived space. They represent the ideals, beliefs, and values of the culture that created them, serving as a canvas for the protagonist’s spiritual and psychological journey.

4.2.3.5 ‘Lived Space’

‘Lived space’ refers to space as “lived through its associated symbols and imagery and is directly related to the inhabitants’ experiences” (6). In Okri’s narrative, lived space is embodied in the protagonist’s subjective experience of the invisible realms. His emotional and spiritual interactions with the spaces he navigates reflect his internal state and transformation. The gardens where he learns the limits of vision, the “rivers that flow with forgotten memories, and the paths lined with whispering trees” (Okri 111) are not just physically traversed but are deeply felt and lived through. These spaces become arenas of personal challenge and growth, profoundly influencing his understanding of identity and the boundaries between visibility and invisibility.

4.2.3.6 Cultural and Historical Spaces

The spaces in *Astonishing the Gods* are also imbued with cultural and historical narratives that contribute to their contradictory nature. These narratives offer insights into the past and potential futures, encapsulating the cultural memories and historical injustices that shape the protagonist's perceptions and experiences. The integration of these elements within the spatial descriptions serves to challenge and complicate the reader's understanding of space as merely physical or neutral.

Okri's depiction of space in *Astonishing the Gods* aligns with Lefebvre's theory by illustrating how space is both a "product and a producer of societal and existential contradictions" (51). These spaces are not merely backdrops but are active elements in the narrative that reflect and respond to the protagonist's journey and the broader human quest for meaning and identity.

4.2.3.7 The Fluidity of Space and Identity

Okri uses fluid spatial boundaries to reflect the fluidity of identity. Spaces in the novel are not static but are constantly being reshaped, mirroring the protagonist's evolving understanding of himself and his place in the world. This fluidity stands in stark contrast to the rigid societal structures that attempt to define and confine identity. Lefebvre's idea of the 'production of space' suggests that "space is continuously being created and recreated by societal forces" (52), and Okri's narrative exemplifies this through the protagonist's transformative journey.

4.2.3.8 Space as a Reflection of Societal Contradictions

Okri crafts spaces that are simultaneously visible and invisible, accessible yet mysterious, reflecting the societal contradictions of belonging and alienation. The protagonist's journey through an invisible island where roads and cities appear and disappear serves as a metaphor for the societal invisibility experienced by those on the margins. This duality mirrors Lefebvre's discussion of 'representational spaces', which are lived through associated images and symbols but are often contradictory to the designed "conceived space or the perceived practices" (32).

4.2.3.9 Existential Tensions in Spatial Representation

The novel's settings often juxtapose the spiritual and the material, the mythical and the mundane. These juxtapositions create a landscape where existential questions—such as the nature of being and the essence of time—are explored. For instance, the protagonist encounters “timeless beings and ageless entities in spaces that defy conventional physics” (Okri 143), highlighting the existential tension between eternity and ephemeral existence. This reflects Lefebvre's notion that contradictions in space can expose “deeper layers of human experience, revealing the limits and possibilities of human existence” (42).

4.2.3.10 The Role of Memory and Anticipation in Spatial Configuration

Okri uses memory and anticipation to further complicate the interrelation between time and space. Panasenکو notes that the retrospective and prospective aspects of time can profoundly affect how “space is perceived and understood in literature” (14). In *Astonishing the Gods*, memories of past events and anticipations of future possibilities create spaces within the narrative that are rich with symbolism and meaning. These spaces are not static but are constantly reconstructed by the protagonist's shifting recollections and expectations, thus highlighting how “personal history and individual aspirations can alter one's perception of space” (Lefebvre 13).

4.2.4 Time and Space in Narrative Construction: A Symbiotic relation

In Ben Okri's novel *Astonishing the Gods*, the intricate interplay between literary time and space is a fundamental element that shapes the narrative structure and deepens the thematic exploration of the protagonist's journey. Natalie Panasenکو's concepts in “Interrelations between Literary Time and Space in Prosaic Texts” provide a valuable framework for understanding how Okri uses time not merely as a chronological backdrop but as a “dynamic force that molds and transforms space” (16) to reflect the protagonist's internal and psychological states.

Okri constructs a narrative realm where time and space are deeply entwined, with shifts in time directly influencing the spatial dimensions of the novel.

Panasenko discusses how literary time can be manipulated to create a narrative space that transcends traditional physical constraints, allowing for a representation of space that is fluid and mutable (Panasenko, 2009). In *Astonishing the Gods*, time flows non-linearly, encompassing flashbacks, visions of potential futures, and timeless states that defy ordinary temporal measurement. This manipulation of time alters the protagonist's spatial reality, where buildings, landscapes, and even cities appear and "disappear, expand and contract in accordance with the narrative's temporal rhythms" (Brasher 16).

4.2.4.1 Integration of Time and Space in *Astonishing the Gods*

In Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, the concept of the chronotope, as theorized by M.M. Bakhtin, plays a pivotal role in fusing the elements of time and space, thereby creating a narrative realm where the mystical and ethereal aspects of the setting are profoundly enhanced. Bakhtin's chronotope refers to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature, providing a framework through which time and space becomes charged and "help in the movements of the plot, history and narrative" (22).

Ethereal Settings: The settings in Okri's novel often transcend conventional physical locations, presenting places that integrate elements of both the temporal and the spatial in ways that elevate their mystical qualities. For instance, "the island where much of the novel unfolds is depicted" (Okri 4) not merely as a geographical location but as a temporal experience that embodies historical, mythical, and spiritual dimensions. This integration allows the island to serve as a metaphysical bridge between the known and the unknown, the visible and the invisible.

Fluidity of Time: Time in *Astonishing the Gods* is portrayed not as a linear progression but as a fluid, dynamic entity. Events and experiences are not confined to the past, present, or future; instead, they exist in a continuous, cyclical pattern that defies traditional chronological boundaries. This fluidity reflects the chronotope's influence, where time becomes a formative component of space, enriching the "narrative's setting with a timeless quality that enhances its mystical atmosphere" (Okri 82).

Spatial Narration: The narrative structure itself is spatially oriented, with the journey of the protagonist through various realms and dimensions reflecting a physical traversing of spaces that are imbued with temporal significance. Each location the protagonist visits is not only a “physical space but also a temporal echo of personal and collective history, mythology, and destiny” (Okri 112). This blending of time and space in the narrative structure highlights the chronotopic nature of the novel, where the journey is both an exploration of space and a traversal through time.

Metaphysical Dimensions: The novel’s settings often operate on a metaphysical level, where physical boundaries are transcended to create spaces that are expansive and limitless. These settings reflect not only the physical world but also the realms of thought, spirit, and subconscious, making the novel’s environment resonate with a depth that is both temporal and spatial. Such environments challenge the characters and readers to perceive time and space not as separate entities but as interconnected dimensions that shape human experience.

Symbolic Confluence of Time and Space: Throughout the novel, specific symbols serve as confluences of time and space, such as the bridge or the ship. These symbols are chronotopic in nature—they do not just connect two physical points but also represent the journey across different times and the bridging of various existential states. This symbolic usage underscores the thematic concerns of the novel, such as the search for identity and understanding, situated within the broader metaphysical exploration of life’s meaning.

4.2.4.2 Spatial and Temporal Fluidity

In Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods*, the fluidity of time and space is more than a mere narrative device; it serves as a profound exploration of the novel’s central themes of identity, visibility, and invisibility. This fluidity creates a dreamlike quality where the boundaries between the real and the surreal blur, offering a rich canvas for Okri to delve into the metaphysical and existential queries that define the protagonist’s journey.

Fluid Identity in Fluid Time: The protagonist’s journey is marked by a continuous transformation that mirrors the non-linear and fluid nature of time

in the novel. As time stretches and compresses, so does the protagonist's sense of self. Each "encounter and experience reshape his identity" (Okri 162), reflecting the novel's premise that self-understanding is a dynamic, evolving process rather than a fixed state. This fluidity of identity is particularly poignant in scenes where past, present, and future converge, forcing the protagonist to confront and integrate various aspects of himself.

Visibility Through Invisibility: The theme of visibility versus invisibility is central to the novel, and it is through the fluid nature of time and space that these concepts are explored. As the protagonist navigates spaces that oscillate between visibility and invisibility, he learns that "understanding and clarity often come from what is not seen rather than what is visible" (Okri 167). This paradox is beautifully illustrated in scenes where the protagonist becomes invisible to "discover essential truths about himself and the world..." (Okri 144), suggesting that true visibility sometimes requires a journey through the invisible.

The Metaphysical Spaces: Okri crafts spaces that defy conventional physical laws, such as a "city made of mirrors or a garden where time stands still" (Okri 133). These spaces, which blend the real with the surreal, facilitate a deeper exploration of the novel's themes. For instance, the mirror city reflects not only the protagonist's physical form but also his innermost thoughts and fears, making the invisible visible and subject to scrutiny.

Temporal Disjunctions and Narrative Progression: The narrative structure of *Astonishing the Gods* is characterized by frequent temporal disjunctions, where flashbacks and flash-forwards disrupt the linear flow of time. These disruptions reflect the fragmented nature of human memory and perception, emphasizing how our understanding of identity is constructed from scattered moments of clarity and confusion. This narrative technique enriches the thematic exploration of how identities are continuously reconstructed as new experiences reshape our understanding.

Interactions Between Characters and Time: The interactions between characters often occur at crucial temporal junctures, suggesting that relationships themselves are subject to the same fluidity as time and space. For instance,

characters from the protagonist's past reappear at pivotal moments, their interactions highlighting unresolved issues or forgotten aspects of his identity. These encounters underscore the idea that our connections with others are not static but evolve over time, influenced by both past experiences and present realities.

4.2.4.3 Key Chronotopic Moments in *Astonishing the Gods*

The Invisible Port Arrival: The protagonist's arrival at the mysterious port serves as a significant chronotopic moment, marking the beginning of his transformative journey. This port, where time seems "suspended and space feels limitless, symbolizes the threshold between the visible and the invisible worlds" (Okri 121). It is here that the protagonist first encounters the fluidity of time and space, setting the stage for his mystical quest.

In Ben Okri's *Astonishing the Gods*, the literary technique of the chronotope, as articulated by M.M. Bakhtin is intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative, creating key moments that epitomize the fusion of time and space. These chronotopic moments are pivotal in enhancing the mystical experiences and significant life events of the protagonist, providing a rich, immersive narrative experience that transcends conventional literary structures.

In a "library that houses infinite wisdom, the protagonist comes across an ancient book that records his own life" (Okri 112)—even those moments that have yet to occur. This scene merges the temporal (the future and the past recorded in the book) with the spatial (the mystical library as a repository of universal knowledge), highlighting the narrative's thematic exploration of destiny and self-awareness.

The protagonist wanders into a "garden where statues commemorate heroes from different epochs" (Okri 143). As he moves among them, time collapses into space; the statues, though static, narrate stories that span centuries. This garden, a space laden with temporal narratives, acts as a chronotope where the protagonist reflects on his place within these myriad histories.

As the protagonist crosses a bridge that spans a "seemingly bottomless chasm..." (Okri 133), he experiences visions of his past and potential futures.

This bridge represents a “literal and metaphorical passage through time and space” (Okri 134), emphasizing the novel’s focus on the journey toward self-discovery and the choices that define existence.

In a “city made entirely of mirrors” (Okri 156), the protagonist confronts reflections of himself from various times of his life. This city is a potent chronotope, where the mirrors’ reflections distort the linearity of time and expand the spatial dimensions of self-perception, forcing the protagonist to confront his multifaceted identity.

The Timeless Dance: During a ritual dance, the protagonist feels “time dilates and contracts with each movement” (Okri 162). This dance, a rhythmic and spatial expression of time, embodies the chronotope by merging temporal progression with the physical space of the ritual, enhancing the mystical quality of the moment.

In a climactic moment, the protagonist boards a ship that travels through time and space. This “ship, moving through the ocean of the cosmos” (Okri 171), encapsulates the chronotope by navigating through the temporal and spatial dimensions of the protagonist’s life journey, symbolizing his transition into a new realm of understanding.

4.2.4.4 Cultural Chronotopes

In Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods*, the use of cultural chronotopes—settings that “encapsulate specific times and spaces imbued with cultural and historical significance” (Bakhtin 14)—plays a crucial role in enriching the protagonist’s mystical journey. These settings are not merely backdrops but active elements that interact with the protagonist, influencing his understanding of identity, visibility, and the unseen forces shaping existence.

Island of Invisibility: The protagonist’s journey begins on a mystical island where visibility and invisibility coexist, serving as a metaphor for self-discovery and the unseen layers of identity. This “island, rich in mythical elements, represents a cultural chronotope” (Bakhtin 23) where historical narratives of transformation and enlightenment are explored. The island’s culture, with its rituals and philosophies, helps the protagonist to navigate his

path towards understanding the visible and invisible aspects of life.

The City of Mirrors: This setting reflects a cultural chronotope that combines modern existential queries with ancient philosophical insights. In this city, every “surface and corner reflect not just physical appearances but the depths of the soul” (Okri 141). This space challenges the protagonist to confront his deepest fears and desires, reflecting the cultural narrative of self-reflection and introspection that is prevalent in many spiritual traditions.

The Library of the Invisible: Here, the protagonist encounters texts and scrolls containing knowledge that is invisible to those not ready to see it. This library represents a cultural chronotope where “history, knowledge, and secrecy intersect, symbolizing the quest for hidden truths” (Bakhtin 41) that define human cultural endeavors across ages. The library’s setting enriches the protagonist’s journey by connecting him to the long-standing human tradition of seeking knowledge beyond the visible and tangible.

The Garden of Time: This garden, where time moves differently, allows the protagonist to experience moments from the past and potential futures. It serves as a cultural chronotope where the linear progression of time is disrupted, reflecting the nonlinear nature of history and memory in human culture. This setting enriches the narrative by providing a space where the protagonist can explore the cyclical nature of time and history, a common theme in many cultures’ understanding of time.

The Bridge of Doubts: As a literal and metaphorical crossing point, this “bridge challenges the protagonist with each step...” (Okri 161), representing his doubts and fears. The cultural chronotope here is one of transition—a common motif in stories of personal growth and heroism, where the hero must overcome internal and external challenges to progress.

4.2.4.5 Psychological Spaces Shaped by Temporal Changes

The protagonist’s journey through various states of visibility and invisibility is marked by a corresponding transformation in the spaces he inhabits. These spaces reflect his “inner psychological state, which is governed by his experiences of time” (Bergson 21). For example, when the protagonist feels

lost or uncertain, the space around him becomes “labyrinthine and disorienting, mirroring his mental state” (Okri 111). This correlation suggests that the spatial representation in the novel is not just a physical setting, but a psychological landscape shaped by the protagonist’s temporal experiences.

4.2.4.6 Temporal Disjunctions and Spatial Perceptions

The novel also features moments where time seems to stand still, creating spaces that feel eternal and unchanging. These moments are often pivotal turning points for the protagonist, providing deep insights into his existential queries and spiritual discoveries. The stillness of time during these episodes allows for a deeper engagement with the space, which becomes “heavily laden with symbolic significance, offering the protagonist—and the reader” (Okri 131)—a pause for introspection.

4.2.4.7 The Weaving of Time and Space Through Narrative Techniques

Okri employs a variety of literary techniques that bridge temporal and spatial dimensions to create a narrative that feels both timeless and boundlessly expansive. Flashbacks and flash-forwards are used effectively to create a “narrative loop where past, present, and future are indistinguishable, contributing to a sense of timelessness” (Panasenko 29). This technique not only disrupts the linear progression of time but also allows space within the narrative to be perceived as fluid and mutable.

4.2.4.8 Blending of Space and Time in the Narrative

Okri’s narrative technique involves a seamless blending of space and time, creating a surreal, dream-like quality that permeates the novel. This blending is evident in scenes where the protagonist encounters timeless realms that simultaneously encapsulate a vast expanse of space and an eternal moment of time. For instance, the protagonist’s journey through the “city of invisible beings is depicted with vivid imagery that suggests both a physical journey through space” (Okri 101) and a temporal journey through the history and future of the city. The descriptions of buildings and streets that appear to morph over time convey the dynamic interplay of space and time.

4.2.4.9 Thematic Expressions through Spatial-Temporal Fusion

This fusion of spatial and temporal elements within the visual arts context in the novel enhances its thematic expressions, particularly those related to identity, transformation, and the nature of reality. The fluidity of space and time in the visual depictions reflects the protagonist's internal transformation and his quest for understanding his own invisibility and identity. As he moves through these artistic spaces, the boundaries between past, present, and future blur, reflecting his existential explorations.

In *Astonishing the Gods*, Okri's use of visual arts to intertwine space and time serves as a critical narrative strategy that not only enriches the aesthetic experience of the novel but also deepens its thematic explorations and character developments. The novel's settings and scenes, depicted with a strong visual quality, function much like the visual arts described by Heffernan, where the "succession of moments and the arrangement of spatial elements converge to form a cohesive narrative experience" (9) that transcends conventional literary forms.

4.2.4.10 Spatial Movement and Time

Spatial descriptions in Okri's narrative often carry temporal implications. For example, the journey of the protagonist across various realms is marked by transitions in scenery that reflect not just a change in location but also a shift in time. The transformation of landscapes— "from lush gardens that suddenly appear wilted to seas that change their color" (Okri 108) with the narrative mood—uses space to signify the passage of time, contributing to the overall ethereal atmosphere of the book.

4.2.5 Conclusion

Ben Okri's temporal and spatial constructs break the traditional notion of time and space. Okri treats time as multidimensional as he brings separate dimensions to portray the flow of time. On the other hand, Okri's treatment of space is not restricted to a fixed locale. He brings variety in his treatment of space. Okri's transcendental treatment of time shows the duration of life which is necessary to comprehend that there is also a space that exists beyond the actual space in the world. Space recreates a person's identity and time

helps in the recapitulation of memories. Ben Okri has attempted to illustrate two key ideas in his works: “postcolonial nations must value time if they want true freedom” and “space exists in the realities of time” (Okwudiri 23). Such a scene evokes both elation and worry. A vision informed by time is the only one that can inspire concern and responsibility for the other. There is hope that we can affect change, but there is also worry since everyone must make the most of their time and avoid making snap decisions without thinking things through. A transcendental treatment of time shows the duration of our life is necessary to comprehend that there is also a space that exists beyond the actual space in the world. We are propelled into action by having such a vision. By emphasizing the significance of our existence, space helps us situate our own identity and therefore, it restores our capacity for free will. As the quotation at the beginning of this article implies, our coextensivity with time is the foundation of our own existence. Our identities are defined by time itself, and our lives have meaning in this society because of the politics of action and accountability to others. Apathy is the antithesis of life and the ethical cemetery. This section assesses the influence of temporal and spatial factors on the overall meaning and reception of Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods*, in line with the research objectives.

4.3 Treatment of time and space in Ben Okri’s *The Songs of Enchantment*

The Songs of Enchantment by Okri marks the perspectives of the spirit child, Azaro. It is a captivating account of the spiritual realm, social and political conflicts, and the actual state of poverty in the nation. The story takes place in such a space which is unknown and doesn’t have any existence in the real world. The Space is a void as it consists of no concrete elements in it. The spaces lie hidden in the novel and are open to multiple interpretations. Time in this novel is mostly the constant movement between different realities that mark the shifts, changes and jumps in the story ultimately bringing a steady progress of the plot of the novel. In this novel, death is a common stand-point that marks the fluid interplay of time and space that recalls the enigmatic atmosphere of dreams.

4.3.1 Narrative Framework

In *The Songs of Enchantment* by Ben Okri, the interplay between narrative and narration forms a crucial component of literary architecture, offering a unique examination of how stories are told and constructed. Gerard Genette's narratological frameworks provide an insightful lens to analyze this interplay, particularly his distinction between "narrative (the story itself) and narration (the act of telling the story)" (9). This distinction is fundamental to understanding the meta-narrative layers that Okri weaves through his text, allowing the narrative voice to reflect on its own storytelling process.

Genette's theory posits that every narrative unveils its methodology, which in the case of Okri's novel, can be seen as a technique to engage readers not just with the "story but with the art of storytelling itself" (Genette 19). This reflective style becomes evident in Okri's approach, where the narrative voice often pauses to contemplate its own narrative strategies and the effects of storytelling on both the narrator and the reader.

One of the primary methods Okri uses in *The Songs of Enchantment* to differentiate between narrative and narration is through the explicit layering of voices and perspectives, which aligns with Genette's concept of "narrative levels" (Genette 19). The novel frequently shifts between the internal experiences of its protagonist and the overarching voice of an omniscient narrator. This shift not only challenges the reader's perception of the unfolding events but also highlights the constructed nature of the narrative, effectively creating a dialogue about the nature of reality and fiction.

Furthermore, Okri's text explores Genette's idea of "narrative time" by playing with temporal structures, thus affecting "how the story is perceived" (Genette 10). The non-linear timeline, characterized by frequent flashbacks and flash-forwards, disrupts the traditional narrative flow, compelling the reader to actively piece together the story's chronology. This disruption serves as a form of narrative commentary, drawing attention to the act of narration itself as a selective and subjective process.

The meta-narrative commentary in *The Songs of Enchantment* is also enriched by Okri's use of mystical and magical realism elements, which serve to question

the “boundaries between the narrated world and the real world” (Okri 9). As Wood (1998) notes in his exploration of magical realism, the blending of the real with the surreal in literature challenges “conventional narrative techniques and encourages readers to question the reliability of the narrator” (11). Okri leverages this to subtly critique social and political realities, embedding “deeper meanings within the fantastical elements of the story” (Wood 18).

Okri’s narrative technique is reminiscent of the works of other postcolonial writers who use storytelling to reclaim cultural narratives and identities. As Ashcroft (2002) suggests, postcolonial narratives often employ “storytelling as a method to navigate and negotiate cultural memory and history” (6). Okri’s narrative strategy, therefore, does not merely serve an aesthetic purpose but is also a “means of cultural expression and critique” (Ashcroft 7).

In essence, Okri’s *The Songs of Enchantment* uses the distinction between narrative and narration to engage in a sophisticated exploration of storytelling itself. The narrative voice in Okri’s work not only tells a story but also comments on the nature of storytelling, challenging the reader to consider the implications of narrative construction. This approach is emblematic of Genette’s theoretical insights into the layered complexities of narrative discourse, making Okri’s work a compelling study of narration as both a literary technique and a thematic exploration.

4.3.1.1 Focalization

In Ben Okri’s *The Songs of Enchantment*, the technique of focalization, or the perspective through which the narrative is presented, plays a pivotal role in shaping the reader’s understanding and emotional engagement with the characters. Gerard Genette, in his seminal work on narratology, describes focalization as the lens through which the “events and characters of a narrative are perceived” (Genette 80). Okri adeptly manipulates shifts in focalization to deepen the narrative complexity and enrich the reader’s connection to the story.

The Songs of Enchantment is primarily narrated through the eyes of Azaro, a “spirit child who inhabits both the spiritual and material worlds” (Okri 6). This primary focalization through Azaro allows readers an intimate glimpse into his experiences and perceptions. However, Okri does not restrict the narrative to a

single focalizer; instead, he introduces shifts that offer alternative perspectives and insights, enhancing the narrative's depth and emotional resonance.

One significant aspect of focalization in the novel is the shift that occurs during encounters between Azaro and other characters, such as his parents or the mystical beings he meets. For instance, during interactions with his father, the focalization occasionally shifts to reflect the "father's perspective, particularly in moments of distress or philosophical contemplation" (Okri 16). This shift not only provides a deeper understanding of his character but also emphasizes the emotional and psychological complexities of living in a politically turbulent environment. Such moments are critical in fostering empathy and a "nuanced understanding of the characters' motivations and struggles" (Nunning 21).

Moreover, Okri uses focal shifts to highlight the contrast between the mundane and the mystical elements of the narrative. For example, the narrative perspective occasionally shifts to "the villagers or mystical beings..." (Okri 23), offering a broader view of the story's setting and the interplay between the physical and spiritual realms. These shifts are particularly effective in scenes depicting "communal rituals or spiritual encounters..." (Okri 41), where the collective perspective enhances the mystical atmosphere and the cultural richness of the narrative setting.

Another layer of focalization involves the reflective and meta-narrative moments where the narrative voice contemplates the act of storytelling itself. These moments often expand beyond Azaro's personal perspective and consider the broader implications of the story being told. This technique not only engages the reader in a dialogue about the nature of reality and fiction but also enhances the emotional depth of the narrative, inviting the reader to reflect on the "storytelling process and its impact on understanding human experiences" (Fludernik 19).

The emotional engagement of the reader is further intensified by these focal shifts through the direct exposure to the inner thoughts and feelings of multiple characters. For example, when the focalization shifts to "Azaro's mother during a particularly poignant moment of sorrow..." (Okri 31), readers gain a direct insight into her enduring strength and despair. This intimate perspective fosters

a deeper emotional connection and empathy towards her character, enriching the reader's experience of the narrative.

4.3.1.2 Impact on Visibility and Invisibility

The novel's settings often transform in response to Azaro's spiritual interactions, such as when mundane environments become infused with mystical elements. These transformations are not just physical but are reflective of the characters' psychological states, thereby influencing their visibility within their community. For example, when "Azaro's father gains political consciousness..." (Okri 44), the spaces around him become arenas of conflict and change, reflecting his newfound visibility in the political landscape. Conversely, the more Azaro delves into the spiritual world, the less he is perceived by those around him in the physical world, illustrating his increasing invisibility.

4.3.1.3 Textual Layers

In Ben Okri's *The Songs of Enchantment*, the narrative is a complex tapestry woven with multiple layers that serve to enhance thematic depth and convey a rich complexity that reflects the mystical and transformative experiences of its characters. Gerard Genette's concepts of textual transtextuality and hypertextuality are particularly relevant in analyzing how Okri layers his narrative to build "thematic resonance and a multifaceted narrative environment" (Genette 10).

The novel is constructed through a series of overlapping narrative layers that involve the physical, spiritual, and psychological journeys of Azaro, the spirit-child. This multi-layered approach allows Okri to explore themes such as the "cyclical nature of life and death, the struggle between the spiritual and material worlds, and the impact of colonial legacy on African societies" (61). Each layer is not just a simple storyline but a complex interweaving of multiple narratives that reflect and enhance each other, creating a rich, polyphonic text.

One of the primary layers in *The Songs of Enchantment* involves the real-time experiences of Azaro in the physical world. This layer is grounded in the socio-political realities of a post-colonial African community struggling with

poverty, exploitation, and political corruption. However, superimposed upon this is a more ethereal and mystical layer that includes Azaro's interactions with spirits and otherworldly beings. This supernatural layer does not exist independently of real-world experiences but is integrally connected to and reflective of the physical layer, providing insight into the cultural and spiritual heritage of the community.

Another significant layer is the historical and cultural context in which the story is set. Okri infuses the narrative with references to African mythology, folklore, and the collective memory of his characters. This not only provides a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations and the cultural forces shaping their lives but also enriches the reader's experience by creating a dense, symbolic tapestry that resonates with larger themes of identity, memory, and resistance.

Furthermore, Okri employs a meta-narrative layer that involves the storytelling itself. Through the voice of the narrator, often reflective and aware of the storytelling process, Okri addresses the power of stories and their role in shaping reality. This self-referential layer invites readers to consider the act of reading as an interactive process, where the text becomes a living entity that engages with and transforms the reader.

The interplay of these textual layers in *The Songs of Enchantment* enhances the thematic depth of the novel by allowing Okri to explore complex issues from multiple angles. For instance, "the struggle for identity and self-determination..." (Okri 57) is portrayed not only through the socio-political struggles of the community but also through the spiritual journeys of its members, particularly Azaro, who navigates both the physical and spiritual realms.

The multi-layered structure also adds complexity to the narrative by challenging the reader's perception of reality and fiction. As the layers overlap and intersect, they blur the lines between the tangible and the intangible, the real and the imagined, reflecting the fluid and often ambiguous nature of experience and memory.

4.3.1.4 Time and Narrative Technique

Okri's narrative technique itself reflects an Aristotelian manipulation of time. By focusing on key moments that represent significant changes in Azaro's life, Okri effectively uses narrative time to measure the protagonist's development. This technique not only aligns with Aristotle's view of time as related to movement and change but also enhances the reader's understanding of time's impact on the narrative structure and the protagonist's evolution.

Ben Okri's use of Aristotelian time in *The Songs of Enchantment* is a sophisticated narrative strategy that enriches the thematic core of the novel. By aligning the protagonist's cyclical experiences with Aristotelian concepts of time, Okri not only provides a deeper insight into the spiritual and existential dynamics of his characters but also offers a reflective commentary on the nature of time itself—as a “measure of change and a vehicle for philosophical exploration” (Aristotle 17).

4.3.1.5 Narrative Techniques and Temporal Layering

Okri's narrative technique of layering multiple time frames contributes to the richness of the visual imagery. Flashbacks, visions, and dream-like sequences blend with the present narrative, allowing past, present, and future to coexist within the same spatial dimensions. This method not only challenges the reader's perceptions of linear time but also enhances the thematic depth, as the convergence of different time frames brings together various thematic threads in a single, vivid moment.

Through the innovative integration of space and time, as discussed by Heffernan, Ben Okri enhances the thematic expressions and character interactions in *The Songs of Enchantment*. The use of visual arts not only serves as a narrative device but also as a profound “medium for exploring the interconnections between identity, culture, and time” (Heffernan 14). This approach allows Okri to offer a narrative that is both visually rich and thematically profound, inviting readers to engage with the text on multiple sensory and intellectual levels.

4.3.2 Temporal Constructs

Temporal constructions are the structures found in the various temporal layers. These concepts aid in readers' concentration on a range of historical, contemporary, and upcoming subjects.

4.3.2.1 Temporal Structures

Okri's narrative structure in *The Songs of Enchantment* is fundamentally non-linear, involving frequent temporal shifts that serve to both enrich the narrative and disorient the reader, thereby mimicking the mystical and often chaotic world that the protagonist, Azaro, navigates. Genette describes these shifts as anachronies, deviations from the chronological order, which include both "analepses (flashbacks) and prolepses (flash-forwards)" (19). These anachronies are pivotal in creating a narrative that does not merely unfold in the present but weaves together multiple strands of past, present, and future, reflecting the cyclical and repetitive nature of Azaro's experiences as a spirit child.

The use of flashbacks in Okri's novel often serves to contextualize the protagonist's current experiences, revealing deeper historical or personal layers that influence the unfolding events. For instance, Azaro's visions of his "past lives provide insights into his eternal struggle with the physical world and his recurring decisions to return to it despite the hardships he faces" (Okri 78). This narrative technique not only deepens the character's backstory but also aligns with Boym's (2001) concept of reflective nostalgia, where the past is not simply revisited for escape but is critically "engaged with, allowing for personal and collective introspection" (29).

Conversely, Okri's use of flash-forwards projects possible futures, creating anticipation and speculative tension that keeps the reader engaged. These glimpses into potential outcomes influence how the present narrative is perceived, as they hint at looming calamities or resolutions, thereby shaping the reader's expectations and interpretations of the story's progression. Fludernik (2009) notes that such future-oriented narrative strategies can profoundly affect the emotional resonance of the narrative, as they allow readers to explore the "implications of characters' choices and the potential consequences of the depicted events before they unfold" (18).

The impact of these temporal disruptions on the reader's perception of the narrative timeline is significant. They blur the boundaries between past, present, and future, challenging the reader's understanding of time as a linear and unidirectional flow. This is particularly resonant in the context of postcolonial literature, where, as Slemon (1990) argues, the disruption of "conventional time narratives can be a strategy for subverting historical narratives imposed by colonial discourses" (22). In Okri's text, the fluid temporal structure can be seen as a metaphor for the fluidity of identity and reality in postcolonial contexts, reflecting the complex interplay of cultural, historical, and personal narratives that define the characters' lives. Moreover, the disorientation caused by non-linear time structures encourages a more active engagement from the reader, who must piece together the fragmented narrative to fully grasp the story's breadth and depth. This active engagement is critical in postcolonial texts, which often "aim to challenge readers to reconsider preconceived notions of history and identity" (Ashcroft 22).

4.3.2.2 Platonic Time and the Celestial Clock

Plato's time is integrally linked to the regular movements of celestial bodies—the sun, moon, and stars—serving as a "natural clock that governs the rhythms of the cosmos" (32). In Okri's narrative, these celestial movements are frequently referenced, subtly indicating the passage of days and seasons, which provide a temporal structure familiar to the reader. This use of natural phenomena to mark time helps to anchor the mystical and often surreal events of "Azaro's journey in a world that remains tethered to the universal laws of motion and time" (Okri 55).

4.3.2.3 Aristotelian Time and Cyclical Existence

Aristotle posits that time is the "number of change" (22) with respect to the before and after. In Okri's narrative, this philosophical view is mirrored in Azaro's repeated transitions between the world of the living and the spirit world—each transition marking a "distinct 'before' and 'after' (Okri 11) in his existential journey. The cyclical nature of these transitions highlights the Aristotelian perspective that "time is fundamentally about counting these changes, not just experiencing them" (31).

4.3.2.4 The Concept of ‘Now’

Aristotle’s exploration of the ‘now’ as a “constantly shifting point that both divides and connects the past and future” (33) is pivotal in understanding Azaro’s experiences. Each of Azaro’s awakenings in the physical world represents a new ‘now’, which ties together his past experiences in the spirit world with his future possibilities in the human realm. This fluidity of the ‘now’ is used by Okri to emphasize the continuity of life and spirit, suggesting that each moment is both an end and a beginning.

4.3.2.5 Time as a Measure of Internal Change

In *The Songs of Enchantment*, time does not merely pass; it deepens, enriching “Azaro’s internal landscape with every cycle of his existence...” (Okri 73). Each “return to the physical world is marked by a transformation in his understanding and emotional maturity...” (Okri 79), illustrating Aristotle’s notion that time is not just about “external change but also about internal development” (33). This internal change is quantified by the emotional, psychological, and spiritual shifts that Azaro undergoes, each phase of his life adding depth to his character and complexity to his understanding of his dual existence.

Through Azaro’s cyclical experiences, Okri engages with Aristotle’s idea that time is essential for the reflection on existence. Azaro’s repeated encounters with life and death, his interactions with the spirits and the living, all serve as meditations on the nature of being and non-being, effectively using time as a tool for existential inquiry and philosophical reflection.

4.3.2.6 Duration vs. Narrative Time

In *The Songs of Enchantment*, Ben Okri navigates the complex interplay between the duration of events within the story and the narrative time it takes for these events to be read, creating an engaging reading experience that both expands and contracts time. This analysis applies Gerard Genette’s concepts of narrative duration to understand how Okri manipulates time within the “narrative structure to affect the reader’s perception and engagement with the text” (Genette 37).

Genette's framework for analyzing narrative time includes several key concepts such as "duration, frequency, and order" (Genette 18). Duration refers to the relationship between "story time—the time within the story world—and narrative time—the time it takes to narrate the story" (Genette 44). In Okri's novel, the duration of events often does not align straightforwardly with the narrative time, creating effects that can either compress or elongate the reader's temporal experience.

Okri employs extended passages to describe moments that might, in the story world, last only a few seconds. For example, a "brief mystical encounter between Azaro and a spirit..." (Okri 25) may unfold over several pages, rich with symbolic imagery and introspection. This discrepancy between the brief actual time of the encounter and the much longer time it takes to read about it magnifies the importance of the event, allowing the reader to explore its implications in depth. Bal (2009) discusses this technique as a form of "stretching time, where narrative details are used to enhance the emotional and philosophical weight of a moment" (15).

Conversely, significant events or even entire days can be summarily described in a few sentences, contracting the reader's sense of time and accelerating the pace of the narrative. This contraction can often serve to highlight the chaotic and ephemeral nature of Azaro's experiences in the physical world, juxtaposing the mundane and the mystical aspects of his life. This narrative strategy can create a disorienting effect, reflecting the protagonist's own perception of living in a volatile environment.

The interplay between expanded and contracted time in Okri's narrative not only influences how events are perceived but also reflects the broader thematic concerns of the novel, such as the cyclical nature of life and the fluid boundary between the spiritual and the material worlds. Wood (2007) suggests that such manipulation of time can be seen as a narrative technique to evoke the nonlinear and layered experience of time that characterizes much of "postcolonial literature, where past colonial histories and present realities are constantly interwoven" (17).

Additionally, the fluctuation between different durations within the narrative mirrors the unstable life of the protagonist, Azaro, who navigates between the spirit and human worlds. The variable pacing of the story, with its sudden expansions and contractions of narrative time, mimics the unpredictability of Azaro's existence. Fludernik (2009) points out that such narrative strategies engage readers more actively, as they must "adjust their reading pace and attention to follow the narrative's temporal shifts" (26).

The differential treatment of time in Okri's novel also allows for a more nuanced exploration of character development and thematic depth. 'Extended narrative time' (Panassenko 15) gives readers the space to delve into the psychological complexity of characters, while 'Contracted time' (Bal 20) can underscore their actions and decisions. This duality enhances the narrative's richness, making it a compelling study of time's flexibility in literary storytelling.

4.3.2.7 Grounding the Mystical

The novel's setting in a Nigerian village allows the integration of these celestial movements into the daily life of the community, reflecting Plato's assertion that "time is cyclical and observable through regular cosmic patterns" (40). For instance, the "phases of the moon are often noted in the narrative..." (Okri 105), influencing the spiritual activities and the visibility of the spirit world to Azaro. These references serve not only as temporal markers but also as elements that align the spiritual and terrestrial worlds in a harmonious existence, echoing Plato's view of the cosmos as a well-ordered whole.

4.3.2.8 Character Interactions and Visual Arts

The interaction between characters and these animated art pieces provides a unique lens through which the reader can explore the characters' emotions and backstories. For instance, Azaro's encounters with artworks that reflect African cultural heritage serve as "catalysts for revelations about his identity and purpose" (Okri 73). These encounters often occur at critical junctures in the narrative, marking moments of psychological and spiritual transformation for Azaro and other characters, thus underscoring the narrative's thematic concerns with growth, understanding, and the cyclic nature of life and time.

4.3.2.9 Symbolism of Art

Art objects in Okri's narrative are often placed in specific spatial contexts that enrich their symbolic meanings. For example, a sculpture in a desolate landscape might symbolize isolation or resilience, depending on the narrative moment. This placement not only reflects the characters' immediate emotional landscapes but also connects to broader themes such as community, heritage, and the struggle against cultural erasure. The temporal changes in these spaces, how they appear or transform over time, further underline the narrative's exploration of change and permanence, echoing Heffernan's notion of the "temporality of space within literature" (10).

4.3.2.10 Philosophical Implications

Through the "consistent use of celestial cycles..." (Okri 107), Okri engages with Platonic philosophy, which treats time as the moving image of eternity. The narrative suggests that while human and spiritual experiences may seem transient and fleeting, they are part of a larger, orderly cosmic dance guided by time's eternal cycle. This perspective invites the reader to reflect on the permanence of change and the constancy of time, as depicted through the unchanging patterns of celestial bodies.

4.3.2.11 Visual Descriptions as Temporal Cues

Okri's use of detailed visual descriptions serves as a powerful tool for depicting the passage of time within the novel. Scenes are painted with "meticulous attention to the changes in light, the transformation of landscapes, and the aging of objects..." (Okri 109), all of which contribute to a palpable sense of time flowing or standing still. For instance, the "changing shadows and the movement of the sun through the sky..." (Okri 111) subtly indicate the time of day and the progression from morning to night, reflecting the natural rhythm of life and the inexorable passage of time.

The novel's visual descriptions often serve as temporal cues. For example, the "gradual deterioration of man-made structures or the growth of plants" (106) are depicted in such a way that the reader perceives time's impact on the physical world. These visual elements are not merely decorative; they carry

significant temporal information that helps the reader understand the historical and chronological context of the events being described.

4.3.2.12 ‘Subjective Time’

In Ben Okri’s *The Songs of Enchantment*, the representation of subjective experiences of time, as analyzed through J. Hillis Miller’s concepts in *Time in Literature*, illuminates the “intricate relationship between character consciousness and development” (10). Okri’s narrative delves into how individual perceptions of time can significantly affect and reflect the internal journeys of his characters, particularly the protagonist, Azaro.

Okri employs ‘Subjective time’ to explore the inner worlds of his characters, where time bends and stretches in accordance with their personal experiences and emotional states. For Azaro, the spirit child, time often appears non-linear and fluid, filled with “echoes of past incarnations and glimpses of possible futures” (Okri 92). This subjective handling of time is crucial in portraying Azaro’s struggle between the spirit world and the earthly realm, highlighting his unique perception of life’s temporality as he oscillates between these existences.

4.3.2.13 Time as a Psychological Construct

Miller’s analysis suggests that literature often uses “time to reflect psychological truths about characters” (36). In *The Songs of Enchantment*, time is also a psychological landscape that character’s traverse. The slow or fast pacing of events as experienced by Azaro and other characters often correlates with their psychological states. For instance, moments of crisis or spiritual revelations are dilated, intensifying the emotional impact and the subjective experience of time slowing down, which contrasts with the often brisk passage of mundane daily events.

4.3.2.14 Time and Spiritual Growth

Okri connects subjective time with spiritual growth, particularly through Azaro’s encounters with mystical elements. Time seems to expand infinitely during Azaro’s interactions with spirits or during rituals, suggesting a different layer of existence where conventional measures of time are irrelevant. These

moments are pivotal for Azaro's development, as they often lead to profound realizations or decisions that alter his path, reflecting the non-linear progression of personal growth and enlightenment.

4.3.2.15 Literary Devices Influencing Temporal Constructs

Okri employs a variety of literary devices that manipulate time to enhance the mystical and ethereal qualities of the narrative. One such device is the use of flashbacks, which are strategically placed to provide backstory or deeper insight into the "protagonist Azaro's previous lives as a spirit child" (Okri 34). These flashbacks are not mere reminiscences but act as gateways that blur the lines between past and present, enriching the narrative's temporal layers.

Flash-forwards are another technique Okri uses to disrupt the linear progression of time. These glimpses into the future are often interwoven with current events, providing a prophetic quality to the narrative that heightens the sense of destiny and fate. This device not only adds depth to the character's journey but also aligns with the cyclical nature of time suggested in the novel, where the future, present, and past continually intersect.

4.3.2.16 Narrative Pacing and Time Dilation

Okri manipulates the pacing of the narrative to expand or contract the reader's perception of time. In moments of heightened tension or spiritual significance, the narrative pace slows, elongating the moment and immersing the reader in the depth of the experience. Conversely, during more mundane or transitional periods, the pacing quickens, skimming over less significant events. This control over pacing not only affects how time is experienced but also shapes the spatial dimensions of these moments, making some settings feel vast and timeless while others are fleeting and transient.

Okri's narrative eschews a straightforward chronological order, opting instead for a structure that seamlessly merges events from the past, present, and future. This technique is not merely a stylistic choice but serves as a means to reflect the cyclical nature of life and the non-linear path of personal growth and spiritual understanding. The protagonist, Azaro, a spirit child, experiences life in a way that is inherently non-linear, with "reincarnations and visions of past

lives that intersect with his present experiences and future possibilities” (Okri 45).

4.3.2.17 Temporal Fluidity and Character Development

The fluid treatment of time in Okri’s narrative mirrors the internal development of the characters, particularly Azaro, whose understanding of his world and his role within it evolves as he navigates between the temporal layers. This fluidity is reflective of the spirit child’s existential condition; his life is a continuous oscillation between the spiritual and earthly realms, each with its own temporal logic. The narrative time becomes a reflection of Azaro’s psychological and spiritual growth, illustrating how “personal time can expand or contract in response to emotional and spiritual states” (Miller 34).

4.3.2.18 Disrupting Reader Expectations

Okri’s approach to narrative time disrupts readers’ expectations by presenting a world where time is mutable and malleable. Traditional markers of time are “subverted, creating a reading experience that requires the audience to relinquish their temporal assumptions” (Miller 19) and engage with the text on its own metaphysical terms. This disruption is not only a narrative technique but also a thematic exploration of the nature of reality as perceived through the lens of African spiritual beliefs, where time is often viewed as cyclical rather than linear.

4.3.2.19 Symbolic Use of Time

Throughout *The Songs of Enchantment*, time has been used symbolically to represent broader themes such as colonial history, cultural memory, and the legacy of ancestral knowledge. The blending of temporal layers within the narrative reflects the ongoing impact of the past on present circumstances, particularly in the post-colonial context that Okri often explores. This symbolic use of time encourages readers to consider how historical events continue to resonate within contemporary settings.

Ben Okri’s use of narrative time in *The Songs of Enchantment* is a complex interweaving of temporal layers that reflects the intricate dynamics of memory, identity, and spiritual existence. By challenging conventional narrative

structures, Okri not only crafts a unique story but also offers profound insights into the nature of time itself, as experienced through the lens of his characters. This narrative strategy not only deepens the thematic richness of the novel but also redefines the possibilities of literary expression regarding time and reality.

4.3.3 Spatial Constructs

A story's use of spatial frameworks can help to portray space, its significance, and its evolution. With the aid of these literary strategies, readers can better comprehend how locations are altered to suit the requirements of the book's characters.

4.3.3.1 The Bar as a Chronotopic Space

Madame Koto's bar is another significant chronotope that represents a nexus of cultural, historical, and spiritual narratives. The bar transitions from a "mere local watering hole to a political hub..." (Okri 124), reflecting the shifting political landscape of the nation. As Madame Koto aligns herself with political figures, the bar becomes a space where "power and corruption are negotiated and contested" (Okri 125). This setting encapsulates the tensions between traditional values and the encroaching influences of modernity and colonial legacies, mirroring Azaro's navigation through visible and invisible realms.

4.3.3.2 Representation of the Marketplace

The marketplace in *The Songs of Enchantment* is a quintessential example of how space carries historical and cultural meanings. As a hub of economic and social interaction, the "marketplace is where cultural heritage is displayed, negotiated, and even contested" (Okri 143). It is a space that reflects the community's resilience and creativity, where traditional practices are preserved and adapted to contemporary challenges. The marketplace's role in the community's daily life exemplifies Lefebvre's assertion that space is a key element in the "production of social relations, embodying both historical continuity and change" (23).

One of the most vivid examples of a cultural chronotope in the novel is the marketplace, which serves as a microcosm of the community's social and economic life. The marketplace is not merely a "place for trade but a space

where social and spiritual exchanges occur” (Okri 144), reflecting the communal and cultural dynamics of Azaro’s world. It is a place where the past and present coalesce, with each vendor and customer embodying the community’s struggles and aspirations. The market’s temporal layers, showcasing daily struggles juxtaposed against historical oppression, enrich Azaro’s sensory experiences and deepen the reader’s understanding of the socio-economic conditions that shape the characters’ lives.

4.3.3.3 The Home as a Cultural Chronotope

Azaro’s home environment is a subtle yet powerful chronotope that reflects the personal and historical struggles of his family. The home is both a “sanctuary and a site of vulnerability...” (Okri 145), where Azaro and his parents experience both joy and suffering. It is a space that captures the everyday realities of a marginalized family in a rapidly changing world, highlighting the intersection of personal identity with broader socio-cultural dynamics. The home’s temporal dimension is marked by cycles of hardship and resilience, which are emblematic of the historical struggles faced by many postcolonial societies.

4.3.3.4 Social Production of Space

In Ben Okri’s *The Songs of Enchantment*, the concept of space as socially constructed is integral to understanding the protagonist Azaro’s journey through both visible and invisible realms. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre’s (1974) theory in *The Production of Space*, this novel demonstrates how spaces are not “merely physical or neutral settings but are imbued with historical and cultural meanings” (69) that actively shape the experiences and identities of individuals within them. Lefebvre’s notion that space is a product of “social interactions, functions, and power relations” (32) provides a lens through which to examine the spaces in Okri’s narrative, revealing how they reflect and perpetuate the socio-cultural dynamics of the postcolonial Nigerian setting.

Madame Koto’s bar serves as a critical ‘Social space’ (Lefebvre 9) where various elements of the community’s cultural and political life converge. As Azaro’s “interactions within the bar unfold, it becomes evident that the bar is not just a physical locale” (Okri 120) but a socially constructed space where

power dynamics, social stratification, and resistance are played out. The bar's transformation from a simple local spot to a center of political activity mirrors the broader societal changes and reflects the historical impact of colonialism and modernity on traditional spaces.

4.3.3.5 The Intersection of Physical and Spiritual Spaces

In *The Songs of Enchantment*, the intertwining of physical and spiritual realms illustrates Lefebvre's idea that "space is a social product" (9). The frequent transitions Azaro experiences between the world of the living and the spirit world highlight how these spaces are constructed by cultural beliefs and practices. These spiritual spaces are not abstract concepts but are rooted in the community's collective consciousness, shaped by their historical struggles and aspirations. The fluidity between these realms reflects the community's understanding of existence as a continuum that transcends physical boundaries, embodying a space that is both a lived experience and a cultural construct.

4.3.3.6 Home Space and Personal Identity

The space of Azaro's home is deeply symbolic, representing a site of personal and familial identity. It is where Azaro retreats to find "solace from the chaotic external world, but it is also where the impacts of socio-economic hardships" (Okri 78) are most acutely felt. The home is a space shaped by the historical conditions of poverty, resistance, and survival, illustrating Lefebvre's concept that "space is not only shaped by social forces but also shapes those living within it" (10). The home's configuration and the activities within it reflect and reinforce the family's place within the socio-cultural and economic fabric of society.

4.3.3.7 Tripartite Model of Space

In *The Songs of Enchantment* by Ben Okri, the application of Henri Lefebvre's tripartite model of space offers a profound framework for understanding the spatial dimensions within the novel. Lefebvre's model divides space into three interrelated aspects: "perceived space (spatial practices), conceived space (representations of space), and lived space (spaces of representation)" (46). This model helps to dissect how each type of space influences the protagonist, Azaro's, experience and identity throughout the narrative.

4.3.3.8 Perceived Space

Perceived space in Lefebvre's terms refers to the "physical space which individuals encounter daily" (47). In Okri's narrative, this includes the "streets of the shanty town, Madame Koto's bar, and Azaro's home" (89). These are spaces of survival, interaction, and everyday social practices. For instance, the "bustling streets, fraught with political rallies and mystic occurrences..." (Okri 133), are not merely backdrops for Azaro's adventures but "active elements in his everyday life that shape his perception of reality" (Morrello 24). These spaces are where the physical and spiritual dimensions of his world collide, revealing the tangible impact of socio-economic conditions on individual lives.

4.3.3.9 Conceived Space

Conceived spaces are imagined or planned spaces, often "created by those in power or by cultural authorities" (Lefebvre 49). In *The Songs of Enchantment*, conceived space can be seen in the "changing landscape of the community, driven by political forces and economic development" (Okri 111). Madame Koto's expanding bar serves as a microcosm of this type of space, embodying the intrusion of external economic interests into the local community. The transformation of her "bar from a modest local hangout to a flourishing establishment frequented by influential figures" (Okri 109) symbolizes the imposition of new social structures and values. This representation of space directly influences Azaro's understanding of power dynamics and cultural shifts within his community.

4.3.3.10 Lived Space

Lived space refers to the complex space as "lived through its associated images and symbols" (Lefebvre 54), and as directly experienced through the associated symbols and imagery of its inhabitants. For Azaro, the "spiritual encounters and visionary experiences that permeate his daily existence" (Okri 79) exemplify lived space. These experiences are deeply personal and formative, providing him with a unique lens through which to view his world. The novel's frequent blending of the spiritual and material realms, such as Azaro's "visions

of spirits intermingling with the townspeople” (Okri 101), illustrates how lived space encompasses more than the physical environment—it includes the overlay of imagination, memory, and symbolism that everyone brings to their experience of space.

4.3.3.11 Metaphorical use of landscape

Landscapes in *The Songs of Enchantment* often reflect the mental and emotional states of Azaro, the protagonist. The forest, a recurrent setting, is not just a physical space but a “representation of mystery, danger, and enlightenment” (Okri 59). It changes with Azaro’s encounters, expanding and contracting with the narrative flow of time, reflecting his fears, joys, and revelations. This metaphorical use of space enhances the fluidity between the visible and invisible realms, illustrating how external landscapes correspond with internal emotional landscapes.

4.3.3.12 Impact on Identity Formation

The interplay of these spatial dimensions within *The Songs of Enchantment* profoundly impacts Azaro’s identity formation. As he navigates through these multifaceted spaces, he grapples with his dual existence between the spiritual and material worlds. The perceived space teaches him about the harsh realities of life in a Nigerian shanty town; the conceived space confronts him with the forces of modernization and change; and the lived space allows him to reconcile these external influences with his internal, spiritual journey.

Through Lefebvre’s spatial triad, Okri not only deepens the narrative’s engagement with themes of identity and transformation but also critiques the socio-political and economic forces shaping postcolonial Nigerian society. Azaro’s journey through these spaces illustrates the complex ways in which spaces are not passively inhabited but actively lived and experienced, each layer adding to his understanding of himself and his community.

4.3.3.13 Contradictions in Space

In *The Songs of Enchantment* by Ben Okri, the depiction of space is not only a backdrop for the unfolding narrative but also a medium through which the author explores and presents societal and existential contradictions. Henri

Lefebvre's theory of space as a product of social relations provides a useful lens to examine how Okri manipulates spatial settings to reflect the contradictions inherent in the protagonist Azaro's world.

4.3.3.14 Societal Contradictions: The Duality of Space

Lefebvre argues that space is “not neutral but loaded with ideologies and contradictions” (13), often reflecting the conflicts and dualities within society. Okri vividly illustrates these contradictions through spaces that serve dual or multiple purposes, embodying the socio-political tensions of post-colonial Nigeria. For example, “Madame Koto's bar is both a place of refuge and exploitation” (Okri 141), offering a sanctuary from the harshness of the outside world while simultaneously exposing Azaro and the community to new forms of control and influence from political figures and outsiders. This space reflects the tension between the old ways of the village and the encroaching forces of modernization and capitalism that often exploit traditional communities.

4.3.3.15 Existential Contradictions: Between Visibility and Invisibility

Azaro, as a spirit child, inhabits spaces that straddle the visible material world and the invisible spiritual realm. Okri uses this duality to explore existential contradictions, particularly the tension between life and death, presence and absence. This is evident in spaces like the “forest where Azaro encounters spirits...” (Okri 68)—these areas are real and tangible yet simultaneously ethereal and otherworldly. The forest acts as a ‘Liminal space’ (Guignery 8) that contradicts its own nature; it is both a place of lost souls and a site of enlightenment and discovery for Azaro, highlighting his existential journey between two worlds.

4.3.3.16 Contradictions in ‘Urban Spaces’: Growth and Decay

The urban setting in *The Songs of Enchantment* is depicted with stark contradictions that reflect the “inequalities and challenges of urban life in a developing nation” (Okri 146). The shanty town where Azaro lives is marked by its vibrant community life but also by its poverty and decay. The juxtaposition of “newly constructed buildings alongside dilapidated structures” (Okri 156) underlines the uneven development and the disparities between

wealth and poverty. These spatial contradictions are not merely physical but signify deeper social divisions and the failure of societal structures to address basic human needs.

4.3.3.17 Spaces of Resistance and Conformity

Furthermore, spaces in the novel also reflect contradictions between resistance and conformity. While some community members, like Azaro's father, use public spaces to "resist political oppression, others conform to the new powers that enter their community" (Okri 178), hoping to gain personal advantage. This contradiction highlights the varying responses to societal pressures and the complex dynamics of power and resistance within contested spaces.

Through these spatial contradictions, Okri not only crafts a rich tapestry of life in a Nigerian town but also critiques the broader socio-economic and political issues facing such communities. The novel's spaces, therefore, are not static but dynamic, constantly shaped and reshaped by the contradictions they embody, reflecting the ongoing struggles within society.

4.3.3.18 Character Movement and Spatial Dynamics

Character movements within spaces are meticulously detailed by Okri and often parallel shifts in temporal perspective. As Azaro navigates through different environments, "from his home to Madame Koto's bar, to the bustling streets" (Okri 67) his interactions with these spaces often precipitate shifts in narrative time, reflecting his growth and the unfolding spiritual and corporeal conflicts.

4.3.3.19 Spatial Movement and Ethereal Quality

The spatial movement within Okri's narrative is often depicted through the wandering paths of the characters, especially Azaro, the protagonist, whose journeys "through the village and its surroundings..." (Okri 66) offers a visual metaphor for his spiritual and emotional wanderings. The descriptions of "winding roads, meandering rivers, and shifting landscapes" (Okri 181) not only suggest physical movement but also mirror the characters' internal journeys. This alignment of physical and metaphorical spaces enhances the novel's ethereal quality, as the boundaries between the real and the surreal blur, reflecting the fluid nature of the protagonist's experiences.

4.3.4 Conglomeration of Time and Space

What makes a story cohesive is that time and place are inextricably linked and cannot exist as separate entities in any narrative.

4.3.4.1 Integration of Time and Space

In Ben Okri's *The Songs of Enchantment*, the integration of time and space, or the "chronotope," plays a crucial role in shaping the novel's mystical and ethereal qualities. Mikhail Bakhtin's (1920) concept of the chronotope helps in understanding how narrative "time and space intertwine to create specific worldviews and realities within literature" (9). Okri masterfully employs this concept to blend the physical and spiritual realms, enhancing the novel's surreal and magical elements that define its setting and narrative style.

The chronotope in Okri's narrative manifests through the seamless blending of the real and the supernatural, where time bends and space is fluid. This fusion is particularly evident in the experiences of Azaro, the spirit-child protagonist, whose perceptions of the world are not bound by the ordinary constraints of time and space. For Azaro, time can "contract or expand; moments of intense emotional or spiritual significance can seem to last forever" (Hakverson 9), or significant events can flash by in an instant.

For instance, Azaro's journeys between the spirit world and the human world are depicted as transitions that defy the conventional linear progression of time. These transitions are not just shifts in physical location but also transformations in how time is experienced. This phenomenon effectively captures the chronotope's ability to "merge different temporal and spatial dimensions" (Bakhtin 10), creating a narrative space that allows for a fluid and dynamic interaction between the protagonist and his environment. The ethereal quality of the novel is further enhanced by the way these spaces accommodate significant temporal shifts. For example, within Madame Koto's bar, "time seems to suspend or accelerate depending on the nature of the spiritual or communal activities" (Okri 108) taking place. Celebrations, rituals, or the presence of spirits can transform the bar into a place where the usual rules of time and space do not apply, highlighting the chronotopic nature of this setting.

Furthermore, the river, another significant chronotopic motif in the novel, symbolizes the flow of time and the continuity of life and death. It is both a literal and metaphorical space where past, present, and future converge, reflecting the life cycle of the community and the individual journeys of its members. This convergence is representative of Bakhtin's idea that the chronotope "grounds narrative" (17), as it embeds the story within a tangible yet transcendent realm that profoundly impacts the "characters' experiences and the thematic development of the narrative" (19).

4.3.4.2 Chronotopic Moments

In Ben Okri's *The Songs of Enchantment*, the chronotope, as conceptualized by Mikhail Bakhtin, serves as a pivotal narrative tool that intertwines time and space to create profound moments of mysticism and significant life events. These chronotopic moments are not merely narrative conveniences but are crucial for unveiling the novel's deeper philosophical and existential layers. They facilitate the protagonist, Azaro's experiences, and perceptions in a realm where spiritual and physical dimensions merge seamlessly.

One such chronotopic moment occurs during Azaro's visions, where he encounters "spirits from both the past and the future" (Okri 47). These visions are spatially situated in familiar settings like his village but are temporally dislocated, existing outside the normal flow of time. This blending of temporal layers within a single spatial setting allows Azaro to experience a non-linear version of reality where he can interact with non-corporeal entities. These encounters emphasize the thematic exploration of time as cyclical and layered, a core aspect of the novel's narrative structure.

Another significant chronotopic moment is the recurring motif of the marketplace, which serves as a central hub for the community's social and spiritual interactions. The marketplace is a place where different timelines seem to converge— "stories from the elders mix with the cries of market vendors..." (Okri 63), and visions of spirits overlap with day-to-day commercial activities. This location exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope by being a space where the community's history and its present activities are layered over one another, creating a rich tapestry of cultural and temporal interaction.

Azaro's journey through the forest represents another key chronotopic moment. The forest is depicted as a "timeless realm, a space that exists parallel to the human world" (Okri 74) but follows different temporal rules. As Azaro navigates through this space, time seems to elongate, stretching moments of fear, awe, and revelation. The forest acts as a threshold between worlds, where Azaro undergoes transformative experiences that are both mystical and developmental, marking crucial points in his life and spiritual journey.

The festival scenes within the novel also represent vital chronotopic moments where time and space are uniquely fused. During festivals, the ordinary temporal flow of village life seems to pause, and a different kind of time, marked by ritual and celebration, takes over. These scenes are spatially centered around significant landmarks in the village, such as the "central square or Madame Koto's bar..." (Okri 188), yet they encapsulate moments that seem to stand out of time, highlighting the community's connection to its ancestral roots and the cyclic nature of life.

Lastly, the moments of physical transformation that Azaro witnesses, such as the metamorphosis of characters like "Madame Koto, who gains supernatural attributes" (Okri 181), represent a fusion of temporal progression with spatial metamorphosis. These transformations are not just physical but signify deeper metaphysical changes that reflect on the characters' spiritual journeys, thereby merging the novel's thematic exploration of growth and decay with the literal and figurative landscape of the narrative.

These chronotopic moments are essential not only for their thematic depth but also for how they allow the reader to experience the narrative's ethereal qualities, blending the mystical with the mundane and making the surreal aspects of Okri's narrative palpably real. Through these instances, Okri explores complex themes such as identity, spirituality, and the nature of reality, making *The Songs of Enchantment* a profound exploration of life through the lens of magical realism.

4.3.4.3 Spatial and Temporal Fluidity

In Ben Okri's *The Songs of Enchantment*, the fluidity of time and space, conceptualized through Bakhtin's idea of the chronotope, profoundly impacts the novel's exploration of identity, visibility, and invisibility. These themes are not only central to the narrative's structure but are also crucial in understanding the protagonist Azaro's spectral existence between the spirit and human worlds. Bakhtin's chronotope allows Okri to create a narrative where time and space are not fixed entities but are instead dynamic and permeable, "mirroring the protagonist's shifting perceptions and existential uncertainties" (Doraiswamy 21).

The novel frequently depicts scenes where the temporal and spatial boundaries are blurred, such as when Azaro transitions between "the world of the living and the spirit world" (Okri 22). These transitions are often seamless, with the protagonist experiencing both realms simultaneously. The fluid nature of these realms reflects the fluid identity of Azaro, who exists as both visible to the living and invisible in his interactions with the spirit world. This duality challenges the conventional perceptions of existence and non-existence, making Azaro's journey a metaphor for the marginal identities that oscillate between being seen and unseen in societal contexts.

4.3.4.4 Chronotopic Reflections on Identity

Azaro's visibility and invisibility can be read as allegorical to the socio-political invisibility experienced by the marginalized communities represented in the novel. The fluid spaces in which Azaro operates— "moving through markets, forests, and urban landscapes..." (Okri 132) that constantly shifts in response to his presence—illustrates how identity is constructed and deconstructed in relation to the spaces one inhabits. The chronotope here serves as a narrative device that aligns the transformation of space with Azaro's personal and communal identity shifts, emphasizing how external conditions can influence internal perceptions of self.

4.3.4.5 Spiritual Spaces and Temporal Layers

The spiritual realms Azaro visits offer a chronotopic exploration of cultural heritage and ancestral memory, serving as conduits for both personal and collective histories. These spaces are densely temporal, where time seems to fold into itself, allowing past, present, and future to interact in ways that are impossible in the physical world. Through these interactions, Okri reveals the deep spiritual underpinnings of the community's cultural practices, linking them to broader historical narratives of survival and resistance.

4.3.4.6 Temporal and Spatial Overlaps: Historical and Modern Contradictions

Okri also employs contradictions in the temporal overlay of spaces. 'Historical spaces' (Lefebvre 46) infused with the memories and traditions of the community often clash with the new spaces shaped by modern forces. This is seen in the transformation of community landmarks, where "traditional festivals are overshadowed by political rallies or commercial activities" (Okri 216). These overlaps create a sense of dissonance for Azaro and the community, who feel a loss of identity and heritage in the face of rapid modern changes.

4.3.4.7 Interconnection of Time and Space

In Ben Okri's *The Songs of Enchantment*, the interconnection of time and space plays a pivotal role in constructing the narrative's architecture, reflecting the protagonist Azaro's psychological transitions and experiences. Natalie Panasenکو's (2021) insights into the relationship between literary time and space provide a crucial theoretical framework for understanding how "Okri manipulates these elements to shape the reader's perception of the story's reality" (8).

4.3.4.8 Structuring Space through 'Literary Time'

Okri uses 'Literary time' (Panasenکو 10) not just chronological progression to structure spatial experiences within the novel. This technique allows him to expand and contract space in a way that mirrors Azaro's internal states and the mystical experiences of his journey. For instance, during "moments of spiritual

insight or supernatural encounters, time seems to dilate” (Okri 204), affecting how Azaro perceives the surrounding space. The forest, a recurring setting in the novel, is experienced differently each time Azaro enters it, depending on his emotional and psychological state, which is influenced by the non-linear progression of time.

4.3.4.9 Symbolic Spaces Linked to Temporal Moments

Each significant temporal shift in the narrative corresponds with a transformation in the spatial setting, which symbolizes Azaro’s growth and challenges. For example, when “Azaro revisits memories of his past incarnations...” (Okri 210), the spaces associated with these memories (such as the bar or his home) are imbued with a surreal quality that transcends their everyday reality. These shifts highlight how ‘Literary time’ (Panasenکو 12) can alter space to reflect the psychological and emotional landscape of the protagonist.

4.3.4.10 Synchronicity of Time and Space in Character Development

As Azaro navigates through various existential crises, the synchronization of time and space serves to highlight his development. When temporal progression slows down, the spaces around Azaro become more oppressive or comforting, depending on his needs and growth at that moment. This synchronization illustrates how literary time does not “merely pass but actively shapes the spatial environment to reflect the protagonist’s journey” (Buccholz 12).

4.3.4.11 The Role of ‘Cyclical Time’ in Spatial Representation

Panasenko discusses how ‘cyclical time’ (5) can influence the representation of space in literature. In *The Songs of Enchantment*, cyclical time is evident in the recurring motifs and settings that evolve with Azaro’s repetitive encounters with life and death. This repetition creates a rhythm that resonates through the spaces in the novel, each cycle adding depth and altering the reader’s understanding of these spaces.

4.3.4.12 Space as a Manifestation of Psychological Time

Finally, the novel portrays space not just as a physical dimension but as a manifestation of Azaro's psychological time. The chaotic, often fragmented representation of time in his experiences affects how he perceives and interacts with his environment. Spaces in the novel often feel dreamlike or nightmarish, reflecting the disorienting effect of living in a non-linear temporal reality.

Through these techniques, Okri crafts a narrative where time and space are intricately linked, each shaping the other in a dance that mirrors the protagonist's spiritual and psychological journey. This approach not only enhances the thematic depth of the novel but also enriches the reader's engagement with the narrative, offering a complex, layered experience of Okri's fictional world.

4.3.4.13 Symbolism and Metaphor

Symbolism is a pivotal device in linking space and time within Okri's narrative. Objects and elements within the environment often carry symbolic weight that transcends their immediate context, bridging the visible and invisible worlds. The river, for example, is a recurring symbol that represents the flow of life and time, its presence reminding readers of the continuous movement of both elements and their inevitable intermingling.

Okri's rich use of sensory details enhances the spatial and temporal depth of the narrative. Descriptions of sights, sounds, and smells are not merely decorative but serve to solidify the reader's temporal and spatial orientation within the story. These descriptions make the settings palpable, blurring the lines between the real and the surreal, and anchoring the ephemeral moments of spiritual and mystical experiences in tangible reality.

Through these literary devices, Ben Okri crafts a narrative in *The Songs of Enchantment* that seamlessly merges time and space, creating a tapestry where the mystical and the mundane are interwoven. This complex narrative structure not only challenges conventional storytelling techniques but also deeply immerses the reader in a world where the boundaries of time and space are continuously redefined.

4.3.4.14 Heffernan's Integration of Space and Time

In Ben Okri's *The Songs of Enchantment*, the blending of spatial and temporal elements is a pivotal technique that enriches thematic expressions and deepens character interactions. This integration, reflective of James A.W. Heffernan's (1987) discussions on the interplay between space and time in literature and the visual arts, is particularly evident in Okri's use of visual art motifs throughout the narrative. These elements do not merely serve decorative purposes but are fundamental in "conveying the deeper symbolic meanings of the narrative, enhancing the reader's understanding of the characters' internal and external journeys" (Heffernan 29).

4.3.4.15 Thematic Expression through Spatial and Temporal Integration

Okri employs visual arts within the narrative to create a vivid tableau that transcends traditional spatial and temporal boundaries. This technique is particularly effective in portraying the mystical and ethereal settings of the novel, where the normal laws of physics and linear time do not always apply. For example, "paintings and sculptures in the narrative often come to life..." (Okri 194), interacting with the protagonist, Azaro, and offering insights that bridge the real with the surreal. This dynamic use of visual arts not only enhances the magical realism characteristic of Okri's style but also embeds deeper thematic layers within the spatial settings.

4.3.4.16 The Role of Nature in Marking Time

Okri frequently uses elements of nature to mark time within the narrative. The cyclical patterns of nature—"the phases of the moon, the seasonal blooms, and the patterns of weather.." (Okri 238)—are richly described, providing a backdrop that highlights the passage of time. These natural cycles add depth to the story, reminding the reader of the larger, universal forces at play and the small, fleeting moments of human existence within this grand temporal scale.

4.3.5 Comparative Analysis of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, *Songs of Enchantment* and *Astonishing the Gods*

Ben Okri's literary technique in *The Famished Road*, *Astonishing the Gods*, and *The Songs of Enchantment* offers a profound departure from conventional narrative structures through his non-linear representation of time. This innovative approach not only defies the traditional chronology that governs most narratives but elevates time from a mere sequential backdrop to a vital, metaphysical element of the storytelling process. Okri's fluid conceptualization of time allows it to loop and bend, enabling characters—and through them, readers—to traverse various temporal realms simultaneously. This manipulation of time enriches the narrative, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of the themes Okri wishes to convey. In traditional narratives, time typically progresses in a linear fashion, moving straightforwardly from past to present to future. However, Okri disrupts this linear progression, creating a narrative tapestry where time is cyclical and mutable. In *The Famished Road*, for instance, the protagonist Azaro revisits past lives and experiences future possibilities all within the same narrative frame. This cyclical approach to time reflects many non-Western perspectives on time's nature, particularly those found in African spiritual and philosophical traditions, which often view time as a recurring cycle rather than a linear path.

This nonlinear time allows Okri to delve into the cyclical nature of life, suffering, and rejuvenation, which is a recurring theme throughout his works. Characters experience and re-experience events, which highlights the repetitive patterns of human experience and the potential for learning and transformation within those cycles. It challenges readers to reconsider their understanding of time as a fixed and unidirectional force, urging them to acknowledge how past, present, and future might coexist and intermingle in a single moment. Moreover, by allowing time to serve as a metaphysical element, Okri invites deeper reflection on existential themes. In *Astonishing the Gods*, the protagonist's journey is marked by encounters and experiences that defy ordinary temporal constraints. These experiences, which blend elements from different times into a coherent present experience, suggest that the journey toward self-discovery and enlightenment is not bound by physical time.

Instead, it is a timeless pursuit, where insights can be gained from any temporal context—be it past, present, or future.

Okri's technique also fosters a unique interaction between the reader and the text. As time bends and loops within the narrative, readers find themselves re-evaluating events and their significance, understanding that each moment in Okri's world is laden with multiple layers of meaning that transcend ordinary temporal boundaries. This active engagement with the text mirrors the thematic quests of the characters, who often seek deeper truths about their existence and the worlds they inhabit. Ben Okri's non-linear representation of time is not merely a stylistic choice but a profound narrative strategy that enhances the thematic depth of his novels. It disrupts traditional temporal expectations and provides a richer, more complex experience that reflects the intricacies of human existence and the cyclical nature of life itself. Through this approach, Okri does not just tell a story; he invites readers into a meditative reflection on time, existence, and the continuum of past, present, and future.

In *The Famished Road*, space is portrayed as a mutable, almost living entity that interacts deeply with the characters, particularly the protagonist, Azaro. The setting transcends mere geographical locale, impacting the narrative and characters in a direct, palpable manner. worlds like the bar, home, or the spirit world are not static; they change and evolve, echoing the instability and flux of the post-colonial Nigerian society depicted in the novel. This dynamic representation of space serves to underscore the chaos and unpredictability of Azaro's world, reflecting the broader themes of struggle and survival.

Unlike his other works, in *Astonishing the Gods*, Okri grants a dominant role to time over space. The narrative focuses extensively on the temporal journey of the protagonist, who navigates through various existential thresholds. This emphasis on time rather than space accentuates the inner, psychological exploration of the character, shifting focus from external surroundings to internal experiences and revelations. This approach highlights the transformative power of time, as the protagonist seeks to discover and understand the invisible aspects of his being and the essence of his existence.

The Songs of Enchantment features a uniquely rapid progression of time, which significantly influences the narrative's rhythm and the perception of events. This quickened temporal flow not only drives the plot forward with urgency but also emphasizes the ephemeral nature of the magical and enchanting experiences the characters undergo. The fleeting quality of these moments, propelled by the accelerated passage of time, serves to highlight their preciousness and the transient beauty of life's mystical experiences. This narrative choice reinforces the themes of impermanence and the fleeting nature of enchantment, enriching the reader's engagement with the mystical and ethereal aspects of the story.

Across *The Famished Road*, *Astonishing the Gods*, and *The Songs of Enchantment*, Magic Realism stands out as a predominant narrative technique. This style enables Okri to blur the traditional boundaries between the real and the supernatural, allowing him to explore complex themes such as identity, memory, and spiritual search in a more nuanced manner. The magical elements are woven seamlessly into the realist fabric of the narrative, presenting a world where magical and mundane coexist and are treated with equal realism. This approach not only captivates the reader's imagination but also invites them to question the nature of reality itself.

The distinction between 'narrative' (the story being told) and 'narration' (the act of telling the story) is a crucial theme in Okri's writings. This theme prompts readers to consider not only the content of the story but also how the story is presented and its broader implications. The non-linear, often fragmented narrative structure that Okri employs forces an engagement with the text that is dynamically interactive, as the readers must piece together the story from the disparate threads presented to them. This technique enriches the reading experience, providing depth and multiple layers of meaning to explore.

The Famished Road and *The Songs of Enchantment* utilise a range of characters to explore and develop the themes of time and space, while *Astonishing the Gods* takes a different approach by using unnamed characters to universalize the experience. In the latter, the absence of named characters strips the narrative of personal specificity, focusing instead on universal themes of

existence and identity. This method allows Okri to explore deep metaphysical questions detached from individual character arcs, presenting a narrative that resonates on a collective human level, irrespective of personal identity. This approach serves to highlight the philosophical underpinnings of his work, emphasizing the idea that the journey towards understanding and enlightenment is a universal one, shared across human experiences.

4.3.6 Conclusion

Ben Okri's temporal and spatial constructs break the traditional notion of time and space. Okri treats time as multidimensional as he brings separate dimensions to portray the flow of time. On the other hand, Okri's treatment of space is not restricted to a fixed locale. He brings variety in his treatment of space. Okri's transcendental treatment of time shows the duration of life which is necessary to comprehend that there is also a space that exists beyond the actual space in the world. Space recreates a person's identity and time helps in the recapitulation of memories. As is seen through Okri's selected works like *The Famished Road*, *Astonishing the Gods* and *The Songs of Enchantment*, this chapter assesses the influence of temporal and spatial factors on the overall meaning and reception of Ben Okri's narratives.

Works Cited

- Aristotle. "Physics." Translated by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye. The Internet Classics Archive, n.d.
- Adorján, István. "New Cosmopolitanism: Altered Spaces in a Postcolonial Perspective". *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 2001. JSTOR. Accessed 16 March 2022.
- Anasiudu, Okwudiri. *The Functions of Signs and Structures In Ben Okri's "Astonishing the Gods": A Functional Linguistics Approach*. Working Papers: Journal of English Studies, 2019.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2002.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*. University of Texas Press, 1981. Print.
- Bal, Mieke. "Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative." University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books, 2001.
- Brasher, Jordan. *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet*. The AAG Review of Books, 2017.
- Buccholz, M. Jahn. "Some Thoughts on the Spatial Forms and Practices of Storytelling". *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/zaa-2016-0003>. Accessed on 7th December, 2020.
- Cooper, Brenda. *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing With a Third Eye*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Currie, Mark. "About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time." Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

- Doraiswamy, Rashmi. *Critique of Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Literature in the Context of Trends in Contemporary Theories of Literature and the Formalist School of the 20s*. 1989. Jawaharlal Nehru University, Ph.D Dissertation. Shodhganga.
- Finn, Julio. "Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition." Duke University Press, 2003.
- Fulford, Sarah. "Ben Okri, the Aesthetic and the Problem with Theory". *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol 46 No 2, 2009, pp 233-260.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25659715>. Accessed on 14th September, 2022.
- Fludernik, Monika. *An Introduction to Narratology*. Routledge, 2009.
- Freeman, Mark. "Mythical Time, Historical Time, and The Narrative Fabric of the Self". *Narrative Inquiry*, Vol 8 No 1, 1998, pp 27-50.
<https://benjamins.com/catalog/ni.8.1.03fre>. Accessed on 14th November, 2023.
- Guignery, Vanessa. Landscapes Within, Landscapes Without: The Forest and Other Places in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*. *Etudes Britanniques Contemporariness*, 2014, pp 47. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.1974>. Accessed on 2nd May 2023.
- Heffernan, James A.W. "Space and Time in Literature and the Visual Arts." Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Hawley, John C. "Ben Okri's Spirit-Child: Abiku Migration and Postmodernity". *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 26, no. 1, Spring 1995. JSTOR. Accessed 15 July 2021.
- Haqshenas, Saleh. *The Concept of Time; Henri Bergson, William Faulkner, Sadeq Hedayat*. Lambert Academic Publishing, 2016.
- Halverson, Lori. "Introduction to Intercultural Communication". *Developing Intercultural Communication Competence*, 2018.
<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/interculturalcommunicationcompetence/chapter/terms/>. Accessed on 20th November 2022.

- Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Judgement*. Digireads.com, 2010.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Blackwell Inc, 1974.
- Miller, J. Hillis. "Time in Literature." Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Morrello, Delijah. "Adventure Time". *Adventure Time Theories*, 2019.
www.pinterest.com. Accessed on 12th March, 2022.
- Nunning, Ansgar. *Reconceptualizing Unreliable Narration: Synthesizing Cognitive and Rhetorical Approaches*. Walter de Gruyter, 2001.
- Okri, Ben. *The Famished Road*. Archer Books, New York, 1991.
- Okri, Ben. *Songs of Enchantment*. U.S.A. New York, 1993. Print.
- Okri, Ben. *Astonishing the Gods*. Orion Publishing Group, 1999.
- Oregon, Osha. "Confined Space". *Confined Space Osha Standards*, 2016,
<https://osha.oregon.gov/OSHApubs/2864.pdf>. Accessed on 12th March, 2022.
- Panasenko, Natalie. "Interrelations between Literary Time and Space in Prosaic Texts". *Language, Literature and Culture in a Changing Transatlantic World*, 2021, pp 69-82. <https://www.pulib.sk>. Accessed on 13th December, 2021.
- Quayson, Ato. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice, or Process*. Polity Press, 2000.
- Ryan, Michael. *Cultural Studies: A Practical Introduction*. John Wiley and Sons, 2010.
- Rau, Catherine. "Theories of Time in Ancient Philosophy". *The Philosophical Review*, Vol 62 No 4, 1953, pp 514-525. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182458>. Accessed on 22nd February, 2023.
- Ricoeur, Paul. "Narrative Time". *On Narrative*, Vol 7 No 1, 1980, pp 169-190. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343181>. Accessed on 15th September 2022.

Slemon, Stephen. "Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse". *Canadian Literature: A Quarterly of Criticism and Review*, 1988.

https://www.academia.edu/30476687/Magic_Realism_as_Post_Colonial_Discourse. Accessed on 22nd February, 2022.

Umrigar, Thrity. *The Space Between Us*. Harper Perennial, 2007.

Warnes, Christopher. "Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence." Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Wood, Michael. *Magic Realism in Contemporary American Fiction*. The Times Literary Supplement, 1998.