

Postcolonial Elements in Ben Okri's *Dangerous Love* in the Context of *Künstlerroman*

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ABSTRACT: Accepted as one of the sub-genres of the *bildungsroman*, the artist's novel (*Künstlerroman*), centers on the stages an artist goes through on the way to becoming an artist and the problems related to art. Characteristics of this genre can be found in the novel *Dangerous Love* by Ben Okri, one of the leading figures of post-colonial English literature. Ben Okri's novel *Dangerous Love*, in which Omovo, the protagonist of the novel, expresses his artistic concerns, tells the effect of corrupt politics on the artistry of a young artist after the civil war years. Set in Lagos, Nigeria in the 1970s, Ben Okri's novel is about the protagonist Omovo, an office worker and painter, and his views on art and his stance against the events he experiences as an artist. This paper will argue that *Dangerous Love* can also be read as an artist's novel through the story of Omovo, who vividly remembers the terrible consequences of the civil war as a child, remembering the tragic effects of colonial process on the Nigerian society. This novel by Okri is studied with a view to exploring the *Künstlerroman* aspects like artist's development, alienation and quest for identity.

KEYWORDS: Art, Ben Okri, *Dangerous Love*, *Künstlerroman* Postcolonial Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Künstlerroman* subgenre has not received as much attention as the closely related *bildungsroman*, of which it is considered a sub-set. While critics have shown and continue to show interest in the *bildungsroman*, the *künstlerroman* is only just beginning to attract such critical interest recently. This is even worse for the postcolonial variant, which has only scant criticisms from scholars. This may be due in part to the fact that postcolonial writers have been more concerned with the reasons for their unique position as postcolonial and all it implies. The painful past of the colonial experience is what has captivated their attention, rather than the development of the artistic prowess of the colonized subject. Incidentally, it is this past, which has played a central role in their artistic formation. This paper is thus interested in examining the role that the memory of colonialism and art play in the artistic development of Omovo as depicted in *The Dangerous Love*.

Since its publication in 1990, Ben Okri's novel *The Dangerous Love* is often categorised as a postcolonial narrative of exile, alienation and identity, which was written by a former colonial novelist from Nigeria about a colonial fellow citizen. A postcolonial reading of the text shows that it also fits into and shows strong resemblances to the *künstlerroman* category as it, as Maria Helena Lima states, is about "an artist-in-formation who creates a homeland for herself within her art" (Majerol, 2014).

The development and evolution of literary genres has most often depended on the group in the society that is exploiting it, the group's socio-historical background as well as geographical location and culture. This paper which examines *The Dangerous Love* as a postcolonial *künstlerroman*, underscores the idea that the artistic development of Omovo is closely related to the history of the colonialism and war both characterized by trauma.

Thus for the postcolonial writer, memory plays a primordial role in the development of the writer as it serves not only as the major source of inspiration but is equally the reason which spurred them to pick up their pens.

Omovo's artistic career empowers his position in his new environment, which has once marginalized him because of his race and social position. Furthermore, it makes him integrate quite easily into society—something that helps him later on form his new hybrid identity: Nigerian and English. As mentioned earlier, the protagonist's feelings towards home are very ambivalent. He has left his home island with its constraints and problems for a foreign land where he seeks independence and the construction of an identity. However, he resists the confines of the homeland and rejects his being subsumed in the new environment, ending up with a hybrid culture amalgamating the heterogeneities of both in one single entity. This way, in his constant search for identity, Omovo realizes that he cannot stick to one culture to the exclusion of the other. This realization marks his maturity or development.

The *künstlerroman* has entered a period of revival and transformation with the shift to the transcultural and the transnational. In the postcolonial context, the *künstlerroman* comes to examine the growth stories of artists by treading the margins and silences previously overlooked by the European model. Another addition is the quest and development of a non-white artist figure from different social classes through an obstacle course to creation located in the interstices of colonial and western cultures as depicted in Anglophone Nigerian literature. The postcolonial diasporic *künstlerroman* thwarts the artists in a hostile environment of diaspora where they have to fight against the grain to become artists. In this way, the postcolonial *künstlerroman* veers away from the traditional tendency of giving uncompromising race, gender, and class growth stories.

In its fictional tracing of an individual's development, the postcolonial *künstlerroman* takes the spiritual and emotional formation of the artist named Omovo as its focal point. The postcolonial *künstlerroman* narrative is an example of a genre whose traditions have been transformed by the contemporary postcolonial writers in the diaspora. As Awad succinctly puts it, "Arab authors in diaspora straddle two cultures and skillfully blend their Arab cultural heritage in their writings" (Awad, 2016). This study wants to create a common ground that bridges the gaps between cultures by appropriating and adapting the European genre of the *künstlerroman*.

II. THE KÜNSTLERROMAN TRADITION AND BEN OKRI'S LITERARY PERSONALITY

The term *Künstlerroman*, which refers to a series of events shaped by the artistic journey of a protagonist who is an artist and who seeks self-realization, is a German word meaning "artist novel." The *Künstlerroman*, a subgenre of the coming-of-age novel tradition, has its roots in the German Romantic tradition of the 18th century, which was a rebellion against the Enlightenment's way of thinking that confined humans within the limits of reason. In the *Künstlerroman* tradition, which focuses on the life story of an artist and the stages they go through on their artistic journey, the main character has to go through very difficult processes and thorny paths in order to become an artist or to practice their art. For the artist, who is exposed to many obstacles and problems both individually and socially, art serves as a kind of refuge.

Focusing on the stages of the main character's artistic development and the processes they undergo, the *Künstlerroman* places the focus on an artist's development from immaturity to full artistic maturity. "The *Künstlerroman* also depicts the artist's sense of self, questioning prejudices about identity and impositions on social relations" (Seret, 1992). In other words, this genre, which focuses on the creative process of the male protagonist, depicts his conscious efforts to reinvent himself in order to understand the society and era in which he lives and the interaction of these dynamics with his inner world, rather than representing him as a professional artist with satisfying artistic production. The artist's experiences and subjective understanding of the world are transformed into pages or canvases that reveal his unique voice and perspective after a long period of internal conflict. From this perspective, narratives about the formation of the hero's artistic identity also problematize the stages of change and creativity in the journey of originality and maturity of the artistically sensitive individual.

The *künstlerroman*, one of the important genres of the romantic literary tradition that allows individuals to reflect their own feelings and thoughts in opposition to the search for free artistic expression and the rationalist discourses rooted in the Age of Enlightenment, narrates the evolution of an artist from inexperience to full artistic maturity and the elements that pave the way for this evolution. As the representative of romantic precursors in

German literature, Goethe triggered the birth of both the Bildungsroman and Künstlerroman genres with his work *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, which represents the hero's transformation into a playwright, and almost all examples of the Künstlerroman have been modeled after this work. For this reason, literary criticism follows the path outlined by Buckley's claim that "the English Bildungsroman (...) is typically a Künstlerroman" (Buckley, 1974). According to Buckley, the hero in early adulthood "tries to adapt himself to the modern world after a period of painful soul-searching. He leaves his adolescence behind and enters adulthood" (Buckley, 1974).

The Künstlerroman, also known as the artist novel, largely deals with an artist's transition from childhood to maturity. In his dictionary, M.H. Abrams defines the Künstlerroman as "a novel that deals with the growth of a novelist or other artist toward maturity, marked by the realization of his artistic destiny and mastery of his artistic craft" (Abrams, 1988). "A type of apprenticeship novel in which the protagonist is a writer or artist (painter, sculptor, or performing artist) and whose struggles are directed both against an environment that does not accept him and toward understanding his own creative mission. The most famous Künstlerroman is James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*."

The main character's libertarian worldview, which seeks to break free from many restrictive social structures, pushes him to take a stand against the oppressive and prohibitive order he experiences throughout the story. Because of the conflicts he experiences with his surroundings and the injustices he is subjected to, the character turns to art as a means of overcoming his difficult circumstances, breaking free from the molds he is trapped in and entering a process of forming his own worldview. "The values of bourgeois society are rejected, art is placed above life, aesthetic values and discussions about these values are brought to the forefront of the plot, and a writer or poet is used as the main character. This writer is usually a failed writer; because the main theme of the Künstlerroman, namely the claim to place art at the center of life, includes discussions of good art and bad art, the artist's struggle between conscious effort and the call of the unconscious. Increasingly the artist's journey of discovery, which he will define entirely for himself, and the artist's process of maturation can also be seen other important main themes. Therefore, the novel deals with writer personifications that have not achieved perfection."

Ben Okri is one of the most renowned Nigerian novelists of the first generation to describe the social and individual consequences of Nigeria's transition from colonial rule to independence in his novels. He has won the Man Booker Prize, considered Britain's most prestigious literary award, twice for his novels *The Famished Road* (1991) and *Infinite Riches* (1998), as well as numerous other international awards. As one of the leading representatives of a "cross-cultural discourse that brings together different worldviews," Ben Okri creates a new hybrid discourse as a novelist reflecting the post-colonial era. Ben Okri, who stands out among the younger generation of African writers as a poet and novelist, has written numerous books ranging from novels to short stories, poetry to essays. Okri, who candidly addresses the reality of Africa in his works, witnessed the political unrest during the Nigerian civil war firsthand, which is why his early fiction is mostly political in nature. Okri's novels are not merely labeled as realistic; he blends reality with fantasy, successfully employing the magical realist style of writing in his own unique way. It is emphasized that fantasy, a fundamental characteristic of African society, helps Okri define African society in terms that are more appropriate:

"At the same time, Okri's literary imagination often focuses on certain untouchable areas of African consciousness, such as the resilience of the spirit, the flexibility of aesthetics, and the capacity for imagination. These untouchable areas, which refuse to be colonized by the literary norms of the colonial center, appear in Okri's fiction as socio-realistic, geopolitical, and historical issues, as well as spiritual, folkloric, and magical realist structures" (Ying, 2006).

A strong proponent of the view that art should be for life, Okri believes that writers represent the indifferent psychological power of the societies they live in. Not seeing himself as a political writer or social propagandist, Okri points out that the reality of Africa cannot be presented honestly by colonial external forces. Through his works, Okri reflects how contemporary African society has succumbed to Western materialistic values and, in return, betrayed its traditional values and cultural heritage. He points to political anarchy and corruption in African states in an attempt to convey an idea of the real living conditions in Africa. Nigerian writer Chris Abani emphasizes the importance of Ben Okri and his works with the following words: "Ben Okri was the

first to articulate how we could begin an experiment and dialogue that could be called a true Nigerian novel for my generation [the third generation] (and future generations)” (Abani, 2006).

Okri's first encounter with the craft of writing can be found in the newspaper articles he wrote in his youth, born out of his anger at the poverty that surrounded him and his family in Nigeria, the widespread corruption, and the social indifference to people's suffering. As he noted in an interview with Jane Wilkinson, Okri began writing as a form of waiting after failing to gain admission to a university in Nigeria. The sense of helplessness he felt in the face of poverty and his firsthand experiences with his father, a lawyer who dealt with the harsh realities of Lagos on a daily basis, shaped his early literary imagination.

Fifteen years after the publication of *The Landscapes Within* in 1981, Okri wrote *Dangerous Love*, a rewritten and revised version of the same novel. The setting for *Dangerous Love* is Okri's homeland, Nigeria, a country dominated by fraud, bribery, deception, tribal hostility, and traditional rituals. *Dangerous Love*, which tells a love story with subtle political and artistic freedom undertones, narrates the story of Omovo, a painter who is the lover of Ifeyiwa, a young woman living in a poor neighborhood of Lagos, Nigeria, who is forced into a loveless marriage with a man much older than she is. As David Jowitt points out, the title of the novel can be seen as a reference, first to Omovo's love for his married wife Ifeyiwa, and second to his artistic practice, which gets him into trouble with the Nigerian authorities and the norms of Nigerian society. The protagonist of the novel, Omovo, chooses to withdraw into his artistic identity rather than establishing a meaningful relationship with his community. The suffocating atmosphere of the society in which he lives causes Omovo to take a stand against this order and embark on a process of forming his own worldview through his artistic identity. Omovo, who lives in constant conflict between his artistic identity and the oppressive realities of his environment, finds escape in art from his lack of communication with his loved ones, his inability to feel at home in the city he lives in, and his sense of being caught between two worlds.

III. TRACES OF THE KUNSTLERROMAN IN DANGEROUS LOVE

Omovo is presented as an observer and ambassador of postcolonial Nigeria's social, political, and economic transformations. As a painter, Omovo represents the poverty of Nigeria that is not allowed to be represented by the Nigerian elite. He is invited by his friend Dr. Okocho to exhibit his paintings at the Ebony Gallery, where he has the opportunity to see paintings depicting caricatures of the first arrivals of white men. Some of the paintings in the gallery consist of conventional images of white missionaries armed with Bibles, mirrors, and guns, while others consist of grotesque surrealistic representations. Alongside paintings depicting national unity, with members of various tribes drinking palm wine and smiling together, the gallery also features paintings depicting traditional social structures, such as women eating mangoes, women carrying children on their backs, women pounding yams, children playing, men wrestling, and men eating. When Omovo sees these paintings in the gallery, he realizes that national unity is definitely a false representation. In contrast to these paintings, Omovo's paintings have been questioned and banned from sale because they express the harshest reality of postcolonial Nigeria. Seeing that Nigerian culture is not being celebrated in these paintings, but rather that the culture and independence of the indigenous people are being mocked, Omovo attempts to rectify this situation through his art.

Okri uses the motif of the disillusioned artist borrowed from James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Omovo's constant struggle to achieve artistic enlightenment, using his art as a means of escape from his surroundings, is repeatedly crushed by the harsh realities of the slum in which he lives. Through Omovo, Okri depicts the artistic intelligence of a young man trapped by social conventions and constrained by poverty. Omovo seeks artistic satisfaction by belittling the social reality he is forced to live in, in order to escape the uncertainty and conflict around him. Omovo dreams of escaping from Lagos, a neo-colonial space that has inherited the logic of an imperial past and suffered the consequences of the civil war in Biafra, because it leaves him powerless and immobile.

Omovo's inner world is constructed through the motif of the modernist artist as an individual, but the environment always imposes its own determinism on this individuality. Omovo's personal development is hindered by the invisible laws of the postcolonial environment, which govern his destiny in ways beyond his

control. Omovo finds himself being pushed toward a fate that actively obstructs all attempts to control his free artistic will. The motif of harmonious development toward artistic mastery in the *Künstlerroman* is constantly interrupted by a naturalist tendency that imposes materialist determinism.

The narrative situates the internal/external conflict between the individualistic bourgeois consciousness and the poverty and forest-like existence of the postcolonial city. This modernist motif of alienation produces fragmentation, and for Omovo, the filth and poverty of his surroundings increase his psychic tension and cause him to become isolated from his environment. Escape from the weakening effect of the environment on Okri's artist-hero becomes a motivation for artistic realization. Rather than atonement, what this novel depicts is a retreat into the inner self through the *Künstlerroman* motif. Omovo's withdrawal parallels Okri's alienation in London and Okri withdraws into his writing. The urge to succeed as a writer brings a young man into conflict with his community and initiates a search for individual meaning.

Okri's 1996 novel *Dangerous Love* focuses on the artistic vision of a young man struggling to find himself, and the narrative features lists of landscapes that set the stage for the emergence of the protagonist's inspiring painting. The novel tells the story of Omovo, an emerging artist in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria, who continues to struggle to paint despite the violent and turbulent life around him. In such a chaotic environment, Omovo's life ends with intense visions that reveal his desire to make his artistic voice heard. His love for Ifeyiwa, who was forced to marry an old man and suffered abuse at his hands, helps Omovo endure his suffering, dream, and continue to see images and paint. Okri, who seems to express a contemporary sense of magic in his novel, also draws on magic and its power to reveal the extraordinary nature of love and art: "The word 'magic' itself, or a virtual equivalent, appears several times in connection with Omovo's painting and his love for Ifeyiwa, who has become his 'spiritual husband,' as if to suggest the extraordinary nature of both" (Faris, 2015).

Ben Okri's narrative, which reveals the realities of post-independence Nigeria against the backdrop of the love story between the protagonist Omovo and his lover Ifeyiwa, revolves around the post-civil war years in Nigeria, "one of the most populous regions of the African continent with more than 250 ethnic groups and different languages." The historical reality of the civil war years and their aftermath becomes a shaping factor in the story, while Omovo struggles against the oppressive odds and pressures of society that hinder the development of his imagination.

Okri's use of symbolic and creative language to vividly reflect the political realities of society and vividly depict the new colonial oppression in Africa is evident in his narration of the painting exhibition incident, where the dominant ideological forces become even more pronounced. The fact that even art and artists are subjected to pressure and deprived of public scrutiny for the benefit and smooth functioning of imperial institutions in a neo-colonial state is also evident in Micere Githae Mugo's statement: "The neo-colonial state... offers privileges here and there to force buyers into cooperation, providing voluntary protection. Those who accept bribes live well, either by being appointed as cabinet ministers by the patronizing neo-colonial regimes or by accepting lucrative directorships that allow them to make quick money, and thus the tempting offers continue. Those who refuse blackmail are severely punished for daring to prohibit the violation of their conscience" (Mugo, 2007).

Okri traces the aesthetic maturation of a young artist by making his young hero Omovo an artist. Like Stephen Dedalus, the young artist in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Omovo, the young artist in Okri's *Dangerous Love*, uses art as a way to create order and meaning in a fragmented world. Exploring the reality of post-independence Africa through the love story of Omovo and Ifeyiwa, Okri also reveals the various threats that hinder the growth and development of an artist in such a corrupt society. The painter protagonist Omovo is presented as a symbolic figure representing the plight of artists in the novel. Living the life of a lonely, uncompromising artist who often clashes with society, Omovo develops the impartial observation and creative expressive power required of an artist. His aesthetic development reaches its peak with the painting "Scumscape," which depicts the miserable conditions of Nigeria's urban poor, but the painting is quickly censored and confiscated due to its powerful social criticism.

Künstlerroman works generally reflect the moral struggle of authors questioning their appropriate position as objective artists. The characteristics of the *Künstlerroman* genre follow the artist's development almost as much as the art they strive to create. Omovo, a sensitive and perceptive artist, feels compelled to feel, observe,

and interpret the chaos and moral decay around him through his art and meditations in his diary. This disruptive atmosphere of chaos is felt at every level of society. Omovo's family life is in shambles; he is in love with another man's wife and loses his artwork repeatedly throughout the story. Because he is a moral and sensitive person, Omovo feels the pain of nearly every wrong he witnesses or hears about in Lagos. These events range from taking bribes at work, to witnessing children starving on the streets torturing stray dogs, to horrific flashbacks of his childhood experiences during the Civil War, to the unforgettable image of a corpse he encountered on the beach.

In the opening paragraphs of the novel *Dangerous Love*, 19-year-old protagonist Omovo has his head shaved by a barber's apprentice in the slums of Lagos. Omovo's intention is not to have all his hair dramatically shaved off, but falling asleep during the haircut and being unaware of what is happening causes him to end up in this situation. In 1970s urban Nigeria, a clean-shaven scalp gives the young artist a strange, unsettling appearance and marks him as an outsider. Though his neighbors and friends repeatedly ask if he is in mourning, Omovo vehemently denies it. Having a completely shaved head initially causes fear in Omovo, but "then slowly, the freshness of the experience enveloped him" (Okri, 1996).

In an environment where even children on the street tease him because of his hair, Omovo finds a way out of this situation by going home. Unable to explain his situation, Omovo tries to escape the difficult situation he finds himself in by painting. He feels happy because engaging in the art of painting feels more real than the events that seem real in life. Omovo, who does not like the men on the site calling him a painter boy, does not want to use this title yet because he thinks he has just started painting and is not yet a full-fledged painter. His paintings become part of the men's conversations, and Tuwo, a forty-year-old man with dark skin, finds one of Omovo's works both strange and successful: "It's really nice to see you working on art again. This is a strange work, really. It reminds me of war. It's a good piece, but watch out for the girls. Especially the married ones" (Okri, 1996).

The painting Tuwo refers to depicts children playing around a tree, and Omovo, aware of the controversy surrounding his work, approaches the painting and says, "I haven't seen you before. But it's wonderful that you're here" (Okri, 1996). One person in the crowd who likes Omovo's painting, which the children do not fully understand, says he wants to buy it. Omovo does not give a clear answer to the man's request and does not want to sell his painting. The phrase "related losses" that he writes under his painting is also quite striking. Omovo, who does not see himself as sufficiently mature and developed as both an artist and an individual at the beginning of the novel, reveals with this signature that he does not yet have a sense of belonging and has not yet achieved a settled identity. This expression also gives the impression that he feels like the other in postcolonial Nigerian society and has a subordinate identity perception.

One of the leading issues of the postcolonial era, language use is one of the most important characteristics that separate individuals from one another. Individuals, who are unable to achieve unity with their own language and culture, nor integrate with the colonial culture, inevitably find themselves in a state of hybridity. Unlike Tuwo, who speaks English in an affected and exaggerated manner instead of using his own language, Omovo strives to uphold his local values. After his two brothers leave home, Omovo is overcome by a deep sense of loneliness, encounters various images, and sounds within himself. Omovo, who feels that his siblings' ghosts are wandering around the house, hears the cries of a man he cannot see, saying, "They are messing with us. We have become like sewers" (Okri, 1996), which is a sign of the deep corruption in the country.

Omovo, who admires the work of Dr. Okocha, who acts as his mentor, is very impressed by a painting of a Nigerian wrestler he sees in his art studio. Thinking that there must be a reason for Omovo's unexpected visit, as he has not seen him for some time, Dr. Okocha asks him if something is wrong, but gets no answer. Knowing Omovo's interest in painting, Dr. Okocha wants him to attend the exhibition to be held in the first week of October. To this end, he tries to find a ticket for Omovo to attend the exhibition. When Dr. Okocha asks him how his painting is coming along, he replies, "Fine. I just finished a painting. I named it 'Related Losses'—I don't know why. I was happy" (Okri, 1996). Omovo, who appears to have relaxed during his conversations with the elderly painter Okocha, feels both good and strange when he steps outside the cabin.

When Omovo arrives at the site where his house is located, he encounters his first love, Ifeyiwa. Unable to take his eyes off her, Omovo feels something stirring inside him for the first time. When Ifeyiwa's husband

Takpo mocks her for not having hair in a sarcastic tone, Omovo thinks, "I must not allow them to treat me this way. I must be strong" (Okri, 1996).

After Omovo's mother dies, his father remarries a woman named Blackie. Omovo feels very lonely when her father celebrates with his new wife and kicks her two other brothers out of the house because his business is failing. Seeing the pain inside her father, who pretends to be happy and tries to appear as if everything is fine, Omovo often cannot escape the darkness that takes hold of her mind like a nightmare when she tries to sleep at night. Mental unrest prevents him from even hearing the sounds in the compound, and he feels disconnected from life: "The feeling that he was drifting away in bright voids, dying, and that everything was dying with him, enveloped him" (Okri, 1996).

Even when he is with Ifeyiwa, Omovo prefers to walk without talking because of the sadness he feels. His presence and being by her side are a source of comfort for Omovo. Ifeyiwa, who forgot to go shopping because she wanted to clean the entire house after having a bad dream, is subjected to violence by her husband. Trying to understand why her husband constantly beats her whenever he gets the chance, Ifeyiwa also asks Omovo if she has done anything wrong. Ifeyiwa's negative situation reminds Omovo of similar situations her mother experienced. Just like Ifeyiwa, her mother also covered her face with her hands to protect herself from the beatings she received, which is an example of the male violence women were subjected to in the post-colonial period.

Like Ifeyiwa, who cannot even tell her husband about a dream she had, Omovo also cannot establish healthy communication with her own father. Unlike Omovo, who constantly thinks about her mother for some reason, Ifeyiwa hates her family for forcing her into such an unhappy marriage. Seeing Omovo as the only place where she smiles and feels happy, Ifeyiwa asks him to paint her portrait. Feeling that she does not belong to her husband, hating her marriage and her husband, which she entered into under pressure from her family, Ifeyiwa experiences a sense of belonging and happiness with Omovo, whom she believes is the reason she is painting: "I am happy with you too. You have your art. I have nothing. Perhaps, except for you" (Okri, 1996). The pain Ifeyiwa experiences as a seventeen-year-old girl and her inability to find happiness in her marriage lead her to lose her sense of belonging.

After meeting with Ifeyiwa, Omovo returns home and, while searching for the lost painting, sees his father having sex with his wife Blackie in the nude, reminding him of a similar incident he witnessed when he was nine years old. Omovo, who did not feel abandoned or lonely when he witnessed his own parents having sex at the age of nine, now feels that way after seeing the scene, thinking, "He had seen something he shouldn't have seen, frozen in place" (Okri, 1996). Instead of dwelling on the lost painting, Omovo decides to create a new one, though he has no idea how to find the lost love of his mother. After working through the night, Omovo named the painting he finished "Drift," and every time he looked at it, he felt "trapped by his own emotions; drained and dried up" (Okri, 1996). At such a moment of feeling worthless and adrift, after Dr. Okocha buys him a ticket to visit an art gallery, Omovo begins to think of himself as an important artist. After the painting was lost or stolen, Omovo, who had concretized the thoughts passing through his mind without losing his excitement, could not help but think, "If your own work surprises you, then you have started something worth pursuing" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who used the Ebony Gallery to exhibit his paintings, felt as if his heart had stopped every time he showed his paintings to the gallery director for review. Darkness descended upon him (Okri, 1996). After feeling uneasy and anxious about the sculptures in the gallery belonging to African black individuals, "Omovo felt detached from the space" (Okri, 1996). Omovo, who felt lost in the crowd, was constantly surrounded by art theories and terms. Enchanted by the works in the gallery, Omovo experiences the pleasure of seeing his own work through the eyes of strangers for the first time. Delighted by a journalist friend's comment on his painting, Omovo begins to free himself from the feeling of inferiority that surrounds him: "I saw your painting. It's strange and well done. It's a very good painting. And a very good commentary on our society" (Okri, 1996)! Omovo, who uses painting to criticize the society he lives in, creates paintings that everyone can interpret according to their own circumstances. Omovo, who is seen as a rebel and accused of disrupting social harmony because of his paintings, cannot understand why he is treated like a criminal and his paintings are confiscated: "They tried to scare me with accusatory questions. I had nothing to fear. If people draw certain meanings from my work, which is beyond my control" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who listens to his friends' troubles in an environment where those around him humiliate him due to the difficulty of coping with harsh living conditions and poverty in Lagos, is unaware that this is a source of inspiration and a reason for his maturation: "He began to create images in his mind while painting, living, and striving. Joy found life within him in that moment" (Okri, 1996). For Omovo, who is completely absorbed in the intensity of the moment he is living, the concept of time loses its meaning. Omovo, who even confuses night and day while painting, loses himself in his journey of self-discovery as he practices his art: "My God! It's already evening! 'Didn't you notice?' No. I was wandering inside myself" (Okri, 1996).

The rapes of women he witnessed, the sight of dead babies thrown around, and his inability to do anything about it, and his inability to report even these incidents to the police because of his marginalized black identity, constantly disturb Omovo's mind. "Ideas take shape and enter my dreams day and night. Events developing in a vicious cycle. A silent game of losses. Poor murdered girl—why did they do this to you? Were you sacrificed to an African night? What can I or anyone else do? Hide? Go into hiding? How foolish" (Okri, 1996). For Omovo, who cannot shake the image of the dead girl's body he saw one night on his way home, such events cause the memories of the civil war he experienced in his country as a child to resurface. Unable to forget the horrific events he witnessed in the past and in the present, Omovo becomes consumed by the psychology that not only the perpetrators of the crime are guilty, but also that he is just as guilty as they are: "He could never erase that horrific image from his mind, the deep stain of that night. Whenever he witnessed an act of violence, he would become that helpless child watching helplessly. And he could never escape the fact that he too was, in a sense, tainted" (Okri, 1996). Like the painful scenes he encounters in the filthy environment of the ghetto where he lives, Omovo also attempts to abstract and objectify the memory of the murdered girl in his effort to comprehend his surroundings through the immobility of art. In order to survive emotionally, Omovo attempts to keep his perception of reality alive by channeling his artistic life through the process of mimesis.

When their mother died, their father sent Omovo and his older brothers to boarding school to get rid of them, so Omovo did not have the opportunity to get to know his brothers very well. He sees the extent of his difficulties more clearly in the letters his brothers wrote to him. Omovo, who reads the letters he receives from his siblings—letters he could never have imagined in his wildest dreams—over and over again in hopes of finding hope and light, can see nothing beyond his own personal exhaustion and the picture of social destruction: "I'm trying to hold on to a ship. Things are tough. I think of you and home all the time, and I feel like crying, but I don't. I have no home and no place to go, and every day while drinking, I see the dangerous things happening to me. Moreover, I fight a lot. By the way, are you still painting? I'm sending you a poem I wrote yesterday. Unfortunately, we've all lost some things. Your loving brothers, Okur and Umeh" (Okri, 1996).

Continuously using his talent for painting is an opportunity for Omovo to free himself from the thoughts that plague his mind and the feeling of emptiness he experiences, and to establish his own identity. "And he understood that he had to do something with his talent every day: and if he didn't, the destructive urges that hunted his family would take hold of him too" (Okri, 1996). After their mother's death, their father's remarriage and bringing his new wife into the home causes a deep rift between Omovo and his brothers, and the family members begin to grow increasingly distant from one another. Their father's refusal to pay even for their university expenses, coupled with his apparent hatred toward them, leads Omovo's brothers to leave home. Omovo, who understands both his father's struggles and his brothers' anger, does not want to take sides in this negative situation. Having lost his strength due to his sadness over his brothers' being kicked out of the house, Omovo feels as if he has fallen into a nightmare. Omovo prays that not all he has experienced is real and that he is dreaming, but he cannot escape the harsh reality. Feeling guilty and broken by the events he has experienced, Omovo uses painting to turn his life in a new direction. In his struggle with life, painting serves as an antidote for Omovo to forget and leave everything behind:

"From that day on, Omovo embraced painting with even greater passion. Painting had once been a childhood pastime for him. After his mother's death, it had become a world filled with strange emotions. With his brothers' departure, it had become a passion. Painting had become a way for him to discover the hidden meanings of life and to adapt to the toxic environment around him. Painting was his way of coping with life: it was a personal and social prism" (Okri, 1996).

With the unpleasant events in his family becoming gossip among the neighbors and his brothers leaving, Omovo, trying to find himself in his memories, began to question his reason for existence, caught between his father's and stepmother's hateful glances: "He sat down on the only chair in the room and began to think about his life. Where was he going? Where would this confusing path lead him? His life was now aimless. He could not find a reason for his existence. (...) With his mother's death, his entire life had turned into a cloud of uncertainty. The only thing keeping him going was his mystical and vague belief that he would rise to unique heights, create lasting masterpieces, and build an unparalleled life" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who feels estranged from his father after falling in love with Ifeyiwa, a married woman, is also bored with the monotony of his job in an office with poor working conditions. Omovo, who wants to pursue a career that makes him feel useful and meaningful, and that frees his soul, wants to use his inclination toward painting to be the voice of those who cannot make their voices heard, by depicting the corruption and moral decay in the society he lives in:

"He felt empty. (...) By creating that painting, he felt a sense of direction toward some kind of meaning. This urge spread vaguely within him. He thought about the girl who had been killed in the park. (...) The more he thought about her, the guiltier he felt. He had to do something about it. However, he was powerless, and the powerlessness of all those whose voices were not heard had to be prevented, had to be changed. With this feeling, his desire to paint reached its peak" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who depicts social reality in his paintings, mentions in a dialogue with Dr. Okocha, an elderly painter, that his painting was confiscated by the state because he mocked his country's progress. Dr. Okocha asserts that no one has the right to censor an artist's work in such a manner, yet under the oppressive and tyrannical regime they are subjected to, the concept of freedom of expression has lost its validity. Omovo, who does not want to remain silent and tries to convey the truth in all its aspects in his paintings, states that although he is aware that the confiscated works cannot be recovered and that the artist is facing difficulties, he clings to painting to keep his spirit alive: "I know. However, what can you do? If you tell the truth, you get into trouble. However, if you see the truth and remain silent, your spirit begins to die. The artist is truly in a terrible situation" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who tries to paint in an environment where censorship and oppression prevail, is aware that it is difficult to create new paintings. The horrific scenes he witnesses in his surroundings are so disturbing that he cannot comprehend them or process them in his mind. These events are so unsettling that he is afraid to depict them even in his paintings. Unable to shake the images of dead bodies from his mind and convinced that the dead are constantly watching and following him, Omovo is aware that all of this stems from the effects of the civil war years. Omovo, who has seen the eyes of dead people in his dreams since he was ten years old, eventually feels exhausted: "I don't remember exactly what they looked like, and I will never paint their pictures, but those eyes will never leave me" (Okri, 1996). Dr. Okocha, who points out that the faces Omovo tries to forget are the inspiration for his paintings, believes that these dead human faces are the starting point of Omovo's artistic journey. "They form the essence of his discoveries. Learning to remember creatively means learning what to feel. However, painting the picture of your dream requires a long journey inward. It also means learning how to think differently" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who sees it as a miracle that people who are victims of poverty and war are able to endure these harsh living conditions without losing their sanity, strives to overcome the established despotic order with his art, seeing that everyone around him complains about the horrors of life. Even though the civil war of his childhood has ended, Omovo observes that a general atmosphere of war continues in society through poverty, corruption, death, and poor governance, and he does not want to remain silent in the face of this situation. Although he expresses his sensitivity to these issues through his artistic power, his painter friend Dr. Okocha does not share his opinion: "You are too sensitive for our society. If you worry about such things, you will lose your mind or commit suicide. You must learn to forget, stay away from such things, and take care of yourself" (Okri, 2001:148).

Omovo, who says his paintings were confiscated because they reflected social reality, and his tall, handsome friend Dele, whose greatest desire is to go to America to study, reveal the desperate situation of the country and its people: "Our lives are filled with a lot of unnecessary effort. Waking up in the morning, washing up is an effort, trying to get on the bus is an effort, a lifetime of struggles. That's why I want to leave" (Okri,

1996). Omovo, who says that his siblings are on a different path and that he is in the middle of another journey, tries to remember them but fails. Struggling to remember even their faces, Omovo felt as though he were walking toward a golden childhood that had never been lived (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who does not feel at home where he lives, feels saddened to see that both he and his people have been alienated from their birthplace. Believing that his siblings left the country because of the pain of not being able to achieve a social position in their own country, Omovo deeply experiences the disappointment of being marginalized and seen as a third-class citizen: "We are strangers here, victims of the journey from the interior, refugees. Even if we were living in our own village, we would still be strangers. It is very strange that we have no place in our own country" (Okri, 1996). Faced with his circumstances, Omovo feels hopeless and helpless, and painting becomes a way for him to find relief by transferring what he cannot express in words onto the canvas.

Both his girlfriend and Omovo himself are filled with fear and astonishment when they see a girl's corpse in the park. Faced with his girlfriend's searching gaze as she constantly asks why this has happened, Omovo feels responsible for what has happened and reaches the point of rebelling against the cruelty of the world and humanity. The feeling that he sees the dead girl's face on his girlfriend Ifeyiwa's face compels Omovo to flee from there. Thinking that he is beginning to see a similar image in his girlfriend's body, Omovo draws a picture of Ifeyiwa, both to express what has happened through art, albeit indirectly, and to try to shake off the feeling that he is partly responsible for what has happened. Seeing the birth of his art in the lost bodies of the dead, Omovo tries to find and show the details he cannot remember in his works with the help of his imagination: "Responsibilities begin in dreams. Art begins in the lost, he thought" (Okri, 1996). Even though Omovo tries to forget all he has seen and experienced by sleeping, his thoughts continue to flow through his mind one after another: "He lay down in bed and tried to sleep, but as soon as he closed his eyes, images poured over him like a flood. He couldn't escape" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, whose article about the brutal murder of a girl whose clothes were torn and whose calves were cut was not published in its entirety by the editor, goes berserk when asked for concrete evidence. Omovo, who describes his experiences as madness, cannot understand why the story of the murder of a little girl was not published: "I'll think I'm going crazy. I don't know what to do" (Okri, 1996). Faced with unbearable events, Omovo uses his art as a healing force for people's mental health and believes that not forgetting what he has seen keeps his art alive: "I think our lives are so full of hardship that our art should be soothing and calming, rather than reopening our wounds. (...) There are things that people cannot forget, things they must never forget. That girl's body is one of them" (Okri, 1996). Omovo, finding himself in a strange state of mind after hearing the stories his friends told him, which he believed were so horrific they could dehumanize a person, felt that "his art was inadequate in conveying the African reality" (Okri, 1996).

Believing that painting helps him escape the complexity of his thoughts, Omovo is curious about shapes unrelated to his emotions and tries to give them meaning. With his respect for the artistic dimension of painting, Omovo brings to life images he has never created before, as if expressing the voice inside him. Omovo feels good about himself thanks to the paintings he creates unconsciously for hours on end, but afterwards he experiences exhaustion and unhappiness. "He looked at his work and thought with sadness and joy in his soul: Art is an inadequate reconciliation, but still the best we have" (Okri, 1996).

Rebelling against the fact that their lives are controlled by powers with a colonial mentality, Omovo sees himself as a helpless individual trapped in a dark place. Questioning how much longer he can accept this situation, Omovo realizes that he feels better when he writes and paints. Conflicts among relatives and events such as everyone turning their backs on each other in bad times also bring Omovo closer to art. Omovo watches in amazement as the people around him accept their circumstances without question, content with what they have been given and accepting whatever happens to them as God's will. Omovo believes that he is also responsible for the situation of his people and relatives, who prefer to rely on a single person rather than show social resistance. He tries to alleviate his unease through art.

After the diary he picked up took him back to the past, Omovo remembered what he had lost. He tried to catch his mother in the labyrinth he found himself in, but he couldn't do it. Feeling like he had fallen into a huge void, Omovo tried to get the love he needed to fill his loneliness from his mother, whom he saw in his imagination

and ran after, but he couldn't reach his goal. Some nights, Omovo sees his mother, whom he lost at a young age, and other nights, he sees his father, who was killed in battle. He cannot escape his nightmares. The fact that the nightmares do not stop even in times of peace reveals that Omovo's soul has been severely damaged. Alienated from the traditions of his own people, Omovo thinks that even though he is physically alive, his soul is dead: "I felt ashamed of myself. I can do all the disco dances, but I have forgotten my own people's dances. How did we become like this? We must be selling our souls without knowing it. Something has been stolen from us, from all of us" (Okri, 1996).

Accused of disrupting the order of his office for not taking bribes and resorting to illegal means, Omovo is disliked by both his boss and his coworkers. Aware of this, Omovo continues to do his job properly without paying too much attention to the situation. Omovo, who has a reserved personality and does not give people many opportunities to get to know him, is far from living a luxurious life, unlike other employees who work as clerks like him. Living in a society where bribery is normalized, Omovo cannot help but think about how "boring and stifling it is to work in a job that lacks both charm and creativity" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who constantly sees images in his mind and imagination depicting life in his country as hell and a place of torture for the lower classes, tries to cope with the weight of these images in his memory by painting. Going to work and returning home from work becomes a chore for Omovo, and the pain of not being able to find solutions to the problems he encounters hurts him more and more every day. Feeling abandoned and alone, Omovo becomes estranged from his family and even his father. Seeking to escape all this, Omovo sees art and the works of master artists as a calming influence, believing that the artworks he sees reveal a hidden treasure within himself. The works in the book he reads about African art offer him "the opportunity to recognize the dimensions of his own artistic richness" (Okri, 1996). Omovo dreams that his passion for art will bear fruit over time and that he himself may become an important name in art history. He believes that the images he sees and the events he witnesses will eventually shape his identity as an artist: "As he looked at his canvas, he realized that the urge to paint was not very strong, but he could feel it forming within the images. Yet he waited for the waves to rise, for the current to take hold of him. His belief that the hunger within him would emerge when the time came was endless; the emotions within him would merge with the images outside" (Okri, 1996).

Unlike his siblings, who left home unable to bear the pain of having nothing in life, and his people, who constantly hide their pain and try to forget, Omovo knows that there are different reasons behind the power that drives him to paint. Omovo, who tries to tell his weak and powerless people that a bright future is possible without making them forget what they have experienced, "sets out to express himself freely, to paint whatever comes to mind, without having anything specific in mind" (Okri, 1996). Omovo argues that the main function of art is to direct people to feel more deeply about what is happening and to see everything in its true reality, without being indifferent to what is happening. Omovo, who desires to be able to give the simple in the complex and the complex in the simple in his works, wants to give life to all the elements that are afraid to be told by adding his creativity: "He wanted to bring to life all the indescribable states of mind that his work sensed, the states of mind that turned into rivers, the states of mind that opened up to great seas. Above all, with the awareness that the artist is a higher servant, a worker, a thinker, a carpenter of imagination, a gateway, he wanted to become a master of all the mysteries of art to the best of his ability" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who is afraid to touch even the girl he loves due to social pressure, finds it brutal that the people of his own people attack each other for the sake of land, reminiscent of the traces of the colonial period. He blames his own people for what happened as much as he blames the colonial mentality of white people. The marriage of Ifeyiwa and her husband, who do not progress on a healthy basis and in their normal course, alienates the two from life. Ifeyiwa, who sees her husband not as a wife but as a stranger, does not want to fulfill what he expects of her. Ifeyiwa, who doesn't even like her husband to touch her and doesn't want to get pregnant by him, feels happier and more peaceful next to Omovo. Ifeyiwa, who continues her relationship with Omovo regardless of all the threats of her husband, offers him the environment of love he seeks and is seen as a source of inspiration for him to practice his art.

Unable to find the peace and happiness she seeks in her husband's home, Ifeyiwa wants to return because of her longing for her village and family. Ifeyiwa, who wants to get rid of her husband to relieve her discomfort

due to her husband's refusal to allow this and the fact that he constantly expects a child from her, finds the solace and joy of life she seeks when she is with Omovo. Although she is happy to think about the good things in his relationship with Omovo, knowing that this relationship will not be accepted in the social order in which they live brings with it a deep feeling of regret for Ifeyiwa: "The feeling that if they were in a better world, in a different world, a love story between her and Omovo could have taken place, filled Ifeyiwa with rebellion. But the world they were in had separated them, the girl had married against her will and knowledge, and she had only known the only person she could have chosen to marry after marriage" (Okri, 1996).

Ifeyiwa, who felt like a servant rather than a respected person in her husband's house, was also affected by the feeling of abandonment and "felt like that girl whose body was dumped in the park after being killed, chopped up, without anyone noticing" (Okri, 1996). Ifeyiwa, who missed her village that she wanted to escape to, sees herself as the other in her husband's house because she cannot find the environment she expected. Just as Omovo is not indifferent to the problems in society, his lover Ifeyiwa sees with her own eyes the troubles of the people and their acceptance of them, and feels unhappy being in such a situation: "Nobody seemed to pay attention to anything, to how they were being deceived. Everyone seemed to accept that life could only be like this and had always been like this. Ifeyiwa was surprised to realize for the first time that no one could see solutions, which no one was looking for other paths to the sea as Omovo's brothers had described in the poem. She felt sad for what she had left behind. But at the same time, she felt as if she were living in a river and the waters of the river had flowed away from her being" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, unable to adapt to the routine of his office, realizes this is a punishment when he learns he has been reassigned to another branch to get himself in order. Assigned to a branch far from his current location and forced to leave early in the morning to get to work, Omovo feels sad and angry, but escaping a place where accepting bribes is commonplace also brings him joy: "The sadness of being laid off, of uncertainty, of the faces he left behind and would never see again, and even of being defeated, descended upon him. The joy and excitement of escaping the crumbling teeth of the company overwhelmed him. He felt free" (Okri, 1996). Taking every opportunity to explore his country from every angle, Omovo determinedly continued his journey to observe the culture, history, and changes experienced by his people and his country. He "would set sail for the treasures and promises of art" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, who watched with astonishment as the conflict created by the colonial whites continued, pointed to the hybridity experienced by the locals, who, instead of adopting their own language, mimicked the language of the colonizers. This hybridity manifests itself in many ways, especially in language, suggesting a sense of inferiority among the locals towards their own values. Unable to fully embrace their own values or adapt to those of the colonial language and culture, the locals appear trapped within a third space.

Omovo, blamed for Ifeyiwa's departure, who left her husband with a short note, is reluctant to speak out, aware of his responsibility for what happened. Omovo, not attempting to defend himself, after a long silence, packs his clothes and decides to leave the city. This decision stems from both her need for a quiet place outside the city where she could paint and her desire to devote herself to her art. Omovo, who has long questioned the reason for his mother's unexpected and untimely death, now tries to find the reason for Ifeyiwa's departure. Trying to rid herself of all negative memories of the past, Omovo, thinking of his departed lover, "stared at the blank canvas, feeling the desire to paint surging, yet unable to fully capture him" (Okri, 1996). When he felt helpless in the face of the events and unable to do much, Omovo, filled with the desire to paint, often retreated to his room, immersed in a different space and trying to bring his paintings to life. Omovo, unable to sing in either his native language or English, attempts to express his surging emotions by creating a new space of emptiness through art. Omovo, who had no clear idea of why he was going and what he was trying to find before setting off on his journey, was now like a nomad without a home. Wandering aimlessly, unsure of where or how to stop, Omovo feels his existence becoming increasingly complex day by day: "He felt restless and incomplete. He felt that he was depriving himself of something" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, wanting to be alone with his immersed thoughts, feels the images in his mind becoming a force ready to explode over time. The fact that Omovo sees the cities he visits not as they are now, but as places where slaves were transported, where blood feuds, conflicts, and civil wars took place, is a sign of the enlightenment

that has settled within him. Embracing the past and the future together in this state of enlightenment, Omovo paints a picture of humanity in his mind: "His enlightenment transformed into swirling words, overflowing with speech and thought, animated by existence and words, emerging with dreams and emotions deeper than the impulse that drives him to paint. In this state of mind, he saw time seep into each moment and the infinite possibilities of life. A terrifying and unending portrait of humanity, imbued with an irresistible love, came to life before Omovo's eyes" (Okri, 1996).

Omovo, believing that responsibility begins in dreams and fantasies, fulfills the obligations of his own responsibility through his paintings. Constantly haunted by images of painful and sorrowful memories of the past, Omovo believes this is a sign of change and is unable to fully grasp the extent of his talent: "Amidst the chaos and clarity, between the ever-moving, motionless being, the intersections and spasms of the moment, a hidden self was forming; a new man was being born. Omovo had been given an unnamed talent, and like most of us, he was unaware of how to use it" (Okri, 1996).

Upon returning to his father's estate, Omovo learns that his stepmother has been murdered by his father, and is informed of Ifeyiwa's death. The "dangerous love" in the novel's title can be seen as a reference, firstly, to the risks inherent in Omovo's love affair with his married girlfriend, Ifeyiwa, and secondly, to Omovo's artistic practice, which lands him in trouble with the Nigerian authorities and requires considerable emotional and intellectual investment. Towards the end of the novel, Omovo, having lost his lover in an accident, is driven mad by grief, but ultimately escapes his emotions by painting a portrait of his deceased lover. He is angered by his father's collapse, driven to ruin by the lack of support from his friends. Omovo also blames the surrounding community for the events that led to his father's murder, stating that those who avoid taking responsibility and supporting one another pave the way for the current social decay: "Get out, you nosy ones! You vultures! You spies! You who spy on others' tragedies! Get out" (Okri, 1996)! The residents of the complex, refusing to acknowledge their guilt in the face of Omovo's accusations, attempt to neutralize him. No one can understand Omovo's departure, as he flees, unsure where he is trying to escape the residents' grasp. They believe he still has a long way to go as an artist: "Have you gone mad, huh? You weren't even born yet. Have you forgotten your responsibilities? Pull yourself together. You're a man—an artist—a warrior" (Okri, 1996).

Despite all the painful events he has experienced, Dr. Okocha insists Omovo continue to paint. Dr. Okocha tries to encourage Omovo by telling him how he has continued to paint for fifty years despite the pain he has endured, the loss of two children, and the burning of his village. Okocha argues that pain and suffering strengthen an artist, and that Omovo can only find his true self through art: "Don't let your grief kill you. You haven't been born yet. You haven't painted enough yet. You will live on through what you have endured. You owe it to us, to your people. Bury this girl in your heart; bury her in your art. Let all the suffering you endure now enable you to master your art and your life. Remember that people suffer and struggle and you find security through art" (Okri, 1996).

Towards the end of the novel, when Ifeyiwa dies in an accident, Omovo is driven mad by grief, but attempts to escape his feelings by painting his lost lover from different angles. He also uses his art as a tool for self-healing. Omovo, having forgotten what his deceased lover's face looked like while painting her, repeatedly tries to redraw Ifeyiwa's face, remembering it. Each time, noticing a missing detail and attempting to redraw it, Omovo grasps one of the keys to painting: "At that moment, he realized the painting would never be finished, that it would always be incomplete, and that the girl would never have a face" (Okri, 1996). Omovo, who strives to finish his work, which he first titled 'Beauties' and then 'Related Losses' and which he knows will never be finished, feels compelled to endure an artistic endeavor and makes changes to different parts of the painting each time.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study, which analyzes Ben Okri's novel "*Dangerous Love*" within the context of the *Künstlerroman*, has determined that the novel, with its central elements, encompasses the adventures of the protagonist Omovo, shaped by his artistic experiences, and thus constitutes an example of a *Künstlerroman*. Okri uses the *Künstlerroman*, a classic genre in Western literature, to depict the individual and social experiences of Omovo, the young protagonist struggling with both the negative experiences inflicted upon him by his parents and lover

and the corruption prevalent in postcolonial Nigeria, becoming an artist and experiencing artistic sensibilities.

The study demonstrates that the author, by incorporating elements of postcolonial literature into the work using the form of narrative within narrative in a multilayered fictional atmosphere, demonstrates the formation of the *Künstlerroman*, and concludes that it illuminates the manifestation of the *Künstlerroman* tradition in postcolonial narrative. With the novel under consideration, Okri immerses the reader in an artistic adventure embodied in a postcolonial *Künstlerroman* atmosphere. In his work, Okri employs the themes of the *Künstlerroman*, a style not often used in many postcolonial novels, expressing the sense of in-betweenness and fragmentation felt by an individual alienated from himself and the society he lives in. The filth and poverty he witnesses in his environment seem to create a growing tension in his psyche, furthering his sense of isolation from his surroundings.

At the beginning of the novel, painting for Omovo is an unconscious act, an escape and relief from the harsh world of reality, but one without any real purpose. After a painful process of personal growth, Omovo understands art not only as an act of individual liberation but also as a form of resistance against a corrupt society that still fails to atone for the mistakes of its ancestors. While Omovo yearns for a better life through his talents as an artist, he is constantly haunted by the uncertainties and inhumane practices of his society. While his friends Keme, Dele, and Okoro use the opportunities offered by education to improve their financial situation, Omovo, though dissatisfied, desires to paint images that depict the corrupt and oppressive reality of post-civil war Nigeria. He longs for greater personal and emotional freedom than he sees in the tense and destructive pattern of his own family life.

Painting, one of the two vital sources of love that sustains Omovo in the face of his difficulties, is his most important source of strength in his struggle with the ghosts of the past and the heavy burden of all the lives lost during the civil war. The role of art in the novel is so significant that *Dangerous Love* can be considered a *Künstlerroman*. The novel, both in terms of Omovo's artistic production and his understanding of art as a tool of liberation for society, speaks to Omovo's maturation as an artist. "Dangerous Love is not just a story; it is a richly textured account of Omovo's artistic crisis. It is a poignant narrative of what African women face through the eyes of a boy entering manhood" (Okpiliya & Inyabri, 2015).

In the novel, Omovo becomes a symbolic figure representing the plight of art and artists in postcolonial Nigerian society. Expressing his ideas through his paintings, Omovo reflects social realities in his art. He portrays the evils of society in his paintings, embracing a stance of non-violence and freedom. Through his paintings, Omovo strives to lift society from darkness to light, using art as a tool to unlock its problems. The colors he uses for his paintings shine with people's intuition, visions, memories, and fears. His paintings prompt people to contemplate the hardships of war. As an artist, he has a clear understanding of the purpose of his art. The author, demonstrating that, like a creator, Omovo seeks to make his art a mirror of reality, cleverly illustrates Omovo's love for art. According to Okri, art not only provides personal liberation but also transforms social correction. Art holds immense power to heal society's postcolonial problems.

Omovo is introduced as a rising artist who rejects an offer to sell his paintings to Europeans. In rejecting his paintings, Omovo reveals himself as a non-conformist, demonstrating his uniqueness as a sincere African artist opposed to imperial power. Omovo, who distances himself from imperial power, has his painting "Related Losses" stolen from his home while attempting to show it to Ifeyiwa, a fact that significantly illustrates the fraudulent nature of postcolonial Nigerian society. Okri demonstrates the abjectness of Omovo's environment to highlight the devastating state of Africa in the 1970s. In the city of Lagos, Omovo is surrounded by filth, hunger, fraud, and violence. Okri reflects on how African independence has become hollowly corrupted.

Omovo, who pours his pain into his paintings, also becomes a tool for recognizing the evils in his society. Through Omovo, Okri draws our attention to the realistic aspects of the lives of the poor, the corruption and injustices within society, the struggle for survival, the groans and yearnings of the dissatisfied, and the helplessness and despair of their existence. The Nigeria Okri describes is a country devastated by years of colonialism and civil war, a country seemingly unable to find its identity again. In this sense, the novel also explores the conflicting gap between generations. On one-side stands Omovo's father's older generation, humiliated and exploited during decades of colonial rule; on the other, the younger generation, to which Omovo belongs and who will shape

Nigeria's future. However, young people find themselves trapped between cultural uncertainty and imitation, hating their white oppressors while simultaneously yearning to become part of Western society, blinded by wealth and promise. Despite society at large living an individualistic life, far from preserving its language and culture, Omovo's positioning as an artist integrated with its environment and social values subverts the individualistic demands of the *künstlerroman* genre. Omovo is not someone immersed in his anxieties, isolated from society, or solely concerned with his personal artistic development. He uses the power of love and art as tools to construct a cultural identity finally freed from the ghosts of past tragedies and the social corruptions he witnesses. Omovo, who sees his artistic production as a means of liberation for both himself and society, achieves artistic maturity after a painful process of personal development.

Dangerous Love has the characteristics of the *Künstlerroman*, like shaping, influencing, educating, learning, initiation, maturation, and experience. Based on the textual analysis and the critical opinions offered above, it can be concluded that Ben Okri's novel is a postcolonial *künstlerroman* and that it can be taken as a good example of the genre in Nigerian English Fiction.

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