

Annotation of Esther de Bruijn's "Coming to Terms with New Ageist Contamination: Cosmopolitanism in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*", *Research in African Literatures* 38.4 (2007) pp. 170-186.

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Esther de Bruijn's essay offers a vigorous response to Douglas McCabe's article "'Higher Realities': New Age Spirituality in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*". In his potentially controversial piece, McCabe had suggested that Okri's 1991 novel, by presenting individual fulfilment as the path towards spiritual enlightenment, displayed some of the narcissistic and neo-imperialist tendencies of the New Age movement, resulting in the narrative's inadvertent promotion of the hegemonic discourse of global capitalism. Addressing these claims directly, de Bruijn proposes to expose the flaws in McCabe's arguments and to provide a different reading of Okri's book, foregrounding the text's cosmopolitan features.

Throughout the essay, de Bruijn accuses McCabe of attempting to fit *The Famished Road* into a single, New Ageist ontological framework of modernist inspiration, and she further takes issue with what she perceives as her fellow critic's prejudice against contemporary African writers' appropriation of the traditional *abiku* (i.e. spirit-child) motif. While her assertions fail to take into account some of the key nuances in McCabe's article, de Bruijn makes the interesting point that the constant negotiation between the conflicting worlds of communal responsibility and individual consciousness in Okri's novel testifies to the narrative's concern with cosmopolitanism. It is suggested that this unresolved tension – added to the author's original exploitation of African cultural material – bears witness to the postmodern and postcolonial traits of the book.

Even though de Bruijn sometimes identifies genuine weaknesses in the essay to which she is responding and puts forward thought-provoking alternatives, her article unfortunately tends to be marred by an unduly aggressive tone, also deplored by McCabe in his own rejoinder to the piece, published in the same issue of *Research in African Literatures*. Ultimately, McCabe's earlier essay and de Bruijn's response can most fruitfully be read side-by-side, as both provide challenging – and, at times, not necessarily incompatible – interpretations of a complex novel.