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# Apologia pro Ben Okri's *In Arcadia*: A neglected masterpiece?

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This article begins by pointing to the dearth of critical attention to Ben Okri's novel, *In Arcadia* ([2002] 2003. London: Phoenix). Examples of the sparse but dismissive critical reviews of this novel are given, showing how these seemingly fail to read Okri on his own terms. The focus here is on an alternate reading in which the proposition is that, narratologically, this three-part novel evinces a careful structure, delineating three phases of spiritual growth: breakdown, breakthrough and emergence. The phases are interlinked by the linear motif of Akashic still points or 'intuitions' (that is, numbered meditations of poetic insight). The argument draws upon Okri's philosophical decoding of the labyrinthine symbolism in Poussin's famous painting *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, as well as Steven Harrison's *What's next after now: Post-spirituality and the creative life* (2005. Boulder, Colorado: Sentient). The article closes with the rationale for its critical approach.

**Keywords:** Akashic still points; Arcadian symbolism; heterocosmica; *In Arcadia*; narratology; Nicolas Poussin; Ben Okri; spiritual growth

*In Arcadia* ([2002] 2003)<sup>1</sup> has suffered surprising critical neglect. The paucity in critical judgement is typified by remarks such as 'A considerable challenge is involved in taking on such an idiosyncratic, complicated and intellectually obscure work of fiction' (Anon. 2008, 1); and such imprecise comments as 'Okri has chosen a big and bold subject and a highly original approach to it' (Keith Bruce 2003). Is this perhaps indicative of a failure to read Ben Okri on his own terms?

Okri's first new millennium novel takes its impetus from both 'A Moment in Timelessness'<sup>2</sup> — his inaugural millennium lecture at the 1997 Edinburgh Book Festival — and 'Mental Fight' (1999) — his Blakean intertext, subtitled 'An anti-spell for the twenty-first century'. Like Melville or Schreiner or Woolf or Joyce, Okri reincarnates his own genre of fiction as a reflection, in words, of his own belief system and right to invent:

A great challenge for our age, and future ages: to do for story-telling what Joyce did for language — to take it to the highest levels of enchantment and magic; to impact into story infinite richness and convergences; to make story flow with serenity, with eternity. (Okri *Birds of Heaven* 1996, 20)

Art, initiation and a dynamic stillness inform Okri's conscious artistry. 'We have entered a new age. We must be prepared . . . People who use only their eyes do not SEE. People who use only their ears do not HEAR' writes Okri towards the end of his first novel, *The Famished Road* (1991, 498). As if in elucidation, he concludes his most recent novel, *Starbook* (2007, 421) thus: 'The ways of time are indeed strange; and events are not what we think they are. Time and oblivion alchemise all things, even the great suffering.' The reciprocity of time is a primary narrative device in *In Arcadia*.

Although there have been one or two positive reviews of *In Arcadia*, negative criticism predominates even among those who do address narrative technique. Consider Bruce King (2003, 86), for example, who dismisses the novel with this comment:

Except as a metaphor of life as a journey, the story in itself seems purposeless as there are few events and little narrative development . . . The plot is mostly an excuse for a meditation on notions of Arcadia with its resonance of paradise, a lost Eden, innocence, the pastoral, and its consequent associations with the Fall, anxieties, unhappiness, and death.

King follows the tone set by Jeremy Treglown (2002, 68) who was even more dismissive:

Realism apart, *In Arcadia* has no narrative tension and the characters are ciphers. The long philosophical-cum-cultural-historical rants which it mainly consists of, with their outbreaks of Latinity<sup>4</sup> . . . are shapeless, repetitious and trite.

What both King and Treglown fail to take cognizance of is the integral relationship between story and artefact, idea and form in the art of fiction-making or heterocosmica. Henry James (1963, 9) uses a graphic metaphor to make the point about this interrelationship:

The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and the thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of the thread without the needle, of the needle without the thread.

Narrative technique in the novels of Ben Okri is likewise not something superadded to the content but, rather, a fundamental and deliberate means of structuring perceptions.

This three-part novel can be read as a three-phase narratological experiment tracing first, modernity's breakdown (the fires of transformation); then, the individual's breakthrough (confronting the actual); and finally, emergence and creativity, as already intimated. Evocative of this tripartite reading, in *Birds of Heaven*, Okri (1996, 42 and 1998, 126) states: 'Maybe there are only three kinds of stories; the stories we live, the

stories we tell, and the higher stories that help our souls fly up towards the greater light.' As will be shown in the fuller discussion of the metafictional elements in *In Arcadia* later in this article, there are significant implications for such 'higher stories':

*Chaque romancier, chaque roman, doit inventer sa propre forme. Aucune recette ne peut remplacer cette réflexion continuelle.* [Every novelist must devise his own appropriate form for each text. No formula can replace this constant or on-going consideration (own translation).] (Robbe-Grillet 1963, 11)

As a conscious artist with an instinctive sense of form, Okri shares Alain Robbe-Grillet's insistence on the centrality not only of form, but also of organic creativity. It would be simplistic, therefore, to suggest that an African author as profound and as daring as Ben Okri would, or even could, divide his text slavishly into these three kinds of stories — his interest lies in Sacred Geometry not simple Arithmetic. 'The greatest stories are those that resonate our beginnings and intuit our endings (our mysterious origins and our numinous destinies), and dissolve them both into one' opines Okri in *Birds of Heaven* (1996, 24).

A brief outline of the story line serves to demonstrate this cyclic patterning. *In Arcadia* traces the journey, from London to Paris, of a motley group of out-of-work professional misfits commissioned, by a mysterious producer, whose identity is never revealed but who provides 'clear instruction' (p. 28) at intervals, to make a television documentary about the meaning of Arcadia. En route aboard the *Eurostar*, they interview the train driver and later film his suburban Paris garden as well as other versions of bucolic ideals at Versailles and in the Louvre. Periodically, members of the crew receive cryptic notes or inscriptions. Symptomatic of the cyclic pattern of spiritual growth, the novel closes with the film crew re-commencing their journey, this time to and then from Switzerland, presumably en route for the original physical Arcady in Greece. Lao is the narrator of the first part of the novel, at once film presenter and intrusive authorial commentator.

The tellingly unnamed sections overlap, reflect back on themselves and foreshadow what is to come. Part One is divided into two. Book One serves to introduce the characters 'all shipwrecks and derelicts on the ruined shores of the city' (p. 5) and sets the scene for the start of the journey and the gathering of the film crew at London's Waterloo Station. Evoking the breakdown phase that necessarily precedes the possibility of spiritual growth, Okri depicts a dismal, contemporary world of social malaise, with 'all on the verge of nervous breakdowns' (*ibid.*). A device that parallels the breakthrough phase, the proposed TV documentary on Arcadia provides an opportunity to escape 'from the dehydrating boredom . . . in this inferno that we call the modern world' (*ibid.*). Stephen Abell's estimation that 'the first section of the book [is] a bilious — and charmless — invective against modernity, a monologue that blazes a narrative trail to which any reader will struggle to warm, and which Okri himself only half-heartedly pursues' (2002, 23), thus fails to appreciate the thrust of this novel. He misses both the mode — that of contemporary journalism's deliberately exaggerated caricature — and aspects of narrative intrigue, such as the suggestion that the coming together of this motley team

is in response to an unspoken ‘summons’ (2003, 5) by Malasso, a ‘mysterious force’ (p. 25). He is an invisible ‘*metteur en scène*’ (p. 27) reminiscent of a ‘Proculus’ or ‘Prospero’ (p. 26).<sup>5</sup> The warning to ‘Beware of inscriptions’ (p. 24) furthers the mystique. Lao is the first to receive a tantalizing warning note about his personal path, which he implies results in ‘unusual irradiations of perceptivity’ (p. 26), this, in the context of confronting reality: a diatribe against the distortions of the photographic image or what Okri terms ‘the faintly disreputable middle-class aspirations’ (p. 30) for fame and money. As if awakening from the first Akashic still point or intuitive insight, Lao realizes that hope is born of the recognition that ‘in living there are no resolutions at all’ (p. 30), and this section closes with: ‘And so this journey must be a sort of dying for me; a dying of the old self; a birth of something new and fearless and bright and strange.’ (p. 32)

Okri does not simply argue against Judaic/Western notions of a singular experience of the spirit-in-the-flesh world; he brings to fictive life the notion of the individual soul re-born from bliss spirit to suffering mortal shape:

One of the reasons I [Azaro] didn’t want to be born became clear to me after I had come into this world. I was still very young when in a daze I saw Dad swallowed up by a hole in the road . . . I was seven years old when I dreamt that my hands were covered with the yellow blood of a stranger. I had no idea whether these images belonged to this life, or to a previous one, or to one that was yet to come, or even if they were merely the host of images that invades the lives of all children.

When I was very young I had a clear memory of my life stretching to other lives. There were no distinctions. Sometimes I seemed to be living several lives at once. One lifetime flowed into the others and all of them flowed into my childhood.

As a child I felt I weighed my mother down. In turn I felt weighed down by the inscrutability of life. (*The Famished Road* 1991, 7)

The spirit world of Okri is not necessarily the *ad terminum* growth or ‘*Bildung*’ of a Western epic, an Odyssey: his bodies are embodied, fitting between life and life.

Steven Harrison (*Odyssey* 2005, 20–21)<sup>6</sup> defines the breakdown phase which makes spiritual transformation possible:

The fundamental deception we construct is the idea of the self. This prime organizing assumption is the progenitor of all the other deceptions, and it is generated by thought itself as an integral part of the arising of thought form . . . While we are in the centre of this projected universe, the lack of full dimensionality in the flat world of thought suggests to us that there is something fundamentally untrue about everything. The subtle disturbance is the actuality of the universe impinging on our dream world. The awakening from the dream appears from the perspective of the dream as death.

Book Two of Part One, reflecting the Fires of Transformation, introduces the eighth member of the party, a young, redheaded ingénue, by the name of Mistletoe (an evergreen plant, itself a sacred symbol of immortality). An amateur artist, she is the agent for a discussion of Vermeer’s ‘The Music Lesson’, which provokes her own artistic credo:

'It ought to be like true breathing, breathing the way God . . . intended us to breath, but which we've forgotten' (p. 53). This painting, with its mystical inscription,<sup>7</sup> 'an allegory of liberty and bondage' (Gowing, in *The Royal Collection*, p. 2), adumbrates the interpretations of the inscription in Poussin's painting — in the third section of the novel — which features a second mysterious note as well as four subsections entitled 'Intuitions in the Garden', each a correlative for an Akashic still point.

The garden is, of course, a metaphor for a return 'to the original world, with Eden's dawn in the air' (p. 40). The idyllic sunlit garden recalls the memory of the cyclic pattern of life and pastoral bliss, ultimately concretised in Poussin's painting that the group view in the *Louvre*:

And then, alone with all its beauty, the earth discovered the moving forms of birds and animals and humanity, and it fell in love with them, and made a home in its womb for them when they died, and provided them with all they needed when they were born. (p. 41)

The second and third re-awakenings continue the theme: 'Creation and destruction were both part of the same song' (p. 42); and the natural world

[h]ad chosen joy at self's existence, and freedom followed . . . had chosen the love of self's regenerativeness, and prosperity followed; the necessity of self's presence, and stillness followed; the certainty of self's growth, and power followed. (p. 44)

The prose flow in this excerpt is as fluid as the sentient double lives of Okri's spirit-in-life beings. A meditative silence is the leitmotif of all three intuitions. However, in the fourth intuition, man's desire for power resuscitates the memory of the Fall: 'And then we dreamt of paradise, because we had lost it' (p. 45). Part One closes with the breakthrough: confronting actuality; re-visioning the purpose of the journey: to recapture 'the matchless mysteries of mortal life.' (p. 58)

Part Two of Okri's novel elaborates upon 'the stress of the world that had given rise to the Arcadian legend' (p. 64), appropriately eliding into five subsections called 'Intuitions in the Dark', all evoked by speeding through the underwater tunnel that links England to France, where all reality becomes pure inscription without words, where 'the mind contracts. The spirit folds inwards' and 'the world surrenders to an omnipotent darkness' (p. 67). Meditations on light and dark proliferate, concretised by the disappearance and reappearance at different points of three of the characters. On arrival in France, Lao realizes that the imagined second Arcadia 'is more true in the mind than on earth' (p. 82); it is 'our secular Eden' (p. 65). As if in explanation, Harrison (2005, 21) states:

The great liberation is actual and requires nothing, gives nothing, contains nothing and creates nothing. We are all done, whether we like it or not, whether we are spiritual or not, whether we agree with this or not. When we cease to characterise life as a process with attendant goals, we apprehend what has always been the case, an acausal world in which manifestation is absolutely true and description is relatively not.

In summary, Harrison notes: 'The great liberation then is not a state, but an energetic manifestation, an actuality, not an idea.' (*ibid.*)

Born of silence, three Akashic still points propel Okri's narrative forward. First, the narrator reiterates the Arcadian dream: 'Our modern neurosis is Pan's revenge. Our craving for nature is our craving for reunion with the sublime, for oneness, for rejuvenation' (2003, 66). Akashic memory then surfaces in the rhetorical question: 'Is the visible life the deposit of all one's thoughts and deeds?' (p. 102) Finally, dropping his habitual mask of cynicism, Lao is encircled: 'because he lived, in spirit, within humanity's abstraction, within the oneness of it. He believed, deep down beyond thought, that all are one.' (p. 105) Okri here re-replaces or re-situates, rather than attempting to displace, Judeo-Christian notions of the spirit world.

The imaginative forum of African writers such as Schreiner and Lessing and Okri is not weakly reactive or predictably adversarial towards the old world. It is vigorous in its certainty of describing and inscribing new places, relations and intellectual structures. It has the verve of discovery and the gloss of newness that Sidney sensed at the quick point of Renaissance English. The key to Okri's *In Arcadia* is arguably Mistletoe's intuition: 'Arcadia is the chiaroscuro of the mortal and the immortal, of happiness and death, of eternity and transience, beauty and the grave.' (p. 179) Hoodwin (n. d., 2) clarifies the concept:

The instinctive (neutral) center is the location of a person's individual akashic records; it interpenetrates the other centers and stores their memories there; it is the seat of the subconscious. The individual instinctive center is, in turn, connected to larger "storehouses", such as the collective consciousness of humanity. Ultimately, it is connected to the whole, so when we clarify our instinctive center through self-knowledge and healing, we are contributing to the clarification of the entire universe.

This is the third phase of spiritual growth, explored fully in the third part of Okri's novel. Reminiscent of an extract from Eliot's poem, 'Burnt Norton',<sup>8</sup> Harrison (2005, 21) elucidates on this erasure of dualism:

The source of quantum creativity is non-located; that is to say that it is located in its entirety. The creative utilises the locus, utilises time and space, but is not these qualities, certainly not limited to their boundaries.

And in *Birds of Heaven* (1996, 5), Okri reiterates this sentiment in relation to literature:

Like music, like painting, literature too wants to transcend its primary condition and become something higher. Art wants to move into silence, into the emotional and spiritual conditions of the world. Statues become melodies, melodies become yearnings, yearnings become actions.

Part Three of *In Arcadia* is devoted to the film crew's visit to the Louvre and a discussion of Poussin's artwork. Set in an idyllic pastoral scene, the painting features

three shepherds and a shepherdess (read earth mother) seemingly examining the enigmatic inscription on a large gravestone, '*Et in Arcadia Ego*'. Andrew Gough<sup>9</sup> states that the painting 'is considered by many to conceal unspeakable esoteric secrets'. Okri echoes this by having his film-maker observe that the inscription is one 'which no one could decode' and, reflecting back on the earlier excerpt about *Le Jardin des Tuileries* [Tuileries' garden at Versailles], that the painting depicts 'a place of immortal bliss, in a land that used to be called Eden, but which was renamed Arcadia, and it is all the lands of the earth' (p. 193). Characteristic of Poussin, the figures overlap suggesting dynamic interaction, while the interplay of light and shade (reminiscent of Mistletoe's intuitive interpretation of the meaning of Arcadia) is a principal painterly technique. As the film group examine the painting, they receive a warning given to the producer in a dream:

Don't forget that the landscape is greater than the tomb. Death is merely Time's inscription, a beautiful absence. Don't dwell too long in Arcadia. This is fatal. For if you dwell too long there, you will become the tomb, and your life its inscription. (p. 193)

Musing upon the nature of art, in general, and of painting, in particular, Okri (2003, 190) states:

Painting is the illuminated record of invisible realms seen in glimpses. Intimations of re-incarnation. *Akashic still points*. Painting is indeed one of the places where Hades is averted. It is the hint of a sort of immortality within. It comes from the same place inside us where gods are born.

Painting is one of the most mysterious metaphors of Arcadia. (emphases added)

This excerpt perhaps explains why Bruce King (2003, 86) assumes that '*In Arcadia* is a variation on *Astonishing the Gods*'. The latter novel does feature an invisible realm, but it does so to the exclusion of the earthly realm. The lead character in *Astonishing the Gods* ([1995] 1999) is similarly invisible, a seeker after divine grace, whereas that in *In Arcadia* is very much flesh-and-blood, a character whom Jeremy Treglown (2002, 68) describes as 'an arrogant, garrulous, paranoid misanthrope'. Of interest here, however, is the reference to 'Akashic still points' which, in the context of describing *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, Okri (2003, 204) suggests are 'the resting point[s] of an idea that has travelled thousands of years in the mind of humanity'. The purpose of such resting points is to help one organize and integrate what one already knows, thus leading to fresh and creative insights.

In *Science and the Akashic field: An Integral Theory of Everything*, Ervin László (2004, 4) states: 'The Akashic records (Akashic is a Sanskrit word meaning "sky", "space" or "aether") are . . . understood to be a collection of mystical knowledge that is encoded in the aether, i.e. on a non-physical plane of existence.' Shepherd Hoodwin (n.d., 1)<sup>10</sup> explains that 'the core of the akashic records is the akashic plane, the neutral plane' and '[i]t is the overall record for the universe'.

Of its author's interpretations of the artwork, *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*, King (p. 87) emotes:



There is a complicated argument here about the imagination projecting the artist's emotions on the world through art, plus some common sense and psychobabble about happiness being within, something one chooses.

Although he concedes that 'The form is interesting — as the novel becomes art criticism, cultural history, meditation', King is quick to insist that 'the great truths offered appear as clichés' (*ibid.*).

Stephen Abell's (2002, 23) review endorses these negative sentiments. In the context of interpreting '*Et in Arcadia ego*' ['I too have lived in Arcadia' / 'I too have been here' / 'Death too is here'], the inscription on the gravestone in Poussin's *Les Bergers d'Arcadie* (and the novel's central enigmatic symbol), Abell expatiates: 'The difficulty of the work comes to symbolize the uncertainty of the world, the inscrutability of the inscription testifies to the elusive nature of all meaning.' Quoting Okri, he states: 'art becomes a "condition of unease, of dislocation, of being out of it all, an exile".' But then, Abell continues:

Reading Okri at his most ripe . . . is something like submerging your head in aromatic water: pleasant to begin with but none the less liable to drown you . . . this novel inhabits the same plane of awkwardness [as the art work], enacting — archly refusing to succour — the struggles of life, by asking questions without providing reassuring answers . . . This . . . reveals the core of inadequacy that undermines the entire book. Okri is, in fact, sheltering in his own ideal of awkwardness, a false aesthetic of failure, as he comforts himself with a sense of his own unforgiving perspicacity . . . Such inconclusion, filled with its own question marks at the end of the novel, is as frustrating as it is lazy.

However, 'Certainty,' says Okri (1997, 30) in *A Way of Being Free*, 'has always been the enemy of art and creativity; more than that it has been the enemy of humanity'. This novel is neither 'trite' nor 'clichéd'. The elegiac ethos of the past tense 'I too once *knew* Arcadia' / 'I too *have been* in now' (emphasis of the Latin translation added), recalls us to an identifying landscape of the soul and field which cuts against rationalist organization, political schemata and mercantilist compensation. And far from being either 'psychobabble' or 'lazy', Okri (2003, 206–207) clearly points to reading the painting as a metonymic Akashic record:

Lao found himself thinking not of the inscription as such, but of an idea through time. He was thinking about the journey of an idea from a real place to a poem; from the real Arkadia in the Peloponnese to the idyllic and pastoral poems of the Greek poet Theocritus, and from Theocritus to Virgil.

Virgil's *Bucolics* are political: the suppliant appeals to Caesar Augustus not to reassign his land. Virgil sings of the sacred bond between 'farmer', 'shepherd' — read human being — and the humanising influence of a known landscape. The theme, or knowledge, of this gained meaning runs straight from Theocritus to Okri. We are the land; the land

is our mother, as already attended to. As a further guide to his interpretation of the painting, an intrusive authorial voice declares: 'With Virgil, Arcadia became the seed of an ideal, a dream, and a lyric meditation on the mystery of creativity' (p. 207). This metafictional comment guides interpretation of novel and painting in accordance with Chinese principles. George Rowley (1947, 5) articulates these principles in a chapter titled 'Spirit and Matter':

We will begin with the basic contrast of spirit and matter. In the west the gulf between them has been impassable. For us spirit belongs to the life of prayer and worship, matter is the concern of science. This has directed our art to the extremes of religious meaning and naturalistic representation . . . The Chinese created a unique conception of the realm of the spirit which was one with the realm of matter. This meant that their painting would never become religious, imitative, or personally expressive as our painting; and it also meant that art would tend to take over the functions of religion and philosophy and would become a prime vehicle for man's most profound thoughts and his feelings about the mystery of the universe.

In a poem entitled 'On Klee' (*Birds of Heaven* 1996, 45) Okri muses:

So you too were on the journey  
To the East  
Where mystery  
Is the stuff of the feast.

As noted at the beginning of this article, Okri interprets *Les Bergers d'Arcadie* as an Akashic still point. Predictably, Part Three consists of meditations, rhetorical questions (to which Abell objects), intuitions: 'ideas that have travelled thousands of years in the mind of humanity' (p. 204, already quoted). Thus, for Okri, this is 'an open painting', 'a true enigma', 'a visual koan', 'a perpetual quest' (p. 203), 'an idea through time', 'the journey of an idea' (p. 206). 'And so Arcadia and death are inextricably intertwined. Immortality and death are conjoined. Beauty and death are linked, happiness and death are coupled' (*ibid.*).

'This unique conception of spirit and matter,' says Rowley 'was embodied in the Tao' (1947, 5). Okri's lead character is a black Lao. Lao Tsû is the old philosopher of Tao Têh Ching. Rowley (1947, 7) explains this natural mysticism:

It is said of the Tao:  
Being great, it passes on;  
Passing on, it becomes remote;  
Having become remote, it returns.

In addition to direct references to Taoism and Akashic still points, eight characters participate in this journey, a journey into the soul. Coincidentally, in Chinese culture, the figure eight is a sacred number, a metaphor for eternity. Compare Okri's fellow Nigerian, Wole Soyinka's 'Modius' [read Moebius as illustrated in Max Escher's painting]:

## multiform

Evolution of the self-devouring snake to spatials  
 New in symbol, banked loop of the “Modius Strip”  
 And interlock of re-creative rings, one surface  
 Yet full comb of angles, uni-plane, yet sensuous  
 Complexities of mind and motion.<sup>11</sup>

In closing his novel, Okri recommends that: ‘Living ought to be the unfolding masterpiece of the loving spirit. And dying ought to set this masterpiece free’ (p. 230); this as the antidote to the despair, terror and cosmic emptiness of modernity, to the ‘finely drawn out ritual of humiliation and meaninglessness’ (p. 121). ‘What ultimately remains on the akashic plane’ writes Hoodwin (p. 2) ‘is the distillation, what was learned, which is what is relevant for the universe to carry forward into the future’.

*Pace* misreadings, Okri thus ascribes a porous world of soul and body which moves in circles of spirit, landscape, past and present: the pure essence of which may be that timeless plane of Akashic still point, but which world is severely at odds with the linear progressivism and obsessive materialist expression of the egocentric Western ideology of the glorious individual.

## Notes

1 All references in this article are to the 2003 Phoenix edition.

2 See Gray, R. 2007. ‘A moment in timelessness’: Ben Okri’s *Astonishing the Gods*. And Gray 2007. ‘Domesticating infinity’ in Ben Okri’s *Mental Fight* and *Astonishing the Gods*.

3 In his foreword to *Beyond Death* (2007, x), Charles Casey explains Edgar Casey’s belief: ‘every action and thought of every individual makes an impression upon the Universal Consciousness, an impression that can be psychically read. He correlated this with the Hindu concept of an Akashic Record, which is an ethereal, fourth-dimensional film upon which actions and thoughts are recorded and can be read at any time.’

4 Treglown (2002: 68) cites, as example, ‘the invidious irritability that specialists in psychosomatic creativity identify as preceding unusual irradiations of perceptivity’.

5 Of the former, Okri writes, ‘Procos being the name of this imaginary semi-deity of disasters, mischief, local catastrophes, lost things, improbable thefts, and unlikely rumours’; and of the latter, ‘this malign Prospero figure who would have such dreadful power over our lives’ (2003, 25).

6 Harrison’s progression is a typical Western developmental linear construct. He terms the third stage ‘breakout’, whereas I have chosen ‘emergence’ which, in line with Okri’s Urhobo mythology, would be followed by a re-emergence. The pattern is cyclical: philosophically, the argument supports the notion of reincarnation and assumes that one learns so little in the flesh form however many times the soul is reborn.

7 The inscription on the lid of the virginal, *MUSICA LETITIAE CO[ME]S MEDICINA*

*DOLORIS[IS]* means 'Music is a companion in pleasure and a balm in sorrow' (p. 2). <http://www.royalcollection.org.uk/eGallery/object.asp?maker=VERMEER&object=4/> (accessed 5 June 2008).

8 'At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;/ Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,/ But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,/ Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,/ Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,/ There would be no dance, and there is only the dance,/ I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time./ The inner freedom from the practical desire,/ The release from action and suffering, release from the inner/ And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded/ By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving . . .' ('Four Quartets: Burnt Norton' ii: 173)

9 Andrew Gough's *Arcadia* [http://ww.templarcavalier.it/images/rennes\\_le\\_chateau\\_i\\_pastori/](http://ww.templarcavalier.it/images/rennes_le_chateau_i_pastori/) (accessed 26 June 2007).

10 The Akashic Records (excerpt from *The Journey of Your Soul*). [http://209.85.135.104/search?q=cache:ONTj5kTT30cJ:www.michaelteachings.com/akashic\\_record/](http://209.85.135.104/search?q=cache:ONTj5kTT30cJ:www.michaelteachings.com/akashic_record/) (accessed 5 June 2007).

11 *Idanre and Other Poems*, p. 8, In Eldred Durosimi Jones. 1973. *The Writings of Wole Soyinka*.

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