

Book Review

Priyanka Ruth Prim

Title	<i>The Freedom Artist</i>
Author	Ben Okri
Publisher	Head of Zeus Ltd.
Year	2019
No. of Pages	347
Price	₹ 1,205.37

A Nigerian author, living in London and writing in English, Ben Okri rose to recognition in 1991 when his book *The Famished Road* won the Booker prize. He has since been widely published, translated and read by readers who cannot fail to be transformed by the subtleties he employs in using a language we all thought we knew. In a prose that reads like poetry, this latest offering opens an overture that retains none of the of the slow gradient one would expect from a gradual introduction to a vast idea. Instead, it hammers home a question that demands an answer: Who is the Prisoner?

Projecting a universal social consciousness into a version of our world, where the dark undercurrents of humanity are laid bare, the book pulls apart the mythos of the world and weaves together a tale that is invasive in its simplicity, ethereal in its complexity and something approaching spiritual in the echoes it leaves in the reader. Each character is placed in their roles with an exactness that draws attention to individual purpose, against the larger backdrop of the prevalent lies, violence, fear and apathy that has pervaded all human existence.

A young woman is arrested for seeking the truth in a question that resonates throughout the novel, and by the end it has become the question every reader has to ask themselves. The answer is implicit in the revelation at the heart of the story. After her disappearance, a man begins to search for the woman, because he loves her. He searches desperately at first, and then with growing realization, that to find her, he first needs to understand her question. As we journey with him through this dystopian, disintegrating world of hopelessness, we come to understand that to survive, and to answer the girl's question, we, like the young man, have to accept the challenge and fight back.

The Freedom Artist is an impassioned plea for justice and a penetrating examination of how freedom is threatened in a post-truth society. From within the pages of this remarkable book, rises a powerful and haunting call to arms against man's changing nature and the gradual remaking of the world.