

CHAPTER 5

THE LITERARY GROTESQUE: FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS

My spirit companions had tried to scare me from life by making reality appear more monstrous and grotesque. —SE 293

The grotesque is one of the most obvious forms art may take to pierce the veil of familiarity, to stab us from the drowse of the accustomed, to make us aware of the perilous paradoxicality of life. The grotesque evokes dormant emotions, particularly the negative ones of fear, disgust, revulsion, guilt. But it is close to the comic, and in it laughter and horror meet.

—Robert Penn Warren, *Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace*.

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a study of the literary technique of the grotesque with reference to its features and functions in the selected novels. The study shows that the literary grotesque in these novels is used as a strategy in constructing the narratives. It is not merely an ornamental device but is invested with functional value. While it articulates the writers' aesthetics of literature, it also foregrounds the hidden, unseen and subdued aspects of the world and life. It showcases an African worldview and dispenses with the centralising tendencies of the West.

The vast and often eerie spatio-temporal span found in the selected novels and studied in the previous chapter offers a space for the operation of monsters, demons, satyrs and a host of esoteric figures. Such a spatio-temporal frame allows for the operation of hidden worlds that seldom find representation in realistic prose narratives. This consequently leads one to probe into the question of the grotesque and its representation—its aesthetic functions and cultural and political significance, if any. This chapter is the result of such probings. It studies the features and functions of the grotesque in the selected novels vis-à-vis the socio-economic and cultural contexts that give rise to it and the historical position of the writer. In doing so, it also studies the commonalities and differences between these writers and the politics associated with their grotesque representations. It is found that the grotesque in their novels derive from native oral tradition which are appropriated into the written narrative. However, one should be wary of reading the grotesque as a direct derivation from an oral tradition. It is a significant appropriation of an oral narrative species within the framework of the written. Borrowing the grotesque from oral tradition, writers like Tutuola and Okri show an urge to

capture, demonstrate and celebrate a unique way of being and seeing that is different from any Western mode of perception.

5.2 Defining Grotesque

The grotesque is both an artistic as well as a literary term and is understood as a particular mode of artistic and literary representation. It is primarily characterised by the distortion and transgression of boundaries—physical and psychological—effected basically through exaggeration and fantasy. The grotesque is an arena or a site where horror and humour co-exist. It is the result of the fantastic—the embodiment of a fantastic imagination. The *Oxford Illustrated Encyclopaedia* (ed., John Julius Norwich) defines the grotesque as a term in art originally applied to a type of mural decoration—painted, carved or moulded in stucco—incorporating floral motifs, animal and human figures, and masks, combined into fanciful and playful schemes. This type of ornamentation was used in Roman buildings and was revived during the Renaissance; the buried ruins, in which examples were discovered were called *grotte* (caves or ‘grottoes’), hence the name. By extension, the term has come to be applied to any bizarre, distorted or incongruous representation¹. In art, the grotesque is a form of decoration derived from antiquity and revived during the Renaissance where human and animal forms are mixed fancifully with plants and abstract shapes to create a bizarre kind of decorative pattern². Wolfgang Kayser in his celebrated work *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* observes that during the Renaissance, the term *grottesco* was used to designate a specific ornamental style derived from antiquity. It suggested not only something playfully gay and carelessly fantastic, but also something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one—a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid (Kayser 21). In the last chapter of his book, “An Attempt to Define the Nature of the Grotesque”, Kayser comes up with more definitions, “the grotesque is a structure...it is the estranged world, our world which has been transformed”; “The grotesque is a play with the absurd”; the grotesque is “an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world”³.

Since antiquity, grotesque images have been considered as monstrous because they are born of unnatural couplings of natural things. The term grotesque has acquired multiple

dimensions in philosophical debates throughout the ages. As Chao maintains, “For some (like Horace), grotesque monsters illustrate a catalogue of sins to be avoided because they deviate from classical norms of reason and nature. For others (like Vasari), however, grotesque monsters epitomise ingenuity and marvel. Also, for some (like Kayser), the grotesque proper is full of demonic terror and yet, for others, (like Bakhtin), full of carnivalesque laughter” (Chao 10). As such, the grotesque could be understood to be a fluid and slippery term⁴. In arts and literature, as Kayser observes, the grotesque operates at three levels— the creative process, the work of art itself, and its reception— and concludes that the grotesque has the makings of a basic aesthetic category (Kayser 180). Moreover, depending on the criteria of form and response— the grotesque has been classified in two ways: John Ruskin in *Modern Painters* makes a distinction between the ludicrous and the terrible grotesque; and Kayser, between the satiric and the fantastic.

Talking of the grotesque in modern painting, Thomas Mann in *Past Masters* observes that the grotesque belongs neither to the tragic nor to the comic. Defying such boundaries of categorisation, it approaches nearer to the tragi-comic:

For I feel that, broadly and essentially, the striking feature of modern art is that it has ceased to recognise the categories of tragic and comic...sees life as tragicomedy, with the result that the grotesque is its most genuine style...(Mann 240-41).

Geoffrey Harpham, in presenting a socio-cultural perspective on the grotesque, is of the opinion that the grotesque depends not only on physical conditions, but also on conventions, prejudices, commonplaces, banalities, mediocrities of a particular people (Harpham 463). Over the years, changes have taken place in man’s perception and understanding of the physical world. Moreover, the world itself has also been changed by technology, pollution, wars, urbanisation, social and politico-cultural phenomena and processes such as colonialism, globalisation, and others. In view of changing affairs of the physical world, certain things which earlier appeared as “distortions are now perceived as commonplace or found to obey other, previously unknown laws” (Harpham 463). No wonder, therefore, that the manifestations of the grotesque in arts and literature along with its forms have changed remarkably over the years and varies from culture to culture”. Notwithstanding this, the emotional complex denoted by the term has remained fairly consistent. For an object to be

grotesque, as Harpham says, “three responses must be aroused by it: laughter, astonishment, disgust or horror” (Harpham 463).

Again, according to Connelly, “many image traditions throughout the world include structures that resemble the western grotesque, but they do not always carry the same cultural associations” (Connelly 6). The meaning generated by grotesque images and figures are culture specific and vary from one society to another. For instance, there has always been a fascination for the monstrous and depictions of the monstrous have been known to be cutting across cultures, times and continents⁵. However, what actually constitutes a monster depends on the cultural conditions and values of a society in which the image is depicted. That which is deemed to be monstrous is against the natural order of what is acceptable, and this is usually the image of nature and human natural forms. Consequently, even some being that is of an abnormal size may be regarded as monstrous yet still be acceptable⁶. Connelly maintains that “the grotesque is in constant struggle with the boundaries of the known, the conventional and the understood. One can take a historical and cultural view of these boundaries. For example, representations of a Nkisi from Congo or Ganesha from India were neither intended nor defined as grotesques until they crossed into the European cultural sphere” (Connelly 5). One way of incorporating the grotesque into non-grotesque structures, as per Harpham’s observation is by the use of certain themes which almost inherently involve the grotesque:

Some of these are predominantly literary, such as the ‘masked ball’, the ‘Carnival’, and the ‘double’. Some are predominantly pictorial, such as the *Danse Macabre*. And some seem to lend themselves to both literary and pictorial representation, such as ‘The Temptations of St. Anthony’ and the ‘Apocalypse’. In works with such themes, the grotesque can serve as a thematic metaphor for confusion, chaos, insanity, loss of perspective, social collapse, or disintegration, or angst. The plain assumption of the grotesque is that the rules of order have collapsed; for this reason it is strongest in eras of upheaval or crisis, when old beliefs in old orders are threatened or crumbling (Harpham 466).

Apart from a medieval style of mural painting and sculpture; and, a classical style of ornamentation, the grotesque as a concept is also derived from another source—folklore. The grotesque, as Bakhtin notes, has its roots in the folk culture/festivities of the Middle Ages (Bakhtin 1981: 174) particularly in the carnival where a dissolution of hierarchies and

boundaries occurs⁷. Bakhtin interprets the carnivalesque as the voice of the people, as the vehicle of self-expression for the suppressed and regulated proletariat⁸. ‘Carnival’ as Cooper asserts is welded to the comic and the grotesque body, linked to fairs ‘with the participation of giants, dwarfs, monsters, and trained animals’. It is a ‘world of topsy turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excesses, where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled’ (Cooper 1998: 24). As seen from the preceding paragraphs, writers like Kayser and Harpham study the grotesque as an aesthetic category. However, this category, as Bakhtin says, is transgressive. He also emphasises the creative dimensions of the grotesque by describing it as “a body in the process of becoming...never finished, never completed...it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body” (Bakhtin 1984: 317).

While the grotesque has been studied and analysed by different critics, philosophers and thinkers with differing emphasis, it would do well to say that a grotesque form or structure is a category or entity with self-effacing boundaries. It is a site where the categories of ‘tragic’ and ‘comic’, ‘laughter’ and ‘fear’, ‘real’ and ‘fantastic’ are juxtaposed, diluted and blurred to generate a mixed response of horror and humour.

It is thus seen that a lot of critical attention has been devoted to the theorisation of the grotesque in literature. This chapter relies on these tenets, especially those of Bakhtin, Harpham and Kayser, in its analysis of the features and functions of the grotesque in the selected novels. In the African writers of English expression selected for this study, it is impossible not to notice the grotesque in their narratives. Taking into account the cultural and historical factors, it could be said that the grotesque in these novels is not inspired by any Renaissance art but owes to folklore—myths, legends, fairy tales, artefacts like masks and native sculptures, songs, music and others. Here it is useful to refer to **Chapter 2** and **Chapter 3** where reference has been made to the fact that in the context of Africa, whatever has been preserved (before the introduction of literacy) is through the word of the mouth. Thus a substantial part of traditional culture is preserved through folklore. Grotesque figures and characters are an important part of African lore and, belief in spirits, ghosts, ancestors a part of ontological faith. Ato Quayson says:

In traditional African oral contexts, the dominant narrative genres that circulate have an element of the magical and the supernatural in them. These genres range from official myths of dynastic legitimation to cautionary and etiological tales of an explicitly

fictional though didactic disposition....The fact that most genres of orality retain a comfortable relationship to magical elements in the constitution of a cognitive response to the world suggests an contrast to the Weberian notion of disenchantment that are supposed to have marked Western modernity. Extended to the realm of literacy this enchantment then generates a particular response to both magic and realism such that the term magical realism gains a different kind of salience in African writing (Quayson 2009: 160).

It could therefore be argued that the literary grotesque in Tutuola and Okri draws on what Quayson calls “the polysemy of oral discourse that establishes the essential porousness of what might be taken as reality” (Quayson 2009: 174).

This chapter studies the grotesque as a literary strategy in constructing the narrative in the selected novels by examining its features and functions as well as specific grotesque images, figures and situations with reference to a particular social context in which it is created. The study shows that the grotesque as a narrative strategy in the selected novels could be defined or understood by what it does—that is, by its features and functions.

5.3 Literary Representations of the Grotesque

The literary applications of the grotesque are as varied and amorphous as the term itself. Wolfgang Kayser is of the opinion that “the shift in usage of the term from the realm of the fine arts to that of literature, is indicated by Montaigne’s use of the term, in characterising his essays as grotesque and monstrous bodies, pieced together of the most diverse members, without distinct form, in which order and proportion are left to chance” (Kayser 24). As a critical term, the grotesque has been extensively applied to any literary work which does not give priority to realistic representations— myths, legends, folktales, utopian allegories, dream visions, surrealist texts, science fiction, horror stories— all presenting realms, other than the human. Among the earliest precursors of the ‘grotesque’ in novels are texts like Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Variations of the grotesque mode as per the writers’ socio-cultural, political and diverse historical positions are found worldwide. Gunter Grass and Kafka (Germany), Cesare Pavese (Italy), Genet and Ionesco (France), Ted Hughes (England), Poe, Joseph Heller, Pynchon

(America), Salman Rushdie (India), Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Latin America) are found to employ the genre by appropriating and using it according to their diverse socio-cultural contexts and historical positions. Another nineteenth century variant of the grotesque is found in the gothic novels of Monk Lewis and Mary Shelley. This shows that the growth and development of the grotesque from antiquity to present times has been contingent upon the conditions of a particular cultural climate, a particular artist, a particular audience⁹. This stance could be substantiated with reference to Ben Okri's *TFR*—one of the novels chosen for this study. *TFR* is set at the historical moment just prior to Nigerian independence. All signposts of modernisation— construction of roads, cars, photography, electricity are found everywhere in the novel. Against such a backdrop, Azaro lives with his poverty stricken parents in a Nigerian ghetto where they are constantly perturbed by the corrupt political parties who use dishonest, ruthless and violent means to try to win support. However, the story is concurrently located in an esoteric world of the dead, spirits, nightmares, dreams, and of those waiting to be born. The two worlds are represented by juxtaposing them in the consciousness of the abiku child. In this context, one may refer to Geoffrey Harpham who says that “every age redefines the grotesque in terms of what threatens its sense of essential humanity” (Harpham 463).

In any study of the grotesque, Kayser's work is particularly useful for it singles out the motifs that usually remain embedded in such representations: “monsters, certain animals, animated mechanical objects, mechanised human beings, insane people, and the like” (Kayser 183). He points out:

these motifs are found to survive as a perennial mode for representing the grotesque in literature. Such motifs suggest that the grotesque is always concerned with a world in which traditional categories are discarded. It could be said that the grotesque, as a flexible category, provides a range of possibilities out of which its various manifestations are found in different kinds of literature in different historical situations. There is no exemplary model or ideal paradigm to which all grotesque representations should conform; there is only a range of different literary works which have similar structural features, motifs and impulses (Kayser 185).

Sigmund Freud says, “The ‘creative’ imagination, indeed, is quite capable of inventing anything; it can only combine components that are strange to one another” (Freud 206-07).

Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* says that literary fantasies have appeared to be free from many of the conventions and restraints of the more realistic texts: “they have refused to observe the unities of time, space and character, doing away with chronology, three-dimensionality and with rigid distinctions between animate and inanimate objects, self and other, life and death” (Jackson 2). Like other literary genres, the grotesque is produced within and determined by its social context. Jackson sees the fantastic text as a by product of its times:

The forms taken by any particular fantastic text are determined by a number of forces which intersect and interact in different ways in each individual work. Recognition of these forces involves placing authors in relation to historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants, as well as to a literary tradition of fantasy, and makes it impossible to accept a reading of this kind of literature which places it somehow mysteriously ‘outside’ time altogether....A more extensive treatment would relate texts more specifically to the conditions of their production, to the particular constraints against which the fantasy protests and from which it is generated, for fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints (Jackson 3).

This denotes that for a proper analysis of the grotesque in a literary text, it has to be related to its cultural formation, conditions and socio-historical context.

The experience of colonialism entails the experience of disjunctures, ruptures, fragmentation of physical boundaries and dissolution of identity. It leads to a collision of cultures and values with scientific and technological advancements constantly threatening traditional belief systems. Both the colonial and the postcolonial experience go to shape the grotesque in Tutuola and Okri. The grotesque figures and structures are often used to portray these disjunctures, ruptures, identity crises particular to their times. At times, it is also used as a vehicle to depict the transitions taking place in the contemporary society; to make a satiric comment on the existing affairs of the world (Okri’s trilogy is a political satire); and often as a constructive mode— to uphold and maintain communal values. In Okri, the grotesque attempts to overturn normal perceptions and destabilise ‘realistic’ ways of comprehending the world. It thwarts Western categories of knowledge in a bid to celebrate the violation in representation of a unified reality. As Jackson says, “the themes of the fantastic in literature revolve around the problem of making visible the unseen, of articulating the unsaid...it

subverts dominant philosophical assumptions which uphold as reality a coherent, single-viewed entity, that narrow vision which Bakhtin termed ‘monological’” (Jackson 48).

The grotesque is also associated with another mode of literary representation—magical realism. Many critics have examined Tutuola and Okri’s works under the lens of magical realism (as pointed out in Chapter 1)¹⁰ although Okri is highly acerbic to such an evaluation of his works. Magical realism, as Cooper says:

thrives on transition, on the process of change, borders and ambiguity. Such zones occur where burgeoning capitalist development mingles with older pre-capitalist modes in postcolonial societies, and where there is the syncretising of cultures as creolised communities are created. Magical realism intersects with the grotesque as the former at its best opposes fundamentalism and purity; it is at odds with racism, ethnicity and the quest for tap roots, origins and homogeneity; it is fiercely secular and revels in the body, the joker, laughter, liminality and the profane. The magical realist writers spurn the conventions of classical realism and use devices and techniques of the improbable, the fantastic—devices that constitute the grotesque as well (Cooper 1998: 22).

The grotesque images and figures in the novels chosen for this study are constructed out of a West African cultural heritage, that is, from native local resources. Stressing the importance of local context in the writings of Marquez and Rushdie, Cooper says, that “the former was deeply influenced by the worldviews and ways of life of the mixed populations of African, Indian and Spanish descent of his tropical Caribbean zone of Columbia. Similarly, Salman Rushdie’s fictions, can only be partially appreciated without a deep knowledge of India’s religions and attendant politics” (Cooper 1998: 37). Okri demonstrates the same through the character of Omovo in *Dangerous Love*, as he considers a book of African art:

He looked at reproductions of sculptings, mysterious monoliths, jujus, masquerades and serene bronze busts. But he studied them with too much familiarity, for African art seemed to him to be everywhere. He saw the terrifying shapes, the evil-fighting forms, and the ritual powers as being part of things, part of an order. They were in him. It was only later that he would learn to see them with estranged eyes, see them for the first time and be startled into the true realm of his artistic richness. (*Dangerous Love* 201)

African writers like Tutuola and Okri focus on the recapturing of a local culture and mythology. In doing so, Okri expresses an ever-increasing disillusionment with current political realities in Nigeria.

The play of exaggerated disproportionate figures, paranormal imagery, hybrid composition of the mundane and the monstrous leads one to question the politics of narrative. The study of narrative is based on the premise that, like language, narrative structure is not neutral. The ways in which the form of a story is constructed, the method in which it is told, by whom and with what authority, contribute to the deepest political and philosophical preoccupations of narrative. In Hayden White's words, narrative involves "choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications"; it is "far from being merely a form of discourse that can be filled with different contents" because it "already possesses a content prior to any given actualisation of it in speech or writing" (White 1987: ix). White makes the fundamental link between narrativity as 'the impulse to moralise reality' and authoritativeness. The masses of events that characterise a historical moment are organised into a story for a purpose. This purpose is moral, social and linked into a relationship with a legal order of authority, which either reinforces or opposes the morality the story espouses. White is struck by the "frequency with which narrativity...presupposes the existence of a legal system against or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate" (White 1980: 17).

Any narrative essentially involves selection. A narrative selects something while excluding the rest. What does the grotesque in Tutuola and Okri choose to depict? The grotesque in their novels contains within it paradoxical facets; it tends to capture reality by a way of depiction of life's many dimensions—seen and unseen, visible and invisible, rational and mysterious, worldly and otherworldly, Western and indigenous, black and white. The grotesque exposes what these writers see as a deeper reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view. Grotesque realism, as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White maintain, "is always in process, it is always becoming, it is a mobile and hybrid creature, disproportionate, exorbitant, outgrowing all limits, obscenely decentred and off-balance, a figural and symbolic resource for...exaggeration and inversion" (Stallybrass & White 8). This observation could lead one to derive that magical realism, the grotesque, and Bakhtin's carnival go hand in hand. According to Brenda Cooper, it is in this tradition of grotesque

carnival, of supernatural realism, that Marquez creates his central figure of Melquiades in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, “a heavy gypsy with an untamed beard and sparrow hands” and unnatural powers. Cooper says that images like the “tumult of acrobats with gold-capped teeth and jugglers with six arms” are powerful images of ambivalent festivity and laughter, of paradoxical bodily revulsion and celebration, of reconstructions of human shapes and forms, normality and aberration (Cooper 1998: 25). The laughter and festivity associated with the revelry of the gypsies and the frenzied display of their wondrous instruments—all in a mood of merrymaking are reminiscent of Bakhtin’s carnival. Rushdie’s creation of Aadam Aziz is also done in a similar vein of laughter and revulsion:

There it was, reflected in the water, undulating like a mad plantain in the centre of his face...his rippling nose. It would have dominated less dramatic faces than his easily; even on him, it is what one sees first and remembers longest....My grandfather’s nose: nostrils flaring, curvaceous as dancers. Between them swells the nose’s triumphal arch, first up and out, then down and under, sweeping in to his upper lip with a superb and at present red-tipped flick. I wish to place on record my gratitude to this mighty organ—if not for it, who would have ever believed me to be truly my mother’s son, my grandfather’s grandson?—this colossal apparatus which was to be my birthright too (Rushdie 13).

Central to the grotesque is its lack of fixity, its unpredictability and its instability. This love for fluidity, instability, transformation and transgression is seen in Okri’s image of the king of the *abikus*:

Our king was a wonderful personage who sometimes appeared in the form of a great cat. He had a red beard and eyes of greenish sapphire. He had been born uncountable times and was a legend in all worlds, known by a hundred different names. It never mattered into what circumstances he was born. He always lived the most extraordinary of lives.... Sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, he wrought incomparable achievements from every life. If there is anything common to all of his lives, the essence of his genius, it might well be the love of transformation, and the transformation of love into higher realities (*TFR* 3–4).

This excerpt shows that transformation and transgression are unambiguously embraced in the grotesque imagery. Hugo’s observation has special resonance here that “ideal beauty

has only one standard whereas the variations and combinations possible for the grotesque are limitless” (Victor Hugo qtd. in Connelly 4).

This section shows that as a literary mode dealing with the fantastic, the grotesque has altered in character over the years in accordance with the changing notions of what constitutes reality. From *Odyssey* through Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* on to Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* to Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* there has been variations in the representation of the grotesque in literature. The grotesque in Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri, studied in the next section, also emerges from their respective cultural conditions and historical position. In the selected novels, the grotesque is often found to take its shape from myth, mysticism, folklore, fairy tales and legends.

5.4 The Grotesque in Tutuola and Okri

Fantasy, exaggeration and the presence of eerie and sinister figures are the hallmarks of the narratives of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri. This section is a study of the features and functions of the grotesque in the selected novels. It shows that the native tradition is the driving force behind the literary grotesque in these novels. It also examines the differences between Tutuola and Okri in their employment of the grotesque.

It could be said that by depicting an inverted world order of monsters and demons, the grotesque in Tutuola functions to emphasise the necessity of establishing and maintaining order in the society rather than their violation. Through the literary medium, Tutuola’s grotesque obliquely demonstrates the threats to society when its normal functioning is disrupted.

In Okri, the function of the grotesque is to depict the futility and failure of a socio-political structure in Nigeria where disorder has become the norm. The grotesque in Okri’s narratives becomes a site for articulating the chaos, confusion, turbulence; loss, bereavement and suffering of a nation on the brink of independence. It is used as a tool to make an ironic comment on the present scheme of things.

One could argue that the fantastical and the magical in the narratives of Tutuola and Okri are derived from an adherence to the native folkloric tradition. In other words, the grotesque in their writings owe to the grotesque found in the native folklore—to their cultural roots. The grotesque which is a salient aspect of myths and folktales is employed by the writers for the purpose of their literary aesthetics. As Lindfors says, “The World of traditional West African village life depends on the constant interplay of these two aspects—the physical, seen world and the unseen world of the gods, ancestors, spirits, witches and magicians” (Lindfors 1986: 9-10).

Rosemary Jackson says that, “without a cosmology of heaven and hell, the mind faces mere redundancy: the cosmos becomes a space full of menace, increasingly apprehended and internalised as an area of non meaning” (Jackson 18). Wolfgang Kayser, notes that snakes, toads, reptiles, nocturnal animals such as spiders, owls, and particularly bats are the favourite animals of the grotesque; and further remarks that jungle vegetation, “with its ominous vitality, in which nature itself seems to have erased the difference between plants and animals,” (Kayser 183) the mechanical object brought to life, the robot, and the mask also recur. Kayser’s comment is quite appropriate if one looks at the grotesque figures of Okri and Tutuola in particular.

In his essay “Oral Tradition in the Works of Amos Tutuola”, Sherryl Takacs suggests that fantasy and fantastic happenings are an integral part of folklore especially that of folktales (Takacs 394). Bernth Lindfors observes that Tutuola’s “roots in oral tradition runs so deep that he knows no other way to compose book-length fiction” (Lindfors 1986: 10). Lindfors’ and Takacs’ observation could lead one to say that folklore is the source wherefrom Tutuola derives his idea of the marvelous and the grotesque. Again, Donald J. Cosentino observes in “In Memoriam: Amos Tutuola” that one remains startled by the ferocious directness of his words and images (Cosentino 17). “There are thousands of folktales,” he was reported to have said, “[but] the ones I like the most, well, I prefer the frightening folktales” (Tutuola quoted in Cosentino 17). Given the state of affairs in Nigeria, Tutuola’s “frightening folktales” evoke a grotesque reality which seems to escape more “realistic” writers (Cosentino 17). On the other hand, critics like Palmer assert that although a large number of Tutuola’s stories come from the oral tradition, there is no doubt that many others have been concocted by his own fertile imagination. Having been steeped in the wonders of traditional lore, he

shows himself quite adept at inventing his own mythology and so colouring it that it looks even more fantastic than folklore. The ‘spirit of prey’ who kills an animal each time he closes his eyes, the strange inhabitants of the Unreturnable Heavens’ Town are all products of Tutuola’s inventiveness (Palmer 1979: 19-20). Harold Collins is also of the view that in Tutuola’s world jam-packed with monsters and marvels, some are imaginatively conceived monsters while others are marvels of oral literature (Collins 115). For instance, the demonic figure of Odara in *TBAH*, the monster of the forest is borrowed from the frightful character, Kpelle that makes its appearance in African folktales and is believed to dwell in the forests. Rohrich says, “Kpelle the forest devil and an ugly monster terrorizes all villagers and feeds on humans and animals” (Rohrich 149). This shows that Tutuola’s literary prowess in shaping the grotesque is influenced and enriched by his native oral tradition.

Cosentino argues that Ben Okri, Nigeria’s most acclaimed new writer borrows images, plots, and language directly from Tutuola in evoking a nightmare society overrun by phantasmagoric charlatans. He claims that “Okri has been praised for his mastery of magical realism without appreciating that he learned that style from Tutuola, not Marquez” (Cosentino 17). Derek Wright also points out the influence of native sources in Okri’s grotesque where, “chaos theory and science fiction rub shoulders with folklore, mythology and oral tradition”. He points out that Okri’s sources for creating the grotesque are “indigenous oral narratives, Tutuola’s dream-narratives starting with *The Palm Wine Drinkard*...from which Okri takes his idea of an original, authentic African Way” (Wright 328). Felicia Oka Moh is also of the opinion that Ben Okri’s magic realism is drawn from the African oral tradition and African folklore (Moh 11).

That the grotesque is derived from folk belief is articulated by the old chief in *FWJ* as he identifies the water people as members of the ‘fish race’:

As I was inside the coffin with him...I saw plainly that this man covered his body from the knee to the waist with the leather of a big fish. He had no hair on head but small scales instead...he had fins on his shoulders, elbows, knees and ankles and there were a number of moustache on his upper jaw which was like that of a big fish.... Now it was revealed to me that the inhabitants of this town were the water people and **that beautiful lady was the nymph of that river**, so they were belonged to the fish race” (*FWJ* 72-74; emphasis mine).

Emmanuel Obiechina observes that the cult of the watermaid is strongly held in the Niger delta (Obiechina 1975: 39). The figure of the river nymph (in *FWJ*) is drawn upon that of the watermaid of folk tradition. So, this grotesque figure of half human and half fish holds a high degree of credibility sanctioned by folk tradition, in spite of its heavily laden magical and supernatural renderings. This also brings Tutuola closer to his indigenous resources and shows that the grotesque in his works is derived from the writer's knowledge of the traditional society in which the novels are set. This folk belief is also reiterated by Azaro in Okri's *TFR* when his abductors tie him in a sack and throw it into water: "I became convinced that I was being taken to an underwater kingdom, where they say certain spirits reside" (*TFR* 132). This finding is in consonance with Cosentino's stance that Okri borrows images from Tutuola and shows that both the writers' rely on native folkloric tradition in the creation of the grotesque.

Critics like Felicia Oka Moh and Charles Nnolim regard Okri as a modernist writer. Nnolim argues that the modernist temper in writers like Okri results from, "the use of **fantasy and exaggerations we find as the staple elements of our folklore**, and from the reversal of ethical and moral values in our body politic with the enthronement of dishonesty, fraud, corruption and nepotism as replacement for age-old values" (Nnolim 64; emphasis mine).

Tutuola's novels are set in the past and played out in modern Nigeria. Bernth Lindfors insists that the ghost world in Tutuola's *MLBG*, "is an African ghost world", derived "almost exclusively from indigenous sources" (Lindfors 1973: 65). In his study of Fagunwa and Tutuola's aesthetics of literature, Victor Beilis observes that the subjects and motives of stories told by the characters of Tutuola's books have been borrowed from myths and fairytales of the Yorubas. Beilis also says that although it could be tempting to read Tutuola in the line of Rabelais, the grotesque in Tutuola derives from his native "ritual culture", that is, folk culture or folklore (Beilis 450-52)¹¹.

Eustace Palmer in *Growth of the African Novel* points out that Zurtjir's story in *TPWD* is an adaptation of the legend of the 'Child-Wiser-Than-His-Father', included in Iyatemi and Currey's *Folk Tales and Fables*. He points out that, "In this Yoruba version the child is born out of the big toe of a previously childless woman who had begged a god to give her a child...although he is tiny at birth he walks and talks immediately and grows with astonishing

rapidity” (Palmer 1979: 17). Palmer’s observation shows that Tutuola adapts and modifies the tales inherited from his community to his own advantage to suit the themes of his books.

That the grotesque in Okri’s narratives is derived from folklore is evident from the tales that Mum and Dad tell Azaro. The myth of the mighty green road, for instance, is derived from folklore. The King of the Road, as Dad tells Azaro is a giant, “his legs are longer than the tallest tree and his head is mightier than great rocks. When he drank, a stream would be empty. When he pissed, a bad well would appear” (*TFR* 298). The title of Okri’s *TFR* also owes a lot to popular belief that the road is originally the stomach of the King with an insatiable appetite.

The concept of the ‘abiku’ as well is founded upon popular belief in certain metaphysical phenomenon that operates within the context of Yoruba socio-cultural ethos. Ato Quayson points out that the belief in abiku phenomenon is widespread in southern Nigeria with the name *abiku* being shared by the Yorubas and Ijos while the Igbos refer to them as *ogbanje*. The concept of abiku is what may be described as a ‘constellar concept’ because it embraces various beliefs about predestination, reincarnation and the relationship between the real world and the world of the spirits (Quayson 1997b: 122-23).

The critical observations and various excerpts and episodes from the selected novels as analysed above show that the grotesque in Tutuola and Okri is derived from an adherence to their native cultural tradition—folktales, myths and legends. With the premise that the native tradition is the driving force behind the literary grotesque of Tutuola and Okri, the following sections study the features and functions of this aesthetic category/trope in these novels.

5.4.1 Features of the Grotesque in Tutuola and Okri

Amos Tutuola’s novels are full of miracles, adventures, spectres, ghosts, and bizarre creatures. Incredible horror and terrific adventures are found in these novels with bizarre creatures and dangerous bushes. One could say that the departure from accepted modes of order, reason, harmony, balance and form opens up the risk of entry into grotesque worlds. But as argued in the earlier section, all these are largely drawn from a native tradition.

Ben Okri’s tenet of the grotesque is stated very characteristically in *SB* through the art of the bronze casters:

The tribe did not favour such simple things in art as order, balance, harmony. These were easy, and had been fully explored for generations. The tribe had advanced to the higher harmony of broken cadencies, discord as beauty, warring elements.... It favoured eyes where the navel should be.... It favoured disjointed metaphorical thinking; fusion of unthinkable elements. The greater the discord, the greater the artistry required to bring forth the highest beauty and paradoxically, the greatest simplicity (SB 95).

From the above excerpt, it could be said that like the art of the bronze casters, Okri has successfully created in his novels, a unique literary style, unexplored by the previous generations of continental novelists.

This section explores and analyses the features of the grotesque that are recurrent and common in the selected novels. It is found that diverse factors, such as, physiological distortions, bodily functions, popular beliefs and superstitions, linguistic rhetoric and emotional complexes of fear and laughter play a crucial role in shaping the grotesque.

5.4.1 (a) Physiological Distortions and the Grotesque

Mikhail Bakhtin in his analysis of Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* finds that the writer relies heavily on folklore and antiquity. Bakhtin refers to seven important components in Rabelais' art that either intersect or move parallelly to each other giving rise to the grotesque. These are: the human body in its anatomical and physiological aspects; human clothing; food; drink and drunkenness; copulation and birth; death; defecation (Bakhtin 1981: 170)¹². An important feature of the grotesque found in the selected novels is the working/operation of these components in shaping the grotesque.

Bakhtin observes that in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, a grotesque physiological episode is Gargantua's birth. His birth as Bakhtin points out, "is accelerated by abnormality in his mother's digestive system. Gargantua's mother, who had eaten too much tripe, suffers a prolapsus of the rectum resulting in severe diahorrea (defecation) and then the birth itself...in the description of Gargantua's birth, grotesque fantasy is combined with precision of anatomical and physiological details" (Bakhtin 1981: 171). In many instances in the selected novels, it is found that the effect of the grotesque is achieved by a distortion either of the

human anatomy or, natural processes and natural phenomena. Felicia Oka Moh says of the grotesque that it “denotes a convention for portraying distortion or irrational association” (Moh 93). A grotesque physiological process in *TPWD* is the birth of Zurrjir who gestates in the thumb of his mother:

When I completed three and a half years in that town, I noticed that the left hand thumb of my wife was swelling out as if it was a buoy, but it did not pain her. One day, she followed me to the farm in which I was tapping the palm wine, and to my surprise when the thumb that swelled out touched a palm-tree thorn, the thumb burst out suddenly and there we saw a male child came out of it and at the same time that the child came out of the thumb, he began to talk as if he was ten years of age (*TPWD* 214).

In view of Tutuola’s smattering of formal education it would be grossly misleading to propose that he was influenced by Rabelaisian tradition and aesthetics. Moreover, it is seen in **Section 5.4** that the parallels between Rabelais and Tutuola (as Beilis points out)¹³ occur on account of the writers’ recourse to their respective folklore. However, from the above excerpts, it could be said that irrespective of their diverse cultural backgrounds, the invocation of the grotesque in both Tutuola and Rabelais necessarily generates the distortion of the body as a formal corollary.

Another dreadful distortion of human anatomy in *TPWD* is found in the case of the man who chases the drinkard and his wife with a whip “walking towards his back or backwards” (If the man is walking backwards, how could he approach/chase the couple?), “his both eyes were on his knees, his both arms were at his both thighs, these both arms were longer than his feet and both could reach the topmost of any tree” (*TPWD* 237).

Distortion of a similar nature is found in the grotesque world that Okri creates. For instance, the man with white stripes on his face and green eyes whom Azaro meets in the forest is a mixture of the hairy and bearded monsters that abound in Tutuola’s bushes:

...his legs were unnaturally hairy and that his face was upside down on his neck....His eyes were on his cheeks, his mouth was on his forehead, his chin was full of hair, and his head was bald except for his beard, and I couldn’t make out his ears. I had to bend my head and twist my thinking to make sense of his features....The eyes at the back of his head watched me cautiously (*TFR* 78).

That the grotesque cannot be comprehended by normal standards is very aptly expressed with Azaro's action of "bend[ing] my head twist[ing] my thinking".

Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* maintains that the "grotesque body is cosmic and universal. It stresses elements common to the entire cosmos: earth, water, fire, air; it is directly related to the sun, to the stars. It contains the signs of the zodiac. It reflects the cosmic hierarchy. This body can merge with various natural phenomena, with mountains, rivers, seas, islands, and continents. It can fill the entire universe" (Bakhtin 1984: 318). Daniel Punday in his analysis of Bakhtin's grotesque body suggests that it becomes a symbolic representative of life in general....The grotesque or monstrous body is here made meaningful by a whole set of philosophical and mythic resonances" (Punday 804).

In the modern context however, the grotesque body loses its philosophic and mythic resonances. As Bakhtin says, "the modern body is treated as an individual object, and thus loses most of its links to the broad cultural mythologies that ensure its effortless interpretation. In the modern image of the individual body, sexual life, eating, drinking, and defecation have radically changed their meaning: they have been transferred to the private and psychological level where their connotation becomes narrow and specific, torn away from the direct relation to the life of society and to the cosmic whole. In this new connotation they can no longer carry on their former philosophical functions" (Bakhtin 1984: 321).

Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque body in the modern context could be applied to study the grotesque body of Madame Koto. As a modernist writer, Ben Okri's grotesque bodies carry a different connotation from that of Tutuola. While the ghetto swelters in hunger and poverty, Madame Koto becomes richer day by day and acquires leviathan dimensions, "Madame Koto, like an ageless matriarch was sitting on an ornate chair...She had grown so enormous that the large chair barely contained her bulk" (*SE* 56). However, her gargantuan stature—both, physical and social—accompanied by material prosperity contribute little to the society, except for a threatening and intimidating menace. It could be said that the untrammelled increase in her bulk carries a two-way meaning. On one hand, it shows that Koto is rich in a very superficial sense of the term. On the other hand, it serves to aggravate the reality of ghetto life in Nigeria. Felicia Oka Moh observes that Madame Koto's grotesque obesity elicits grim humour. Her back door has to be expanded to accommodate her massive

stature...she is a woman but the virtues associated with her sex, like gentleness, kindness and considerateness are all twisted and distorted” (Moh 83).

According to Moh, the grotesque in Okri “is a device for presenting the human figure in an exaggerated and distorted manner. It conceives of similarities between people and animals or other objects” (Moh 93). It is therefore seen that Okri uses the grotesque in describing the men of wealth and power. This could be seen in Azaro’s description of the group of men that attempts to kidnap him in Madame Koto’s bar:

There was an albino, but he was tall and had a head like a tuber of yam. The man who was bulbous in one eye was white and black in the other. The two men who were sinister in dark glasses now had white hair and curious lip deformations. The youth who had no teeth was now a woman (*TFR* 157).

The grotesque, distorted features and weird description of these people serve Okri’s purpose to reveal their wicked and evil nature.

The grotesque female body

Grotesque images of fertility and birth are found throughout the *Famished Road* trilogy. In Okri’s *SB*, some of the women in the kingdom of the young prince give birth to babies that are part gaps and part human. Such grotesque births are indicators of the impending chaos and instability in the contemporary functioning of the society and country. Brenda Cooper argues that, “The nation’s unnatural greed, grotesque desires and immanent volcanic eruption into civil war are symbolically represented by female attributes grown monstrous” (Cooper 1998: 112). Madame Koto’s enormous pregnancy threatens to deliver “a nation...an unruly nation, bursting with diversity (*IR* 233)¹⁴. Madame Koto’s grotesque body could bear forth only war, horror and violence as Azaro describes the unborn *abiku* triplet who “spent their lives divided, warring against each other, fighting for their mother’s milk, savaging her breasts, and tearing her apart” (*TFR*142):

And I saw that Madame Koto was pregnant with three strange children. Two of them sat upright and the third was upside down in her womb. One of them had a little beard, the second had fully formed teeth, and the third had wicked eyes. They were all mischievous, they kicked and tugged at their cords, they were the worst type of spirit-children, and they had no intention of being born (*TFR* 464).

Through the grotesque Okri holds up a mirror to reflect upon the chaos in society. Charles Nnolim opines that in the Nigerian modernist novels like those of Okri, “we enter a

topsy-turvy world where the impossible happens, where both fratricide and misgovernment are held up to ridicule by recourse to the ludicrous and the absurd, showing through horror and shock techniques the despair and decadence in our body-politic” (Nnolim 64). One could say that Nnolim’s reference to a ‘topsy-turvy world’ and ‘ludicrous and absurd’ elements hints at the workings of the grotesque in the modernist novel in Nigeria.

Again, it is found that *the grotesque female body is also evoked to generate hidden meanings and truths*. Deformed by a strange disease, with humped back, twisted eyes, ghostly voice and swelling legs, the old weaver woman is a grotesque figure but reveals the real affairs of things throughout the weaving of the tapestry. The pictures in her tapestry records a symbolic protest against the fabricated accounts of Africa pervading the Governor General’s written documents. Here it would be relevant to bring in the image of Bakhtin’s pregnant old hag. Bakhtin’s senile, pregnant hags are ambivalent life in death and death that gives birth¹⁵. Okri’s hags however leave a very little room for the play of ambivalence. With her broken frame and the abiku children scrambling for power within, Madame Koto at best symbolises death-in- life. On the other hand, the old woman is pregnant with new meanings of the world; in spite of her broken frame and a life of seclusion, she stands for life-in-death. Through the grotesque figure of the old woman, Okri shows the absurdity of social structures in contemporary Nigeria and attempts to generate an ethos of traditional world. Here, it would be fit to cite Peter Koepping’s observation that a grotesquely extended body points to the paradigmatic expressions of the experience and absurdity in social arrangements and their governing values or in the logic of rules of language and symbolism (Koepping 201).

5.4.1 (b) The Grotesque and the Metaphor of Vision

It is observed in both the writers that where the grotesqueness of the body is concerned, the eyes are given exaggerated, eerie dimensions almost without fail. It could be argued that this recurrent feature of the grotesque found in the selected novels is derived from folklore.

Alan Dundes in his celebrated work *Interpreting Folklore* makes a detailed study of the ‘evil eye’ which is a fairly consistent and uniform folk belief complex. Dundes maintains that the evil-eye belief complex is based upon the idea that an individual, male or female, has the power, voluntarily or involuntarily, to cause harm to another individual or his

property merely by looking at or praising that person or property. The harm may consist of illness, or even death or destruction. If the object attacked is animate, it may fall ill. Inanimate objects such as buildings or rocks may crack or burst. If the object attacked is a cow, its milk may dry up; if a plant or fruit tree, it may suddenly wither and die (Dundes 93). Variations of the evil eye in terms of shape, size and their varied eerie effects could be found in the chosen novels of Tutuola and Okri.

Eyes are a crucial agency of perception. When perceived with eyes of strange shape, size and form, the reality appears grotesque. Such an experience is undergone by the young protagonist in *MLBG* when after the war between the 13th and 14th town of ghosts, the head of a ghost is given to him instead of his own head. This makes him experience the world in a different way; the terra incognita appears more terrific and beyond cognition. The eyes of the hairy giantess which are four times bigger than the eyes of her husband have superhuman powers; they could render any object motionless when gazed at. The eyes of the satyr are described to have powers that (in *SSDJ*) illuminate every part of a particular spot. Similarly, in the description of Odara, the monster of jungle, the eyes are reported to be so powerful that Adebisi is unable to look at them (*TBAH* 27). The flood of light emitted from the eyes of the flash eyed mother has use value and is used to inflict punishment as well. They supply electricity for the entire town and the flash of light is also used as a whip to flog her offenders. She used to sell the flash of fire to other towns in the country of ghosts in exchange of a heavy amount of ghosts' money. There is also the Spirit of Prey in *TPWD* which emits light from its big eye to kill its prey.

In the selected novels of Okri too one could find eyes with grotesque characteristics. The smelly man in the market has two eyes that constantly keep rolling in an effort to see themselves (*TFR* 20). Ato Quayson says that this madman “shares a curious kinship with the grotesqueness of spirit figures” (Quayson 2009: 174). He argues that “at various points in the narrative in *TFR*, it is the humans who take on the manifestations of spirits so that the distinction between the two is problematised” (Quayson 2009: 174). The herbalist, whose divination helps Mum to rescue Azaro from the clutches of the policeman, has one eye brighter and more glittery than the other (*TFR* 36). The men wearing dark glasses who kidnap Azaro have eyes as white as milk. Their eyes were unmoving as if they had been stuck there “malformed in the empty sockets” (*TFR* 127). The tall man has no eyes (*TFR*

158) and Azaro feels that Madame Koto's grotesque clientele have "hidden and invisible eyes at the sides and the backs of their heads" (*TFR* 158). The three headed spirit that comes to Madame Koto's bar has a unique pair of eyes for each head:

Each of its head was a different shape. One was red with blue eyes, the other was yellow with red eyes and the third was blue with yellow eyes. The spirit had about ten eyes in all. Smoke issued from the yellow eyes (*TFR* 342).

One of the bar dancer's eyes falls from its socket and the eyestone palpitates on the ground in front of Azaro (*SE* 39). The old beggar woman who takes shelter at Azaro's place is referred to having a pair of poisonous eyes (*SE* 60). The man who gives Azaro a piece of chicken in the bar has holes in his eyes (*SE* 100). A macabre incident with 'eyes' occurs when one of the murderers of the carpenter plucks out his eye thinking it to be a weird slug that had burrowed its way into his head (*IR* 82).

In his short stories like "When the Lights Return" Maria (a character) sees a man with three heads and three pairs of eyes that shines in the dark. The evil eye syndrome is also found in "Worlds that Flourish" where the nameless protagonist is stared at by a man who has three eyes on his face. In "Stars of the new Curfew" the protagonist has to consult a herbalist who gives him strange potions as remedy to break the spell of the evil eye.

At one point in *SE*, Azaro hallucinates that the entire forest is filled with eyes, all gazing at him:

Suddenly there were many eyes on me in the forest. It seemed that the trees and leaves had eyes, that insects were watching me, that the darkness was intensely populated with eyes, all concentrated on me (*SE* 85).

All the characters with misshapen eyes threaten Azaro in one way or the other. For instance, the blind old man with green liquids dripping from his eyes forces Azaro to see through his eyes:

Everything went dark. I tried to blink, but couldn't. As if I had woken into a nightmare, thick green substances passed over my eyes. They settled. Gradually, my eyes cleared. When I looked out at the world again, what I saw made me scream. Everything was upside-down. The world was small. Trees were like slow-moving giants. The rain was a perpetual nightfall, and night a perpetual rain. The earth was full of craters. It kept moving as if it were a monster fretting in sleep. The spaces between things were populated with the most horrifying spirits I have ever seen. They had wounds all over

them which dripped pus. When they talked green spit poured from their mouths. I screamed. My eyes caught fire (*TFR* 313–14).

Brenda Cooper insists that “not to be able to see, to perceive and understand is the novel’s nightmare. Hence, the blind old man is a great force for evil. He...wants to see by the light of Azaro’s youth” (Cooper 1998: 104). Again, the fear of loss of sight is manifested through the communal blindness of the ghetto dwellers; Dad’s temporary loss of sight before he could actually see through the affairs of the world, and others.

The topography of the modern fantastic, as Rosemary Jackson observes, suggests a preoccupation with problems of visions and visibility. For it is structured around spectral imagery: it is remarkable how many fantasies introduce mirrors, glasses, reflections, portraits, eyes—which see things myopically, or distortedly, or out of focus—to effect a transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar (Cooper 1998: 104). Seen through the eyes of the abiku, reality appears to be dislocated and confusing, revealing hitherto hidden spaces which could not be perceived by the normal human eye. Azaro, as he says, could ‘sense and suffer’ the future on his living flesh. In a prophetic dream where he has a vision of the future era of politics, coup, and power, the blind old man appears with scores of eyes all over his body:

I noticed that he had eyes all over his body... he had eyes in his feathers like a peacock, he had an eye in the middle of his forehead, and he had a necklace of them round his neck. My fear became intolerable (*SE* 88-89).

In Okri, the apprehensions, terrors and phobias of the community are all related to ‘eyes’, the task of seeing or vision, and the lack of it. Brenda Cooper points out that Okri’s narratives abound with “metaphors and symbols related to ‘seeing’—eyes, masks, mirrors, sunglasses, among others”. These metaphors, as Brenda Cooper insists, point out to one of the novels’ message that the truth hides itself behind mirrors, masks, and eye glasses and that reality is often not what it seems” (Cooper 104).

An emphasis upon invisibility in *AG* and *SB* points to one of the central concerns of the grotesque: the problem of vision. To quote Rosemary Jackson again:

In a culture which equates the ‘real’ with the ‘visible’ and gives the eye dominance over other sense organs, the unreal is that which is invisible. That which is not seen, or which threatens to be un-seeable, can only have a subversive function in relation to an epistemological and metaphysical system which makes ‘I see’ synonymous with ‘I understand’. Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of

the *look*, through the ‘eye’ and the ‘I’ of the human subject whose relation to objects is structured through his field of vision. In fantastic art, objects are not readily appropriated through the look: things slide away from the powerful eye/I which seeks to possess them, thus becoming distorted, disintegrated, partial and lapsing into invisibility (Jackson 45).

The sense of sight is highlighted in the discourse of *AG* which is privileged only so that it may be questioned. In this context Robert Fraser observes that, “For various reasons visibility, and the ways of shedding or re-establishing it, recurs constantly in modern literature” (Fraser 88). One could say that the value and importance attached to visibility is questioned and thwarted in *AG* when the protagonist is content to remain ‘invisible’ after his quest for visibility. As the protagonist looks into the mirror (in *AG*) to see his image, he finds that he is not reflected—he has become invisible. From the vantage point of invisibility, he could discover a new world with a new set of rules. Rosemary Jackson says that “wherever the device of the mirror is employed, it introduces an indeterminate area where distortions and deformations of normal perception become the norm” (Jackson 44). Thus, the unnamed protagonist could not see the people in the hall. It is only when he imagines himself blind, he could see them.

The issues of ‘visibility’ and ‘invisibility’ were given a theoretical foundation by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty who said in a note written in November 1959, “the invisible is not the contradictory of the visible...[it] is the hidden counterpart of the visible” (Merleau-Ponty 151). In *SB* Okri talks of a hidden world that could be reached by crossing the correct gaps between the things of the visible world. The motif of invisibility runs across the pages of *SB* where Okri probes into the advantages of being invisible. The kingdom of the tribe of artists is an invisible kingdom but ironically these invisible artists are the craftsmen of the highest quality of art. Invisibility renders the tribe of artists free from external restraints and makes them “wholesome creators...supreme creators of beauty in the land” (*SB* 76). Their invisibility could be paralleled to that of the old woman (in *IR*) who weaves/creates with panache, a tapestry telling the hidden stories of her tribe. The bronze casters are the makers and foretellers of fate and destiny. They have mastered the art of divination through creating bronze forms. Like the old woman, they create invisibly and in isolation. They tell a story while being invisible themselves:

...a tribe that knew and kept the ancient secrets of bronze-casting, of divination through art, of healing through created forms...they were an underground tribe, who lived and created invisibly, not disdainng others, but knowing that the only way to serve the land was to live their own way, with their own freedom, following their own magical and fluid laws (*SB* 41).

The motif of invisibility also helps Okri to talk about the condition of the marginalised sections of the society viz. slaves, women and the like. Through the unseen and the hidden aspects of the world, Okri shows the hidden truths.

It is seen that in both Tutuola and Okri, the 'evil eye' trope is used to generate the grotesque. While in Tutuola its function is to evoke the simple uncomplicated emotion of terror, in Okri its connotations are extended to articulate the tensions and anticipated horrors of the community, the complexities of vision, as well as to depict the complex and hidden realities.

5.4.1 (c) Horror, Humour and the Grotesque

It is seen that to derive the characteristic effects of 'horror and humour' (as per definition of the grotesque in section 4.2), the grotesque in Tutuola and Okri is associated with obscenities and bodily humour; morbid imagery; precision of description, and depiction of an inverted world order. In *TPWD*, the palace of the king of the field creatures is made of refuse and the king himself is covered with refuse. Moreover, the king sits on a throne of refuse (*TPWD* 227). This kind of base and bodily humour could tantalise one to categorise Tutuola with writers like Rabelais but, as stated earlier, it would be misleading to study them on the same line. The socio-cultural context of the Renaissance under which Rabelais writes has nothing to do with shaping the artist in Tutuola. However, as Viktor Beilis argues, both draw upon popular culture in shaping the grotesque.

Again, in the Unreturnable Heaven's Town where the drinkard and his wife are held captive, the children torture them by spitting and passing urine and excreta on their shaven heads. This is done with a spirit of vengeance and pure comedy is diluted to create a horrific effect. This finding is in consonance with Beilis' stance that the grotesque in Tutuola does not always correlate with the comic as in Rabelais but oftentimes manifests itself as sinister and threatening (Beilis 452). Commenting on Tutuola's evocation of terror, Harold Collins says that, "it is the fear of trapped, helpless humanity in the presence of, or in the grip of bestiality

and malignancy....The fact that the incidents are hardly ever realistic does not keep them from giving the reader the vicarious terror” (Collins 119).

In Okri’s narratives too the grotesque in certain sections has its parallel to Rabelais’ grotesque (related to lower body parts and body humour) viz. the madman pissing (*TFR* 101), Madame Koto farting (*TFR* 124), a load carrier farting uncontrollably (*TFR* 170), the goats shitting (*SE* 206), the bucket latrine alive with flies and maggots (*TFR* 207), the carpenter urinating and farting (*TFR* 250), the prisoners farting and excreting in the cell (*IR* 26) and others. But the effects that Okri strives to create through these episodes of base humour of lower body stratum are quite different from that of his European predecessor as well as from that of Tutuola. Apart from arousing laughter, these images of decay and defecation set against a political backdrop highlight the political and moral depravation of a new Nigeria¹⁶.

The grotesque is associated with morbid imagery in Tutuola and Okri to evoke horror and grim humour. In the Foreword to *MLBG*, Geoffrey Parrinder says, “the morbid fascination of dirt, blood, snakes, insects, smell, ugliness, deformity, size and all that is grotesque is everywhere evident in the book” (*MLBG* 13). Parrinder’s observation could be understood with reference to the King of the Smelling Ghosts— one of the most grotesque figures created by Tutuola:

All kinds of snakes, centipedes and flies were living on every part of his body. Bees, wasps and uncountable mosquitoes were also flying round him and it was hard to see him plainly because of these flies and insects...the smell of his body first drove us to a long distance before we came back after a few minutes...all his body was full of excreta, urine, and also wet with the rotten blood of all the animals that he was killing for his food...his nose and eyes were very dirty and smelling...[he] wore many scorpions on his fingers as rings and all were alive, many poisonous snakes were also on his neck as beads and he belted his leathern trousers with a very big and long boa constrictor which was still alive (*MLBG* 29).

Further, this ghost could not kill an animal until the latter is asleep, for his bad smell which could be scented from a long distance of four miles, made the animals run away before he could reach them. Smell, dirt, urine and excreta which characterise all the morbid qualities of the grotesque (as in the case of the Smelling Ghost) are evoked more forcefully in the gargantuan figure of the flash-eyed mother who “has a “fearful, dreadful, terrible, curious,

wonderful and dirty appearance” (*MLBG* 97). Palmer further argues that this “monstrous figure” is “obviously the product of Tutuola’s fantastic imagination—who alone fills the town like a vast hill” (Palmer 1979: 20). “She never bathed” (*MLBG* 99), on account of which “numerous small birds built their nests inside the hair of her head as on the trees” (*MLBG* 106). Another morbid grotesque creature pointed out by Palmer (Palmer 1979: 21) is the television handed ghostess, “she was almost covered with sores, even there was no single hair on her head, except sores with uncountable maggots which were dashing here and there on her body” (*MLBG* 161). In his analysis of the figure of this ghostess, Victor Beilis points to Tutuola’s ‘aesthetics of ugliness’ (Beilis 454) in the young protagonists’ irresistible desire to “see her [the ghostess] ugliness clearly to my satisfaction” (*MLBG* 86-87).

It could be seen that Okri too caters to morbid details of rotting flesh and nauseating gore of corpses to evoke the grotesque:

He tripped over the extinguished lamp and fell on the bloated body of the dead man in an unholy embrace, when the body—stewing with bile and nauseous gases and suppuring gore—exploded its resentments, its foul purple liquids, its rotting flesh on dad, surrounding him with its noxious odour of death....at first Dad was not sure what had happened. He had fallen and had found himself swimming in soft inner tissue and strange liquids... (*SE* 277).

Madame Koto’s dead body is also described with morbid and grotesque essentials. Her body festers for seven days in her secret palace and is paradoxically shown to be a fertile site for growth of poisonous flowers, onions, salamanders, worms and slugs, cockroaches and flies and the mating and breeding space for geckos. Hardy leaves of rhododendrons grew from her armpits. As her body decomposes, her eyes grow in death. This growth has sinister implications in the lives of the common people and her followers. With the expansion of her eyes, comes the lessening of their sight. Her eyes grow to massive proportions arousing the suspicion of people that “she was seeing more when dead than alive” (*IR* 332). The paradoxical phenomenon of growth on death is exacerbated when a beard grows on her face which has to be shaved three times by her followers before the day of her funeral arrived. It could be said that by the use of morbid imagery of death, decay and deformation, Okri sets the background for action. Ugliness and morbidity is intended to shock the readers to see into corruption and evil governance.

As Bakhtin observes of Rabelais' art¹⁷, in Tutuola too, one could find grotesque fantasy combined with precision of time and measurement. This, one could say, has to do with the story-telling element with which he infuses his narratives. A good story teller has to capture the readers' attention and Tutuola does it aptly even while presenting the grotesque. Precision and accuracy of description enhances the sinister effects of the grotesque. In the 'very thick bush' at 'two o'clock in the night' the drinkard and his wife see a curious creature painted white throughout:

...he was coming towards us, he was white as if painted with white paint, he was white from foot to the topmost of his body, but he had no head or feet and hands like human beings and he got **one large eye on his topmost**. He was long about ¼ of a mile and his diameter was about six feet, he resembled a white pillar (*TPWD* 224; emphasis mine).

Harold Collins opines that "although Tutuola is devoted to the mythical mode of thought, his works are full of graphic touches, clear and lively descriptions showing striking imaginative power...lend[ing] momentary belief to his magical world" (Collins 117). The bag in which the drinkard and his wife are held captive has a diameter of one hundred and fifty (150) feet and could contain forty five (45) persons. Their captor, the huge man has a pot-like head that is about ten (10) feet in diameter. The pipe used for smoking by the young protagonist in the town of the river ghosts is described with accuracy, "it is six feet long, three feet deep with a diameter of four feet. It could contain half a ton of tobacco at a time and looked like a big boiler emitting smoke (*MLBG* 72)

As in Tutuola, Okri's penchant for precision and accuracy are found in the minute and detailed description of his monstrous creatures:

...monsters with teeth all over their bodies appeared beside him and began to eat of his flesh, till only his heart remained. Liverish spirits with snake-like legs and eyes that reflected what they saw and bodies crawling with white worms slid into him and danced and wriggled in his being (*SB* 49).

The grotesque image of the carpenter's corpse is rendered with minute details to evoke grim and sinister effects:

The dead man had bloated and his feet had split his shoes. His trousers and shirt had burst at the seams. His eyes, still open, were large like two diseased mangoes... and a mushroom, bright yellow, had sprouted from his navel (*SE* 236).

Thus, it is found in both the writers that the effect of the grotesque is enhanced by detailed and precise description of certain bodily features and situations.

Another feature of the grotesque found in the selected novels is that its effect is achieved by depicting an inverted world order. The Unreturnable Heaven's Town in *TPWD* depicts a topsy-turvy world that is comic. The inhabitants build houses on the sides of a steep hill leaving aside flat land. They do not wash themselves but wash and clothe their domestic animals; while, they wear only leaves. Moreover, they leave their finger nails uncut for a hundred years. The inverted world order of these curious creatures serves to distance it from the human world to preserve the functioning and structure of the latter. The grotesque here does not reflect the socio-political deficiencies of the real world (as it does in Okri) but shows that it is next to impossible for an earthly being to dwell under such an apparently impossible system. It stresses on the importance of stability and order in the society. Retrospectively, this brings to mind Tutuola's strict demarcation of spatial boundaries between the human and the spirit world as discussed in Chapter 4. Again, the people of the Deads' Town walk backwards—which is a reversal of the human world-order. The two worlds are found to be incompatible as the drinkard and his wife could not adapt to the new system. Therefore that they are not allowed to stay at Deads' Town. In *SSDJ*, natural phenomenon is reversed in 'the path of death' where the sun rises in the West. Simbi tells her friends, "let us wait until the sun rises. For I am quite sure, any part of the sky that the sun appears in the morning, is the west..." (*SSDJ* 43). In the bush of ghosts, the young protagonist finds that their manners are upside down compared with the world of living beings. Here the devil celebrates in church, babies are baptised not by water but by fire, people drink urine and eat excrement, people keep cursing, "he was always speaking evil words, even he was punished in the fire of hell more than fifty years for these evil talks and cruelties" (*MLBG* 59), they worship mosquitoes as gods as they believe that mosquitoes purify blood. Here, the grotesque serves to depict the incongruity between the world order of the ghosts and that of the humans. Taking a cue from Kayser, it could be said that the operation of the grotesque in Tutuola is, "an attempt to **invoke and subdue** the demonic aspects of the world" (as per definition of grotesque in section 4.2; emphasis mine).

The inverted figures and features of the grotesque in Okri show that disorder is the norm in the world of the living. In the marketplace, Azaro sees people who walk backwards, men standing on their heads with baskets of fish on their feet, women with breasts on their backs and babies strapped to their chests, beautiful children with three arms and a girl with eyes at the side of her face (*TFR* 18). While in Tutuola narratives the inverted world order of the grotesque depicts the importance of social stability and harmony, in Okri it is symbolic of the state of affairs of a “grotesque country, large and unwieldy” (Moh 82). However, it could be said with reference to both the writers that the importance of certain categories is established through its opposite. The meaning of health is realised through disease; morality through unruliness and stability through temporariness.

Again it could be seen that fear is mingled with the comic in Tutuola’s novels to prevent the stories from verging on pure horror. Eustace Palmer observes:

Grim though Tutuola’s world is, it is also often a humorous one...it is usually the monsters who contribute to the humour by their grotesque behavior (Palmer 1979: 34).

Again, Collins holds that “Tutuola’s best humour is humour of situation” (Collins 122). One could thus find some light hearted moments infused in the encounters with the monsters. For instance, the encounter of the village chief with the ‘fearful shadow’ or the ‘dangerous night creature of the forest’ turns comic when this fearful monster slaps him suddenly, “the shadow held my gun downward and within that moment it gave me a slap on the face suddenly, and my gun sprang to a short distance” (*FWJ* 55). When the king of the quiet bush is all set to narrate the story of his horrific transition to a semi-serpent, the chief pulls a three legged chair, “but as I was sitting on, I fell down and the chair itself fell apart, because I had forgotten that its fourth leg had been broken off” (*FWJ* 41). The king of the savage people could shout so loudly that his voice shook the hills, rocks and trees and all the animals in that forest. In a bid to display his powers, he screams so loudly that the chief falls off his hiding place on the tree top underneath which the savages has gathered for a meeting. As the chief falls on the king unexpectedly, the king is badly wounded and his chair is damaged beyond repair (*FWJ* 60). The mountain which is the dwelling place of the Goddess of Diamonds is so high that “if a person raised his head up with a hat on head to see the top of it, the hat on his head would certainly fall down yet he would not see it” (*FWJ* 86-87). The king of the famine-

struck town which he visits during the fourth journey is unable to put the crown upright on his head on account of being famished (*FWJ* 69).

Palmer opines that “Tutuola’s monsters, though gigantic, are too grotesque and ridiculous to be awe-inspiring and dignified” (Palmer 1979: 34). Fear evoked by the grotesque turns comic when the terrible hairy giant says, “Stop in one place and let your death meet you there or be running away and let your death chase you! Please choose either of the two because I am the death who is coming to kill you all now” (*FWJ* 116). The end of the dangerous satyr of the dark jungle is also very comic as he is bitten (not beaten) in the nostril by Simbi to death as she changes to a water insect to bring about his end.

It is found in *MLBG* that certain manifestations of the grotesque are designed to evoke pure laughter viz. grotesque communication (shrug of shoulders in the Hopeless Town); grotesque exchanges (a yam is obtained by the protagonist in exchange of ten ‘warm’ slaps and a ride for the ghost on his back for three days and nights); grotesque dance and celebration (where the ghosts cut themselves into two halves and both the halves would also dance for sometime until getting joined subsequently). Palmer’s observation quoted above, that laughter is evoked by the grotesque behaviour of the monsters could be fittingly applied in these instances.

The grotesque in Okri, as Moh says, is used “not merely for laughter, but for censorious laughter...the rich are like the archetypal king of the Roads who preys on everything for self preservation” (Moh 93). For instance, the bodies of the rich people are compared to “some sort of abyss” (*TFR* 366) which can accommodate wealth and money in profusion while the poor have a hand to mouth existence. This kind of grotesque description is used to heighten ridicule. Another incident that evokes censorious laughter is the episode of doling out milk to the ghetto dwellers by the party of the rich:

Soon the whole street, in a frightening tide of buckets and basins, of clanging pots, and rancorous voices rocked the van. The landlord looked sick with fright. Sweat broke out on his face as he struggled to take off his agbada, but it got caught in the outstretched clawing hands of all the struggling hungry people...the women’s kerchiefs were torn off, shirts were ripped apart, milk spilt everywhere and powered the faces of the women and children. With their sweating, milk-powered faces they looked like starving spirits (*TFR* 146).

Though such an account evokes laughter, the analogy of the ghetto children with starving spirits and the description of the chaotic melee shows a society “suffocating with plentitude while the majority starved” (*TFR* 345).

5.4.1 (d) The Grotesque and its Linguistic Tropes

Rosemary Jackson points out that a basic linguistic trope of the fantastic is oxymoron (Jackson 21). An important feature of the grotesque found in the selected novels of Tutuola and Okri is that it is used to articulate the writers’ aesthetics of paradox. It could be said that the grotesque in their narratives is founded upon contradictions. For instance, in *MLBG*, the newly born babies of the town of the smelling ghosts smell like dead animals (*MLBG* 34). In the annual exhibition of smells, the first prize is awarded to the one with the ‘worst’ smell which for these ghosts is perfume or lavender (*MLBG* 35). The Flash Eyed mother of the 13th town of ghosts uses dirt as a beautifying agent (*MLBG* 96-104). One could say that the use of oxymoron in Tutuola serves to evoke the topsy turvy world of the grotesque.

Just like Tutuola, Okri is found to have a penchant for paradox. Okri creates a clash of opposites to generate grotesque images, “the old man emerging from the anthill had a face that was both a hundred years old and childlike...” (*TFR* 282). Thus, one could say that the grotesque is founded upon contradictions.

AG is full of strange paradoxes. Okri describes an insubstantial bridge made of light, air and feeling that the protagonist has to cross in order to fulfil his quest. The paradoxes in the city of the invisibles are many. When the protagonist stops looking, he could see beyond; when he stops thinking, he could comprehend; when he forgets, he remembers. Further, when the inhabitants of the city are ill, they go to banks; when healthy, they go to hospitals. The illumination of lamps increases darkness and mirrors do not reflect images. In the quest to find out the secret of visibility, the protagonist learns through experience a number of paradoxes. He feels that “he had become smaller and therefore greater. He had become hidden and therefore could learn to see, that he had become a secret and therefore open to all truths” (*AG* 143). John Hawley observes that, “In Okri, the Western dilemma of the dissolution of the subject is celebrated” (Hawley 36). Hawley’s stance could be conflated to add that it is largely through the use of paradox that this dilemma of the West is celebrated in Okri’s narratives.

In *SB*, at the birth of the prince, the soothsayers predict for him an unusual and strange life, “He will be a king and a slave...sold like a goat, treated like an animal...suffer like a sinner...live like a god...die young in his old age or that he would die old in his youth” (*SB* 4). About the tribe of artists and their art, Okri says, “The greatest masters say nothing...the less one makes, the more is made” (*SB* 98). By making use of a paradox, Okri emphasises the superiority of their art. Similarly, it is with a paradox that the lovelorn condition of the prince is brought out, “I am not well and I am too well because of her” (*SB* 14). Kehinde’s observation could be suitably applied here to see that through the paradoxes of motion, vision and appearance, Okri makes a dig at the Western civilisation and its fanatic inclination towards growth and advancement (Kehinde 37).

While Jackson refers to the oxymoron as a major linguistic trope of the grotesque, another linguistic rhetoric found to be crucial in shaping the grotesque in the selected novels is the hyperbole. It is seen that exaggeration of bodily features evokes humour and horror and is an important abiding element in shaping the grotesque. For instance, the Spirit of Prey in *TPWD* is described to be as big as a hippopotamus, but walks upright as a human being, both the legs have two feet each, the head resembles that of a lion and the body is covered with scales. But the most interesting aspect of exaggeration in this grotesque figure is that it kills its prey with the flood of light emitted from its eyes (*TPWD* 235). This kind of exaggeration is not designed to evoke laughter but fear. Similarly, the grotesque arouses fear in the case of the red-complexioned woman “**as tall as a ten feet long stick**” (*TPWD* 253; emphasis mine). The Drinkard’s wife exclaims out of fright, “This is not a human-being and she is not a spirit, but what is she?” (*TPWD* 253). The linguistic trope of hyperbole achieves its desired effect when accompanied with detailed and minute description of the grotesque features. Thus, fear is evoked by the red fish which could fly (the idea of fishes flying is strange in itself); its head is like that of a tortoise but as big as an elephant. It had over thirty horns and large eyes surrounding the head:

It could not walk but was only gliding on the ground like a snake and its body was just like a bat’s body and covered with long red hair like strings. It could fly to a short distance, and if it shouted a person who was four miles away would hear. All the eyes which surrounded its head were closing and opening at the same time as if a man was pressing a switch off and on (*TPWD* 259).

This description shows that the red fish in no way resembles a fish. Similarly, the head of the red bird could weigh at least a ton and along with its beak, it had six long teeth measuring half a foot each. Moreover, it had an insect covered body that adds to its grotesqueness. Other instances of exaggeration are found when the couple enters a forest to find strange birds eating animal flesh:

The birds were about two feet long and their beaks were also one foot and very sharp as a sword...when these birds started to eat the flesh of those animals, within a second there we saw about fifty holes on the bodies of those animals (234-35 *TPWD*).

The wonderful bad creature, another bird, which is partially human and partially avian has long sharp thorns on both the wings. Its beak is so sharp that it could pierce people to death (*TBAH* 38). The huge man who captures the drinkard and his wife has two large eyes on his forehead resembling two big bowls; his feet are as thick as the pillar of a house. The huge stern pigmy that captures Adebisi has a 'fearful' navel so big that it could contain more than four gallons of water:

It swelled out from his belly to a distance of about five feet...whenever he was walking very hastily along, this navel would be shaking and sounding heavily as when water was shaking in a large tube and it appeared on his belly as if a large bowl covered the belly (*TBAH* 77).

The obstacle is so huge and short that none could believe from a distance that he is a living creature and not the stump of a mighty tree, "each of his fingers was as big as a big plaintain...he had a big half fall goitre on his neck" (*TBAH* 61). The king of the quiet bush has a snake-like waist with a diameter of four feet (*FWJ* 46). The feather woman is surrounded by "more than 200 small and big birds" (*FWJ* 14). The old fee collector is bald but his beard is ten feet long (*FWJ* 114). The flash eyed mother who is as enormous as a round hill with a mouth that could swallow an 'elephant uncut' has two 'very short' thick stumps as legs on which she sits as on a stool (*MLBG* 98-99).

Hyperbolic language is also found to shape the grotesque in Okri. The crowd on the night of the political rally is described as a mixed crowd of men and spirits, "men with twelve arms, women with four heads, adults with six feet, all wearing different shoes" (*IR* 260). Azaro learns the 'purity of fear' by looking a man who "was so tall that his head seemed to

almost touch the cobweb-infested rafters” (*TFR* 158). This man resembles the hairy giant in *FWJ*:

The man had a wide mouth, prominent nostrils that flared unnaturally when he breathed, and two big disproportionate ears....I screamed very loud and kicked the man’s shin and he leant over to me and opened his mouth wide as if he were going to swallow me (*TFR* 158-59).

Another grotesque figure reminiscent of the hairy giant is the man in white suit who fights Dad in the bar. “His hair was so much like that of a bush animal that the spectators gave a shocked cry when they saw how inhuman he looked” (*TFR* 541). In the forest that is gradually diminishing, Azaro sees a fascinating crowd of nocturnal beings with weird faces, incomplete faces, or faces with too many features, “some were without noses, or without ears, or teeth, or hands. Some had a combination of too many noses, ears and teeth. A few were distinguished with an excessive number of legs” (*IR* 164). The horde of amazing people that come to pay homage to Madame Koto is described with exaggerated details:

A man who could remove his eyes. The spotted albino couple who could exchange their features, and the yam headed woman, and then the toothless man who had an eye at the back of his throat which looked like a bright marble when he yawned. Then there was the short man whose head resembled a camel’s (*IR* 213)

The gifts these people bring for Madame Koto are equally strange, “a cow without a tail,...a chicken that laid stones instead of eggs...” (*IR* 216). Hyperbolic language is used to describe the “cycles of life and death that had gone mad” (*SE* 157) and the transformations where animals deliver eggs of metal, birds give birth to snakes, donkeys give birth to frogs:

People turned into chickens, goats and iguanas under our gaze. People’s features began to alter... We saw Sami, the betting shop man who had run off with all Dad’s money. We rushed over to him and when we got there he had turned into a goat.... The women began to look like variations of Madame Koto. Someone passed the thought to me that I resembled a baby jackal (*SE* 157).

Apart from anatomical and physiological aspects, it is found that the grotesque in Tutuola and Okri is crucially shaped by its linguistic tropes.

5.4.1 (e) The Location of the Grotesque in Tutuola and Okri

This section points out a major difference between Tutuola and Okri in the use of the grotesque in their narratives. It is found that in Tutuola's narratives the grotesque and the marvellous are located outside the human world—in the terra incognita. But it is shown to be a part of the real world in Okri's narratives; as Derek Wright says of Okri's novels, “we find the manifestation of the fantastic as part of everyday reality” (Wright 328).

In Tutuola's narratives the grotesque figures are the inhabitants of the terra incognita; they are found in the jungles and difficult terrains where his protagonists go for adventures or to fulfil a quest. The grotesque in Tutuola always has an otherworldly effect and one is relieved to find that such characters are not found in the human world. As the protagonists return to the hearth, there is a feeling of respite and release from the anxieties and apprehensions stirred by the grotesque monsters and ogres. Ato Quayson argues that by “positioning the grotesque beyond the human world, Tutuola suggests that it is the world of spirits that embodies the chaotic and anxiety generating forces of nature” (Quayson 1997a: 56).

In *FWJ*, the goddess of diamond sends two fearful soldiers to the village of the chief to bring back her daughter who had eloped with the chief. This is the only part in the selected novels of Tutuola where the non-human world intrudes into the human world. The consequence, therefore, is predictable—destabilisation of the functioning of community—for, as they shout heavy rain and wind shake the place violently and lightning strikes the chief's house reducing everything to ashes.

Brenda Cooper in her book *An Introduction to the African Prose Narrative* maintains that Okri's narration in *TFR* manifests the infusion of unreality in reality (Cooper 1997: 138). This feature of his narration as pointed out by Cooper could be found in the other novels selected for this study. A fitting example of such ‘infusion’ is the musical celebration on the night of the political rally (in *IR*) where ghosts dance among the musicians:

They danced their dread dance amongst us. They danced through us. They danced onto the stage and danced over the musicians, marvelling at the instruments...as the music got worse, the awakened spirits grew weirder. They laughed grotesquely in their celebration, their awakening (*IR* 278).

To elucidate her stance, Cooper herself refers to the marketplace scene in *TFR*. First, Okri presents the picture of a typical market day in a Nigerian marketplace with its swarming crowd of buyers and sellers, its animated mercantile transactions and a general unruly atmosphere. But, right in the middle of this realistically rendered scene, there is the infusion of a surreal world of myths where the spirits with borrowed parts of the human anatomy mingle with the men and women of the market place¹⁸. Madame Koto's bar is another fitting example of this. It is a hotbed of amalgamation of spirits and humans. Like the marketplace scene, there takes place interchange of features among the clients in the bar which Azaro terms as 'grotesque' (*TFR* 157). Madame Koto's clientele comprises of humans as well as weird beings with strange features: "the group of men with bloated eye have only one hand and one of them had only three fingers, one had no thumbs, no teeth, and was altogether bald. Another group with long legs and neck and had small heads, tiny eyes and voices of children" (*TFR* 126).

It is seen that the grotesque in Okri often takes its shape gradually from reality or from the occurrences of some incidents in the real world. Azaro has a vision of a dragon fly formed out of milk doled by the Party of the Rich, "I looked, I saw something growing out of the milk. It grew very tall and white and resolved itself into a ghastly agbada" (*TFR* 149). That the grotesque is often woven out of reality is seen in the description of the tramps who attend Dad's party. Their features are so "fertile in deformities" that they seem to "have been made by a perverse and drunken god". Azaro is shocked at the sight of the assembly of beggars whose:

hair was the breeding ground of lice and sprouting rubbish, and who stank, they had deformed legs which looked like the English letter K, their rickety feet were turned somewhat backwards...some had twisted necks. Others had both feet behind their heads. One of them had one eye much higher up on his face than the other. Another seemed to have three eyes, but on a closer inspection it turned out to be a wound like a socket with an eye missing. One was almost completely blind and could see only through pupils so scrambled up and confusing that they seemed like mashed egg yolk...Each beggar had an unique deformity....Two of the beggars had malformed legs and dragged themselves on the ground like hybrid serpents, with the cushioning aid of elbow pads...one of them had only one arm, another had two fingers...the beggars brought with them all the smells of the gutters, street-corners, dustbins, rotting flesh, and damp nights..." (*TFR* 476).

Another fitting example could be drawn from *SE* where a sudden hurricane creates havoc in the ghetto. The scene is described in a plausible manner:

Houses had crumbled altogether. Rooftops have been torn off and twisted under a pressure or a malign force. The broken down political vehicle which the inhabitants of the streets had destroyed in the early days, had been crushed and its parts scattered as if the wind had taken steel fists to it and flung its components all over the area (*SE* 149).

This plausible scene soon metamorphoses with an unnatural hue as Okri evokes a scene of horror where “the innards of a dog” are stamped on Dad’s door, the heads of black cats are found in living rooms, where the corpses of lizards, mauled goats, dead frogs, rotting vegetables are all mixed up with broken furniture, clothes, shoes and mountains of rubbish (*SE* 149-50). Commenting on the chaos, Azaro says that it made them hallucinate, “it became hard to tell if the world was real or if we had collectively invented it (*SE* 151-52).

In his *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka speaks of the “integrated essentiality” (Soyinka 1976: 51) and the animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness’ in the Yoruba world view. Derek Wright observes that it is this ‘integrated essentiality’ that generates the contiguity of living and unliving, spirit and substance, dream and reality and imagined and perceived phenomena” in Okri’s narratives without any defence or explanation (Wright 327).

Thus, in Okri’s novels one finds the manifestation of the fantastic as part of everyday reality whereas in Tutuola, grotesque manifestations are a part of the marvelous esoteric world.

5.4.2 Functions of the Grotesque in Tutuola and Okri: Similarities and Differences

This section consists of a study of the functions of the grotesque in the selected novels. The study shows the role played by this literary technique in articulating the writers’ sense of purpose and intentions, in other words, their literary aesthetics. The divergent functions that the grotesque is made to perform in the selected novels point out the similarities and differences in its use in Tutuola and Okri. The discussion towards the end of the section shows the influences of Tutuola’s technique and style upon Okri vis-à-vis the grotesque.

It could be argued that the use of the grotesque helps the writers to arrive at their literary aesthetics. The Tutuolan narratives with grotesque images and figures serve the writer's aim (his aim is stated in Chapter 3) of preservation and conservation of his native lore—folktales, myths and legends—which he appropriates into the written narratives. Okri's literary aesthetics is to hold up a mirror to the failings of the contemporary society, especially its political and economic system. The grotesque images and bodies in Okri's narratives serve as a metaphor for the tensions and inconsistencies in the society. The grotesque figures articulate the situation of 'Nigeria out of joint' (Moh 8).

Moreover, the disharmony of the grotesque body in Tutuolan narratives is made meaningful by emphasising the necessity of preserving order in the society. In other words, the chaotic world of the grotesque located beyond the human society underlines the need for stability in human world. On the other hand, in Okri, the grotesque is infused/embedded within the human world so that it becomes a part of the latter. By distorting reality he depicts the decadence of his times. Therefore, as Okri himself states, the grotesque in his narratives functions to "alter the way in which we perceive what is valid and what is valuable" (Okri qtd. in Wilkinson 87).

As a writer concerned with the preservation of values of the community, Tutuola's grotesque obliquely demonstrates the threats to society when its normal functioning is disrupted. In *TPWD*, the grotesque process of gestation (in the thumb) leads to a grotesque birth—that of a son with enormous gastronomical ability to devour the food supply of an entire village and monstrous strength to oust anyone that dares challenge him.. Set under such conditions, the ability of this son (named Zurrjir) to whistle "as if he were forty persons" gives an idea as to how a sinister working of his powers could upset order in the village. The grotesque here is threatening as well, "Ah! How could we escape from this half bodied baby?" (*TPWD* 220). Tutuola therefore makes the drinkard discard the boy in a forest after a lot of troublemaking:

All the time he was in my wife's head, his belly swelled out like a very large tube, because he had eaten too much food and yet he did not satisfy at any time for he could eat the whole food in this world without satisfaction (*TPWD* 219).

Another such baby which is half human and half ghost is found in *MLBG* where it grows to a height of four feet and a few inches within six months. Taking into account

Tutuola's aesthetics of upholding values of the community, he makes the protagonist (the father) declare, "They gave him the ghosts' name which I could not write or pronounce, of course, I myself gave him an earthly name which is—OKOLEBAMIDELLE, the meaning is—'you cannot follow me to my home' " (*MLBG* 134).

The stories with grotesque characters in *TPWD* are designed to reform the lazy and indolent drinkard. Moreover, the grotesque is also employed to teach a moral lesson and the value of hardwork to the wicked and make them conform to social standards. When the people take to laziness and sloth on account of the miraculous power of the magical egg, it produces a bundle of whips to lash at them. Therefore, it could be said that the function of the grotesque in *TPWD* is restoring or establishing order rather than their violation; in other words, to ensure normal functioning of the society.

The encounter with the grotesque creatures brings about the desired changes in Simbi. Once again Tutuola's penchant for preserving values of the community is stressed with Simbi's remorse and regret, "If I had obeyed my mother's and other persons' warnings—not to attempt to know the punishment and the poverty... (*SSDJ* 84). The perilous experiences in the jungle exacerbate her plight. For instance, in the land of poverty, Simbi's clothes turn into ashes and she has to move about naked. When captured by the satyr, Simbi's hands and feet are petrified and turned into a rock. Tutuola could have made young Simbi kill the satyr in an earlier section of the novel; but that would not serve his purpose of demonstrating the necessity to conform to the ways of the community. Emmanuel Obiechina observes that, "the most significant Tutuolan boundary, the one that structures all the others, is the conservative moral code which results in the punishment of those who infringe it...obedience to parents and elders by children is a cardinal virtue" and therefore "the whole story of Simbi is an extended moral treatise on the theme of parental obedience" (Obiechina 1980: 99).

Cooper observes that both Fagunwa and Tutuola are widely recognised as straddling indigenous oral traditions and literary experiments. She further opines that the African writers often adhere to animism, incorporate spirits, ancestors, and talking animals in their stories (both adapted folktales and newly invented yarns), in order to express their passions, their aesthetics and their politics. The stories, encompassing a transgression of boundaries, lie at the heart of adaptation of the past (Cooper 1998: 39-40). But, as Tutuola is a preserver of integrity and values of the community, he locates the grotesque outside the human world

where the standardised notions of harmony and balance need not necessarily operate but could serve as an index for determining the necessity of harmony and balance in the real world. Tutuola, for all the adventurousness of his heroes and the riotousness of the extraordinary places and creatures within his forests and uncleared bush, retains an unambiguous set of boundaries between the village and that bush, and even within the bush, between different species and monsters. Chinua Achebe points this out:

...no monster however powerful is allowed a free run of the place, anarchy is held at bay and a traveller who perseveres can progress from one completed task to the domain of another and in the end achieve the creative, moral purpose in the extraordinary but by no means arbitrary universe of Tutuola's story (Achebe 1980: 261-62).

The Tutuolan world 'shows clearly defined geographical and national boundaries and racial differences' (Obiechina 1980: 90). On the other hand, Okri's society is the bizarre product of both new and old, tradition and burgeoning technological and cultural change. Under such a transitional period, the force of tradition and the penchant for deference towards ancient wisdom is only a part of the moral purpose of his novels. The other part, one could say, is to forward a critique of contemporary politics and society.

Elisheva Rosten observes that, "the very structure of grotesques calls attention to itself—as ornaments they are both too noticeable and too expressive. They upset the organisation of a figurative system and the hierarchy in which it is based" (Rosten 125-35). It is found in Okri that the grotesque serves as a useful tool to depict the dysfunction of politics and power in a new age of political independence. The anxiety generating aspects of the grotesque are reflective of real-world conditions—the gritty reality of slums and the entire backdrop of squalor and dispossession:

I went to the bathroom to have a wash and discovered, as if for the first time, that the rubbish dump in the backyard had grown so high that it was impossible to see the forest (*Stars of the New Curfew* 101).

Ben Okri statement that "reality can have a completely different face when turned slightly another way" (mentioned in Chapter 1, p. 6 of this thesis), encapsulates how the artistic technique of the grotesque is brought into play/exercised in his narratives. The following extract from *TFR* incorporates all the wild sensuality and grossness of the grotesque where

living and dead, human and animal mingle together and Okri depicts the decadence of the present:

Red lights flooded my brain and when my eyes cleared, the smells of a thousand perfumes, of wild sex on hot illicit nights, of vaginal fluids, of animal sweat, overpowered my senses. In the terrible heat of the dance I saw that, among the erotic dancers, the politicians and chiefs, the power merchants, the cultists, paid supporters, thugs and prostitutes, all moving to the beat of the new music, among them all, there were strangers to the world of the living. I saw that some of the prostitutes, who would be future brides of decadent power, had legs of goats. Some of the woman, who were chimeras and sirens and broken courtesans, had legs of spiders and birds. Some of the politicians and power merchants, the chiefs and innocent-looking men, who were satyrs and minotaurs and satanists, had the cloven hoofs of bulls. Their hoofs and bony legs were deftly covered with furry skin. Fully clothed, they danced as men and women when in fact they were the dead, spirits, and animals in disguise, part-time human beings dancing to the music of ascendant power (*TFR* 459–60)

Felicia Oka Moh observes that by moving into the fantastic realism of the folktale, Okri is making an important statement of life in Nigeria. Appearance and reality, life and dream are non-differentiated in this abiku nation. Living in Nigeria is dreamlike, illogical and unreasonable. This fantastic element, this dream vision, this dislocation of the plausible order of things, is a befitting tribute to the strange disorder of things in the nation (Moh 94).

As found in the preceding sections, Okri's narratives show that the grotesque in many cases is woven out of reality. The grotesque in Okri's narratives remains embedded in the normal; it is often an inconspicuous aspect of what is held to be natural. Okri's narrative craft shows that reality is not restricted to the familiar and the banal for it is underscored by the latent and the unspoken. By locating the fantastic within the familiar, Okri makes the grotesque a tool to reduce the gap between the human and the esoteric world. On the other hand, in Tutuola, the grotesque is used as an index of demarcation between the two worlds.

In Tutuola, the difference between 'man' and 'monster' is held up in both its physical and moral aspect. In his narratives, the integrity and dignity of the former (man) is preserved at the behest of derision of the demonic aspects of the latter (monster). In Okri, however, the human beings are shown in their bestial aspects. The grotesque in Okri thus functions to

express his disgust at people with depraved morality. Moh argues that Okri uses the grotesque to underscore the essential animal nature of the people in power and wealth (Moh 82). The blind old man who forms an alignment with Madame Koto is depicted with an assortment of different animal features:

He had feathers about his neck, and quills and glow worms on his face. His arms had bony wings, as if he had been trapped midway in transformation from a skeleton into a bird...he had the eyes of a bull and the feet of a dog...the tongue of a cat (*SE* 87-88).

Throughout the trilogy, Madame Koto is compared to different animals viz. lion, bull. Even in her illness she resembles “a rhinoceros whose horn had been cut off” (*TFR* 161). Her three weird clients had toes which were turned inward like those of certain animals (*TFR* 92). By portraying these characters with beastly features, Okri shows that they are bereft of any human sentiment (Moh 97). Conversely, the pet animals and birds are given ferocious human attributes reflective of their keepers’ temperament. For instance, the goat in Madame Koto’s parlour cries like a woman in agony. Her peacocks are fearful and often peck Azaro drawing out blood. This shows the corrupting influence of evil which turns seemingly harmless creatures into objects of fear.

One could say that apart from communicating his disgust with the corrupting influences upon the society, the grotesque in Okri’s narratives is also used to depict the wretchedness of the noble characters. Mum who was a village belle in her youth is transformed into an ugly woman on account of the painful rigours of existence. Her beauty undergoes painful distortions making her appearance grotesque, “For the first time I saw how the world had sharpened her features. Her cheekbones jutted out, her nose was pointed, her chin was sharp and the two corners of her forehead stood out like the rock-shaped result of permanent bruising” (*TFR* 228).

One way through which the grotesque functions in Okri’s narratives is through abnormal psychological states of the characters viz. hallucinations, delirium and nightmares. Azaro could enter into the dreams of Madame Koto and the Blind Old Man where he has visions of impending socio-political chaos and nightmarish experiences. Dad and Mum too undergo a series of hallucinations and deliriums. Mum in a delirium has a grotesque vision, “I saw you [Azaro] walking on your head. You were walking away from me. I saw you had no eyes and no mouth, and you had little legs on your head” (*TFR* 68). In *SB*, the prince has

grim visions of the future of his kingdom, “On his favourite bed of hardened clay, he tossed in dreams. He turned in horrors...at last he emerged in a grey world, where everything was made of ash, and a pale and sickly light that was no light was spread evenly over everything” (*SB* 67).

Moh observes that, “the major characters are great dreamers whose dreams are not rosy, romantic or therapeutic. Okri uses such fantasies to highlight the unrealities of the lives of the city-dwellers....He uses the literary device of the fantastic and the grotesque to heighten his disgust with post-independent Nigeria” (Moh 70-72). One could say that the city of the invisibles in *AG* is presented as an ideal alternative to the real world of politics and oppression. The hunger for wealth and power in modern Nigeria is contrasted to the spiritual hunger of the inhabitants of the enchanted city, “the only hunger that existed in the city was its dream for a sublime future” (*AG* 71). Dad’s vision of an ideal society (a recurrent theme in the *Famished Road* trilogy) could exist in such kind of a hidden and nameless city where the universities are places for self-perfection, places for the highest education in life:

Everyone taught everyone else. All were teachers, all were students. The sages listened more than they talked...research was a permanent activity, and all were researchers and appliers of the fruits of research (*AG* 66).

Dad’s egalitarian society is found here among the “invisible people” in “invisible spaces” (*AG* 28):

There were no hierarchies. Each person was an equal participant and creator. All worked to the rhythm of the most haunting music....Together they built their towns and hamlets, their palaces and villas, their avenues of angels, their infinite libraries, their exemplary universities. There were no distinctions between people, none high, none low, and men fed children while women constructed temples (*AG* 131).

Thus it is seen that through the use of the grotesque the writers arrive at their literary aesthetics. One concern of the grotesque in both the writers is to foreground or make visible the unseen aspects of the African world which are crucial in shaping an African ethos. The grotesque figures and spaces in *Tutuola* and *Okri* function to portray a different world-view and to subvert “dominant philosophical assumptions which uphold reality as a coherent, single-viewed entity, that narrow vision which Bakhtin termed ‘monological’ (Jackson 48). Thus, the literary grotesque in the selected novels thwarts Western categories of knowledge in

a bid to celebrate the violation in representation of a unified reality and to undermine 'realistic' ways of seeing.

Influence of Tutuolan grotesque upon Okri

It is found that the grotesque figures in Okri have similarities with those found in the Tutuolan world. In other words, Okri draws on Tutuola's technique and style in articulating the grotesque. The idea of the many headed spirits in Okri's trilogy is drawn upon the two headed creature in the 2nd country of the Bush of Ghosts that finds mention in *TPWD*. The king of the smelling ghosts who could be identified from a distance because of his smell is paralleled to the man Azaro notices in the marketplace because of his malodorous body:

He wore a dirty, tattered shirt. His hair was reddish. Flies were noisy around his ears. His private parts showed through his underpants. His legs were covered in sores. The flies around his face made him look as if he had four eyes. I stared at him out of curiosity (*TFR* 21).

The features of this old man is also evocative of two other creatures in *TPWD*—those of the ugly ghostess (as Azaro stares at the creature out of curiosity), and the television handed ghostess whose body is full of sores.

The curiosity that the grotesque evokes in Tutuola is also seen in Okri. The irresistible desire of the young boy to see the ugly ghostess (It is better for me to die than to leave this ugly ghostess and run away without seeing her ugliness clearly to my satisfaction...*MLBG* 86) has its parallel in Azaro's irrepressible desire to gaze at the cross-eyed man, "...it was hard to look anywhere else after the experience of seeing him" (*TFR* 103). In a similar kind of situation Azaro's bafflement on seeing the two legged dog with flea-ridden ears is evident, "I was so amazed to see the dog standing on only two legs that I forgot my hunger and pain. It had a left forefoot and a right hindfoot and it stood wobbling, as though on invisible crutches" (*TFR* 135).

Another technique that Okri draws from Tutuola to evoke the grotesque is by inciting the readers' imagination. In some episodes in Tutuola's narratives, incomplete description of the grotesque figures evokes fear as in the case of the archer sent by the goddess of diamond to the chief's village, "The front of his hat formed a fearful mask over his face, so his eyes could not be described" (*FWJ* 100). The second soldier has such a fearful appearance that the chief is "unable to look at the rest part of his body" (*FWJ* 101). In the typical Tutuolan fashion

(Tutuola's rejoinder, 'I could not describe them here') of leaving to the readers' imagination to concoct the grotesque, Okri is also found to resort to a similar technique, "she [the woman who stepped out of a tree] was deformed in a way I couldn't define" (*TFR* 47).

It is found that the grotesque structures and architectures of the Tutuolan world, designed to evoke fear, have their resonances in Okri. A grotesque architecture is depicted in the form of the big hall devised by the satyr to lure Simbi into entering it. The walls and murals were made of living migratory birds; and the windows and roofs were formed by singing birds. This shows the evil intentions of the monsters to trap and intimidate innocent human beings. In Okri, the grotesque structures like the masquerades, the red colossus and the white horse are man-made structures aimed at terrifying people and subduing them to political pressure:

It was a gigantic red Masquerade, bristling with raffia and rags and nails. It had long stilts for legs and two twisted horns at the sides of a wild jackal's head. The red masquerade held aloft a shining machete in one hand and a white flag, emblem of their party, in the other.... The masquerade had the head of a jackal, with fiercely protruding jaws, and it had the twisted horns of a ram—but it had human eyes. The eyes kept looking at us, turning in their sockets with intense hostility. It was when people noticed the eyes that they began to be really mesmerised with horror (*SE* 98).

In *SB* a horrifying masquerade is witnessed by the prince with its rallying cry of "Eat, eat, eat the world...Rule, rule, rule the world" (*SB* 37), "The masquerade... was like the figure of a terrible deity. It was more terrifying than death itself was fabled to be. And it had seven heads... [which] blocked out the sun. All about its person were things too horrible to behold" (*SB* 37). Okri's grotesque structures like masquerades are embodiments of fear, disintegration and doom and depict the transference of monstrosity from monsters (in Tutuola monstrosity is attributed to monsters) to human beings.

In grotesque representations, as Elisheva Rosten says, "fantasy, liberty and deliberate attacks on order and reason are played up; however these easily invert themselves and become their opposites: violent denunciations of anything threatening the established order" (Rosten 128). This is found in Tutuola. His protagonists always emerge victorious in the encounter with the grotesque beings of the grotesque world, showing thereby, his penchant for order and peace in the human community. Conversely, whenever the need arises, the grotesque characters, settings, situations are found to play a vital role in infusing community values in

the characters in an oblique manner. As Francis Connelly says, “The grotesque may be better described for what they do than what they are” (Connelly 4). While the grotesque in Okri symbolises loss of morality and values, in Tutuola, the grotesque is informed by a moral allegory. They defuse potentially disturbing, anti-social/anti-community drives and retreat from any profound confrontation with existential unease.

The grotesque in Okri becomes a device to represent the unseen and the unsaid of contemporary times which, as Jackson says, “has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent” (Jackson 179). For instance, it is through the eyes of the spirit child that the Governor General’s manipulation of African history and culture is made manifest in *IR*. Here the grotesque representation is also a device to make visible the invisible and to discover absence, as the tapestry of the old woman in *IR* tells the readers a number of stories silenced in history.

As an expressive mode, the grotesque functions to exert pressure against the dominant hierarchical systems. In Okri, the grotesque is characterised by a subversive function. Viewed through the eyes of the abiku, the natural world is inverted into something strange, something ‘other’. Here, the grotesque functions not merely to present an esoteric world but to reflect upon human condition. The grotesque therefore infuses a desire to transform the world. It uncovers all that needs to remain hidden if the world is to be comfortably known. Thus it subverts any representation of a unified reality.

The grotesque defies the laws of motion, statics, and gravity. For instance, the sun and the moon are found in a well in *FWJ*. The old woman (in *IR*) could fly to the moon sitting on a broom. The protagonist’s experiences in the enchanted island nullify all rational phenomena. It is a space where spatial, temporal and philosophical ordering systems dissolve— he covers less distance when he moves fast and vice-versa. Again, Azaro’s in-between status of an abiku is suggestive of dissolution of dominant signifying practices, especially ‘character’ representation. The subject becomes heterogeneous, spreading into every contradiction and impossibility (Jackson 90). Okri’s works could be said to fall under what Jackson says, “the modern fantastic”—a form of literary fantasy within the secularised culture produced by capitalism, is a subversive literature. It exists alongside the real, on either side of the dominant cultural axis...” (Jackson 180).

Thus it is seen that the literary grotesque functions differently in Tutuola and Okri, depending upon its particular historical placing, and its different ideological, political and economic determinants. The Nigeria of Okri's narratives, as Azaro says, is an abiku nation—caught in the cycle of change and renewal. It lacks “stability, fixity and order” (Connelly 4) like a grotesque body. Through the abiku metaphor, Okri expresses an ever-increasing disillusionment with contemporary political realities in his country. The grotesque thus becomes a site for articulating local non-western concepts of suffering, loss and bereavement as seen in Okri's works; and alternately, of recovery or healing as found in Tutuola. The latter finds in the technique, a medium to store his stories, local beliefs, myths and legends. Through the grotesque images, he preserves the world of spirits, ghosts, ancestors, that is integral to his Yoruba cosmology.

5.5 Summing Up

This chapter shows that the strategic device of the grotesque in the selected novels could be studied by analysing its features and functions. It is seen that the grotesque in Tutuola and Okri is heavily indebted to the native cultural tradition wherefrom the writers derive their inspiration. It is found that the grotesque displays an assortment of features that reccur in the narratives. Distortion of natural and physiological process; rhetorical devices of contradiction, paradoxes, exaggeration; motif of visibility vs. invisibility; morbid imagery and bodily obscenities; and emotional complexes of laughter and fear are the abiding features of the grotesque in the selected novels. These factors play a central role in evoking the grotesque.

The study shows that the grotesque performs a set of functions in the narratives. The grotesque is not merely an ornamental device to evoke horror and humour; it has functional value too. By depicting the lack of ‘fixity, stability and order’, the grotesque world in Tutuola demonstrates the need for the same in the human world. The marvellous scape and characters serve his aim of preservation and conservation of the world of spirits, ancestors and traditional wisdom and morality through the literary medium.

The grotesque in Okri manifests a loss of the old ways; it makes an ironic comment on the present scheme of things and expresses an ever-increasing disillusionment with contemporary political realities in Nigeria. It is seen that the structure of the grotesque is

founded upon contradictions. As Derek Wright says, “in the credibility-defying transformations of Azaro’s/Okri’s world everything is really something else. In this zone of syncopated realities all Western categorisms are dispensed with. Stones cry, trees talk, corpses sing, the wind changes colour and mythologies do battle. Miraculous reversals and inversions are the routine functions of this unceasing metamorphosis” (Wright 327). The grotesque in his novels becomes a tool to attack the hierarchical systems of the society and to reflect upon human condition.

In shaping the grotesque, Tutuola has selected from what he has to hand. Writers are influenced by other writers, who have themselves been influenced by the traditions of their own particular families, groups and regions, as well as by those of the other writers. It is seen that Okri owes to his literary predecessor Tutuola. It could be said that as cultural nationalists these writers’ use of the grotesque is an attempt to excavate an African mythology, and world view uncontaminated by Western influences. It tends to capture reality by a way of depiction of life’s many dimensions—seen and unseen, visible and invisible, rational and mysterious, worldly and otherworldly, Western and indigenous, black and white. As a strategy of narrative construction, the grotesque exposes what these writers see as a deeper reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view.

NOTES

1. *Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia* (ed. John Julius Norwich), Volume 5, *The Arts*, p. 195. Manifestations of the grotesque since antiquity to present times are found in painting, sculpture, photography, prints, medical illustration, architecture, performance arts, film and popular culture.
2. Taken from *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia* (ed. David Crystal), p. 527. The grotesque in Renaissance art is familiar to us through Raphael’s designs in the Vatican Loggia. These are wall and ceiling paintings depicting pagan or Christian history that are bordered or framed by panels of delicate foliage, inhabited by strange objects borrowed from the “Golden House of Nero”: satyrs, cupids, fruit, festoons, frets, knots, and bows.
3. These definitions are extracted respectively from p. 184, p. 187 and p. 188, 184 of *The Grotesque in Arts and Literature*.

4. In the essay “The Grotesque: First Principles”, Geoffrey Harpham maintains that, “the grotesque is the slipperiest of aesthetic categories”, p. 461. There has been considerable scholarship on the grotesque tradition in art and literature. Some scholars who have made significant scholarly contributions to this subject are Tzvetan Todorov, Frances K. Barach, Peter L. Hayes, Philip Thompson, Willard Farnham, Shun-liang Chao, Frances S. Connelly, Andrew Schulz, Marina Warner, Zakia Hafani, among others. A striking number of influential thinkers including Baudelaire, Ruskin, Nietzsche, Freud, Bataille, Kristeva have drawn from and reinterpreted the grotesque tradition.
5. Taken from *Giants, Monsters, and Dragons: An Encyclopedia of Folklore, Legend, and Myth* (ed. Carol Rose), p. 253. The fascination for the monstrous could be seen in as diverse literary cultures as in *Illiad*, *Odyssey*, *The Mahabharata*, *The Ramayana*, *Paradise Lost*. Folklore also plays a part in cultures throughout the world where a similar phenomenon is experienced but is given different names, such as the Werewolf, that is known in the shape of animals in most western cultures.
6. In Greek mythology, composite forms of beings viz. Echidne (serpent-woman), Minotaur (man-bull), Centaur (horse-man) abound. In Indian mythology too such forms are found in the Makara (hybrid crocodile); Jataya (humanoid bird); Kempurusha (horse-man), and others. In African myths, legends, fables, songs and proverbs monsters like the Inkanyamba (a huge carnivorous eel-like animal found in the legends of Xhosa and Zulu people), Kongamato, (a flying reptile of Zambia, Angola, Congo folklore), Impundulu or Lightning Bird that can drink human blood (Pondo, Xulu and Xhosa folklore); Adze, a vampire (in legends of Ewe people of Ghana and Togo), and others are found.
7. In his study of the carnival, Bakhtin’s analyses the grotesque and the folklore vis-à-vis Rabelais’ works.
8. Carnavalesque refers to the pre-Lenten merry making, a brief period of celebration that is traditionally marked by actions, and images representing the world upside down. In carnival, fools are crowned as kings and donkeys consecrated as priests. This grotesque originated in folk culture and was appropriated into a literary and fine arts tradition in the sixteenth century. Charting a difference between the Horatian grotesque and the carnivalesque grotesque, Connelly says (p.8 of *Modern Arts*) while the former prompts aesthetic debates about artistic license, the carnivalesque was overtly transgressive in realms beyond the aesthetic.
9. The grotesque is found to emerge variously in divergent cultures as evident from the writings of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Carroll’s *Alice in*

Wonderland and *Through the Looking Glass*, Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Maupassant's *The Hand*, Gogol's *The Nose*, Philip Roth's *The Breast*. Much scholarship has applied the grotesque to the works of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dante, Coleridge, Hogarth, Callot, Bosch, Dickens, among others.

10. Mahdi Teimori in a study of *TFR* ("Time and Vision in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*", p.2), points to Okri's style as belonging to the genre of magical realism.
11. Beilis maintains that the grotesque in Tutuola derives its pedigree from ritual culture which is more archaic than Bakhtin's carnival culture; thus, maintaining a distinction between the two. Beilis also says that as a phenomenon of literature and as a literary phenomenon, the Rabelais' work and those by the Nigerian authors (Tutuola and Fagunwa) are totally different, but all of them feed on their respective popular culture and live in conformity with its laws, p. 455.
12. Bakhtin in "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel". *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, p.170. The human body, as per Bakhtin's analysis is portrayed by Rabelais in a variety of different aspects, viz. anatomical and physiological; clownish and cynical; fantastic and grotesque allegorisation; and, the folkloric aspect.
13. Beilis in his essay also asserts that it is impossible to miss the parallel between Tutuola and Rabelais just as it is impossible not to note the reign of grotesque in the books by Nigerian authors.
14. The enormous pregnancy of the goddess of the island could be seen as prelude to a grotesque birth, "she could have been giving birth to a god or to a new world" (*TFR* 16). Madame Koto's enormous pregnancy could be paralleled to the sea-goddess imagery in *TFR*.
15. In *Magical Realism in West African Fiction* Brenda Cooper says that Bakhtin's image of the senile and pregnant hag stands as a symbolic and representative symbol of all the cacophony of carnival syncretism, p. 24.
16. In case of writers like Armah, one finds images of filth and dirt. But Armah's narratives are set in a realistic plane while Okri presents such images within a mythopoeic backdrop.
17. Bakhtin's observes in *The Dialogic Imagination* (p. 171) that in Rabelais, grotesque fantasy is combined with precise anatomical and physiological details. This observation is also quoted in p. 17 of this chapter.
18. In the marketplace scenes, both Tutuola and Okri play on a popular Yoruba myth which says that the living, the dead and the unborn throng the marketplaces of the world.

Works Cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson. Austin: Texas UP, 1981. Print.
- . *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1984. Print.
- Beilis, Victor. "Ghosts, People, and Books of Yorubaland". *Research in African Literatures* 18.4 (Winter, 1987): 447-457. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Don Quixote* (1605). Norton Critical Edition. Trans. Burton Raffel. Ed. Diana de Armas Wilson. London & New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999. Print.
- Chao, Shun-Liang. *Rethinking the Concept of the Grotesque: Crashaw, Baudelaire, Magritte*. Oxford: Legenda, 2010. Print.
- Collins, Harold. "Tutuola's Literary Powers". *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors. London: Heinemann, 1980. 256-64. Print.
- Connelly, Francis F, ed. *The Modern Art and the Grotesque*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Print.
- Cooper, Brenda. *An Introduction to the African Prose Narrative*. Ed. Lokangaka Losambe. Pretoria: Kasigo Tertiary, 1997. Print.
- . *Magical Realism in West African Fiction*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.
- Cosentino, Donald J. "In Memoriam: Amos Tutuola, 1920-1997". *The Benin Centenary, Part 2*. Spec. issue of *African Arts* 30.4 (Autumn, 1997): 16-17. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 May, 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- Crystal, David, ed. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990. Print.
- Dundes, Allan. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1980. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures Psycho-Analysis*. London & New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1933. Print.
- Garcia Marquez, Gabriel. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Penguin, 1972. Print.
- Harpham, Geoffrey. *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1982. Print.

- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London & New York: Routledge, 1981. Print.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Random House, 1922, Print.
- Kayser, Wolfgang. *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*. Trans. Ulrich Weisstein. Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1963. Print.
- Kehinde, Owoeye Durojaiye. *Intertextuality and the Novels of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri*. Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011. Print.
- Koepping, Klaus Peter. "Absurdity and Hidden Truth: Cunning Intelligence and Grotesque Body Images as Manifestations of the Trickster". *History of Religions* 24. 3 (Feb 1985): 191-214. *JSTOR*. Web. 9 Sep. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- Lindfors, Bernth, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Literatures*. London: Heinemann, 1979. Print.
- , ed. *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*. London: Heinemann, 1980. Print.
- . *Powre above Powres: Nigeria's First Novelists*. Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, University of Mysore: The Literary P, 1986. Print.
- Mann, Thomas. "Conrad's 'Secret Agent'". *Past Masters and Other Papers*. Trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter. New York: Freeport, 1968. Print.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Alphonso Lingis. Ed. Claude Lefort. New York: Northwestern U P, 1968. Print.
- Moh, Felicia Oka. *Ben Okri: An Introduction to his Early Fiction*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 2002. Print.
- Nnolim, Charles. "Trends in Nigerian Novel". *Literature and National Consciousness*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1989. 53-65. Print.
- Norwich, John Julius, ed. *Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia*. Vol. 5, *The Arts*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1993. Print.
- Obiechina, Emmanuel. *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1975. Print.

- . "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition" *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*. Ed. Bernth Lindfors. London: Heinemann, 1980. 84–105. Print.
- Okri, Ben. *Stars of the New Curfew*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1989. Print.
- . *The Famished Road*. London: Cape, 1991. Print.
- . *Songs of Enchantment*. London: Cape, 1993. Print.
- . *Astonishing the Gods*. London: Phoenix House, 1995. Print.
- . *Dangerous Love*. London: Phoenix House, 1996. Print.
- . *Infinite Riches*. London: Phoenix House, 1999. Print.
- Palmer, Eustace. *The Growth of the African Novel*. London: Heinemann, 1979. Print.
- Parrinder, Geoffrey. Foreword. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. By Amos Tutuola. New York: Grove P, 1954. 9-15. Print.
- Penn, Warren. Robert. *Ballad of a Sweet Dream of Peace*. Illus. Bill Komodore. London: Pressworks, 1980. Print.
- Punday, Daniel. "Narrative Performance in the Contemporary Monster Story". *The Modern Language Review*. Vol. 97, No. 4 (Oct., 2002), pp. 803-820. Web. *JSTOR*. 23 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>> .
- Quayson, Ato. *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri*. Oxford: James Currey, 1997a. Print.
- . "Protocols of Representation and the Problems of Constituting an African 'Gnosis' ": Achebe and Okri. *The Yearbook of English Studies* 27 (1997b): 137-149. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 July, 2010. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- . "Magical Realism in the African Novel". *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. Ed. Abiola Irele. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2009. 159-176. Print.
- Rabelais, Francois. *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Trans. J.M. Cohen. Baltimore: Penguin, 1955. Print.
- Rohrich, Lutz. *Folktales and Reality*. Trans. Peter Tokofsky. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana U P, 1991. Print.

- Rose, Carol. *Giants, Monsters and Dragons: An Encyclopedia of Folklore, Legends and Myths*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000. Print.
- Rosten, Elisheva. "Innovation and its Reception: The Grotesque in Aesthetic Thought." *SubStance*, Vol. 19, No. 2/3, Issue 62/63: Special Issue: *Thought and Novation* (1990), pp. 125-135. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 July. 2009. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>>.
- Rudd, Niall. *Horace: Epistles Book II and Epistle to the Pisones ('Ars Poetica')*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1989. Print.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1981. Print.
- Ruskin, John. *Modern Painters* (1860). Vol. 1. London: Adamant Media Corporations, 2005. Print.
- Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976. Print.
- Stallybrass, Peter, and Allon White. *The Politics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell U P, 1986. Print.
- Sterne, Lawrence. *Tristram Shandy* (1759). Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Howard Anderson. London & New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979. Print.
- Takacs, Sherryl. "Oral Tradition in the Works of Amos Tutuola". *Books Abroad* 44.3 (Summer, 1970): 392-398. Print.
- Tutuola, Amos. *The Palmwine Drinkard*. New York: Grove P, 1952. Print.
- . *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. New York: Grove P, 1954. Print.
- . *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle*. New York: Grove P, 1955. Print.
- . *The Brave African Huntress*. New York: Grove P, 1958. Print.
- . *The Feather Woman of the Jungle*. London: Heinemann, 1962. Print.
- White, Hayden. "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality", *Critical Enquiry*, (Autumn 1980): 5-27. Print.
- . *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1987. Print.
- Wilkinson, Jane, ed. *Talking with African Writers: Interviews with African Poets, Playwrights and Novelists*. London: Heinemann, 1992. Print.

Wright, Derek. Whither Nigerian Fiction? Into the Nineties. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33.2 (Jun, 1995): 315-332. *JSTOR*. Web. 3 May. 2013. <<http://www.jstor.org/search>> .