

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study shows that Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri exploit elements from an indigenous traditional oral culture for the purpose of literary experimentation. These elements of an oral culture are appropriated and used as strategies in the construction of the literary narrative in the selected novels. The appropriation of oral cultural elements in constructing the literary narrative results in the showcasing of an African identity expressed through “mythopoesis and ritual instead of conventional realism” (Quayson 1997a: 158). As such a comparative study of the two writers could be pursued along this trajectory.

**Chapter 1** lays down the rationale for a comparative study of the works of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri. It shows that although a substantial amount of criticism has been devoted to their works, these are mainly centered around their respective magnum opuses. There is also a dearth of book-length works bringing the two writers together for a comparative study despite the fact that many critics acknowledge the powerful overtones of Tutuola’s style in the exuberance of Okri’s images and West African oral culture. It argues that the present has its roots in the past. Tutuola who had been attacked by a group of critics for his “unschooled” (Larrabee 9) English and for writing all sorts of fantastic tales about Africa could be seen in retrospect to be the pioneer of an alternative mode of realism in novel writing which is appropriated by younger writers like Okri. This stylistic experimentation is steeped in oral culture and serves to show the working of an African cosmology along with a critique of the coloniser’s epistemology.

**Chapter 2** shows that in all cultures the oral cultural tradition prevalent in the society plays a crucial role in conditioning the literary. In this sense, there exists a continuum between the two categories instead of binary tendencies. However, this continuum is not an unproblematic one as the scripted version of oral elements has its own limitations and involves mutations of “oral-aural”<sup>2</sup> elements. Notwithstanding this, in a postcolonial technologised world the effects of ‘writing’ are far reaching and appeals to a wider public located beyond the community. Documentation provides a stable and tangible identity vis-à-

vis the coloniser's discourse. This chapter argues that in the context of Africa where oral forms are a living reality, the inscription of oral elements into the literary acts a vehicle for asserting Africa's cultural identity (Takacs 397).

**Chapter 3** This chapter examines the function of traditional narratives (viz. myths, folktales), traditional narrative practices (storytelling) and folkloric elements markedly apparent in the thematic and structural pattern of the novels of Tutuola and Okri. It shows that in the novels of Tutuola and Okri there is a constructive engagement between folklore and the novel. As socially conscientious writers, their use of folklore serves as a medium of self expression and also depicts and comments on different times and changing situations. This chapter shows that the novels of Tutuola and Okri open up new vistas for exploring newer aesthetic directions based on a broader understanding and utilisation of various aspects of African folklore (viz. storytelling, myths) and less dependence on imitation of the European novel. If the writers draw on folklore for literary experimentation, the written narrative becomes a site of conservation of folklore in a non-traditional socio-cultural scenario. It shows that folklore not only serves as a tool of self-expression, but is also employed (in the novels) to reflect the changes in the social and cultural scenario of contemporary times to which the writers belong.

**Chapter 4** analyses the functional value of the cultural metaphor of journey in shaping the narratives in the selected novels. Journey is used as a trope to bind the digressive and episodic narratives together. It is used as a strategy to depict the functioning of an African ontological system that is beyond the grasp of an imperial consciousness. Making an analysis of 'character', 'time' and 'space' (which are the inevitable elements in a journey), this chapter shows that the spatio-temporal configurations within which the journeys are undertaken debunk the colonial penchant for fixity in representing indigenous African cultures. With respect to characterisation, it is found that the journey trope is used as a learning phase in the life of the characters. In both Tutuola and Okri, journey facilitates man's understanding and comprehension of the world/environment in which s/he lives. As in the case of the cultural rituals, in the novels too, the experience gained via journey is both physical and metaphysical where the characters cross the most fundamental boundaries of space, life, and experience.

**Chapter 5** shows that the literary grotesque as a strategic device is derived from its oral counterpart, that is, the folktales, myths and stories of a native cultural tradition. By depicting the lack of ‘fixity, stability and order’, the grotesque in Tutuola’s world demonstrates the need for the same in the human world. The realm of the marvellous and the esoteric 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. As a strategic device, the grotesque 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. This chapter argues that the grotesque showcases what Tutuola and Okri as writers see as a deeper reality than conventional realist techniques would bring to view.

While the content or the subject-matter of writing of two writers might be the same, no two writers write in the same way. Each will write according to his/her own perception and highlight what s/he regards as significant. There can be no uniformity in writing while there might be a lot of uniformity in thoughts, beliefs, convictions, aims and objectives. What distinguishes one writer from another is primarily the nature of his/her sensibility. One may have a lyrical temperament, another may be of a satirical bent of mind, still another may have a mystical strain in sensibility. However, writers belonging to the same social milieu and experiencing the same tensions and sharing the same tradition, customs and cultural inheritance may have a lot in common with one another. These get reflected in their writings. Writers who are close to one another in respect of their mental and emotional leanings are often grouped together and are said to represent a trend or a literary movement. But, individually, each has his or her own distinctive qualities as a writer.

A writer’s sensibility does not grow in a vacuum. It is moulded very largely by his environment—not only by the physical environment but also by the currents and cross-currents of ideas and values and attitudes, concepts and concerns prevailing in his environment. These sharpen his sensibility and help him evolve his own outlook. A writer is closely linked with life. his creativity draws heavily from life and whatever s/he writes,

reflects the social milieu to which s/he belongs. It is in this sense too that a writer's work bears the stamp of his age.

Different colonies have gone through different experiences of the colonial encounter. The aftermath of colonialism has led to different situations in different colonies. Even within Africa, different nations with varied experiences of colonialism deal with problems peculiar to each. The situation is more complex in South Africa which had to undergo an extreme experience of racism in the form of the Apartheid. Postcolonial writers often use elements from indigenous culture to express their identity encoded in 'writing'. However, their way of doing this is unique in each case. For instance, writers like Rushdie who make use of Indian mythologies, tradition and folklore, characterise reality in their own unique way.

The novels of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri are in dialogue with each other. Both the writers share a common resource in the form of a Yoruba/traditional/local narrative discourse. Though Okri belongs to the Urhobo community, Yoruba references are found in abundance in his narratives. It shows that Okri's selection of resources is based on his aesthetic concerns instead of racial. It also focuses on his cosmopolitan outlook.

This study of strategies of narrative construction shows that the two novelists—Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri draw strength in their literary craft from the resources of their oral culture. This indigenous cultural resource-base acts as a reservoir for stylistic invigoration extending the frontiers of the literary narrative (with respect to novel writing) in Africa. This thesis provides a framework for a comparative study of the works of Tutuola and Okri through a study of strategies of narrative construction with elements drawn from an oral culture and life. It shows that the novels of Tutuola and Okri display similarities in strategies of narrative construction. Though this thesis focuses exclusively on Tutuola and Okri, the trajectory of this comparative study could be extended to analyse the role of indigenous oral resources, rituals and cultural life in the written narratives of other African writers of English expression as well as writers beyond the continent.

### Works Cited

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