

ABSTRACT

Constructing the Narrative: A Comparative Study of the Select Novels of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri

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This thesis is a comparative study of the strategies of narrative construction with reference to the selected novels of the two African writers of English expression—Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri. It examines the appropriation of elements from an indigenous oral culture in constructing the literary narrative. Drawing on the theory of narrative as propounded by Robert Scholes, James Phelan and Robert Kellog in their influential book *The Nature of Narrative*, this thesis argues that the written narrative of Tutuola and Okri is shaped out of oral influences. The elements of oral culture and life are used by the two writers as strategies/tools for self expression and as a critique of a monological world-view. The strategies of narrative construction that this thesis investigates are the use of folkloric elements in technical experimentation of a literary genre; use of the cultural metaphor of ‘journey’ as a leitmotif in the literary narratives; and, the use of ‘grotesque’ as a strategy for depicting an African reality in the selected novels. Drawing on Richard M. Dorson’s and Emmanuel Obiechina’s idea of folklore, this thesis shows that there exists a symbiotic relationship between folklore and the written narrative. While the writers use folklore as a strategy for constructing the literary narrative, the latter becomes a reservoir of the former in an age of print culture. Instead of oppositional practices, this thesis sees the two narrative modes in a unique kind of nexus. Borrowing Margaret Thompson Drewal’s theorisation of ‘journey as a cultural metaphor’, the present study investigates the appropriation ‘journey’ as a motif in the literary narratives of Tutuola and Okri. The motif of journey functions to depict an African ontological system with unique nuances of time and space. This study makes use of the tenet of grotesque as put forward by Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser to argue that the literary grotesque as a strategic device is derived from its counterpart in oral culture. As a strategic device, the grotesque brings into play the subdued aspects of an African world and life. It presents an alternative to conventional realist techniques in expressing the nuances of an African world. The present study of strategies of narrative construction shows that a comparative study of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri could be pursued along this trajectory.