Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Rationale of the Study

This thesis is a study of the strategies and devices employed by Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri in constructing the literary narrative. By concentrating on the selected novels, this thesis examines the construction of the written narrative by the two writers with elements derived from traditional life and culture thereby creating a unique framework for a novelistic discourse. These strategies are the application of folklore in technical experimentation of a literary genre and in shaping the literary narrative, the use of 'journey' as a leitmotif in the narratives to depict an African ontological system, and the use of the grotesque as a tool to challenge a Eurocentric world view.

This study shows that Tutuola and Okri borrow their strategies of narrative construction from an indigenous cultural resource-base[1] and cultural life thereby necessitating different standards and criteria for critical evaluation of their works. V.Y. Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa* observes that Africa is perpetually caught within the grasp of a Western knowledge-base, to the extent that Western interpreters as well as African analysts could be said to have been using categories and conceptual systems which depend entirely on a Western epistemological order (Mudimbe x). Anjali Gera in *Three Great African Novelists* makes a case for non-Eurocentric criteria in the evaluation of the African novel[2]. She urges: "When a certain Western critical theory does not seem to account fully for the aesthetic merit of a work, it is necessary to look for alternative models" (Gera 82). Gera's argument could be applied in a critical assessment of the novels of Tutuola and Okri. Therefore, this thesis makes a study of the selected novels by taking into account the aspects of an oral narrative tradition deployed as strategies that have helped to shape them.

The journey of the European novel to the erstwhile colonised cultures necessitated modifications of some of its techniques. This has led to what Emmanuel Obiechina describes

as the "domestication" of the Western novel (Obiechina 1975: 28-155). While critics like Dseagu argue that the African novel is not purely and exclusively a product of Western culture (Dseagu 604), this thesis shows the influence of oral tradition and culture as major factors in the construction of the literary narrative in the selected novels of Tutuola and Okri. The use of these elements as strategies in the construction of the written narrative provides a counter to the general criticism directed against the African novelists that they have "borrowed all their techniques from the West in the course of borrowing the art form of the novel" (Dseagu 584).

Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri belong to two different times and two different generations. While Tutuola is controversially acclaimed to be one of the pioneers of novel writing in Nigeria, Okri received international recognition with the Booker Prize in 1991. Tutuola started his literary career at a time when Nigeria was still a colony, whereas, Okri is a member of the Nigerian diaspora in the U.K. Okri's engagement as a writer is shaped by his academic life in the universities. His literary and cosmopolitan background makes him aware of the various politico-cultural phenomena viz. postcolonialism, postmodernism and globalisation. This has led to his production of texts that are ironic and complex. Tutuola, on the other hand, had scant knowledge of the world of letters and therefore, as urged by a host of earlier critics, his writings tend to be less affected by the established literary conventions and norms of the times. However, later trends in reading Tutuola have done much to challenge this position. Seen in retrospect, Tutuola could be seen as the inaugurator of an alternative mode of realism (as a reaction against the more popular convention of social realism frequently used by his contemporaries) in Nigeria and by extension in Africa[3].

Critics like David Whittaker observe that an exploration of Tutuola's novels emphasise his relevance today, giving him a strong foothold amidst the concerns of contemporary postcolonial critics and theorists vis-à-vis the tropes of 'liminality' and 'identity' (Whittaker 2). I. Adeagbo Akinjobin claims that Tutuola's style is a dead end for African literature as the "author's written style" shows "no marks of possible future development" and is "incapable of giving accurate information about Africa" (Akinjobin 30). However, Okri's oeuvre (of novels) starting from his magnum opus *The Famished Road*, through its sequel *Songs of Enchantment* has turned Tutuola's so-called dead end into a new

vista for exploring new aesthetic directions based on a broader understanding, of African folklore with less dependence on imitation of the European novel.

Both Okri and Tutuola share a common resource-base in the form of a "Yoruba narrative discourse" (Whittaker 2) which takes into account elements from the traditional metaphysical belief system. The written narratives of both the writers are a blending of the real, the supernatural, the esoteric and the metaphysical. The use of episodic narrative structures and mythic landscapes with animist deities, supernatural beings, and ghosts of the ancestors serve to show their affiliation to an indigenous resource-base.

The core texts chosen for this study are, Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard, My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle, The Brave African Huntress* and *The Witch Herbalist of the Remote Town* and Okri's *The Famished Road, Songs of Enchantment, Infinite Riches, Astonishing the Gods* and *Starbook*[4], although references to their other works are made throughout the study. A reading of the novels shows that the aforementioned strategies are crucial and abiding in shaping the narratives of Tutuola and Okri. It is hoped that a study of these strategies of narrative construction with respect to the written narrative in the works of the writers would throw some new light on their narrative practices and advance the frontiers of the knowledge universe.

1.2 Objective(s) of the Study

This comparative study of strategies of narrative construction aims at showing that Ben Okri writes back to Amos Tutuola and that their novels are in dialogue with each other. However, Okri does not merely follow or borrow these narrative strategies from his literary predecessor; rather he reworks and builds on the Tutuolan tradition to enrich the 'novel' in Africa. Another objective of this study is to show that both the writers via the aforementioned narrative strategies present a unique idea of Africa that challenges fixities and unified identities. The study also shows that African traditions and Yoruba belief-systems and mythology function in the novels to provide a unique framework for a novelistic discourse. This foregrounds the ethos and the value system of a community and challenges a totalitarian world view. This study also shows that the 'magical' and the 'real' in literature have

variegated and unique functions in relation to different regional, cultural and historical contexts.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

As already stated, this thesis is a comparative study involving analysis of some common strategies of narrative construction in the selected novels of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri. Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study owes to different quarters (and is not structured/ organised according to one particular 'school' or an individual theoretician). Significant among these are Richard M. Dorson's tenet of folklore and Emmanuel Obiechina's theorisation of folk consciousness in the African social and literary context, Margaret Thompson Drewal's theorising of 'journey' vis-à-vis West African life and rituals, and Wolfgang Kayser's and Mikhail Bakhtin's tenet of the literary grotesque. This study also makes use of Ato Quayson's stance on narrative as articulated in "Protocols of Representation" and draws on the theory of narrative propounded by the troika Scholes, Phelan and Kellog in *The Nature of Narrative*. Margaret Drewal's work *Yoruba Ritual* theorises journey as an important organising symbol in Yoruba thought and rituals. Her approach is found useful in analysing how this organising symbol is frequently made to work in the narratives of Tutuola and Okri. Obiechina's critique in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* is useful for this study as it helps to relate 'writing' to the cultural and social situation in West Africa. Dorson's classification of different genres/aspects of folklore in *Folklore and Folklife* is employed to locate the folk elements in the novels. These different theories and critical tenets are brought together in this study to facilitate analysis of the selected texts. In this comparative study of narrative strategies, the employment of divergent strands and theories make it necessary to extract the relevant points from each tenet without presenting the theory as a whole or following all of its implications. However, these different strands aid to pursue a comparative analysis of the texts and aid in driving home the central argument that both the writers have created a unique vehicle out of the flexible form of the novel in order to transmit the poetry, logic, wisdom and philosophy of their African cultures through the written narrative.

1.4 Locating Tutuola and Okri in the gamut of African writers in English

It would be fair to say that no other African writer of English expression has received so much of controversial response and reception as did Amos Tutuola (1920-1997). This in turn shows the amount of attention that the writer has succeeded in generating through his novels; although, it could be argued that he was not conscious of the hybridity he was creating (unlike his more nurtured literary counterparts). Tutuola's parents were cocoa farmers and at the age of seven, he started working for an Igbo man who sent him to a primary school in lieu of his services. Tutuola had formal schooling for a very brief period of five years only. In 1939 when his father died, Tutuola left school and tried a number of vocations till he completed the draft of *TPWD* in 1946. Its publication in 1952 played a decisive role in his life. It served to bring Tutuola to the larger academic scenario by circulating Yoruba folklore across the world and attracting readership worldwide.

Tutuola is one of the unparalled tellers of tales and his credit lies in appropriating the novel form in preserving the tales of his Yoruba community. Although severely criticised from different quarters for his crude English that tarnishes the literary aspects of his work, what is remarkable is his vigorous imagination by virtue of which he weaves the tempo of traditional narrative modes (story-telling) into the structural pattern of the novel. Anjali Gera's *Three Great African Novelists* very deftly sums up Tutuola's pioneering role in novel writing with the observation that "the spade work [in the creation of the African novel in English] had been done by that storyteller *par excellence*, Amos Tutuola, who felt he had to write down Yoruba tales to prevent them from being forgotten" (Gera vii). Although his example was not followed by his contemporaries and immediate successors, Tutuola's works are a hallmark in the realm of novel writing in Nigeria and by extension in Africa. Seen in retrospect, it could be argued that his appropriation of the novel to suit the purpose of narrating Yoruba tales leads to a broadening of the dimension of the genre. While Tutuola's reputation has been consistently controversial in the academia, Okri was welcomed with laurels.

Ben Okri (1959—) is acknowledged as one the foremost contemporary writers in the postmodern and postcolonial literary traditions. Born in Nigeria, Okri belongs to the Urhobo community. Okri spent his early years in London where his father had been studying law. He

received recognition as a writer with the publication of his first novel *Flowers and Shadows* at the age of 21. In an interview with Alastair Niven, Chinua Achebe acknowledges the achievements of such younger Nigerian writers as Festus Iyayi, Adewale Maja Pearce, Niyi Osundare, and Bode Sowandi[5]. Among his successors, Achebe sees Okri as a major writer (Niven 277). Niven says that one particular aspect where Okri differs markedly from his senior counterparts is in his vision about the future of Africa. In the works of Achebe, Ngugi, Armah, Soyinka, and Ousmane the hope for a better society lies in political action, individual leadership or mass uprising against a corrupt government. But in Okri, the solution lies, as Alastair Niven says, in "self-examination" (Niven 281). Okri states that there has been "too much attribution of power to the effect of colonialism on our consciousness…true invasion takes place not when a society has been taken up by another society in terms of its infrastructure, but in terms of its mind, and its dreams and its myths, and its perception of reality….There are certain areas of the African consciousness which will remain inviolate" (qtd. in Wilkinson 86). It is found that in his novels like *TFR*, Okri explores a unique African way of perceiving reality by locating the narrative in the consciousness of his abiku protagonist, Azaro. Okri is not merely replacing one mode of narration with another but he seeks to recognise and celebrate a distinctive way of encountering and describing reality. He says of *TFR* that "this book is my modest effort to...alter the way in which we perceive what is valid and what is valuable" (qtd. in Wilkinson 87). Again, he says, "reality can have "a completely different face" when "turned slightly" another way (qtd.in Wright 327).

Okri has always rejected the categorisation of his work as magical realism, claiming that this categorisation is the result of laziness on the part of critics and likening this categorisation to the observation that "a horse ... has four legs and a tail. That doesn't describe it[6]. He has, instead, described his fiction as obeying a kind of "dream logic," and stated that his fiction is often preoccupied with the "philosophical conundrum ... what is reality?" He insists that:

> I grew up in a tradition where there are simply more dimensions to reality: **legends and myths and ancestors and spirits and death**…Which brings the question: what is reality? Everyone's reality is different. For different perceptions of reality we need a different language. We like to think that the world is rational and precise and exactly how we see it, but something erupts in our reality which makes us sense that

> there's more to the fabric of life. **I'm fascinated by the mysterious element that runs through our lives.** Everyone is looking out of the world through their emotion and history. Nobody has an absolute reality (Sethi 31; emphasis mine).

Okri's assertion that the West African reality is imbued with myths, legends, ancestors, spirits, and death is found to be at work in his novels. It is a feature that brings his work closer to that of Tutuola whose world is constituted by myths, legends, spirits, humans and death. In his short stories, Okri leans more to realism and is less fantastic than his novels, but these stories also depict Africans in communion with spirits, while his poetry and non-fiction have a more overt political tone. Obi Nwakanma says, "Nigeria's postcolonial nationality has been marked by disjunctions that continue to highlight its character and one of the fundamental sources of its evolution is to be found in its literature and significantly in the novel, which constitutes much of the narrative of the nation" (Nwakanma 1). As a writer of current generation, Okri's writings encompass the new attitudes, desires, values, and anxieties of postcolonial Nigeria and its postwar democratic transitions. His novels depict the crises and challenges of a new nation in a postcolonial society which manifest the sense of marginality and disempowerment experienced by men who were earlier revered in traditional societies. He explores the dispersal of tribal communities into the urban arena and the impact of urbanity in creating hybrid, displaced identities with deep implications for the transformation of cultural consciousness.

Tutuola and Okri do not belong to the group of writers who use the novel for anthropological and ethnographic placing of African cultures. A host of writers could be mentioned in this category including Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Onuara Nzekwu, John Munonye and Elechi Amadi among others. Neither do Tutuola and Okri belong to the group of polemical writers who employ the novel as a vehicle of anti-colonial protest and resistance such as T.M. Aluko, Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi wa Thiongo. Tutuola exploits the potential of the written narrative to transfer the cultural heritage of his 'oral society' and Okri uses the novel as a tool for self analysis by locating the written narrative within the realm of the mythical. Their novels belong to a category that is aptly captured in Abiola Irele's phrase as "an African variety of magic realism" (Irele 2009: 3). In tune with Irele, Ato Quayson also holds that "it is with Okri that we arrive at the most sophisticated expression of magical

realism in African literature today" (Quayson 2009: 172). While in Tutuola the blending of the real and the esoteric shows the workings of an African cosmology populated by deities, spirits, and ghosts of ancestors, in Okri it serves to critique the postcolonial situation and the functioning of a new administrative machinery.

Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri develop unconventional narrative stratagems that mark a departure from the tradition of social realism that has been dominating the mode of the narrative (of the novel) in Africa since it was used by Chinua Achebe. The narrative strategies in Tutuola and Okri present new aesthetic issues that require different criteria for critical evaluation. Their narrative concerns and techniques bring them closer to writers beyond the continent like Salman Rushdie and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, hailing respectively from India and Latin America. In their novels, both the writers employ the narrative as a vehicle for transmission of an African ethos and sensibility without resorting to the much accepted mode of describing reality by means of conventional realism.

1.5 A Review of Research

Over the years an enormous corpus of critical works has been built around the works of Tutuola and Okri. A particular distinction between the writers becomes conspicuous in the amount of critical attention that their literary works have received. On account of his pioneering contribution to the realm of the African novel in English, Tutuola was received into the literary sphere with the contradictory impulses of suspicion and admiration. Therefore, his works have generated more academic and critical reaction than his younger counterpart who entered into the literary scene decades later in 1990 with his magnum opus *TFR*.

One of the seminal works that brings the writings of Okri and Tutuola together is Ato Quayson's *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing: Orality and History in the works of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka and Ben Okri.* Quayson's work is particularly important for this study because it interrogates the significance of indigenous belief systems and their moral particularities with reference to the novels of both the writers. Quayson studies the original uses and recyclings of oral traditions. African writers' use of oral tradition, Quayson argues, are complex and varied, and any appreciation of African literature

is likely to be superficial without due regard to the individual sensibility which each writer brings to bear on his manipulation of indigenous resources. Examining deep philosophical issues thrown up by the advent of oral tradition in a modern context, he demonstrates how the old forms embedded within the oral medium are shaped in different ways by different hands. Owoeye Durojaiye Kehinde in *Intertextuality and the Novels of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri* brings the novels of the two writers under the theoretical lens of intertextuality. Kehinde's analysis is focused on Tutuola's *TPWD* and *MLBG* and Okri's *TFR* and *AG*. In a mood similar to that of Ato Quayson, Emmanuel Obiechina in his book *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel* asserts that the traditional material of folk tale, myth and legend is so intimately connected with the life of Africa that some knowledge of it is necessary for an intelligent understanding of certain areas of creative writing by Africans. Obiechina concentrates on the cultural and environmental background of the West African novel. He examines the general theme of traditional culture, the contact with Western culture and their expression in the West African novel. Paulin J. Hountondji's book *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* provides an important strand of thought that 'African philosophy' exists in the form of a body of literature which is a fusion of myth and reality. Brenda Cooper's book *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* focuses on three West African writers, Okri being one of them (the other two being Syl Cheney-Coker from Sierra Leone and Kojo Laing from Ghana). However, it leaves out Tutuola who is studied only to elucidate the style and techniques of the three key writers in her study. This thesis sees Tutuola as one of the forerunners of a literary style of which an acclaimed contemporary practitioner is Ben Okri. This style that has been variously designated as "African magical realism" by Brenda Cooper (Cooper 39), "African animist realism" and "African variety of magic realism" by Quayson (Quayson 1997a: 45) and Irele (Irele 2009: 3) respectively.

Charles Larson's essay "Time, Space and Description: The Tutuolan World" and Robert P. Armstrong's essay "The Narrative and Intensive Continuity: *The Palm Wine Drinkard*", both included in Bernth Lindfors edited *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, focus on different aspects of Tutuola's narrative in *TPWD*. These essays provide useful reading enabling one to see how Okri uses these narrative tropes from his literary ancestor and reworks them into his novels creating a dialogue and continuity between the two. "The

Interface of Myth and Realism in Okri's Settings" by Abiodun Adeniji and "Realms of Liminality: The Mythic Toponymy of Amos Tutuola's in *Bush of Ghosts*" by David Whittaker focus on the interweaving of the 'mythic' and the 'real' in their narratives showing how this fusion of myth and realism effects the numerous transformations that take place in the characters**.**

Although many critics have written on Amos Tutuola, their critiques have mainly been centred round the themes, the oral form and language use mostly in *TPWD*. Owoeye Durojaiye Kehinde observes that "literary minds stopped making criticisms on Tutuola's fiction since the early '70's probably due to the unchanging nature of his themes and styles" (Kehinde 11).

Gerald Moore points out "the intensively oral quality of Tutuola's writing", the lovely rhythms of his English, and the fact that he is always quick to "introduce us to the main plot at once" (Moore 1962: 39-40). Moore's position that Tutuola's novels deal with 'man' alone in his environment, whereas the novel as a genre deals with "man in society" could be debated upon. What Moore fails to realise and what Owoeye Durojaiye Kehinde is able to appreciate is that the experiences which Tutuola's heroes undergo are representative of some "communal and universal concepts" (Kehinde 12). Moore opines that Tutuola's works bear resemblance to Bunyan, Dante and Blake; but basically he draws upon Yoruba culture and the textual influences of Daniel Fagunwa[7]. One however has to agree to Moore's analysis that Tutuola's second book *MLBG* fails to sustain the effect on the readers like *TPWD*. Kehinde opines that the repetition of the folkloristic style could be responsible for the decline in interest in Tutuola (Kehinde 12). *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola* edited by Bernth Lindfors is a compilation of critical observations on Tutuola's literary oeuvre. In the essay "Debts and Assets", Lindfors compiles a substantial amount of critiques on him. He refers to critics like Harold Collins, Martin Tucker and John Ramsanran who point to the presence of folk elements in his novels. Collins calls him a 'folk novelist' (Lindfors 1975: 235) and Tucker states that he is more a "mythologist than a novelist" (Lindfors 1975: 227). This reiterates the clichéd Eurocentric binary between the oral and the written. In a similar vein with Moore, Lindfors also points out the influence of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* on Tutuola (Lindfors 1975: 242) vis-à-vis its motif of quest. Richard Priebe, in "Tutuola, the Riddler" opines that

"his works are as difficult to pin down as the monsters he writes about" and sees him as an unconscious literary artist (Priebe 216). E.N. Obiechina in "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition" argues that Tutuola's importance lies in blending fantasy with conventional realism (Obiechina 1980: 127). Taban Lo Liyong's article "Tutuola, son of Zinjanthropus", makes a case for Tutuola's "ungrammaticality" and argues that art is arbitrary. In "Portrait: A Life in the *Bush of Ghosts*" (included in the book edited by Lindfors), A Nigerian correspondent argues that Tutuola's books would lose their "imaginative texture" and "degenerate into just another collection of fables" if composed in grammatically correct English (A Nigerian Correspondent 27). Benedict Ibitokun, in keeping with this observation opines that if he wrote in "perfect English", his imaginative faculty would have left him (Ibitokun 31). His stance that "*The Palm-Wine Drinkard* entertained the most violent and conflicting reactions of all Nigerian writers makes it evident that Tutuola is one of the canonised Nigerian authors" (Ibitokun 28).

Babasola Johnson and Eric Robinson are bitterly critical of Tutuola's language, labelling it as the type of English that is intelligible to none—neither to the West Africans nor to the English. Eric Larrabee's "Palmwine Drinkard Searches for a Tapster" says that the style is "unschooled" but "oddly expressive" (Larrabee 6). Larrabee further claims that this odd style is inadequate to represent the ethos of a culture. Notwithstanding this, he acknowledges that the book is "imaginatively rich". Dylan Thomas' "Blithe Spirits" showers laurels on Tutuola and appreciates his ability to infuse features of modernity into a myth-oriented literary narrative. Adrian Roscoe in his book *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature* is in agreement with Moore when he claims that Tutuola's fiction "ruins the comfort of easy generalisation" as his works are "patently not novels" (Roscoe 1981: 98). His belief that Tutuola's writings are not didactic could be challenged on the ground that the innumerable tales expressly manifest a moral element, if not overtly didactic. Again Eustace Palmer in *The Growth of the African novel* points out the inconsistencies in his narratives by citing particular instances from *TPWD*, *MLBG*, *SSDJ* and *TBAH*. He focuses on certain episodes which he thinks lack psychological plausibility (Palmer 1979: 31). He further observes that *SSDJ* is the most unified of his narratives. However, Palmer gives Tutuola his due by assigning him his place in the world of African letters—as a writer representing the

"transition from an oral to a written literature" (Palmer 1979: 34) and as one who has brilliantly captured the nuances, the techniques and effects of the oral tale in writing.

Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike are vehement supporters of Tutuola's literary style, theme and technique. In their effort to locate the novel in Africa they insist that Afro-centric paradigms should be employed in attempting any critique of Tutuola's works especially written in the vein of *TPWD*. They display an acerbic stance towards any analysis that regards Tutuola's works as "ghost novels, romances, quest romance, fantasies, allegories, etc" (Chinweizu, Jemie, Mabubuike 18) and not real novels. They strongly argue that the Eurocentric conception of the novel be shunned and African criteria be applied in place of it. They maintain that the term "man in society" should be applied strictly to the European bourgeoisie novel to which it suits comfortingly and not be extended to any other version of the genre. They are highly critical of Charles Larson who points out metaphysical problems in Tutuola's *TPWD* (Chinweizu, Jemie, Mabubuike 99). In another interesting analysis made by Anjali Gera in *Three Great African Novelists* which includes Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, she shows how Tutuola succeeds in creating a unique vehicle out of the flexible form of the novel in order to transmit the poetry, logic, wisdom and philosophy of traditional society in Africa. This he achieves by "bringing his ethical and moral universe together with the native oral patterns and literary habits and retelling it in the English language" (Gera 128).

Fred Akporobaro says that the protagonist in *TPWD* is marked by "passion and moral force" (Akporobaro 103); he talks of the emotional and moral passivity of the child-hero in *MLBG*. He points out that in Tutuola, story-telling is, first of all, a strategy for social entertainment and then, a tool for moral edification. He also suggests that Tutuola's novels have elements of aesthetic suspense and that they preserve the dramatic quality of the folktale form (Akporobaro 109).

"West African Writing" by Patrick Williams included in the book *Writing and Africa* hails Okri as the second most successful novelist after Achebe in West Africa (Williams 44). Derek Wright in his essay "Whither Nigerian Fiction?" affirms that a survey of contemporary Nigerian fiction is incomplete without the "portentous and perplexing writing" of Ben Okri (Wright 326). Felicia Oka Moh's *Ben Okri: An Introduction to his Early Fiction* is a book

length work on Okri's early fiction including the short stories. Moh explores the tradition of satire in African oral and written literature prior to the coming of Okri to the literary scene and further goes on to analyse how his practice of satire coheres with the existing tradition, or differs from it. Abiodun Adeniji in "Utopianism and the Quest Motif in Ben Okri" argues that the writer's unusual characterisation in *TFR* is one of the avenues explored by him to "effectively work out and demonstrate his utopian quest for the New Man" (Adeniji 142). While Felicia Moh brings out the satiric vein in Okri's style, Adeniji's analysis shows that Okri's engagement with life transcends the satiric. As he says, it is an enduring search for a new man living in "New Jerusalem" (Adeniji 142). In the essay "Ben Okri's Spirit Child: Abiku Migration and Post-modernity", John Hawley analyses the postmodern and postcolonial concerns in *TFR*. Further, he discusses the socio-political and thematic concerns of his earlier works like *Flowers and Shadows, Laughter Beneath the Bridge*, *Stars of the New Curfew* with *The Famished Road* (Hawley 30). Hawley also makes a comparative study of *TFR* and Lewis Caroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and Camara Laye's *Radiance of the King*. In "Intertextuality and Postcolonial Literature in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*", Olatubosun Ogunsanwo speaks of Okri's non-affinity to the mode of conventional realism in analysing the African world. He points out that Okri goes for the "multiplicity of narrative dimensions and cultural interdiscursivity" which are the hallmarks of Tutuola's writings (Ogunsanwo 44). Quoting Okri, Ogunsanwo affirms that "everyone's reality is superstitious" (Ogunsanwo 41). In the essay "Recharting the Geography of the Genre: Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* as a Postcolonial Bildungsroman", Jose Santiago Fernandez Vazquez shows how Okri exploits the theme of childhood in most of his novels. He further argues that the protagonists are either children or young men "trying to make sense of the chaotic reality" that surrounds them (Fernandez Vazquez 85). In *Flowers and Shadows*, Jeffia is a 19 year old boy; in *The Landscapes Within* revised and published as *Dangerous Love*, the protagonist is Omovo, a young painter. Most of the short stories included in *Incidents at the Shrine* and *Stars of the New Curfew*, explore the reactions of young characters when confronted with the nightmarish reality of the Nigerian cities. *TFR*, *SE* and *IR* are narrated by Azaro, a young boy from an African ghetto in the period following independence of Nigeria. In *SB* the protagonist is a young prince whereas, *AG* tells the story of a young man who heads towards an enchanted island to find the secret of visibility. This argument of Jose

Santiago could be carried further and applied to Tutuola as well. In *TPWD*, *MLBG* and *SSDJ* the protagonists are respectively a young man, a child, and a young girl. But the nature of experience that the characters undergo in the Tutuolan world differs from that of Okri. This aspect is studied in Chapter 4 of the thesis. In the essay "Writing from Memory: The Diasporic Discourse of Abdulrazak Gurnah and Ben Okri", Maurice O'Connor attempts to show how Okri as a first generation diasporic and a postcolonial subject negotiates new spaces within an "alien culture where he has to play out those complexities that come about when occupying the metaphorical border space of identity" (O' Connor 1). To explicate his stance O'Connor focuses on the discourse of colour and maintains that integration into a society dominated by discourses of whiteness is problematised both by the local population (Europe in case of Okri) whose gaze discovers the underlying racist ideologies of colour, and by the memories of homeland where black, as a skin colour, is invisible. This is to a considerable extent exemplified in the dual consciousness of Azaro that operates within the border of two realms and thus problematises identity. In "Time and Vision in Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*" Mehdi Teimouri argues that 'time' as a major preoccupation of the novel explicitly and implicitly affects the major characters. Entwined with 'time' is the concept of 'vision'. Teimouri focuses on the transformations that the two major characters, that is, the spirit-child and his father undergo and demonstrates how these changes are functions of temporality.

Ato Quayson in "Protocols of Representation and the Problems of Constituting an African 'Gnosis': Achebe and Okri" maintains that Ben Okri's work throws up different challenges for the analysis of an African form of knowledge. Though he shares common ground with Chinua Achebe and other African writers who explore indigenous resources for the writing of novels, it is clear that the effects he tries to achieve are quite different. Again, "From Past to Present and Future: The Regenerative Spirit of the Abiku" by Mounira Soliman investigates the use of the African oral tradition to promote the socio-political agenda of African writers by focusing on the famous West African 'abiku' phenomenon and its representation in three literary texts by three Nigerian writers namely, J. P. Clark Bekederemo's poem "Abiku" (1965), Wole Soyinka's poem also entitled "Abiku" (1967) and Ben Okri's novel *TFR* (1991), maintains that going back to oral tradition by the African writers is not simply an act of anthropological retrieval of a culture that has been intentionally

confiscated by the colonizer, as Western criticism is fond of pointing out. On the contrary, it is more of a socio-political agenda. For even though the anthropological project may have been true at a very early stage of African literature (especially West African literature) at the hands of some writers like D. O. Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola, yet the intentions of such writers who have attempted to document African folk culture remain to a great extent debatable. He argues that such "anthropological projects had their own socio-political agenda since the historical documentation of folkloric material has indeed contributed to the process of building up the African collective memory, which the colonial power had tried earnestly to eradicate" (Soliman 150).

Bill Hemminger in "The Way of the Spirit" draws on Heidegger's concept of 'dasein' which presents a counter to the anthropocentrism of Western metaphysics (Hemminger 68) and argues that Okri's *TFR* and *SE* offer an 'African Way' of compassion and serenity in a chaotic social environment. Hemminger argues that Okri's 'African Way' shows people how to become attuned to the chorus of entities that surround them (Hemminger 80). He further says that this 'African Way', in line with Heidegger's 'dasein', contradicts much of what the West has come to value (Hemminger 81). Hemminger's stance is useful for this study as it helps to show that the Africans have a different way of dealing with reality which is different from the materialism of Europe.

Ogunfolabi in *Animist Consciousness in Ben Okri's The Famished Road and Songs of Enchantment* provides an interesting analysis of how both *TFR* and *SE* derive their respective plot-essences from an animist perspective. The book takes the reader to the origin of the animist theory, propounded by Edward Tylor (Ogunfolabi 1). In elaborating the animist issues in *TFR* and *SE*, Ogunfolabi argues that the novels are found to be teeming with characters, both human and non-human, with multiple forms, thereby emphasising the shift from social realism to the intangible realms of the supernatural (Ogunfolabi 10). This stance is in consonance with Ato Quayson's assertion, confirming Amos Tutuola's position as a foremost practitioner of 'animist realism'.

In "A Mask Dancing: Nigerian Novelists of the Eighties", Adewale Maja Pearce narrows Okri's ultra-hybridity to a matter of literary influence alone, and ends by dismissing *TFR* as an inferior imitation of Latin American 'magical realism' and a "tedious exercise in the fantastic for its own sake" (Maja-Pearce 33). On the other hand, the English critic Gerald

Moore in *Seven African Writers* makes a limiting comment on Tutuola's art saying that, "Tutuola's books are far more like a fascinating *cul-de-sac* than the beginning of anything directly useful to other writers. The *cul-de-sac* is full of wonders, but is nonetheless a dead end" (Moore 1962: 57). These comments of Maja Pearce on Okri and Gerald Moore on Tutuola are aptly contested by Donald J. Cosentino as he points out that far from being a cul-de-sac, Tutuola is the only writer of his generation whose work still seems fresh (Cosentino 17) and inspires new writers like "Okri who learned that style from Tutuola, not Marquez" (Cosentino 17). The influence of Tutuola's style on Okri is aptly summed up by Owoeye Durojaiye Kehinde's stance that "the presence of stories, myths, legends, etc, in the plot of Okri's fabulous works is a carryover from the flora and fauna of African culture which Amos Tutuola delights in" (Kehinde 62).

It is found that Ben Okri borrows Tutuola's elements in his story-telling and reworks and builds on the Tutuolan tradition to enrich the novel in Africa. What is distinctly perceived in Okri and not in Tutuola is that in spite of the shift between the terrestrial and the esoteric spaces, his critique of contemporary Nigerian socio-political reality is palpably evident. The strokes of satire in Okri, subtle and yet incisive, (also examined by Felicia Oka Moh) are absent in Tutuola.

The survey of the existing corpus of criticism shows that a substantial amount of scholarship has grown around the writings of Tutuola and Okri. But a majority of existing literature studies the writers individually/separately, although, critics like Derek Wright, Cosentino and Cooper acknowledge Tutuola as a major source wherefrom Okri's literary techniques are derived. Except for Ato Quayson's *Strategic Transformations* and Kehinde's *Intertextuality* there is a dearth of book-length works bringing the two writers together for a comparative study. Moreover, from the survey of literature above, it could be said that the critics have mostly focused their study of Tutuola and Okri on the writers' respective magnum opus, namely *TPWD* and *TFR*. This thesis brings the two writers together for a detailed comparative study by extending the analysis from their magnum opus to the later novels as mentioned in Section 1.1.

1.6 CHAPTER PLAN

This thesis is organised into six chapters including this **Introduction** (Chapter 1) and the **Conclusion** (Chapter 6). This chapter lays down the rationale of the study. It highlights the need for a comparative study of the works of Tutuola and Okri. Although separated by decades, Tutuola and Okri take recourse to native cultural resources in shaping their literary narratives. This chapter specifies the strategies of narrative construction in the selected works of the writers taken up for study and locates the position of Tutuola and Okri in the gamut of African writers of English expression. This chapter posits that although a lot of critical attention has been given to the two writers individually, there is a dearth of comparative study of their works.

Chapter 2 titled **"Narrative and the Novel: Oral-Written Continuum"** shows that the oral narratives of a culture/society plays a dynamic role in the construction of the literary narrative. This chapter draws on the theory of narrative as formulated by Robert Scholes, James Phelan & Robert Kellog in the book *The Nature of Narrative*. They insist on the importance of non-literary narratives in the study and analysis of literary narratives. Taking a cue from their theory, this chapter lays down the basic argument of this thesis that Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri appropriate the elements of an oral culture to construct the literary narrative in the selected novels. Seen from this perspective, it could be said the oral narratives of the indigenous societies are a dynamic entity that mould the literary. This chapter argues that the novel in the hands of Tutuola and Okri is a conflation of oral and literary elements. It also briefly studies the socio-cultural context of the coming of the novel in Africa and shows that in a postcolonial context, the written narrative with traits of the oral narrative is a tool to critique Western representations of indigenous reality.

Chapter 3 titled **"Folklore and the Novels of Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri"** draws on Richard M. Dorson's idea of folklore and Emmanuel Obiechina's theorisation of folk consciousness in the African social and literary context. This chapter shows that the incorporation of oral traditions of West Africa in the writings of Tutuola and Okri, has created a body of literature that expresses a West African consciousness and sensibility. Both the writers' use of folklore in the construction of the written narrative is intricate and varied. This chapter argues that instead of oppositional tendencies between the oral and the written as mutually exclusive modes of narrative, the selected novels posit both modes as mutually

sustaining and complementary to each other. 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 for self-expression, but is also employed (in the novels) to reflect the changes in the social and cultural scenario of the times to which the writers respectively belong.

Chapter 4 titled "**Journey as a Leitmotif"** studies the trope of 'journey' which functions as a motif in the selected novels to show the operation of a uniquely African ontological system against the centralising tendencies of Western thought and epistemology. This chapter draws upon Margaret Drewal's theorising of journey in *Yoruba Rituals* where she argues that the journey is a unifying symbol in Yoruba thought and rituals. While writers like Fielding and Defoe (pioneers of the English novel) have employed journey-plots in narrating the tales of their protagonists, it is seen that the nature, essence and function of journey in Tutuola and Okri differ fundamentally from their Western counterparts. The journey motif in this chapter is studied with reference to its constituent elements—character, time and space. The chapter examines how the motif of journey is contextualised within a particular 'time' and 'space' where the protagonists interact with the beings of the spirit world. It shows that journey as a leitmotif is used as a strategy of narrative construction in the selected novels. This leitmotif serves a specific function of structural organisation of narration by binding together the different episodes of the narratives. It also becomes a device to present a plethora of unique aspects of African life, culture, beliefs and world view.

Chapter 5 titled "**The Literary Grotesque: Features and Functions"** is a study of the elements of fantasy and exaggeration used as strategies for narrative construction in the novels of Tutuola and Okri. Drawing on Kayser's tenet of grotesque and Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque body, this chapter shows that the literary grotesque in these novels is not merely an ornamental device but is invested with functional value. While the grotesque 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 Western categorisms with centralising tendencies.

Chapter 6, that is, the **Conclusion** sums up the findings of the study and opens up path for future research on the area.

1.7 Summing Up

The points of contact and those of departure between these two Nigerian writers, separated by almost three decades, provide a ground for a comparative study. The present cannot stand without its foundation upon the past. As T.S. Eliot observes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent", the past and the present are not two mutually exclusive categories; the past is not external to the present, but the present draws its essence from the past (Eliot 37-44.) A study of the strategies of narrative construction with reference to the novels of these two writers leads to new insights that deepen and broaden perspectives. Ben Okri draws on the narrative techniques of his literary predecessor. He borrows elements from indigenous cultural resource as used by Tutuola in his storytelling and reworks and builds on the Tutuolan tradition to expand and extend the horizons of novel writing from the erstwhile colonies. This comparative study establishes that the two writers (writing in different times) move closer to their cultural base, while simultaneously creating new framework for a novelistic discourse.

NOTES

1. The term indigenous resource-base is borrowed from Ato Quayson and is used here in the same sense as used by him in *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writings.*
2. Gera says that the evaluation of many noteworthy African works has suffered greatly due to the indiscriminate application of traditional Western criteria. These works have either gone completely unappreciated or have been acclaimed for the wrong reasons. For example, discomfited by the narrative looseness and frequent time-shifts of Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, critics have placed it in the stream-of-consciousness technique and rejected it as a poor sample. Similarly, critics have compared the structure of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to that of Greek tragedy and lauded it as an example of a well constructed plot. This despite the fact that Achebe's plot is episodic and that large chunks of seemingly irrelevant sociological material interrupts the neat line of tragic conflict (Gera, p. 82).
3. In "Amos Tutuola: Debts and Assets" (included in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola*, pp. 224-255), Richard Pribe opines that "Amos Tutuola is most important as an innovator. He was one of the first African writers to contribute something entirely new to Western

literature. Although few of his innovations were conscious or calculated and many were borrowed from Fagunwa and Yoruba oral tradition, he deserves to be called the father of experimentation in Nigerian fiction in English" p. 255.

4. Hereafter the titles of the selected novels would be abbreviated as: *TPWD* for *The Palm Wine Drinkard, MLBG* for *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts, SSDJ* for *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle, TBAH* for *The Brave African Huntress, FWJ* for *Feather Woman of the Jungle, TFR* for *The Famished Road, SE* for *Songs of Enchantment, IR* for *Infinite Riches, AG* for *Astonishing the Gods* and *SB* for *Starbook.*
5. Festus Iyayi is a Nigerian writer known for his radical and sometimes tough stance on social and political issues. In 1988, he won the Commonwealth Prize for Literature for his book *Heroes*. Bode Sowande is a Nigerian writer and dramatist, known for the theatric aesthetic of his plays about humanism and social change. Sowande is a member of the so-called second generation of Nigerian playwrights, who favor a much more political tone in their writing and seek to promote an alliance or acquiescence to a change in the status quo and fate of the common man and farmers who constitute the majority of the Nigerian society. Adewale Maja-Pearce is a British-Nigerian writer, born in London of British and Yoruba parents. He has made the documentary essay his principal medium, in the belief that it is most suited to his investigations of the British and Nigerian cultures he has inherited. Niyi Osundare is a prolific poet, dramatist and literary critic. Osundare is renowned for his commitment to socially relevant art and artistic activism and has written several open letters to the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, whom Osundare has often publicly criticised. His famous works include *Songs from the Marketplace*, *Village Voices* among many others.
6. Okri in an interview with Stefaan Anrys on 26 August 2009.

7. Bernth Lindfors in his essay "Debts and Assets" in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola,* (p. 247-48) and Ato Quayson in *Strategic Transformations* (p. 44-45) also points out that Tutuola's works bear resemblance to that of Daniel Fagunwa. Quayson, Lindfors and Moore allude to one scene in particular which occurs in *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle*. They opine that Simbi's first meeting with the Satyr closely resembles Olowo-Aiye's meeting with Esu Kekere Ode or "the little devil of the ways" in *Igbo Olodumare*, Fagunwa's second novel. The descriptive details of both the devils bear striking resemblance to each other.

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