

THE INFLUENCE OF AFRICAN FOLKTALE IN WOLE SOYONKA'S *FOREST OF A THOUSAND DAEMONS* AND AMOS TUTUOLA'S *THE PALM WINE DRINKARD*

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Abstract

*In recent, times it has been noted that many Africans relegated their traditional folklore to the background with no hope of revival. However, some African writers have borrowed from their traditional oral literature in creating works of literature. This article corrects the initiative that folklores are unimportant and fetish practices that should be kept under the carpet. What is expected is to preserve these folklores as Wole Soyinka and Amos Tutuola have rightly done. In this article, there is a comparative analysis of the influence of African folklore in Wole Soyinka's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* as a means of heralding the true emotions and charm of African folklore. By adopting different forms that make up African folklore, these authors illuminate the spirit and beauty of African art and create within every reader a sense of Africanness.*

Keywords; Africans, Traditional Oral Literature, Folklores and Palm-wine Drinkard

Introduction

No literary writer can boast of composing a piece of work solely from his thoughts and ideas. Every writer is a member of a society and his society influences him consciously or unconsciously. In the society in which he finds himself, he relates with individuals, he hears about the deeds of fellow men, their thoughts and feelings, their likes and dislikes. Through writing, therefore, a literary writer expresses these cumulative feelings and his audience who reads his work becomes interested and feels at home with him.

In other words, the subject matter of literature is the source from which it draws its contents and society is the bond of fellowship between men through communication that the writer seeks, in a sense that, if literature expresses social sympathies, naturally, it is bound to exercise some positive influence on our minds and attitudes, simply put society reacts to literature in a living way in the same way in which it creates literature. The African society is one of such societies which writers- African and non-African- are ever indebted to for its immense contribution to their writings. Apart from its aesthetic nature and history, another source of writing is the culture and tradition of the African people. One of such captivating tradition is the superb evocation of oral tradition of Africans.

Oral tradition is cultural material and tradition transmitted orally from one generation to another. The messages are verbally transmitted in speech or song and may take the form, for example, of folktales, sayings, ballads, songs and charts. According to scholars, Renee Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod, oral traditions are "the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation. Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory"().

With the above situation in mind, it is the writers' intention to carry out a research on the works of two prominent African writers; Wole Soyinka's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, which is a translation of D.O.

Fagunwa's novel *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmale*, the most famous of all works of Yoruba Fiction, and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drunkard* with the aim to examine the influence of folklore in these works, as well as to buttress the point that since oral tradition has become a major source of African literature, it should be regarded with esteem rather than considered to be a fetish part of African Literature.

Criticisms

A classical work of African literature, *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, is the first novel to be written in Yoruba Language. First published in Nigeria in 1939, it is one of Nigeria's most revered and widely read works and its influence is profound most notably in the works of Amos Tutuola. Nobel Prize-winning author Wole Soyinka translated D.O. Fagunwa's masterwork while imprisoned during the Nigerian Civil War in the 1960's.

The novel is a successful depiction of the mythic imagination, the narrative unfolds a terrain where, just as in Yoruba cosmology, human, natural and supernatural, beings are compellingly and wonderfully alive at once. It is a world of warriors, sages, witchcraft and gnomes; magical trees, spirits, ghommids and big trolls. These are the encounters of Akara-Ogun, son of a brave warrior and a wicked witch-as he journeys into the forest, encountering and dealing with unforeseen human forces, engaging in diverse spiritual and moral relationships that determine his fate. Thematically, the novel also explores the difference between the Christian beliefs of Africa's colonizers and the continents traditional religions.

What must have drawn Soyinka to translate Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode ninu Igbo Irunmale* and many others could be said to be Fagunwa's total conviction in multiple existences with our physical world, which is as such an inspiration to some of the most brilliant fiction in Yoruba writing as it is a deeply felt urge to justify the ways of God to man.

Although Wole Soyinka is a Yoruba man, he also provides an essay in the special challenges of translating Fagunwa from the Yoruba into English along with a glossary of Yoruba and unfamiliar words. It can thus be said that no one would approach Fagunwa with the mind of translating him without ensuring that he sounds right in the English, and that takes quiet a lot.

What a lot of critics who slammed Soyinka over the first of Fagunwa's trilogy failed to realize was that, translating Fagunwa is like translating no other. It is partly a business of adapting, of appropriating multiple if not desperate attempts at encapsulating; a complete reactive voyage, which was why they complained that there was too much of the translator in the work, without recognizing how much we owe to Soyinka's pioneering effort. The creative and intellectual contribution of the translator allows a vivid interpretation without finishing the original author in any way. Soyinka (therefore) offers us a simple translation but a complex and truly respectful re-rendering. With this tender touch by Soyinka, Fagunwa's book comes alive in a thrilling new language.

The concept of folklore is an attempt to interpret man's activities, his personal longings, his purpose in life, his relation to the divinities who appeared to rule the cosmos. It is this definition that the novel characteristically takes in the form of loosely constructed picaresque tales containing folklore elements: spirits, monsters, gods, magic, witchcraft, stories, maxims, parables, proverbs and fables. Every event joins to a moral, and this moral tone is reinforced by the author's use of Christian concepts and of traditional and invented proverbs. Soyinka's Interpretation of imagery, humour, word play and rhetoric reveal the knowledge of classical Yoruba. The first impression we get from reading of *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is that we are faced with a world which is incomprehensible and unpredictable. The characters have strange shapes and behave in a way that we fail to understand. On a second thought, we are able to grasp certain morals from the novels by interpreting their symbolism. It is therefore necessary that the novel be interpreted at more than one level; the superficial level- they are stories of adventure where a hero sets out on journey to a forest or in quest of an object. At a deeper level, the eye is an allegory of life's journey with its attendant problems and difficulties. It is only through an understanding of this deeper level that we can attain the full meaning of the novel. Soyinka has thus far been able to relate his work to social reality as art draws from life.

An African creative writer who strives to avoid the cultural and traditional or socio-political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being irrelevant. Just as Egudu observes in *Igbo Traditional Verse* (1973) In traditional Igbo society, literature is always generally a purposeful affair, in the sense that it is not meant merely to satisfy some aesthetic cravings or to engender intellectual appeal. The purpose ranges from ritual through demonstration of accepted values, to simple moral or ethical education. In these dimensions of the purpose, emphasis is consistently placed on the relationship between man and man, which if it is healthy, becomes instrumental to the growth of a harmonious society (36).

Thus, whether a story has animal, historical or supernatural characters, we can learn one or two lessons from it. Herein lies the social relevance of art to the society. Familiar with Soyinka's works, especially *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, we recognize the indigenous Yoruba folklore in which the fine work is embedded. Soyinka has helped to redefine African Literature by emphasizing the folklore of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Some critics pointed to his knowledge of the Yoruba mind and language, his careful observation of the manners and mannerisms of his characters and his skill as a storyteller. Readers can only be grateful that he used his prison time to bring this important Yoruba novel into English language.

Tutuola's first and most famous novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was written in 1946. Dylan Thomas, a Welsh Poet, described the novel as "brief, thronged, grisly and bewitching" Although the book was praised in England and the United States, it faced severe criticism and caused controversy among many African intellectuals, particularly from Tutuola's native Nigeria.

One of the major reasons of this criticism was due to his "broken English" and primitive style, which supposedly promoted the Western idea of "African backwardness"; the depiction of a drunk and the promotion of the idea that Africans are superstitious raised many eyebrows.

The novel tells us of a young man whose love for palm wine drives him to go into the land of the dead to find his dead palm wine tapster. In his journey, he encounters many different creatures; he even marries and has a child which is a devilish child. Though at the end he finds his tapster, but he is unable to return to the land of the living with the "father of all gods" who could do everything in this world, so he gives him a gift of an all providing egg which feeds the whole of humanity but when defied produces a ton of whips.

For the fact that Amos Tutuola had written his novel in the style which salient nature was the ungrammatical English, some critics hold that his language is too idiosyncratic and aberrant while some like Gerald Moore like to see him as representative of an English dialect, comparable to the 'racy American vernacular'. Tutuola uses Yoruba grammar and structures, idioms, myths, proverbs, repetitive style, redundancy and expresses them in shaky English. The view of some critics on Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, as a derogatory form of African literature has lost its steam in the opinion of Taban Lo Liyong in *Critical Perspective on Amos Tutuola*.

Now, in all that he has done, Amos Tutuola is not sui generis. Is he ungrammatical? Yes. But James Joyce is more ungrammatical than Tutuola. Ezekiel Mphahlele has often said and written that African writers are doing violence to English. Violence? Has Joyce not done more violence to the English Language?

Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is written in seven dialects, he tells us. It is acknowledged a classic. We accept it; forget that it has no "grammar", and go ahead to learn his "grammar" and what he has got to tell us. Let Tutuola write "no grammar and the hyenas and jackals whine and growl... Art is arbitrary. Anybody can begin his own style. Having begun it arbitrarily; if he persists to produce in that particular mode, he can enlarge and elevate it to something permanent, to something other artists will come to learn and copy, to something the critics will catch up with and appreciate.

It can be said that critics were too interested in noting the grammatical malfunction in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to recognize the author's effort to combine the culture of two worlds in his novel. However, Chinua Achebe in his novel, *There Was a Country* points out that, "In a novel such as Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, you can see this ritually put to work in the written page...(57). In a story that is set in the distant past you suddenly see a telephone, a car, a bishop—all kinds of things that don't seem to tie in, but in fact, what you have is a whole life of the community, not just the community of humans but the community of ancestors, the animal world, of trees and so on. Everything plays a part"(57). With reference to the text, Tutuola has succeeded in achieving his goal by carefully exploring the sobering effects invading colonial powers have on indigenous populations, imposing 'civilization' through violence.

Tutuola criticizes this shift, the inevitable migration from his own cultural traditions toward modernity, while still retaining an optimism which allows him to incorporate the remaining fragments of his culture into that new, unknown world. The narrator's journey is in essence a nightmare caused by his tapster's death, sobering him into the reality of his cultural situation. He is, due to circumstances he cannot control, forced to embark on this journey. In this sense, Tutuola points at the short nature of existence and the inevitability of change—the need to adapt to altering circumstances.

Worthy of note is that many allegorical elements emerge from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* which depicts Tutuola's fusion of two distinct worlds in his novel. One of these is the "Red-Town" with its "Red-People", calling to mind the imperial British in their red coats, or even the initial Native American hospitality toward European explorers arriving on West Indian and North American shores. That is why O.R. Dathorne says in *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*:

Tutuola deserves to be considered seriously because his work represents an international attempt to African folklore with modern life in this way he is unique not only in Africa, where the sophisticated

African writer is incapable of this tenuous and yet controlled connection, but in Europe as well, where this kind of writing is impossible (66).

Amos Tutuola has thus far been able to relate his work through folklore to social reality as art draws from life. Like Chinua Achebe rightly said "...there is need to bring life back into art by bringing art to life, so that the two can hold a conversation". To this end Professor Wole Soyinka in *The American Scholar*, Vol 32 stated:

Of all his novels, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* remains his best and the least impeccable. This book, apart from the work of D.O Fagunwa, who writes in Yoruba, is the earliest instance of the new Nigerian writer gathering multifarious experience under, if you like, the two cultures, and exploiting them in one extravagant, confident whole. (360).

In spite of negative criticism thrown at Tutuola, there is no gain saying the fact that he has opened to us a whole new world of folklore narrative, not satisfying only Africans in the stories that they alone understand and relate to, but also allowing the Western world to gain insight into the folkloric aesthetics of the Yorubas. Although folklores are bound to be transformed, re-evaluated or even rejected as the society which produces it develops new physical and social conditions through history, this re-evaluation to suit the state of the contemporary society, without loss of the aesthetics of folklore is what Wole Soyinka and Amos Tutuola aim to achieve through their texts.

On this premise, Chinweizu et al in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* asserts that:

African oral literature is important to the enterprise of decolonizing African literature for the important reason that is an incontestable reservoir of the values, sensibilities, aesthetics and achievements of traditional African thought and imagination, outside the 'plastic arts': It serves as the ultimate foundation guidepost and point of departure for liberating African literature. It is the only root from which modern African literature must draw substance.

The African writer, thus, has the responsibility of reviving and sustaining the African culture through his writings.

Ojaide, in "Poetic Imagination" in *Black Africa* (1998) observes that:

In Africa's dramatist is not only a specifically gifted person but his gauge of society's condition is more perceptive than the man of common disposition. He sees through what appears to the rest of the society as opaque.

The African writer is therefore most tasking in that he is saddled with the responsibility of understanding the intricacies and complexities which his society is immersed in and he must be able to capture and mirror the society in which he finds himself.

These assertions confidently show that the African writer, and not only the dramatist, is an artisan who showcases and projects the image of his society. Wole Soyinka and Amos Tutuola are those artisans. They achieve this through the culmination of folklore in their novels. For Tutuola, a close examination of the inner structure of the way in which chains of disjointed episodes are knitted, set in sequence and woven together into a beautifully coherent design makes the work to be unique. The imagery, narrative style and content makes Tutuola sound exactly like a Yoruba raconteur. Though, Soyinka in his complexities in his words usage, since *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is not his original work but a translated work of Fagunwa, the words are simple and understandable. Even an average reader should read and understand. Soyinka's language can thus be described as fresh and inventive. He remains a craftsman in fusing, enriching, transforming and elevating the English and Yoruba languages into a unified medium of the celebration of human potential and the rich cultural heritage of Africa

Conclusively, *The Forest of a Thousand Demons* and *The PalmWine Drinkard* are marvelous stories; they are quite adventure oriented in language and atmosphere and are traditionally immersed in Yoruba folktales. Both, aiming to entertain and educate its audience as well as to emphasize equally the role of African tradition in contemporary society.

Critical Analysis of the Novels

The story in *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is based on the adventure of a hunter Akara-Ogun in a forest of daemons. In the Yoruba kingdom, it is very common for adult males, called 'Ode', to go for hunting and more often than not, they return to tell tales of their extra ordinary experiences during their escapades. It is this situation that Wole Soyinka wholly captured in the portrayal of the hunter, Akara-Ogun, in the novel.

The Forest of Thousand Demons is a narrative about Akara-Ogun's adventure in the gothic forest of Irunmale. The novel begins with a simple frame story. In the present day, in the novel, the hunter is an old man, but he

comes on a beautiful morning to tell his story to the narrator, asking him to “take up your pen and paper and write down the story which I will now tell.” What he relates is a wonderful tale of action and adventure.

The old man explains that he was one mighty hunter known as Akara-Ogun or compound-of-spells. He says at the outset that his father was like him, a hunter, and “also a great one for medicines and spells... But deep as he was in the art of the supernatural, he was no match for my mother, for she was a deep seasoned witch from the cauldrons of hell”. His father unworthily kills his mother who had transformed into an antelope. But soon after the death of the witch his father passed on.

Having narrated the story of his parents he begins his own. At the age of twenty-six, he said “I seized my gun one afternoon and headed for Irunmale, the forest of a thousand Daemons”. Akara-Ogun is not a saint. In the forest he engages in a war of words with small ghommid and ends up begging the ghommid to grant him a boon which it did. He encounters the six-eyed devil and they both had an unending victorious battle. He met Iranlowo the Helpmeet who promised never to desert him; Iwapele in the city of Filth; the time he spent as a mount for a ghommid; how he saved the life of the King in the city of ghommids, how he met Lamorin and even married a wife; and how this wife was taken to the bottomless bog by her brother.

He returns home the wealthiest man in his village considering all he acquired during his sojourn but is required to pick the gun again when he is summoned along with other hunters by the king to journey to Mount Langbodo to bring him an object of great importance. They journeyed through the city of birds, where the Ostrich is the king of all birds, before they arrived at the magnificent Mount Langbodo.

The king promised to bring to a fruitful conclusion the purpose of their journey, but first they must spend seven days with Iragbeje whose house had seven wings. Each day in Iragbeje's house he took them to a different wing, he told them stories and gave them lessons about life. But of the seven days, only three days are narrated by Akara-Ogun.

Finally, the king gives them their present and they set out from the Mount Langbodo to their hometown. But of all the hunters, only Imodoye, Olohun-Iyo and Akara-Ogun returned home. Their king, now aged welcomes them back home. Thus ending the story of his journey to Mount Langbodo.

What one finds in the novel is a captivating story filled with intrigue, but the stories are tied together rather loosely. Akara-Ogun often will separate stories in a manner as follows: “Since the day of my homecoming I put my gun aside and resolved never again to go hunting or embark on an arduous task...And so this story ends as I said before... (however) Tomorrow I will return and tell you all that is left to tell”. And then a new adventure begins. He also says “I cast aside all that went before and bring you something new, so let you all re-tune your ears” and what follows has no relation to the first at all. This mode of narrative is characteristic of what one finds in the moonlight story setting; where an elderly man or woman tells tales to little children under a tree or by the fireside. In these tales, the adventure of the hero transcends quickly from one to another. He moves from one place to another defeating the odds and conquering his enemies.

Forest of a Thousand Demons reads like a wonderfully written half-finished novel. In the narrative, some salient informations are not given. Being that Akara-Ogun is narrating his story to an audience, one might say that he was simply telling the interesting parts to his listeners perhaps. But what are even more disheartening are the parts he mentions and skips over during his stories. For example, after he and his party escape the kingdom of Birds, they arrived at the kingdom of animals where we again experienced all manner of things...when we departed from the kingdom of animals, we crossed the indigo river and crossed the river of blood, we touched the country of the twelve-armed men and passed the abode of the seven viragos who weep incessantly upon earth...the rest is silence”.

The reader is therefore left oblivious of what happened in the kingdom of the Animals, the River of Blood and the country of the twelve armed men. Why skip over something so fantastical? Akara-Ogun's statement “Ah my friends, narrating is the poor brother of witnessing”, may account for these missing details, but it does nothing to quench the desire of the reader who already is aching for more interesting details of the adventure. Another perspective to the explanation of the incomplete stories is that being that the novel was originally written for a contest, certain external factors may have contributed to the missing information. Perhaps the author only had a certain amount of paper or pages, so he had to leave some stories out. It certainly seems this way at the end, where the master of a mansion of seven rooms, Iragbeje, tells Akara-Ogun and his band that he has seven lessons to teach them over the course of seven days, spending each day in a different room. First, we read about day one in the first room. Then we read about day two in the second room. What happened from day three through day six is entirely omitted. Another idea is that Fagunwa did not have much time to write, thereby not giving much to Soyinka to translate into English.

Forest of a Thousand Daemons is not only the first of Fagunwa's novel to be translated from the Yoruba into English but also a pioneer in a new art form. Though in the tradition of novels, that is to say, on the common grounds of a long narrative, the formal organization of the novel is in a class of its own. The internal

structure is that of storytelling: a conversation between the narrator, the recorder of the tales and other members of audience. It is a perfect situation of the traditional raconteur who relates stories, moving from one story to another as they arise in the mind.

One source of pleasure in the novel is the author's evident delight in the use of words. As Isidore Okpewho rightly observes in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*;

When African writers and scholars started doing their own translations, they saw it as their primary duty to dress African oral literature in an European language in such a way as to bring out the poetic quality, the charm, of the original.

This original quality is what Soyinka sustained when he retains certain words and expressions in the novel. Instead of saying "Divination" he retains the name 'Ifa'; instead of 'blouse' he maintains 'Buba' and 'Eko' is used in place of 'Corn meal'. In his translator's note, he states that "The essential of Fagunwa, as with all truly valid literature, survives the inhibitions of strange tongues and bashful idioms, himself persuade us"

The Yoruba expression in the statement means 'Good drumming requires no advertisement'. Part of the credibility of the novel thus goes to Soyinka's intense and skillful level in the exploitation of African oral literary tradition.

The Influence of Folklore in *Forest a Thousand Daemons*

As at the time the novel was written, writing in Nigeria was slight and had not gained prominence. The novel, being a response to a writing contest rose to become one of Africa's first novels.

African writers as well as writers in the Western world have at all times employed materials from folklore and these have sophisticated their writings. When Soyinka translated *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* into English; it not only gained a wider audience but also gained recognition as a new art form and possibly the best rounded single work of African folklore. Like the African raconteur, the novel through Akara-Ogun, seeks to illuminate the African culture which is slowly fading away in contemporary Africa. When one reads *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, what he finds is an interesting heroic story of adventure, however if apt attention is not given, one may not understand that it is the preservation of Africa's heritage that is the writer's paramount aim.

In the beginning of the novel, Akara-Ogun says:

I am concerned about the future and there is this fear that I may die unexpectedly and my story die with me. But if I pass it on to you now and you take it all down diligently, even when the day comes that I must meet my Maker, the world will not forget me.

Therefore, the author writes on matters that are of central importance to the posterity of African oral traditions. Which has so blatantly influenced his work as such we are going to identify all the forms of folklore employed by Soyinka in the novel that constitutes into traditionalism; they are-

- i. Proverbs
- ii. Myths
- iii. Superstitions
- iv. Magic
- v. Tales
- vi. Invocations and Incantations

Soyinka uses these forms mentioned above as oral techniques to bring out the authentic Africanness in the novel. The use of these forms makes the work outstanding and it poses to show what colour, charm and aesthetic the rich fertile legacy of folklore adds to literature. These forms are hereby explained in details below.

Proverbs

African oral narrative will be incomplete without the use of proverbs. Proverbs thus help to bring out the richness and grandeur of orality and cultural heritage. Abiola Irele, in discussing orality, literacy and African literature says:

When Achebe writes adapting an Igbo proverb into English, that proverbs are "The palm oil with which words are eaten", he is drawing attention to the central position that the form occupies in African speech. He is also indicating the relish in words that has been cultivated in nearly every African society as a matter of cultural conditioning, sensitivity to language, that orality encourages, and the aesthetic function of the proverb which this cultural factor promotes(80).

Proverbs are a compaction of experiences and a whole lot of thoughts are compressed in it. Wole Soyinka thus translates a number of Yoruba proverbs and beautifies the novel with them. Some of them are quoted below:

"When our masquerade dances well, our heads swell and do a spin";(1) "The goods which he truly understands are what a trader sells" (36); "He who must do what no one has done before him will experience what no man has experienced before" .

More examples of proverbs are found in pages 42-43, 45, 52, 54, 55, 75, 116 and 136. The use of proverbs in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* gains its source from the Yoruba culture, yet, they possess a sense of Africanness and this arouses delight in readers' especially African readers. "It is this awareness in the intellectual value of the proverb that is summed up in the Yoruba meta proverb: Owe L'esinoro; tioraba some, owe l'afinwa'. This means that, "Proverbs are the horses of thought; when thoughts get lost, we send proverbs to find them".

People have recently termed 'bush babies'-that carry about with them a mat, and if a man finds this creature and succeeds to get this mat he will become very wealthy. It is this creature which Akara-Ogun meets on his first sojourn in the Forest of Irunmale. He said:

... a singular being appeared, hardly taller than my waist. He had a small mat under his arm and wailed aloud...why do I not crave a boon from this creature? So I called him back, prostrated myself full length on the ground and begged him to grant me a boon".

In defining what a myth is, Ruth Finnegan has it that "Myths are prose narratives which in the society in which they are told are considered to be truthful account of what happened in the remote past".

This leads us to the second mythological tale in the novel. In this tale, Iragbeje tells the hunters about the devilish child Ajantala and how he contributed to scattering animals that once inhabited to different habitats. The goat, the Elephant, the lion, the Hyena and the leopard had suffered terribly in the hands of Ajantala and when they gathered to discuss how to dismiss the tyrant, he left down from above and scattered them to the winds. The result was this:

And from that day it came about that goat fled to human habitation, Elephant to the home of the back race and to Indian, leopard and Hyena into the depths of the jungle, but Lion chose to live in the plains

Myths, thus offer to us a societal explanation of why things are as they are, its pedagogic view of life and nature.

Superstitions

The definition of superstition according to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia is the belief in supernatural causality-that one event leads to the cause of another without natural process linking the two events. It includes religion, omen, witchcraft, prophecies that contradict natural science.

In the novel, a number of superstitions are portrayed. First, the common idea that the mat of the wailing ghommid can make one wealthy is superstitious. And since Akara-Ogun could not get the mat from the creature, he begs it to grant him a born. Another episode of superstition is evident in Akara-Ogun's ritual offering of kolanut to his hunting gun. Even though the kolanuts have prophesied a bad omen, Akara-Ogun changes his fortune himself. He said "So when I had cast them many times without good augury, with my own hands I turned two up and faced two down " and hardly had he done, when he hit his left foot and he described it as an evil omen which "whenever I stumbled by this foot over any matter, that affair would not prosper...". While he stood pondering on what the stumbled foot could mean "...and out now past and its wings hit me in the face; a most evil omen was this". Akara-Ogun did not yield to the warnings given by these omens, thus he found himself as a stooge to a terrible creature.

Superstitions is a major component in the Yoruba traditional beliefs. It would have been impossible for Soyinka to produce the novel without this essential ingredient. Its inclusion adds beauty to the oral narrative of the raconteur.

Magic

Magic is another indispensable part of Yoruba culture. It is believed that supernatural beings called 'Aje' possess magical powers. These powers are used for protection, to manipulate events of life as well as to kill. In the beginning of the novel, we are told that Akara-Ogun's father was a great one for medicines and spells. He had a thousand powder gourd lets, eight hundred and his amulets numbered six hundred (9). His mother too was "a deep witch from the cauldrons of hell" and with magic and sorcery, she killed eleven members of her family.

Akara-Ogun uses magic in many instances in the novel; one of such was the way he escaped from the head of the Forest Lord. He said, "I remembered an appropriate spell, egbe, the verifier. Quickly, I invoked its powers and at once I found myself back in my own room, snatched thither by egbe" (16).

Again, when Akara-Ogun met Aroni, the one-legged ghommid in the forest of Irunmale, the creature gave him "a magic powder". And all he had to do whenever he needed game was to "sprinkle it on the spoor of game, and whatever animal on earth left the spoor would surely return at once and die on that very spot" (63).

Magic, thus contributes immensely to the success of the novel because it makes the novel lively and enjoyable.

TALES

The entire novel is a tale about Akara-Ogun in the Forest of Irunmale. Notwithstanding, the narrative sometimes shifts from the main story to other ones, usually moral tales. The first tale is told by Iwapele in the city of filth.

Once upon a time, the people of this city committed a most atrocious crime; a very evil deed. It was so evil that the sun did not shine for six entire months, nor did the moon emerged for three whole years; the rain fell no more and the corn did not come to fruit...".

This tale is a moral lesson and from a perspective, it can be said to be the wrath of God on unrepentant sinners at the end of time.

The other tales in the novel are narrated by Iragbeje on Mount Langbodo. He tells us about the troublesome child, Ajantala who caused so much chaos in his town that everyone commenced a rapid dialogue with his feet, calling on their god for rescue. Many other moral tales are in pages 117-121, 121-123, 124-130 and 131-136.

The purpose of African folktale is primarily to teach a lesson at the end of the story. Each tale of Iwapele and Iragbeje narrative has a moral lesson to imbibe, thus the novel preserves the purpose of African folktales and the way these tales punctuate the novel makes it interesting from start to finish.

Invocations and Incantations

The Yoruba culture is deeply rooted in rituals and other paranormal acts. One of their major beliefs is reincarnation and many other African traditions hold the belief that dead relatives can be called upon to help in difficult situations.

In the novel, Akara-Ogun invokes his dead mother and other spirits that is Helpmeet to come to his aid when he is in a life threatening situation. During the unending duel with Agbako, Akara-Ogun cried out: "Spirits of the woods! Pilgrims of the road!-hasten to my rescue!" When he has suffered in the hands of the fish-like creature who mounted him like a horse, the hunter cried to God:

'Ruler of skies, Owner of this day, this matter is much beyond me. Help me now, help me for I cannot do it by myself alone... I implore you rescue me, I cannot alone save myself, God Almighty, save me from my plight'.

Again in distress Akara-Ogun calls upon his mother, saying:

'Ah Mother! Mother! Mother! Why do you fail to answer me at this hour? Why do I detect no sound of your presence?... mother who wines well in heaven, Ah, you invaluable mother, wherever you are this day, do not fail to let my eyes behold you'.

Akara-Ogun also chants incantations to ward off evils or to appease his deities as these invocations and incantations are purposefully employed in the narrative to give the unique feeling of Africanness to the novel.

Wole Soyinka in the novel tries to maintain and present in an appreciable artistic form the typical African folkloric situations which are common to the people. Though as a result of colonization, Africans no longer realize the intrinsic values of their culture anymore, yet Soyinka has done his best to highlight the orature of his people in this novel. This is because he realized early enough that in spite of western education and civilization, the African heritage still possesses a charm, an originality and a kind of bliss that distinguishes it from other cultures. Thus, he lets his Yoruba tradition take precedence in his writings.

Analysis of Tutuola's Novel

Amos Tutuola's novel relates the travels of the self described "Palmwine drinkard". The protagonist has such a tremendous thirst for wine that his father employs "an expert palm-wine tapster" who taps over two hundred kegs of palm-wine per day. Unfortunately for the drunkard, one day his tapster falls from a palm tree and dies. No other tapster can satisfy his thirst for wine, so the drunkard seeks the wisdom of the elderly in his village, who "were saying that the people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they

were living in one place somewhere in this world." Believing that his tapster now resides in "Deads Town", the drunkard summons all his "native juju," or magic, and sets off hoping to find and re-employ the dead man.

His journey, often marked by nightmarish encounters with strange creatures, takes the form of episodic adventures that gradually move him further from home. In the most significant of his early exploits, the palm wine drunkard rescues a young woman, whom he will eventually marry, from a family of "Skulls" that has captured her and held her prisoners. Together, the couple moves into the bush country, crossing the borders of various kingdoms inhabited by odd creatures, such as "Wraith-Island", "Unreturnable Heaven's Town", and "Red Town", where they suffer numerous delays and hardships. When they finally reach "Deads' Town," ten years after the protagonist started his journey, the drinkard learns that his dead tapster cannot return home with him "because a dead man could not live with the living". Disappointed, but given a magical gift, the drinkard must make the journey back home with his wife to help his people, who suffered from famine during his absence.

The novel is a captivating folkloric rendition written by a man deeply rooted in his traditional African religion and it does not take much to notice the conspicuous orthography with which this story is rendered. The magical story of Amos Tutuola is narrated by a drinkard who speaks what many have described as "young English". His language is uncorrupted by Western Literary gimmicks, words are short and simple but the impact is fresh and poetic: "But in those days, there were many wild animals and every place was covered by thick bushes and forest; again towns and villages were not near each other as nowadays, and I was travelling from bushes to bushes and from forests to forests and sleeping inside it for many days and months...". Although his language had been attacked as imperfect English that gives a disparaging image of Nigeria, yet this same language contributes to the uniqueness of the narrative. It projects the mind of a semi-literate Nigerian deeply rooted in his African tradition with an unusual capacity to create the world where ancient Yoruba Folkloric and religious realities simultaneously exist with Western Christian and scientific realities.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is a novel with a rather classical structure. Unlike the normal division of a novel into chapters, Tutuola partitions his novel by giving subtitles within stories and to the next story he wishes to address. It is as if Tutuola wants to guide the reader through his characters' amazing adventures. But more than just leading the readers from story to story, the captions for the stories increase the reader's interest, making him want to know exactly what will happen next to the drinkard and his wife in their dangerous journey.

The next superstructure rests on a very loosely coordinated inner structure. The hero is involved in one adventure after another but these adventures are not well integrated. Tutuola appears to be improvising as he goes along. There is no orderly system or well developed artistic pattern in the chain of disjointed episodes in *The Palm Wine Drunkard*. The structure of Tutuola's art exemplifies the African storyteller's improvisation of technique and material. Tutuola is a storyteller cum novelist-that is, a conscious craftsman of the novel as a genre.

The Influence of Folklore in *The Palm-Wine Drunkard*

Every language has its own stock of images conveying a people's culture. In Africa, many writers have tried to mould their modern forms of writing so that they could express African ideas. For an effective rendering of the African spirit, these writers borrow the tools of African Folklores to project the oral literary heritage that is present in every African community.

In writing his novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Amos Tutuola uses many features borrowed from Yoruba folklore. As such we will identify these forms of folklore used by Tutuola in the novel that elevate it and project its Africanness; they are:

- i. Myths
- ii. Magic and spells
- iii. Ritual
- iv. Folktales

Tutuola compels us to appreciate the beauty of his literary work by using traditional folklore. These forms are hereby explained in details below.

Myths

The entire novel is based on the mythological belief that when a man dies-especially from unnatural causes-he does not go directly to his maker, but wanders on the earth for some time. It is this belief that makes the palm-wine drinkard go in search of his palm-wine tapster since the "...old people were saying that the whole

people who had died in this world, did not go to heaven directly, but they were living in one place somewhere in this world."

The drinkard's ultimate task is met with many hideous circumstances, yet the belief constantly motivates him to find the dead tapster, this developing for us a powerful adventurous story.

Another myth in the novel springs from the palm-wine drinkard's narration of how he contributed to making Death popular in the world.

In the bid to find his tapster, the palm-wine drunkard decides to do a "wonderful work" for an old man who promised to tell him where to find his tapster. This work was to bring Death from his home with the net. He succeeds in his quest and brings Death to the town. He says, "So that since the day that I had brought Death out from his house, he has no permanent place to dwell or stay, and we are hearing his name about in the world".

Being that Tutuola borrowed from his indigenous Yoruba beliefs, he modifies the story of how death came into the world and presents it instead as how Death became popular. This modification must have resulted from the fact that from the beginning of his story two deaths had already occurred-the deaths of the palm-wine drinkard's father and tapster. His palm-wine drinkard therefore could not bring death into the world again; instead he makes it popular in the world.

Again, the novel gives a mythological explanation of why certain things are the way they are. The personified Drum, Song and Dance perform so vigorously in a special occasion that dead men rose to witness and domestic as well as wild animals joined in the performance. Finally, what happened was that:

"Drum" was beating himself till he reached heaven before he knew that he was out of the world and since that day he could not come to the world again. Then "Song" sang until he entered into a large river unexpectedly and we could not see him anymore and "Dance" was dancing till she became a mountain.... All the deads rose up from the grave returned to the grave and since that day they could not rise up again, then all the rest of the creatures went back to the bush etc. but since that day they could not come to the town and dance with anybody..

By employing the myths of the Yoruba into his novel, Tutuola projects the traditional ideology of his people and for a while his reader is immersed into the waters of these sacred beliefs as he flips the pages of the novel.

Magic and Spells

The Palm-wine Drinkard is a folkloric magical and mystical novel. Magic is performed and supernatural beings and ghosts naturally interact with human beings. So through his arduous journey in the forests to the land of the dead, the palm wine drinkard uses magic and spells to wade off, fight and sometimes out smart dangerous creatures. The first time the drinkard uses magic, he transforms himself into a bird so as to get important information that will lead him to his dead tapster. He said, "...then I used one of my juju and at once I changed into a very big bird and flew back to the roof of the old man's house..."

Again, to escape from the skulls from whom he rescued the girl that would be his wife, he recounts, "...if I continued to run away like that, no doubt, they would catch me sooner, then I changed the lady to a kitten and put her inside my pocket and changed myself to a very small bird...". Spells are also sparsely used in the novel. A **spell** is a charm or incantation considered to evoke some magical effect. The devilish child of the palm-wine drinkard, ZURRJIR, cast spells on his parents when they tried to abandon what was left of him after he had been burned alive. The narrator said:

"Then he was telling my wife to take him along with us...but as we did not stop and take him with us, he then commanded that our eyes should be blinded at the same moment as he said it." Again, "when the saw that we did not come back and take him, he commanded again that we should stop breathing, truly speaking we could not breathe."

The author's inclusion of the Yoruba people's belief in the powers of magic and spells makes the novel exciting because the struggle to survive is depicted most truthfully with the palm-wine drunkard's combat with the supernatural.

Ritual

Ritual and sacrifices are indispensable part of the Yoruba cultural heritage which is the root of the author's work. Ritual is an act of offering something to a deity in propitiation or homage, especially the ritual slaughter of an animal or a person. The Yoruba are well known for performing sacrifices known as 'Ebo' which are placed in crossroads, (Oritameta) where the devil is believed to reside. This ritual practice is

expressed in the novel, in Red Town, where the palm-wine drinkard volunteers himself to be sacrificed to the red fish and red bird. He says:

I did not know that these Red-people would perform their native ceremony for me or anybody who volunteers his or her life to the two creatures before the very day that the two creatures would come out from their hole.

The preparation for the sacrifice to the beasts exemplifies the practice of the society from which the author borrowed and it brings the narrative close to home for the readers.

Folktale

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is a tale about a palm-wine drinkard in search of his dead tapster, but almost at the end of the narrative, the narrator sprinkles his own story with some folktales. The first story is a case that was brought to him in "Mixed town". The story went thus: there were two friends, one of these two friends was a money borrower, he had no other work than to borrow and he was feeding on any money that he was borrowing.

This tale is a moral lesson especially directed to gossips. It seeks to deter people from involving themselves in issues that do not concern them because it may lead to a destructive end.

The second tale is also a case in which the drunkard was asked to judge. A man with three wives stumbled over in a journey through the bush and he suddenly dies. The first wife decides to die with him, the second wife goes to find a Wizard to bring them back to life and the third wife guards their corpse against wild animals. The Wizard does come and returns the man and his wife to life but in return for his services he demands to take one of the wives for his own.

The palm-wine drinkard adjourns both cases for a year, and he also gives room for his readers to give their own judgments.

The last tale in the novel tells us of the rift between "Land and Heaven (who) were tight friends as they were once human beings". This entails relationship over who takes a hunted mouse that leads to famine because "when Heaven reached the heaven, he stopped rain falling to the earth even he did not send due to the earth at all, and everything dried away on earth,...so both living creatures and non-livings began to die away".

These tales thus teach readers some morality and projects also the riches and diversity of the African oral tradition.

Amos Tutuola may have just been writing this novel *The Palmwine Drinkard* for pleasure but he did well to inculcate within his story the essential ingredients necessary for the posterity of African oral tradition. The entire story revolving around Yoruba mythology on death and the afterlife is not one that will fade from the memories of its readers especially European readers who contributed to defacing the rich African culture.

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

On the whole, Wole Soyinka's *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* have shown the extent African folklore has influenced their novels. We can then say that these authors have made tremendous achievements in adopting African oral literature in their works. This achievement is significant since these authors do more than telling us stories, but preserve African orature for the new generation who has almost lost touch with their indigenous practices since the advent of civilization and the ever improving scientific innovations that detach them from their indigenous traditional society.

In studying *Forest of a Thousand Demons* and *The Palmwine Drunkard*, we find a number of parallels that exist in the storyline of both novels: the troublesome child Ajantala in *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is presented to us by Tutuola as ZURRJR in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Also, Akara-Ogun's guardian spirit Iranlowo (Helpmeet) cares for the hunter throughout his journey, just the same way Faithful Mother in the White House cares for the palm-wine drinkard and his wife. And at one time, both hunters are abducted by a big creature and put in a bag, and they are also buried to the neck but the rainfall softens the ground, making their escape easy. The point here is that these similarities show the unity that exists in diverse African tradition. There is coherence in the indigenous practice and beliefs of the African people. That is why in spite of political emancipation, it is only the cultural values of the people that can inspire them with a sense of national pride and identity.

The novels on their own are a medium of educating readers on the intrinsic values of the African culture. For literature is not merely for pleasure but it should be able to interpret the soul of the society of its origin and it should be in the service of men and the society from which it originates. In this regard, Wole Soyinka and Amos Tutuola have indeed used their novels to project and enlighten their readers on the richness and impeccability of the African culture, especially the Yoruba culture.

Finally, Wole Soyinka and Amos Tutuola have been able to use effectively the forms of African folklore in their novels. These folkloric components have enriched their novels. The authors have employed these forms as a medium to encourage and inspire Africans, especially the new generation who have turned away from their roots and allowed the African tradition to be relegated to the background, asking them to return to their roots and forfeit the Western ways.

It is hoped that this work will motivate people to do more research on African oral literature and take to the writings of African orature for its posterity with the aim of projecting the values, norms and cultures which have been hidden for years.

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