

Twenty-five Years of Amos Tutuola

EUSTACE PALMER, *University of Sierra Leone*

It is now twenty-five years since Amos Tutuola made his explosive debut on the world's literary scene with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952). He was the first West African writer to be published by a major British publishing house and to be extensively reviewed and acclaimed by the Western world. It is now common knowledge in literary circles that the tone of the Western readers' response was set by Dylan Thomas's wildly enthusiastic review in *The Observer*; he saw the work as a brief, thronged, grisly, bewitching, tall and devilish story, "in which nothing is too prodigious or too trivial to put down."¹ Following in the wake of Dylan Thomas the reactions of Western critics like Gerald Moore, Dr. G. Parrinder, and Harold Collins continued to be largely favorable, although the enthusiasm declined slightly with the publication of Tutuola's other works.

The first reaction of Nigerian and other Africans however, was almost uniformly hostile. They raised objection to two aspects of Tutuola's art: his use of the English language and his originality. On the whole these critics got to the heart of the Tutuola problem and their diagnosis was largely correct, although they were wrong in concluding that Tutuola's work should be dismissed on these grounds. The Western critics were equally misguided in praising Tutuola for the wrong reasons, although their general conclusion that Tutuola was a writer of genius was not far off the mark.

The Western critics generally claimed that *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was written in "West-African English" and that in the process Tutuola had injected new life and vigor into the moribund English language. This drew scorn from West Africans who realized that it was simply untrue to say that Tutuola's language is common in West Africa or acceptable in those circles. Similarly, the Western critics' enthusiasm over Tutuola's originality and fertile inventive imagination is likely to sound hollow in the ears of Africans who have heard similar tales told on countless occasions in the village square or round the family hearth. In their haste to reject the Western critics' view, however, the Africans blind themselves to the fact that Tutuola's claim to greatness lies not in the originality of his imagination, but in his skilful remodeling of the old tales.

The truth about Tutuola lies surely between these two extreme views. In order to establish his position in African literature and to understand him properly, it is essential to be absolutely clear about the genre in which he wrote. It has been too easily assumed, particularly in the Western world, that he wrote novels. Yet, no matter how flexible we might be in our definition of the novel or in the choice of criteria for its evaluation, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find a definition or a set of criteria which will enable us to describe the works of Tutuola as novels. To attempt to make a serious evaluation of Tutuola as a novelist is to apply to his works a body of assumptions to which they are not capable of rising and to do a grave disservice to his reputation.

¹Dylan Thomas, Rev. *The Observer*, 6th June 1952.

Tutuola is not a novelist but a brilliant teller of folktales. In order to answer the objections of West-African readers we have to concede that his language is not up to standard, and not just deliberately so; but we can then go on to suggest that within the genre of the folktale this deficiency does not matter; in fact, it is, in a sense, an asset. Similarly, we have to agree with these African readers that Tutuola is not strikingly original, but we can then go on to stress that whereas realism and originality are expected of the formal novel, the teller of folktales takes his subject matter and framework from the corpus of the people's traditional lore.

The most useful approach to Tutuola, then, is to regard him as working within the African oral tradition. The folktale is common property belonging to the people as a whole; it is an expression of their culture, their social circumstances and, at times, of their religious attitudes. The teller of the folktale knows that the framework of the tale he is about to tell is already known to the majority of his audience, but he also realizes that his skill as a teller depends on the inventiveness with which he modifies and adds to the basic framework of the tale. For within the basic framework the teller was allowed considerable room for maneuver. His audience, knowing the details of the tale already, would look forward, not to his accuracy, but to the extent and effectiveness of his improvisations and modifications, to the skill with which he makes use of facial expressions, gestures, pauses and rhetorical devices and creates suspense and excitement. Thus while using the inherited framework the brilliant teller of folktales transforms them into something uniquely his own.

Tutuola is precisely such an author. Taking his stories direct from his people's traditional lore, he uses his inexhaustible imagination and inventive power to embellish them, add to them or alter them, and generally to transform them into his own stories conveying his own message. It is obvious that most of the stories in his works come direct from the oral tradition. Several readers have identified many of them as belonging to their folk tradition; others bear a marked resemblance to folktales in various collections; and all of them manifest the characteristics of the oral tale even in their written form. This is seen, for instance, in the insistence on the moral at the end, involving either retribution, punishment, or the idea of "the tables turned." Thus the girl in the "complete gentleman" episode in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is punished for her disobedience when her handsome gallant turns out to be a skull and the Prince Killer who had hoped to contrive the execution of the Drinkard and his wife for a murder he had committed, is at the end justifiably killed himself.

Again, at the end of the entire story of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola, reverting to the third person omniscient, says: ". . . that was how the story of the Palm-Wine Drinkard and his dead palm-wine tapster went." It has been generally recognized that many folktales are concluded in this way. It is also to the oral tradition that we owe the apparently unnecessary repetitiveness at certain points in Tutuola's stories, for the storyteller is naturally anxious that his audience do not forget certain important points in the story and therefore feels obliged to recapitulate.

The world of Tutuola is the world of traditional lore where human beings mingle freely with beings from the spirit world. It is a world in which animals, vegetation, and spirits are frequently given human attributes while human beings are endowed with miraculous supernatural powers. It is a world of fantasy where the human being is often at the mercy of the incomprehensible forces of the universe. It can be said that the creation of the Tutuolan world is an attempt to come to terms with those hidden forces lurking in nature, which have always haunted the African imagination.

The Tutuola story normally takes the form of a quest from which the hero or heroine emerges stronger and wiser. By the very nature of his quest the human hero is forced into contact with these forces who regard his irruption into their midst with great hostility; he must therefore be destroyed at all costs. At the center of the Tutuolan world, then, is a man who is out of his element since he has journeyed from the human world, and who has to put up a desperate struggle for his very survival. Although man seems physically weaker than the forces of the spirit world he is not entirely helpless; he possesses tremendous resilience and courage and can always rely on his superb intelligence and the efficacy of his magical powers to see him through. The works of Tutuola are therefore a saga demonstrating man's capacity for struggling successfully with the dark unreclaimed forces of nature.

To demonstrate some of the ways in which Tutuola has transformed the tales derived from the oral tradition into something uniquely his own, I wish to discuss the story of the headstrong girl in the "complete gentleman" episode in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. In the Tutuola version of the story this extraordinarily beautiful girl originally rejects all offers of marriage. However, at the market, she sees a "complete gentleman" who is so beautiful that "if he had been an article or an animal for sale, he would be sold for at least £2000." The girl is instantly infatuated and makes advances to the gentleman who ignores her, but she persists and follows him at the end of the market day, although the gentleman urges her to return home to her parents. Eventually, they enter an "endless forest" where the gentleman begins to return parts of his body which he had apparently hired from the rightful owners. The girl who is now thoroughly alarmed, wishes naturally to return home, but this time the complete gentleman refuses to allow her. Subsequently, he returns his belly, ribs, and chest leaving only his head, arms, and neck; he thus has to move by leaping like a bullfrog. Within a short time this complete gentleman is reduced to a skull, but with extraordinary powers. His voice is so terrible that it could be heard two miles off, and since he can leap a mile to the second, it is quite impossible for the girl to escape. Soon they arrive at the complete gentleman's house which is a hole in the ground inhabited by other skulls.

One of the Drinkard's tasks is to rescue the girl. Having set out on his journey, he identifies the complete gentleman at the market, watches him go through the process of returning the hired parts of his body, and tracks him to the hole where he finds the girl. He finally succeeds in his rescue bid by changing himself into a bird and the girl into a kitten, and as a reward for his success he is allowed to marry the girl himself.

Several variants of this story are to be found in the traditional lore of numerous African countries. In a Yoruba version published in Ogunfufu's collection of legends, the complete gentleman is originally a head, not a skull, and he comes from a country entirely peopled by heads. He visits the human world because he longs to see it and, in order to do so, borrows (he does not hire) the parts of his body from humans. On arrival at the town it is actually he himself who is attracted to a group of girls dancing, and it is he who persuades one of them to marry him and return with him to his own country. When the bride eventually realizes that her husband is nothing but a head she is filled with horror and runs away to her home; and since the head now has neither body, arms, nor legs, he is unable to pursue her and thus loses her.² In the Sierra Leone version of the tale the gentleman sheds only his clothes, not the parts of his body.

²M. I. Ogunfufu, *Yoruba Legends* (London: Sheldon Press, 1950).

It should be obvious that Tutuola's adaptations and additions are considerable and they are generally of three kinds: there are the additions he makes to draw attention to the Drinkard's skill in rescuing the lady; there are those which deepen the moral dimension of the tale, and finally, those which increase the suspense and fascination that the audience of an oral tale would naturally expect. The fact that the skull hires his clothes and parts of his body instead of borrowing them, confers on him a certain dignity and independence; he is clearly a force for the Drinkard to reckon with. The girl does not escape because the legless, bodyless head is now rendered helpless; it is essential that the Drinkard should be the agent of rescue in order to call attention to his tremendous courage and resilience right from the start of the tale. So Tutuola does not merely strip the complete gentleman down to a mere skull or head, thus emphasizing the deceptiveness of appearances as the original tales does; he makes the skull a most formidable character and adds the paraphernalia of the other skulls and the entire episode of the Drinkard's ingenious and successful rescue bid. He wishes to stress that if the skull is a formidable character he meets an equally formidable opponent in the Drinkard. Tutuola also adds the detail of the girl's disobedience of her father, her wilful rejection of other suitors and her insistence on following the skull in spite of his warnings, in order to make the girl herself ultimately responsible for the disaster that almost overtakes her and thus to sharpen the moral point. Then he heightens the girl's fascination for the gentleman for the benefit of his audience and colors his description in such terms that the audience's interest is aroused.

One can almost hear the accents of the storyteller emphasizing and exaggerating the details of the gentleman's beauty; "If this gentleman went to the battlefield, surely, enemy would not kill him or capture him and if bombers saw him in a town which was to be bombed, they would not throw bombs on his presence, and if they did throw it, the bomb itself would not explode until this gentleman would leave that town, because of his beauty."³ It is in ways such as these that Tutuola cleverly adapts and transforms the inherited stories wielding them into the themes of his book.

It is an integral part of Tutuola's handling of the traditional that he quite unashamedly incorporates into it elements from the modern technological world, thus imparting new vitality and interest. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* for instance, he moves quite unselfconsciously from the world of the complete gentleman into the world of modern warfare where bombs are used. On their way to the Faithful Mother's domain the Drinkard and his wife are photographed by an unknown photographer and in the "Lost or Gain Valley," in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, the hero and his wife turn out to be wearing the most modern clothes—shirt, tie, socks, golden ring, costly wrist watch, golden beads, shoes, and costly handbag.⁴ The hero's cousin's capital looks like a modern city with medical facilities, modern schools, modern church and a police system, and, as every critic has remarked, the ghostess who finally shows the hero his way home has hands with television sets on them. This transfer of the modern and technological into the traditional is of course anachronistic. A small detail in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* where the hero informs us that his brother is a slave dealer and indulges in human sacrifice, suggests that the imaginative

³Amos Tutuola, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (London: Faber, 1961), p. 25. Subsequent references are to this edition, and will appear in the text after the abbreviated title *PWD*.

⁴Amos Tutuola, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (London: Faber, 1964), p. 132. Subsequent references are to this edition and will appear in the text after the abbreviated title *LBG*.

period of the tale and presumably of the others is during the last century at the latest. Perfectly equipped hospitals, schools, and an adequately staffed judicial system must therefore be anachronistic. But there are mercifully few instances when the anachronisms call attention to themselves.

Tutuola also transforms the traditional by exaggeration. Fantasy and exaggeration are hallmarks of his art. They are also, of course, the hallmarks of the folktale, though Tutuola's details are perhaps the most fantastic and exaggerated that will be found anywhere in the world of the folktale. Some of his creatures perform the most extraordinary feats. On leaving the greedy bush the Drinkard and his wife meet some monstrous birds, only two feet long, who are capable, nevertheless, of making fifty holes per second in the bodies of large animals and devouring them in two minutes; the white tree which is the entrance to the Faithful Mother's domain is one thousand and fifty feet tall and two hundred feet in diameter. In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* the hero, now turned into a cow, springs to a distance of ninety yards and the Flash-eyed Mother's body has millions of heads which when talking together sound like the striking of iron or church bells.

Although most of Tutuola's stories come from the oral tradition there is no doubt that many of them have been concocted by his own fertile imagination. Having been steeped in the wonders of traditional lore, Tutuola shows himself quite adept at inventing his own mythology and so coloring it that it looks even more fantastic than folklore. One thing of the sheer fantasy of the Spirit of Prey who kills an animal each time it closes its eyes, of the strange inhabitants of the "Unreturnable Heavens Town" who climb a ladder before leaning it against the tree and wash their domestic animals leaving themselves dirty. In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* there is the monstrous figure of the Flash-eyed Mother—so obviously the product of Tutuola's fantastic imagination—who alone fills the whole town like a vast hill:

She had a large mouth which could swallow an elephant uncut. The two fearful large eyes which were on the front of her head were always flashing or bringing out fire whenever she was opening them . . . The hair on her head was just as bush, all could weigh more than a ton if cut and put on a scale, each was thicker than a quarter of an inch and almost covered her head, except her face. All these hairs were giving shelter to her whenever it was raining and whenever the sun was scorching her as she was not walking to anywhere. Both her hands were used in stirring soup on the fire like spoons as she did not feel the pain of fire or heat, her fingernails were just like shovels and she had two very short feet under her body, she sat on them as a stool, these feet were as thick as a pillar. She never bathed at all. (*LBG*, pp. 98-99)

One must admit that some of the products of Tutuola's imagination are incredibly nauseating.

Although tribute must be paid to his inventiveness, the point must still be made that Tutuola's imagination is essentially a childlike one. His fantastic creatures appear at times like the bugbears conjured up by a child's imagination which is haunted or delighted by stories of the monstrous, the fantastic, or the incredible. Take the references to killing away, and the Big Bird's rantings in *The Brave African Huntress* look rather like two boys bragging about their physical prowess. The impression of simple-mindedness is reinforced by the style:

"I am a wonderful bad creature who is half human and half bird. I am so bad, bold, cruel and so brave that I am eating together with witches. I am one of the fears of the jungle of the Pigmies! I am a bad semi-bird who has long sharp thorns on both my wings! My beak was so long and sharp that I have pierced several people to death with it! I am quite sure that there is no another living creature or human being in this world who is so brave and cruel enough to challenge me in the night."⁵

It is now time to discuss Tutuola's language in some detail. While his prose style has proved objectionable to many African readers, Tutuola has had many stout defenders from the Western world. Ulli Beier talks about his innocent approach which allows him to distort the language to suit his own purposes.⁶ Harold Collins endorses this and then goes on to claim himself that "Tutuola's innocent manhandling of our language gives results that are extremely interesting for language study; they suggest the malleability of the language, the possibilities in the language for creative expansion, for freshness and for the assimilation of alien ideas."⁷ And Ronald Dathorne asserts that Tutuola's language is a sensible compromise between raw pidgin (which would be unintelligible to European readers) and standard English.⁸ All these views suggest that Tutuola is the accomplished linguistic craftsman who deliberately chooses to use this kind of language for perfectly laudable reasons. Nevertheless, we must make certain discriminations if our criticism is to be valuable, no matter how great our admiration for Tutuola may be.

It is now generally recognized that the West-African writer, forced to write in a language which is not his own and which is often inadequate to accommodate his insights, will bend it to suit his own purposes, but no less a writer than Chinua Achebe himself has warned that this kind of manipulation of the language could only be done from a position of strength by writers who are competent in its use, not from a position of weakness.⁹ It is idle to pretend that Tutuola deliberately distorts the language or that he consciously fashions a sensible compromise between raw pidgin and standard English to meet the predilections of his European readers. Tutuola does not "refuse to be merely correct"; he could not possibly be correct. He writes as he does because his education did not proceed beyond the elementary stage. We must make a distinction between his practice and that of say Okara, or Joyce who quite consciously put the English language through interesting hoops precisely because they are at home in it. It should be possible to admit that Tutuola breaks most of the rules of the language without necessarily denigrating the value of his art, for one can also surely point out that this kind of language is perfectly suitable for the genre in which he has chosen to write. Let us look at some examples of Tutuolan English in action. First, his treatment of clauses:

⁵Amos Tutuola, *The Brave African Huntress* (London: Faber, 1958), p. 38. All references are to this edition and will appear in the text after the abbreviated title *BAH*.

⁶Ulli Beier, ed., *Introduction to African Literature* (London: Longmans, 1967), pp. 186-87.

⁷Ronald Collins, *Amos Tutuola* (New York: Twayne Publications, 1969), pp. 102-3.

⁸See Ronald Dathorne in *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (London & Lagos: University of Lagos and Evans Brothers, 1971), p. 72.

⁹See Chinua Achebe, "The Role of The Writer in a New Nation," in *African Writers on African Writing*, ed. G. D. Killam (London: Heinemann, 1931), p. 12.

As I was waiting for him to bring the palm-wine, when I saw that he did not return in time, because he was not keeping me long like that before, then I called two of my friends to accompany me to the farm. (PWD p. 8)

But immediately he heard from me that I had brought Death and when he saw him on my head, he was greatly terrified and raised alarm that he thought nobody could go and bring Death from his house, then he told me to carry him (Death) back to his house at once, and he (old man) hastily went back to his room and started to close all his doors and windows, but before he could close two or three of his windows, I threw down Death before his door and at the same time that I threw him down, the net cut into pieces and Death found his way out. (PWD p. 15)

As we entered the bush, when we had travelled for about two miles inside the bush, then we began to notice that there were many trees without withered leaves, dried sticks and refuse on the ground of this bush as was usual in other bushes . . . (PWD p. 51)

The second extract in particular demonstrates Tutuola's habit of piling up clauses thus constructing extremely long and rather clumsy sentences. All the extracts show his inability to combine clauses together, properly subordinating them to a main clause. The first and third examples reveal an unnecessary reliance on temporal clauses when another main clause would have been more appropriate. In fact Tutuola reduces the use of main clauses to a minimum, putting almost everything into subordinate clauses whether appropriate or inappropriate; it is almost as though he wishes to keep the reader in a state of suspended animation until the main event.

Tutuola's sentence construction is another interesting aspect of his language. Harold Collins himself mentions the tautologies, syncopations, sentence fragments, and strange idioms, although he sees these as a virtue.¹⁰ Here are some examples:

As we were going on in this bush, we saw a pond and we branched there, then we started to drink the water from it, but as the water dried away at our presence and also as we were thirsty all the time, and there we saw that there was not a single living creature. (PWD p. 52)

Although she was a wonderful singer whose beautiful voice could wake deads and she was only the most beautiful girl in the village.¹¹

All these horns were faced its front accurately. (BAH 16)

The first two sentences are obviously incomplete; the second consists in fact of three subordinate clauses without a main clause. Tutuola often seems unaware that a sentence is not just a conglomeration of clauses, but needs a main clause to be complete. In the final example there is obscurity resulting from bad construction, possibly due to the confusion of active and passive (faced and were faced) and a wrong choice of words in "accurately." It is of course to Tutuola's grammar that many African readers object. Here are some examples:

¹⁰See Ronald Collins, *Amos Tutuola*, pp. 101-3.

¹¹Amos Tutuola, *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (London: Faber, 1955), p. 7. All references are to this edition and will appear in the text after the abbreviated title *Simbi*.

- (1) They saw me lied down (*PWD* 11);
- (2) We saw a male child came out;
- (3) But I lied down there awoke (*PWD* 14);
- (4) The next thing that which she was doing (*Simbi* 7);
- (5) To safe your life (*Simbi* 12);
- (6) He wore several oversize garments for her (*Simbi* 22);
- (7) But all her efforts were failed (*Simbi* 29);
- (8) But when I rose up my head and looked at the top of them . . . (*PWD* 52).

Most significantly, however, Tutuola is uncertain about the use of past tenses. We often find expressions like "I was seriously sat down" (*PWD* p. 8), "I saw the lady sat" (*PWD* p. 26), "and she was nearly to faint" (*Simbi* p. 8), "She did not happy" (*Simbi* p. 8), "As if she had already dead" (*Simbi* p. 17), and "she should had died" (*Simbi* p. 29).

There are hosts of examples in Tutuola's works of the wrong use of idioms, vocabulary, prepositions, and comparatives. He frequently punctuates badly, putting full stops where there should be commas and vice versa.

In defence of Tutuola, Afolayan in an extremely valuable essay suggests that Tutuola's English is Yoruba English representing the interaction between Yoruba deep grammar and English surface grammar.¹² When Tutuola says "the whole people" instead of "all the people" he is probably reflecting Yoruba usage of the one word in both contexts. However, this only offers an explanation rather than a justification for Tutuola's practice, and it still amounts to saying that Tutuola's control of the language is far from complete, for interference is quite often a sign of inadequate control. Afolayan is surely right when he says that a lot of the vigor and freshness that Gerald Moore and others see in Tutuola's English derives from his original Yoruba and the subsequent interplay between the two languages, and not so much from Tutuola's refusal to be merely correct.

Yet Tutuola shows himself quite capable of inventing his own words. The word "Drinkard" itself should not be hastily dismissed as bad English—a corruption of drunkard—but as a personal invention deriving from the realization that "drunkard" would not quite convey the sense of a man who is addicted to palm wine drinking, as opposed to being drunk. When Tutuola says "this old man was not a really man," he wants a word which is much stronger than "real" and which would suggest that the old man possesses much more than the essence of humanity.

Tutuola's English, then, is demonstrably poor; this is partly due to his ignorance of the complicated rules of English syntax and partly to interference from Yoruba, but it would be a serious mistake to deprecate this as a weakness in his art or to use it as an excuse for dismissing his work completely. It is the language of the speaking voice, telling a tale in a particular situation, exaggerating, elaborating, repeating, explaining, and inevitably making numerous errors; but all these add to the vigor and color of the tale. We make the same allowances for him that we would make for a normal speaker. Indeed, the errors only become immediately obvious in those works like *The Brave African Huntress* where Tutuola relies less on the resources of the oral tradition than on his own fantastic imagination.

¹²See A. Afolayan, "Language and Sources of Amos Tutuola," in *Perspectives on African Literature*, ed. Christopher Heywood (London: Heinemann, 1971), pp. 49-63.

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is indisputably Tutuola's most accomplished work. The achievement here lies in the skillful welding of several tales from the oral tradition into one extended folktale, subordinating all of them to his main theme. In this story Tutuola's hero sets out on a quest to find his dead palm wine tapster. The Drinkard is a lazy glutton addicted to palm wine, and just as modern doctors might compassionately prescribe drugs for drug addicts, so the Drinkard's father, on realizing that his son does nothing but drink palm wine from morning till night and from night till morning, engages an expert palm wine tapster for him and gives him a palm tree plantation with five hundred and sixty thousand palm trees. For the Drinkard, therefore, the death of his tapster means the loss of one on whom he is dependent for his very existence; and Tutuola skillfully sketches in the Drinkard's sense of loss and loneliness. His tapster is necessary both for his existence and his social relations; this is why it is essential that, like Eurydice, he must be brought back from the clutches of death. The Drinkard's quest is no less than an attempt to discover and explore the meaning of life and death, to see whether death could be baffled, whether the distinctions could be blurred and the dead reclaimed for the world of ordinary humanity. This is why the binding of Death is such an important part of the Drinkard's quest.

The appearance in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* of figures apparently taken from international mythology might superficially suggest that Tutuola was well read in world mythological lore. To make this assumption, however, would amount to a terrible mistake. From what we know of his level of education it is highly unlikely that Tutuola was able to read so widely in world mythology. The point is that these figures have permeated the mythologies of several peoples and Tutuola could have become acquainted with them by simply immersing himself in his own Yoruba mythology. In any case, the researches of Northrop Frye and others have demonstrated that there are certain archetypal patterns and figures common to various folklores.

After the spectacular success of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* Tutuola's work shows a distinct falling off in power. In the other works the pace of the narrative visibly slackens, the language is much less captivating, and the reader's imagination less enthralled; little attempt is made to fuse the various episodes to suit the purpose of a single overriding theme.

One of the most striking aspects of his art is his insistence on details. He shows a particular concern for exact details of measurement; he quotes the exact sums involved in certain transactions, the exact time involved in doing certain things, and the exact distances to be traversed in getting to certain places. Thus the Drinkard and his wife enter the "Greedy bush" at half-past one in the morning precisely; and they live with the Faithful Mother for a year and two weeks.

There is a certain element of wish fulfillment in Tutuola's works, particularly in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. It is very much like a child's yearning after what is basically unattainable in real life, but could be realized in the world of the imagination or of daydreaming. The tenth town of ghosts, where the hero meets his cousin, is every pioneer's dream of the model town he is going to build from scratch. It is the narrator's cousin who introduces Christianity to the town, builds a church, and starts the practice of holding synods. He establishes schools, hospitals, and a judiciary. This element of wish fulfillment reinforces one's impression that Tutuola's imagination has its child-like side.

If Tutuola's monsters repel us it is not so much that they are frightening and forbidding but because they are nauseating. Obiechina suggests that they are always built on a gigantic scale and imbued with supernatural power in the same way as Milton builds up Satan, the comparison is surely very tenuous.¹⁴ Where Satan is an awe-inspiring figure of great dignity and stature, Tutuola's monsters, though gigantic, are too grotesque and ridiculous to be awe-inspiring and dignified. In practice they turn out to be remarkably inefficient, stupid, and easy to defeat. Death turns out to be a very tame person whose cleverest ruse is to offer the Drinkard a bed of bones in the hope that when the latter is asleep he will come in and club him to death; and he allows himself to be caught in a net like any small animal. The Satyr in *Simbi* and Odara in *The Brave African Huntress* seem to be morons who are only capable of boasting and are comparatively easily defeated by the girls Simbi and Adebisi. It is partly in order to ensure the survival of his protagonists that Tutuola makes his monsters so inefficient and moronic, but in doing so he robs them of some of their appeal.

Grim though Tutuola's world is, it is often also humorous, which one doubts whether is always intentional. And it is usually the monsters who contribute to the humor by their grotesque behavior. The Satyr, for instance, tells Simbi and the other girls: "Come along my meat, I am ready to eat both of you now. Come along and don't waste my time" (*Simbi*, p. 73). In their preposterous conceited blustering the monsters are always comic. The Iembe bird in *The Brave African Huntress* is comic even as he revels in his wickedness, and the Gatekeeper in the same work is surely comic when he says: "All right, come and lay your head on this rock and let me cut it off. I do not need yourself or the rest part of your body but your head."

Tutuola's work has a religious dimension. In the midst of adventures involving pagan gods and human sacrifice there are suddenly references to the Christian God as in "God was so good," or "It was only the God almighty helped me to conquer this satyr." In *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* the ghosts attend church service, worship God, and have to wait for the judgement day. Of course in the African situation belief in the existence of spirits and monsters is not incompatible with belief in the Christian God. Tutuola is known to be devout Christian; it is his very Christian devotion that makes him so powerfully aware of the unseen forces lurking in the universe waiting to pounce on man.

Where then does Tutuola stand in the history of African literature? It is perhaps a disservice to consider him as a magnificent accident. His place in African letters is assured because he represents the transition from an oral to a written literature. He has put down his tales on paper, but he has captured, as effectively as anyone could, the nuances, the techniques, and the effects of the oral tale. Few other writers of fiction have followed his example, and it will be a very brave critic who will categorically say that his works lead in a straight line to the African novel. But as a writer of folktales his achievement is solid.

¹³See E. N. Obiechina, "Amos Tutuola and the Oral Tradition," *Presence Africaine*, 65 (1968), 96.