The Village Witch Doctor Study Guide

The Village Witch Doctor by Amos Tutuola

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Amos Tutuola's story "The Village Witch Doctor" was originally published as part of the 1967 novel *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* and then as the title story in his 1990 collection, *The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories*. Tutuola is known as the first African writer to gain international recognition. This story is one of many loosely based on Yoruba folktales of the oral tradition, which Tutuola heard as a child. Tutuola's non-standard form of written English, his first language being Yoruba, was controversial for its grammatical incorrectness and apparent lack of sophistication, what Dylan Thomas referred to in a controversial designation as "new English."

"The Village Witch Doctor" is about Aro, a man from a wealthy family, and his friend Osanyin, a witch doctor. After Aro asks Osanyin to help him bury his inherited fortune, the witch doctor goes back to dig up the fortune and buries it in his own shrine. As a result of this theft, which Aro never finds out was perpetrated by his friend the witch doctor, Aro dies in poverty. This "inherited poverty" is passed on to his son, Jaye, and, eventually, to his grandson, Ajaiyi. With each generation, the family becomes increasingly impoverished. In a state of abject poverty, Ajaiyi goes to the witch doctor for advice on how to escape his poverty. Osanyin advises him to place nine rams in nine sacks on his father's grave, as a trade for the return of his fortune by his dead father. The witch doctor then steals the first six rams from the grave and butchers them for food. Ajaiyi, however, tricks the witch doctor by hiding in one of the last three sacks and jumping out with a machete to demand the return of his family fortune.

This story includes themes of inheritance, wealth, and poverty, as captured by repeated reference to the family's "inherited poverty" and the witch doctor's deceitful insistence that if Ajaiyi follows his advice, he will become "money man!" The theme of deceit and cleverness are also prominent in the story, as the witch doctor first cleverly deceives three generations of men out of their family fortune, and then Ajaiyi cleverly deceives the witch doctor into returning the fortune to its rightful owners.

Author Biography

Amos Tutuola has been described by Bernth Lindfors as "one of the great eccentrics in African literature" who "appears to be the kind of man least likely to win an international reputation as an author." Tutuola was born in Abeokuta, Western Nigeria, in 1920. Ethnically of Yoruba descent, and raised speaking Yoruba, Tutuola wrote, in English, epic adventures and short stories loosely derived from Yoruba myths and folk narratives. Tutuola's family was Christian. His father, Charles, was a cocoa farmer, and his mother's name was Esther. It was not until after his death that his reading public learned his family name was not Tutuola but Odegbami, Tutuola being his father's first name. Throughout his childhood, Tutuola received a checkered education, totaling less than six years, often changing schools due to family and financial circumstances, and working intermittently on his father's farm. Nonetheless, he excelled in school, and several times skipped ahead a grade. Lindfors comments that "considering his cultural background, minimal education, and lack of literary sophistication, it is surprising that he began writing at all and even more astonishing that he chose to write in English rather than in Yoruba, his native tongue." During World War II, Tutuola was enlisted in the Royal Air Force, from 1943 to 1945. In 1947, Tutuola married Victoria Alake, but a lesser known fact is that he had a total of four wives and eleven children. He held several different types of jobs: He was trained as a coppersmith, was employed as a messenger in the Nigerian Government Labor Department, and worked for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. He began writing down stories traditionally told in the Yoruba oral tradition on pieces of scrap paper as an antidote to boredom at work, and his first manuscript was sent to a London publisher in handwritten form. Upon publication of his first novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), Tutuola won immediate acclaim in Britain and the United States. To the African literati, however, Tutuola, with his technically "bad" grammar and crudely written narrative style, was an embarrassment. Many African intellectuals felt that the Western world celebrated Tutuola because his writing catered to colonialist perceptions of Africa and Africans as primitive and unsophisticated. His second novel, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), was equally well-received in the West and criticized in Africa. However, as Western readers and critics began to tire of Tutuola's style with subsequent publications, African critics began to appreciate Tutuola as an important writer. By the time of his death, he had published nine novels and two short story collections, including the 1990 *The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories*. Tutuola died of diabetes and hypertension on June 8, 1997, in poverty and obscurity, having been unable to afford adequate medical attention for his ailments. Both African and Western literary communities were slow to publicly commemorate Tutuola upon his death, but eventually recognized him as the first internationally known African writer and an important contributor to African literature. Oyekan Owomoyela said that Tutuola "died as he had lived, among uncertainties, contradictions, and controversy."

Plot Summary

As the story opens, Aro is a middle-aged man from a rich family. When his father died, he "inherited a large sum of money, farms, and other valuable property." One night, Aro invites his friend Osanyin, the village witch doctor, to help him bury his fortune in two large water pots out in the bush, in order to protect it from theft. Osanyin returns to the spot one midnight a few months later and digs up Aro's fortune, then buries it "in front of his gods which were in the shrine." When Aro goes, a few months later, to retrieve some of the money, he finds that it is gone. He goes to Osanyin for help. Osanyin tells him to go home, and that he, Osanyin, will ask his gods to tell him who took the money. Without actually asking the gods, Osanyin then tells Aro that his gods told him it was Osanyin's dead father who had stolen the inherited money from him. Aro goes with Osanyin to the site where the money had been buried and curses whoever stole it. He swears, "'My money will be recovered in the near or far future from whomsoever has stolen it, by my son, or my son's son, or one of my generation.'" Although maintaining his secret of having stolen the fortune from his friend, Osanyin goes home "worriedly. . .as if it had been revealed to Aro that Osanyin was the person who stole the money." From that point, Aro "started to live in poverty." Finally, "Aro died of poverty and he left poverty for his son Jaye."

Jaye marries "a very wretched lady," and two years later they have a son, Ajaiyi. After his wife dies, and after "several years' hard work," Jaye "became so poor and weary that he could not go and work on the farm any more," and so his son works the farm to support himself and his father. When Ajaiyi turns thirty and wishes to marry, his father cannot afford the marriage, and so Ajaiyi pawns his labor for the money to marry. He marries "a beautiful lady." Several months later, Jaye "fell seriously ill and died within a few days." Upon his death, Jaye's son cannot afford to pay for his funeral, and so must pawn his labor in order to afford the funeral expenses.

Pawned out to two different pawnbrokers, Ajaiyi's entire day is devoted to working for others, and he has only a few hours in the evenings to work his own farm. As a result, "his inherited poverty became even more severe." When he goes to Osanyin, the village witch doctor, for advice, Osanyin advises him to place nine rams in nine sacks on top of his father's grave, in order to trade with his dead father in exchange for the family fortune. Ajaiyi pawns his labor a third time, but can still only afford to buy six rams. He and his wife decide that they will leave the six rams as a first installment to his dead father, and then buy the other three rams with the money which the dead father will supposedly give them in trade. Osanyin then sneaks out to the father's grave at night with his servants and takes the six rams which Ajaiyi has placed there as a first installment. Osanyin takes the rams home and butchers them for food.

When Ajaiyi and his wife learn that placing the six rams on the grave has not brought them wealth, Osanyin advises Ajaiyi to place the remaining three rams on his father's grave. Ajaiyi then hides himself with a machete in one of the three sacks, and, when Osanyin and his servants bring the sacks home, Ajaiyi jumps out of the third and

threatens Osanyin, behaving as if he believes Osanyin is his dead father and demanding the family fortune. Terrified, Osanyin eventually returns the fortune to Ajaiyi.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Many centuries ago, in a small village, live two middle-aged friends named Aro and Osanyin. Aro is from a rich family; Osanyin is the village witch doctor. Upon the death of Aro's father, Aro inherits a large sum of money, farms, and other valuable property. Out of fear that the money will be stolen by thieves, Aro decides to bury it in the bush. Aro asks Osanyin to accompany him to assist with the burial of the money. Osanyin agrees to help his good friend.

One night at midnight, Aro places all his money into two large water pots and sets out with Osanyin to bury it under the Iroko tree. After they dig two large holes and bury the money, they return to the village. Aro feels comfort in the knowledge that his fortune is safe from thieves. Unfortunately, Aro is unaware that Osanyin is considering stealing the money for himself. Not long afterward, Osanyin returns to the Iroko tree at midnight and unearths the two pots of money. He carries them back to his house and buries them in front of his shrine to the gods.

A few months later, Aro needs money badly and goes to the Iroko tree to dig up some of his buried treasure. To his dismay, he finds that all his money is gone. He is so distraught that he holds his head in both hands and bursts into tears. He then runs to his friend Osanyin's house to tell him that the money has been stolen. Osanyin pretends to be surprised by the news.

Osanyin tells Aro to return to his home. That night, Osanyin says, he will ask his gods who has stolen Aro's money. As soon as he finds out who has done such a deceitful thing, he will tell Aro. Then they will go together to inform the village elders, who will arrest the thief. Of course, Osanyin does not consult his gods at midnight. Instead, he goes directly to Aro's house and lies to him, telling him that, according to the gods, Aro's dead father stole the money back.

At first, Aro does not believe the witch doctor. Why would Aro's father take back the money he had left Aro? Eventually, unable to find another answer or believe that his good friend Osanyin could have stolen the money for himself, Aro begins to accept Osanyin's explanation. However, before Aro finally lets the matter rest, he and Osanyin return to the Iroko tree from which the money was stolen. In great anger, Aro raises his fists to the sky and curses the person who stole the money. Aro says, "My money will be recovered in the near or far future from whosoever has stolen it, by my son or my son's son, or one of my generations!" Reluctantly, his friend Osanyin reaffirms his friend's oath to the gods and asks that the gods assist in returning Aro's money.

From that day forward, Aro lives in poverty. As he grows older, his poverty worsens. Finally, Aro dies in poverty, and his son, Jaye, inherits only poverty from him. After struggling for years, Jaye marries, and his wife bears a beautiful baby boy, Ajaiyi. As

each day passes, the family grows poorer and poorer. Ajaiyi's mother suddenly dies as a result of their poverty. After a few more years of struggle, Jaye grows weaker and poorer, until one day he is no longer able to work on the family farm. This leaves Ajaiyi with the sole burden of working the farm from morning to night in order to feed his father and himself.

When Ajaiyi turns thirty, he notices that all his friends have married. He decides it is also time for him to marry, and so he approaches his father about the idea. His father informs him that the tradition of their tribe requires fathers to make marriage arrangements for their sons. However, since they live in such great poverty, Jaye is unable to raise the money needed to pay Ajaiyi's dowry. Ajaiyi weeps bitterly at his cruel fate.

After some thought, Ajaiyi decides to pawn himself to obtain the money needed for a dowry. The following day, he visits a wealthy pawnbroker, who gives him enough money to marry a beautiful woman. In return, Ajaiyi has to work on the pawnbroker's farm from seven until eleven o'clock each morning.

Several months after his son's marriage, Jaye falls ill and dies; Ajaiyi has no money for the funeral ceremony. Because it will bring great shame not to perform his father's funeral ceremony, Ajaiyi pawns himself to a second pawnbroker to cover his father's funeral expenses. As a result, Ajaiyi is forced to work from seven to eleven o'clock for the first pawnbroker and from noon until four o'clock for the second pawnbroker. Unfortunately, this leaves only a few hours left to work the family farm. As a result, Ajaiyi and his wife slip deeper and deeper into poverty.

One day, Ajaiyi's wife encourages Ajaiyi to visit the village witch doctor, Osanyin, and beg him for help. She says that Osanyin can ask the gods why Ajaiyi and his wife have been forced into such great poverty. The couple is hopeful that, through Osanyin, the gods will suggest a way to end their poverty. Convinced, Ajaiyi decides to consult Osanyin to see what the gods have to say.

Osanyin reports that if Ajaiyi wants the poverty to stop, he must buy nine rams and nine empty sacks. Then Ajaiyi must put one ram in each sack and place them on his father's grave at midnight. Once this is done, Ajaiyi is to tell Osanyin immediately. To be sure that his father has accepted the sacrifice, Ajaiyi is to return to the grave the following morning. If he finds only empty sacks, it means that his father has accepted the sacrifice, and good luck and fortune will be his to enjoy. If this is the case, Ajaiyi need only take the empty sacks home, and his dead father will fill them with money.

Ajaiyi tells his wife what Osanyin has said; however, Ajaiyi also tells her they do not have enough money to buy the nine rams. Ajaiyi's wife encourages him to go to a third pawnbroker and borrow the money for the rams and sacks. Reluctantly, Ajaiyi borrows two hundred naira from a third pawnbroker. Unfortunately, this only turns out to be enough to purchase six rams and six empty sacks. Since he is unable to buy all nine rams, Ajaiyi wishes to return the money to the pawnbroker, not wanting to take the chance of going deeper and deeper into debt. Instead, his wife tells him to buy the six rams and place them on his father's grave. She says that Ajaiyi can explain to his father

that this is only the first installment, and that he will receive the remaining three rams after he gives Ajaiyi the money.

Ajaiyi takes the six rams and sacks to his father's grave at midnight. As directed, he places one ram in each sack, then puts them all on top of his father's grave. Ajaiyi explains to his father that this is only the first installment; he promises to bring the remaining three rams once he is lifted out of poverty. Afterward, Ajaiyi walks to Osanyin's house to tell him that he has placed the rams on his father's grave. Osanyin praises Ajaiyi's efforts and tells the young man to go home. Ajaiyi will soon be known as a "money man," Osanyin says.

As soon as Ajaiyi leaves, Osanyin and his servants go to the grave and take the rams. They then return to Osanyin's home, where they slaughter and eat all six rams. Before daybreak, Osanyin has one of his servants return to the grave to drop off the empty sacks. When Ajaiyi arrives at his father's grave that morning, he finds the sacks. Joyfully, he takes them back to his house and places them in his room. He and his wife then wait for Ajaiyi's dead father to fill the sacks with money.

Ajaiyi and his wife wait many months; Jaye does not fill the empty sacks with money. The three pawnbrokers grow annoyed with Ajaiyi because he is not satisfying their demands. Life grows harsher for Ajaiyi and his wife. Ajaiyi's wife prompts him to again return to the village witch doctor to find out why they still live in poverty.

Osanyin tells Ajaiyi that he must bring the remaining three rams to his father's grave as a sacrifice. Only then will poverty end for the young couple. Horrified, Ajaiyi returns to his wife to relay the news. Growing angry, Ajaiyi tells his wife that he will visit his father's grave at midnight to confront him. He will demand to know why Jaye requires nine rams to end the poverty that he himself left to his son.

At midnight, Ajaiyi takes a long machete and three empty sacks to his father's grave. He fills the first two sacks with sand. He then goes to Osanyin's house to tell him that he has taken the three remaining rams to the grave site. However, instead of returning to his home, as Osanyin directs, Ajaiyi returns to his father's grave and craws into the third sack. Ajaiyi waits patiently to confront his father. Ajaiyi is shocked when, instead of hearing his father's ghost, he hears the familiar voices of the witch doctor and his servants as they carry the three sacks to Osanyin's house.

Osanyin and his servants began opening the sacks in anticipation of the feast they will soon enjoy. To their horror, they discover that the first two sacks are packed with sand. As they open the third, Ajaiyi leaps out, his machete in hand. Ajaiyi demands that Osanyin release him from his poverty that night or else be killed. Ajaiyi then threatens to cut off Osanyin's head unless he tells Ajaiyi where his grandfather Aro's money is hidden. Osanyin finally shows Ajaiyi where Aro's money is buried. Ajaiyi proceeds to dig up the two water pots of money that were stolen from his grandfather so long ago. Ajaiyi returns home, where he and his wife count the money. They find over four thousand naira in the two water pots, enough money to pay back the pawnbrokers and still lift the couple from poverty.

Analysis

Author Amos Tutuola, born in Nigeria, originally published "The Village Witch Doctor" in 1967. This short story, like many of Tutuola's other stories, is loosely based upon Yoruba folktales told to him as a boy. Tutuola's writing style is sometimes criticized for being grammatically incorrect. However, many readers and critics believe that this simply reflects the original tone and style of the oral storytelling tradition.

Yoruba folktales were passed orally from generation to generation. They were not only a common form of entertainment, but also served as tools for teaching moral, social, and religious instruction. Ideas of fairness, cleverness, and wickedness are central to Yoruba folktales. The stories display a cultural admiration for the quality of determination; however, they also recognize the fine line between determination and deviousness. Tutuola's "The Village Witch Doctor" possesses these familiar elements of Yoruba folktales.

Tutuola's short story also illustrates the classic moral message that "what goes around, comes around." Even though it may take time, the tale asserts, everyone eventually gets what they deserve. Osanyin, the village witch doctor and ostensible good friend of Aro, commits an evil deed. He steals his friend's money and forces Aro, Aro's wife, and their future descendants to live in great penury that continues for three generations. However, in time, Osanyin's evil is eventually punished; at the same time, Aro's, Jaye's and Osanyin's goodness, innocence, and determination are rewarded. At the end of the story, Ajaiyi finally succeeds in deceiving Osanyin into returning the money stolen from Aro so long before.

Inheritance, wealth, and poverty are also themes central to this short story. Aro inherits a large sum of money after his father's death. He is consumed by fear that thieves will steal his money and leave him in poverty. Ironically, Aro's worst nightmare is realized; however, it is not a thieving stranger or unknown criminal, but rather his supposed close friend, Osanyin, who steals the money. With Osanyin's crime, the theme of inherited poverty begins. The only inheritance that Aro is able to give to his son, Jaye, is one of poverty. Likewise, Jaye must pass this same poor legacy to his own son, Ajaiyi, upon his death.

Finally, just like characteristic Yoruba folk tales, "The Village Witch Doctor" includes familiar themes of deceit, cleverness, and special twists of fate. Osanyin, the witch doctor, is cleverly able to deceive three generations out of their rightful family fortunes. However, justice is served when Ajaiyi just as cleverly deceives Osanyin into returning it.

Characters

Ajaiyi

Ajaiyi is Jaye's son and Aro's grandson. When Jaye becomes too ill and weary to work his own farm, Ajaiyi must work the farm himself in order to support the two of them. When Ajaiyi reaches thirty years of age and wishes to marry, his father cannot afford the marriage, and so Ajaiyi pawns his labor for the money to marry. He marries "a beautiful lady," but when, several months later, his father dies, Ajaiyi again pawns his labor in order to pay for the funeral. Pawned out to two different pawnbrokers, Ajaiyi's entire day is devoted to working for others, and he has only a few hours in the evenings to work his own farm. As a result, "his inherited poverty became even more severe." When he goes to Osanyin, the village witch doctor, for advice, Osanyin advises him to place nine rams in nine sacks on top of his father's grave, in order to trade with his dead father in exchange for the family fortune. Ajaiyi pawns his labor a third time, but can still only afford to buy six rams. He and his wife decide that they will leave the six rams as a first installment to his dead father, and then buy the other three rams with the money which the dead father will supposedly give them in trade. When this does not work, Osanyin advises Ajaiyi to place the remaining three rams on his father's grave. Ajaiyi then hides himself with a machete in one of the three sacks, and, when Osanyin and his servants bring the sacks home, Ajaiyi jumps out of the third and threatens Osanyin, behaving as if he believes Osanyin is his dead father and demanding the family fortune. Terrified, Osanyin eventually returns the fortune to Ajaiyi.

Ajaiyi's Wife

Ajaiyi's wife is described as "a beautiful lady." Ajaiyi pawns his labor in order to afford to marry her. Once they are married, it is she who advises Ajaiyi to go to the village witch doctor for advice on how to end his inherited poverty. When they can only afford six of the nine rams Osanyin has advised them to place on the dead father's grave, it is she who suggests they buy six rams as a first installment to the dead father. When this does not work, it is Ajaiyi's wife who advises him to go again to the village witch doctor for advice. Ajaiyi carries out each of his wife's wishes only with reluctance.

Aro

Aro is the father of Jaye and the grandfather of Ajaiyi. As the story opens, Aro is a middle-aged man from a rich family. When his father died, he "inherited a large sum of money, farms, and other valuable property." One night, Aro invites his friend Osanyin, the village witch doctor, to help him bury his fortune in two large water pots out in the bush, in order to protect it from theft. When Aro goes, a few months later, to retrieve some of the money, he finds that it is gone. He goes to Osanyin for help. Osanyin tells him to go home, and that he, Osanyin, will ask his gods to tell him who took the money.

Osanyin then tells Aro that his gods had told him it was his dead father who had stolen the inherited money from him. Aro goes with Osanyin to the site where the money had been buried and curses whoever stole it. He swears that, "'My money will be recovered in the near or far future from whomsoever has stolen it, by my son, or my son's son, or one of my generation.'" From that point, Aro "started to live in poverty." Finally, "Aro died of poverty and he left poverty for his son Jaye." Nonetheless, Aro's curse of the person who stole his money, and his declaration that the money will be recovered, comes true in the end of the story when his grandson, Ajaiyi, recovers the fortune while terrifying Osanyin, who had stolen it from Aro years before.

Jaye

Jaye is the son of Aro and the father of Ajaiyi. When, after his inherited fortune is stolen, Aro dies of poverty, Jaye inherits his father's poverty. Jaye marries "a very wretched lady," and two years later they have a son, Ajaiyi. After his wife dies, and after "several years' hard work," Jaye "became so poor and weary that he could not go and work on the farm any more," and so his son works the farm to support himself and his father. Several months after his son is married, Jaye "fell seriously ill and died within a few days." Upon his death, Jaye's son cannot afford to pay for his funeral, and so must pawn his labor in order to afford the funeral expenses. Thematically, the business of the funeral further indicates the burden of "inherited poverty" which grows with the passing of each generation of this family.

Jaye's Wife

Jaye's wife is referred to as "a very wretched lady, of whom no one could tell how or from where she had come to the village." Two years later, she and Jaye have a son, Ajaiyi. The family grows "poorer and poorer," and "at last Ajaiyi's mother died suddenly in poverty."

Osanyin

Osanyin is the village witch doctor of the story's title. He "was well known throughout the village and also all other surrounding villages because of his profession." His friend, Aro, invites him one night to help bury his inherited fortune in two large water pots out in the bush under a tree. Osanyin returns to the spot one midnight a few months later and digs up Aro's fortune, then buries it "in front of his gods which were in the shrine." When Aro comes to Osanyin to report that his fortune has been stolen, the village witch doctor deceitfully tells his friend to go home while he asks his gods who took the money. Without asking the gods, Osanyin goes to Aro's home and tells him that the gods said his dead father had taken the money. Aro then goes to where the money had been buried and curses whoever stole it. Although maintaining his secret of having stolen the fortune from his friend, Osanyin goes home "worriedly. . .as if it had been revealed to Aro that Osanyin was the person who stole the money." When Aro's grandson, Ajaiyi,

comes to Osanyin years later for advice on how to end his "inherited poverty," Osanyin deceitfully advises him to place nine rams in nine sacks on his father's grave, as a trade for his family fortune. Osanyin then sneaks out to the father's grave at night with his servants and takes the six rams which Ajaiyi has placed there as a first install ment. Osanyin takes the rams home and butchers them for food. When Ajaiyi comes to Osanyin for further advice, the witch doctor tells him to place the remaining three rams on his father's grave. Ajaiyi, however, tricks the witch doctor by hiding himself in one of the sacks supposedly containing a ram. When Osanyin brings the three bags home with his servants, Ajaiyi jumps out of the third and threatens Osanyin with a machete until he gives him the family fortune.

Themes

Justice

This story contains the classic theme, or moral, that, in the end, everyone gets what he deserves. In other words, evil is punished and good is rewarded. Furthermore, suffering inflicted by one man upon another is vindicated in the end. The witch doctor, although he successfully deceives three generations of men out of their family fortune, is ultimately punished for his evil deeds. In the world of this story, it seems that fate is at work, to the extent that Osanyin, the witch doctor, becomes the agent of his own undoing. When Aro curses whoever has stolen his buried fortune, Osanyin is compelled to assert that the curse will come true in order to protect his secret. Osanyin is unsettled by the curse, and by having to echo the curse, because he has in effect been cursed, and cursed himself, as a result of this deception. All of Osanyin's lies come back to haunt him in the end. He deceives Ajaiyi, Aro's grandson, by claiming that the gods have told him his "inherited poverty" is due to his dead father having stolen his rightful inheritance from him. Osanyin tells Ajaiyi that he must place nine rams in nine sacks on his father's grave, as a trade for the return of the family fortune. Osanyin then sneaks out to the grave and takes the rams home to be butchered for his food. However, Ajaiyi ultimately tricks Osanyin into returning the fortune when he hides in one of the sacks with a machete and jumps out of the sack once Osanyin has brought it home. Ajaiyi punishes Osanyin for his deceit by terrifying him with the machete. It is Osanyin's lie which comes back to haunt him because Ajaiyi pretends that he believes Osanyin is in fact his dead father who has supposedly stolen the money from him. Thus, Ajaiyi turns Osanyin's own lie against him in order to punish him for the theft. In the end, therefore, the wicked are punished and the good are rewarded with their rightful inherited wealth.

Family and Inheritance

This story follows three generations of men and their wives through the inheritance, theft, and recovery of the family fortune. Family is thus a central theme of the story. In addition, the inheritance of both wealth and poverty are carried down through a patrilineal line of descent; each man inherits the financial status of his father. The continuation of the line of descent is indicated by Aro's curse upon the person who stole his buried fortune. Aro, standing on his father's grave, declares, "My money will be recovered in the near or far future from whomsoever has stolen it, by my son, or my son's son, or one of my generation!" This projection of revenge by future generations is carried out when Aro's grandson, Ajaiyi, does in fact recover the family fortune from the man who had stolen it. The theme of family is also tied to concerns about pride and status within the village community. Ajaiyi, Jaye's son, must procure the money necessary to obtain a wife, because his father cannot afford to do so; this circumstance is a measure of the family's poverty, as Jaye explains: "According to our tradition, it is a father's duty to make a marriage for his son." And again, when Jaye dies, Ajaiyi must obtain the money for a proper funeral ceremony in order to avoid the "shame" of not

being able to afford to bury his own father. Thus, family in this story is central to both the financial and social status of the individual.

Style

The Yoruba Folktale

Tutuola's stories are loosely based on traditional Yoruba folktales, originally told in oral form. African critics pointed out early in Tutuola's writing career that he seemed to have borrowed heavily from the Nigerian writer Fagunwa, who wrote Yoruban folktales in the Yoruban language. Subsequent critics, however, have noted that Tutuola's stories are infused with his own particular style of narrative, and do not include the pointed moralizing which Fagunwa's tales emphasized. In his later writing, however, which would include "The Village Witch Doctor", Tutuola consciously included more specific elements of traditional Yoruba lore into his stories.

Repetition and Rhythm

Although every culture has its particular style of folktale, critics have found many similarities in folktales across a spectrum of cultures. Italo Calvino, for example, in collecting and transcribing traditional Italian folktales, has noted the "rhythm" and "hard logic" with which these stories are told. Rhythm, according to Calvino, is a function of repetition: "The technique of oral narration in the popular tradition follows functional criteria. It leaves out necessary details but stresses repetition: for example, when a tale consists of a series of the same obstacles to be overcome by different people. A child's pleasure in listening to stories lies partly in waiting for things he expects to be repeated; situations, phrases, formulas. Just as in poems and songs the rhymes help to create rhythm, so in prose narrative there are events that rhyme." "The Village Witch Doctor" is also structured by a rhythm of anticipated repetitions. The male of each generation of the family in the story□Aro, Jaye, and Ajaiyi□follows a similar set of experiences and actions. Both Aro and Ajaiyi go repeatedly to the village witch doctor for advice, and are repeatedly deceived by him. Aro and Jaye, and their wives, each die "suddenly" of poverty. Repeated actions are also taken by individual characters. For example, Ajaiyi has no choice but to pawn his labor for money three different times in the story.

Language

Tutuola's stories have been noted for their nonstandard use of the English language. These stories, written in English, are loosely based on Yoruba oral folktales. And, while English was not Tutuola's first language, he also received only a minimal formal education. As a result, his early novels and stories were characterized by grammatical errors which the editors chose to leave uncorrected, in order to capture Tutuola's narrative voice. By the time "The Village Witch Doctor" was published, late in Tutuola's career, he had made efforts to improve his use of standard English in his writing. As a result, as Oyekan Owomoyela noted, "If. . .Tutuola's English in the earliest novels approximated that of contemporary secondary class two students, and in the later ones.

. .that of secondary class four users. . .certainly by *Witch Doctor* he was writing at a level that compares easily with that of high school certificate holders." Harold R. Collins, however, asserts that, despite the increasing standardization of Tutuola's use of English in the later stories, "the language of the new romance is still pure Tutuolan unschoolmastered and unedited, robust and sinewy."

Historical Context

Nigeria

Tutuola was born and lived throughout his life in Nigeria, and his life spanned most of twentiethcentury Nigerian history. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the area of West Africa now known as Nigeria was inhabited by various tribal peoples often at war with one another. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the area came increasingly under the rule of British traders and missionaries, and eventually was politically conquered by the British. In 1894, the two protectorates of Benin and Yorubaland were combined by the British to create the Niger Coast Protectorate. The British government eventually took control of the areas which had been run by the Royal Niger Company. The British re-divided the region into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. In 1914, these two territories were merged by the British and renamed the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. In the early twentieth century, the British instituted what they called "indirect rule," which was a policy of allowing for native rule at a local level, overseen by a British governmental rule of the colony. Violent rebellion against British rule, resulting in significant casualties, took place in 1906, 1918, and 1929. Throughout the 1950s, pressure for self-rule increased, and new constitutions were adopted several times. In 1960, Nigeria was granted national self-rule. Subsequently, however, internal tensions between various ethnic groups led to national instability. In 1966, a military coup was attempted, in which the prime minister was murdered; however, the military head who came into power as a result of this coup was assassinated that same year. During that year, inter-ethnic tensions erupted into violence. A civil war began in 1967 when several states declared themselves an independent Republic of Biafra. The Biafrans surrendered in 1970. In 1975, a military coup was enacted, and in 1976 the leader of that coup was assassinated. Another military coup took place in 1983. In 1985, Nigeria saw its sixth coup in a period of twenty years. Nigeria's first presidential elections in 1993 were ruled illegitimate, and another military coup resulted.

The Yoruba

Tutuola's ethnic identity was Yoruba. The Yoruba are one of the two most populous tribal identities in Nigeria. Among the more than 24 million Yorubans in Nigeria today, the men are traditionally farmers or craftsmen, and the women, who do not farm, are traditionally shop-owners and tradeswomen. The Yoruba are known for their bronze casting skills, using the "lost wax" technique. To this day, the city of Ile-Ife is of great importance to the Yoruba, as it is traditionally considered to be the location of the creation of the earth.

Nigerian Novelists

Tutuola is one among several prominent modern Nigerian novelists. Daniel Fagunwa, a Nigerian, was the first to publish a full-length novel in the Yoruba language. Published in 1938, the novel's title is translated as *The Forest of a Thousand Demons,* and is essentially a collection of traditional Yoruba fairy tales with a clearly stated moral which shows the influence of Christian missionary education. Tutuola has often been criticized as having borrowed rather heavily from his early reading of Fagunwa's work. Chinua Achebe, probably the best known African writer in the Western world and also a Nigerian, is famous for his 1954 novel, *Things Fall Apart,* which idealizes a lost traditional African culture destroyed by colonialism.

Literary Heritage

Tutuola's short stories, written in English, are derived from the oral tradition of his native African tribe, the Yoruba. Tutuola's literary style is noted for its preservation of the speech patterns characteristic of oral storytelling, which boldly defy the dictates of standard written English. Daniel Fangunwa earlier transcribed similar traditional stories into the Yoruba language, and some critics have denigrated Tutuola for borrowing too heavily from his work, while others note that Tutuola has added his own literary voice to these traditional tales. Tutuola's renditions of stories he heard among his family and fellow members of his tribal village can also be categorized among written works of folklore based on oral traditions, such as *Italian Folktales*, by Italo Calvino, and *Grimm's Fairy tales*, compiled from German folktales by the Brothers Grimm. Tutuola's fiction also belongs to the category of African fiction written in English which emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, roughly commensurate with the achievement of national independence among many African nations in the years after World War II. As a Nigerian, Tutuola's work is categorized with other twentieth century West African writers, most notably the Nigerian Chinua Achebe, whose novel *Things Fall Apart* was first published in 1954. Since many African nations remained part of the British Commonwealth, even after independence, Tutuola's work is also part of the broader development of English literature of the British Commonwealth.

Critical Overview

Oyekan Owomoyela, writing in 1999, stated that, while "Amos Tutuola is the first African author to get international fame," he is also "undoubtedly one of the most controversial of African writers; indeed, many would assert that he is indisputably, and by far, the most controversial." Bernth Lindfors has pointed out that Tutuola "appears to be the kind of man least likely to win an international reputation as an author." Lindfors goes on to explain that "considering his cultural background, minimal education, and lack of literary sophistication, it is surprising that he began writing at all and even more astonishing that he chose to write in English rather than in Yoruba, his native tongue."

Tutuola, whose life work includes nine novels and two short-story collections, became known for his epic novels loosely based on traditional Yoruba folktales he learned as a child. The most controversial quality of his writing is the nonstandard use of written English, which Western critics found charming and early African critics regarded as disgraceful.

Tutuola's first novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), gained immediate recognition and generally positive reception in England and the United States. Harold R. Collins notes that, as a result of the publication of Tutuola's first novel, "Anglo-Nigerian literature was on the world scene, for it was immediately successful." Lindfors explains that "the first reviewers greeted Tutuola's unusual tale with wideeyed enthusiasm, hailing the author as a primitive genius endowed with amazing originality and charming naivete." Lindfors states, "Tutuola's second book, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), was welcomed with the same mixture of awe, laughter and bewilderment that had greeted his first." Collins claims that, with the publication of this second book, Tutuola "was established as a genuine West African literary bombshell." Collins goes on to depict the international breadth of Tutuola's success: "In England he was a big success; his books got enthusiastic reviews from Dylan Thomas and V. S. Pritchett. In America Grove Press brought out his second romance, and he achieved such fame as to be mentioned in *Vogue.* French, German, Italian, and Yugoslav translations attested to considerable European interest."

However, upon publication of his third novel, *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), Western critics began to cool to Tutuola. As Owomoyela pointed out, "Within the space of a few years. . .some of his early admirers were reversing themselves, proclaiming his diminishing literary powers or expressing irritation with the very qualities and affectations they had earlier applauded." Lindfors adds, "By the time Tutuola's fourth and fifth books. . .appeared. . .his European and American readers were tired of his fantasies and fractured English. They expressed impatience with his inability to develop new themes and techniques and deplored his crippling limitations as a writer." Collins sums up this decline in Western reception of Tutuola's work, stating that "it must be admitted that the Western critics' admiration for Tutuola's work was pretty much a flash in the pan. After *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* these critics are either silent or patronizingly severe or damningly faint in their praise."

Far from Western critics, the African literati immediately took offense at Tutuola's international recognition. They were both concerned with the image of Africa and Africans that his work promulgated in the West and suspicious of Western motives in praising Tutuola as a primitive and exotic curiosity which was in keeping with a patronizing colonialist view of Africa. Collins noted:

> Many educated Nigerians were simply horrified by the books. They deplored his "crudities," his lack of inhibitions, and the folk tale basis of his romances. . .; they accused poor, shy, diffident Tutuola of encouraging an unprogressive kind of mythical thinking, of leading the West African literature up a blind alley, and, most important, of giving the supercilious, prejudiced westerners an excuse for continuing to patronize the allegedly superstitious Nigerians! The Nigerians' sense of their vulnerability to western scorn seems to give the greatest force to their objections to Tutuola's work.

However, Owomoyela has pointed out that these early criticisms by Africans were not entirely off the mark:

> Dylan Thomas's description of Tutuola's usage as "young English written by a West African" certainly betrayed that subtext, as did V. S. Pritchett's priceless description of Tutuola's voice as "like the beginning of man on earth, man emerging, wounded and growing."

Lindfors similarly sums up the early African critical response to Tutuola, and to the West's adoration of his work:

> Indeed, Nigerians disliked Tutuola for the same reasons that Europeans and Americans treasured him: his subject matter was exotic and his grammar atrocious. Educated Africans suspected that the bizarre narratives of this messenger-turned-author appealed to foreigners because they projected an image of Africa as uncouth, primitive and barbaric□an image which happened to coincide with the foreign stereotype of the "Dark Continent." As a consequence, many of Tutuola's countrymen were convinced he was only being patronized by condescending racists and was really unworthy of serious consideration as a creative writer.

However, in the 1960s and 1970s, having achieved national independence and with greater confidence in the Western world's image of Africa, African critics began to warm to Tutuola. Collins has noted that, eventually, "most educated Nigerians are willing to admit that American and English critics may just possibly be right, that Tutuola is in fact a great writer." Lindfors further characterizes this sea change in the response of African critics to Tutuola's stories:

> Africans . . . were just beginning to appreciate his mythical imagination and extravagant sense of humor. In the mid-sixties a number of African literary critics wrote reappraisals of his work, probing his special strengths and weaknesses as a creative artist. By this time most sub-Saharan states had achieved political independence so African intellectuals were less self-conscious about their image abroad. Tutuola's books could therefore be evaluated more objectively than before, and many Africans discovered they liked them despite their oddities and obvious flaws.

Lindfors states that, by 1967, with the publication of *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty*, "Tutuola's reputation was fairly secure both in Africa and abroad." Nonetheless, Collins, writing in 1969, stated that "some Nigerian critics recognized Tutuola's extraordinary talent, but Tutuola has always been 'controversial,' and even now a West erner's praise for Tutuola will bring a somewhat wary glance from an educated Nigerian."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture, with a specialization in film studies, from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses the themes of cleverness and deceit and poverty and wealth in "The Village Witch Doctor."

As in many folktales, this story revolves around the themes of cleverness and deceit. Osanyin, the witch doctor, cleverly deceives three generations of men out of their inherited fortune. In the end, however, the grandson of the man whom Osanyin originally deceived is able to successfully use his cleverness in order to deceive Osanyin into returning the family fortune.

Throughout the story, the reader is reminded of the many deceptions, small and large, which the village witch doctor visits upon Aro and his descendants. When Aro first comes to Osanyin to report that his buried family fortune has been stolen, the witch doctor "pretended to be surprised and innocent" of the matter. In assuring Aro that he will ask his gods who has stolen the money, Osanyin "caressed Aro as he deceived him." When, without actually consulting his gods, Osanyin reports to Aro that they have told him his own dead father has stolen his inheritance, the witch doctor "deceitfully" feigns surprise at this solution to the mystery. Finally, Aro "believed the faulty explanation" Osanyin offers him.

Osanyin's deceptions take the form not only of outright lies, but also of the false face he puts on for those he is deceiving. The narration of the story frequently points out to the reader the ways in which the witch doctor pretends to have only his friend's interests in mind, all the while scheming to continue the deception from which he has profited. As the story opens, and Aro explains to Osanyin that he wishes to bury his fortune to keep it safe from thieves, Osanyin's response is one of cheerfully agreeing to help his friend; however, the reader, in retrospect, may detect that this cheerful demeanor on the part of the witch doctor is forced, as he is already scheming to steal his friend's money. When Aro asks him to help bury the money, and explains why, the witch doctor's response is described in the following manner: "'Oh, yes,' Osanyin replied cheerfully, 'I see your point. Let us carry the money to the bush and bury it there before daybreak!'" His enthusiasm, as indicated by the exclamation point which ends the sentence, indicates the forced nature of his professed interest in protecting his friends' money from theft. And when, several months later, Aro goes to Osanyin to report the theft, the witch doctor goes so far as to pretend he doesn't even understand what Aro has told him: "The witch doctor pretended to be surprised and innocent by saying, 'Has your money been stolen, or is it you cannot remember what you wanted to tell me?'"

When Aro returns to his father's grave to curse whoever had stolen the money, the witch doctor, in order to maintain his deception, is put in a position of having to "reluctantly" reinforce a curse which is in fact aimed at Osanyin himself: "Then his friend reluctantly said, 'Let your curse come to pass on whoever has stolen your money.'" Ultimately, then, Osanyin is undone by the powers of his own deception. His unease with endorsing

Aro's curse is described when "the witch doctor worriedly returned to his house as if it had been revealed to Aro that Osanyin was the person who stole the money." Thus, the witch doctor's layering of deception causes him to bring justice down upon his own head, as the curse is realized by the end of the story.

Osanyin's greed and deception are made ironic by his status as a respected witch doctor, "well known throughout the village and also all other surrounding villages." The hypocrisy practiced by the witch doctor is emphasized by the ways in which he specifically uses his profession as a means of deceiving others. The fact that Aro and each of his descendants go to Osanyin for advice facilitates Osanyin's schemes. Furthermore, the ways in which Osanyin utilizes his sacred profession to further his profane ends is made apparent by the fact that he buries the stolen fortune "in front of his gods which were in the shrine." He further abuses his position by repeatedly claiming to consult his gods in order to help the victims of his theft, and then not consulting the gods at all but only further deceiving them in order to protect his own wealth.

In the end, it is Ajaiyi's cleverness and deceit of Osanyin which wins him back the money that is rightfully his. Osanyin hides himself with a machete in one of the sacks on his father's grave which Osanyin believes to hold a ram. When Osanyin steals what he believes are three sacks of rams and brings them back to his shrine to butcher them for food, Ajaiyi jumps out of the third sack, surprising the clever and deceitful witch doctor. Ajaiyi's cleverness and deceit further facilitate his success as he pretends that he thinks Osanyin is in fact his dead father who has supposedly stolen his inheritance from him. By this means, Ajaiyi succeeds in terrifying the witch doctor into returning the fortune. The fortune thus goes to the man who is cleverest in his deceit.

This story also centers on themes of poverty and wealth. The entire story is focused on the theft, and ultimate retrieval, of a family fortune. The fate of these characters, and each new generation of the family, is inextricably linked to the status of their financial situation. Aro, in the opening of the story, is "from a rich family." When his father dies, Aro "inherited a large sum of money, farms, and other valuable property." Fearing that someone may steal his fortune from his home, Aro buries it out in the bush under a tree, believing that "his inherited wealth was safe."

The witch doctor's greed for wealth motivates him to steal the family fortune of a man who is his friend, who trusts him and seeks him out for advice. The lust for money in the witch doctor is thus strong enough to motivate him to betray a trusted friend over a period of several generations.

Wealth is also clearly important to Aro and his descendants. When Aro learns that his buried fortune has been stolen, he "held his head in both hands and burst into tears." As a result of the theft, "Aro started to live in poverty." This poverty, as inherited by Aro's descendants, determines all of the significant events of their lives and even causes their deaths. Having to work hard on his farm as a result of the theft of his inheritance, Aro eventually becomes "so poor and weary that he could not go and work on the farm any more." When Aro's son, Jaye, wishes to marry, he cannot provide the needed money to

afford the marriage. This "inherited poverty," as passed on from father to son in a patrilineal society, threatens the pride and status of Aro's descendants, as well as their material conditions. As Aro explains to Jaye: "According to our tradition, it is a father's duty to make a marriage for his son. But as you know I am in great poverty. My poverty is so great that I have not had even a half-kobo for the past four years. So, my dear Ajaiyi, it is a great pity that I have no money with which to pay the dowry for you. I am sorry, indeed." As a result, Jaye must pawn his labor in order to raise the money. When, after Jaye marries, Aro dies, Jaye's poverty again causes him to pawn his labor in order to pay for the funeral. And, as with the marriage, Jaye is obligated to do so as a matter of tradition and pride, thereby avoiding the shame of his community: "Ajaiyi had no money to spend on the funeral ceremony for his father. Of course, as it was a great shame if he failed to perform the funeral ceremony, Ajaiyi was forced to go and pawn himself to another pawnbroker, who gave him the money which he spent on his father's funeral expenses." Because almost all of his time is committed to working for other people, he has little time to work on his own farm, and "his inherited poverty became even more severe."

The theme of desire for money is expressed in the witch doctor's phrase, "Money man!," which he uses to assure Ajaiyi that he will be able to recover the family fortune. Osanyin tells Ajaiyi, "'Yes, it is sure you will be a rich man. . .And when a person has money, the people call him 'Money man!'" The ecstasy attendant upon wealth is expressed by the way in which "the witch doctor and Ajaiyi shouted together, laughing, 'Money man!'" Ajaiyi's wife also uses this phrase, particularly in pointing out to Ajaiyi the status attendant upon those with money, and the comparative shame of poverty; in urging him to carry out the witch doctor's plan for ending their poverty, she declares, "'Can't you see, when you go here, you see 'Money man!' You go there, you see 'Money man!'"

The primary concern of the story with financial status is summed up through the happy conclusion, in which Ajaiyi and his wife recover "four thousand *naira*" from the witch doctor, upon which they "were free from their poverty and other burdens, as soon as Ajaiyi refunded the money to the three pawnbrokers." In the world of this story, financial status is the most important factor in the life of a family, and determines the fate of each individual in that family.

Source: Liz Brent, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In his brief review of Amos Tutuola's new volume of stories, The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories*, Richard Bauerle still finds delight in Tutuola's tales, which are based on traditional Yoruba embellished with some modern twists.*

Amos Tutuola's new volume contributes eighteen more stories to his already large number, all based on traditional Yoruba folktales. His themes are much like those in his previous books: greed, thievery, betrayal, fraud, et cetera. However, the milieu is in some cases more modern. The major plot device is that of the trickster tricked. The title story is typical though more elaborate than most. The witch doctor keeps tricking his victim in different ways until finally the tables are turned. The characters in the tales include many familiar figures: the tortoise, the jungle drummer, the beetle lady, and people with regular Yoruba names.

Tutuola's manner of telling his stories is, as one would expect, closer to that of his later books than to that of his first and most famous work, *The Palm- Wine Drinkard*. There is more of the writer and less of the talker. Almost gone are such rich expressions as "He said whisperly" and "We took our fear back." Still, one occasionally encounters such fresh phrasing as "The priest lived lonely in the heart of the forest." It is gratifying to see Tutuola at age seventy still busy enriching African literature with his illuminating interpretations.

Source: Richard Bauerle, "Africa & The West Indies," (reviews) in *World Literature Today,* Vol. 64, No. 3, Summer, 1991, p. 539.

Critical Essay #3

In the following brief review, John Haynes discusses Amos Tutuola's book The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories*, a collection of fables and retellings of old Yoruba folk tales for which Tutuola is widely known.*

Although *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was Amos Tutuola's first published novel, he had written *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of the Ghosts* earlier, in 1948, and sent the exercise-book manuscript to Faber and Faber where it stayed until 1982, when Three Continents Press issued a limited scholars's edition with a facsimile of Tutuola's handwriting. In 1983, while attending the International Writers' Workshop at Iowa, Tutuola was asked to prepare the present edition. In his foreword, Bernth Lindfors writes:

> He went through the typescript of the original version carefully, correcting obvious errors and restructuring several episodes. I was asked to lend a hand in the revision and to supervise computerized typesetting of the final text.

Lindfors' phrasing is a little unfortunate in that it may give the impression to some readers, not in possession of the earlier text, that some scholarly tinkering has been going on. We are reassured that "what is being presented here is basically the same old *Wild Hunter* in more modern dress", but all this does sound a little jaunty at a time when African writers and critics are increasingly wary of the role of western scholars and publishers in handling their work. "This transformation" [*sic*], Lindfors concludes, "achieved by means of the latest technological miracles, is very much in keeping with the spirit of the story."

Is it? It is only in a very superficial sense that Tutuola deals in "miracles". His cosmology is one that undermines the western notion of the "miracle" a bizarre deviance from the stable, solid world of western rationalism and literary naturalism.

The Wild Hunter, like *The Palm Wine Drinkard*, challenges this whole cultural scenario and draws on vernacular Yoruba writing. In *The Palm Wine Drinkard* Tutuola carried the challenge into the very structure of his prose by using a non-standard kind of English which, though sometimes taken as a quaint index of semi-literacy, was in fact, as Chinua Achebe has pointed out, a conscious choice. *The Wild Hunter* is in standard English but with tellingly non-standard deployment of the "bureaucratese" of his civil service years. Thus if you want to get into heaven you need the official letter from, of all places, the office of the Devil, who

> would forward the letter to the record office in heaven without delay. . . . The Devil suggested that the person should use two envelopes. He or she should write his or her name and address on the back of one of the

two envelopes, and the correct postage stamps should be affixed to it.

Like a good mission-school précis writer he cites exact dates and numbers, but not in quite the clerical spirit. He uses them for ironically precise approximations. A stream is "about seventeen feet wide", in heaven "the yard was about four thousand miles square". The colonial clerk's precision is mocked by being seen, from the clerk's point of view, in its true pointlessness. This is Nigeria. This is the Bush. In a naturalistic story, setting limits the options of the characters. In the Bush anything at all can happen. Tutuola can always produce any situation he wants whatever, at any point. What compels his reader's interest is neither the "naivety" of the writing, nor the bizarre ghosts he concocts, but his sheer intensity and worry about his hero's spiritual quest.

The Village Witch Doctor and other stories is a collection of fables, also in standard English, [. . .] much slighter than *The Wild Hunter* and more readily [. . .] comfortable western view of African quaintness; as also, more worryingly, to the sentiment that the Zulu poet, Mazisi Kunene, put into the mouth of Shaka: that conquered nations end up with a literature of children's fables about animals. Not all Tutuola's fables are about animals. They deal with tricksters, devious juju-men, often with an explicit moral about the wages of disobedience. The story of Tortoise's degeneration from a promising, handsome young man to an armed robber who sells his own town to an enemy and then foments civil war there will remind Nigerians of the betrayal in high places of the promise that independence seemed once to hold, and the subsequent descent into civil war and poverty.

Source: John Haynes, "Precise Approximations and trickster tales," in *Times Literary Supplement,* May 18-24, 1990, p. 534.

Adaptations

Tutuola's first novel, *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, was adapted for the stage by Kola Ogunmola.

Topics for Further Study

Tutuola has been compared to fellow Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe and Daniel O. Fagunwa. Learn more about one of these authors and his work. Compare his work and literary reputation to that of Tutuola. In what ways is this author's representation of African culture and history different from or similar to that of Tutuola? What themes are of concern to this author? In what ways does his writing style compare to that of Tutuola?

Tutuola is Nigerian. Learn more about the history of Nigeria during the pre-colonial period, the colonial period, and after national independence. What major historical events and political struggles occurred during these periods in Nigerian history?

Tutuola was ethnically of Yoruba descent. Learn more about the history, social structure, and culture of the Yoruba people. What different tribal identities exist within the broader category of Yoruba people? What was the effect of colonization on Yoruba culture and social structure? What is the status of the Yoruba people in Africa today?

Although Tutuola was raised speaking the Yoruba language, he wrote exclusively in English. Learn more about the Yoruba language. In what countries is Yoruba spoken? Why do you suppose Tutuola chose to write in English?

Tutuola is credited with recording in written English an oral narrative tradition of Yoruba culture and language. Other writers have recorded the traditional oral folktales of their own cultures, for example, *Italian Folktales*, collected by Italo Calvino; *Grimm's Fairy Tales,* a collection of traditional German fairy tales, collected by the Brothers Grimm; and *A Thousand and One Nights* (also called *Arabian Nights*), which is an ancient collection of tales from the Middle East. Read a story from one of these collections. Compare it to Tutuola's tale. In what ways does it contain similar themes and narrative structure to that of Tutuola? In what ways do these folktales differ from each other?

Tutuola's stories are a liberal rendering of stories told to and by him as a child among his family, friends, and community. What stories have been told to or by you among your own family, friends, or community? Write down a story you have only heard in oral form. What changes occur in the process of translating an oral story to written form? What elements of the story are lost in the process of transcription? Does the process of writing it down add to or embellish the story in any way?

What Do I Read Next?

The Palm-Wine Drinkard and His Dead Palm- Wine Tapster in the Deads' Town (1952) is Tutuola's first novel, an epic adventure loosely linking together a number of traditional Yoruba folktales.

My Life in the Bush of Ghosts (1954), Tutuola's second novel, was as enthusiastically received in England and the U.S. as was his first.

Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty (1967) is the novel on which the short story "The Village Witch Doctor" is based.

Yoruba Folktales (1986) was compiled and translated by Tutuola.

The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories (1990) is Tutuola's collection of short stories.

The Forest of a Thousand Demons (1938) by Daniel Fagunwa is a novel based on a collection of traditional Yoruba folktales.

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David Galens

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Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

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Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Literature of Developing Nations for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535