

JALIYA

celebrating African and Caribbean Folklore

Issue Six - June 2023



Tutuola Shrine

Honouring Amos Tutuola
and Yoruba Folklore

compiled and edited by Natty Mark Samuels

Editorial

Dear Reader

The first and last pieces in this issue, come from a 2022 collection of mine, marking the 70th anniversary of the 1952 publication of *Palm Wine Drinkard*, written by Amos Tutuola, published by Faber and Faber. A novel about a quest; for a legendary palm wine tapper, encountering characters like the "Skull" and passing through places such as "Deads Town."

He was always going to be a hero of mine, because his nine novels were inspired by Yoruba Orality; and because he wrote in an idiosyncratic style, as if to say, this language has been presented to us, but I will use it how I wish. When we think of innovative wordsmiths, we speak of figures such as Kerouac and Joyce; I think Tutuola should be mentioned in that league of lexicon sparklers. You know what its like, when you want to re-read again, sentences by Ben Okri; lines from *Under Milk Wood*, by Dylan Thomas; a haiku by Basho. You've got to re-read it again, to marvel once more, at the rhythm, or interplay of words. You give thanks again for the great writers, and the moments of enchantment they generate: so it is with Amos Tutuola. For example, I love the rhythm of this excerpt... *'So I agreed to find out his daughter. There was a big market in this town from where the daughter was captured, and the market day was fixed for every 5th day and the whole people of that town and from all the villages around the town and also spirits and curious creatures from various bushes and forests were coming to this market every 5th day to sell or buy articles'*

One of the dedicatees of the collection, is T.S.Eliot, who was an editor at Faber and Faber and the motivating force behind the publication; the aforementioned Dylan Thomas wrote the first great review of the book. This novel was published a few years before the more well known *'Things Fall Apart'* – first in the trail-blazing Heinemann African Writers Series – by fellow Nigerian Chinua Achebe. If Okonkwo is one of the great characters from African literature, then the *Palm Wine Drinkard* must be also.

I think of Tutuola as part of what I call the Ife Quartet. Four creative spirits, whose work was inspired by Yoruba Folklore. Two artists, Mama Nike and Prince Twins Seven Seven; two writers, Daniel Fagunwa and Amos Tutuola.

To finish, I'll leave you with another excerpt...

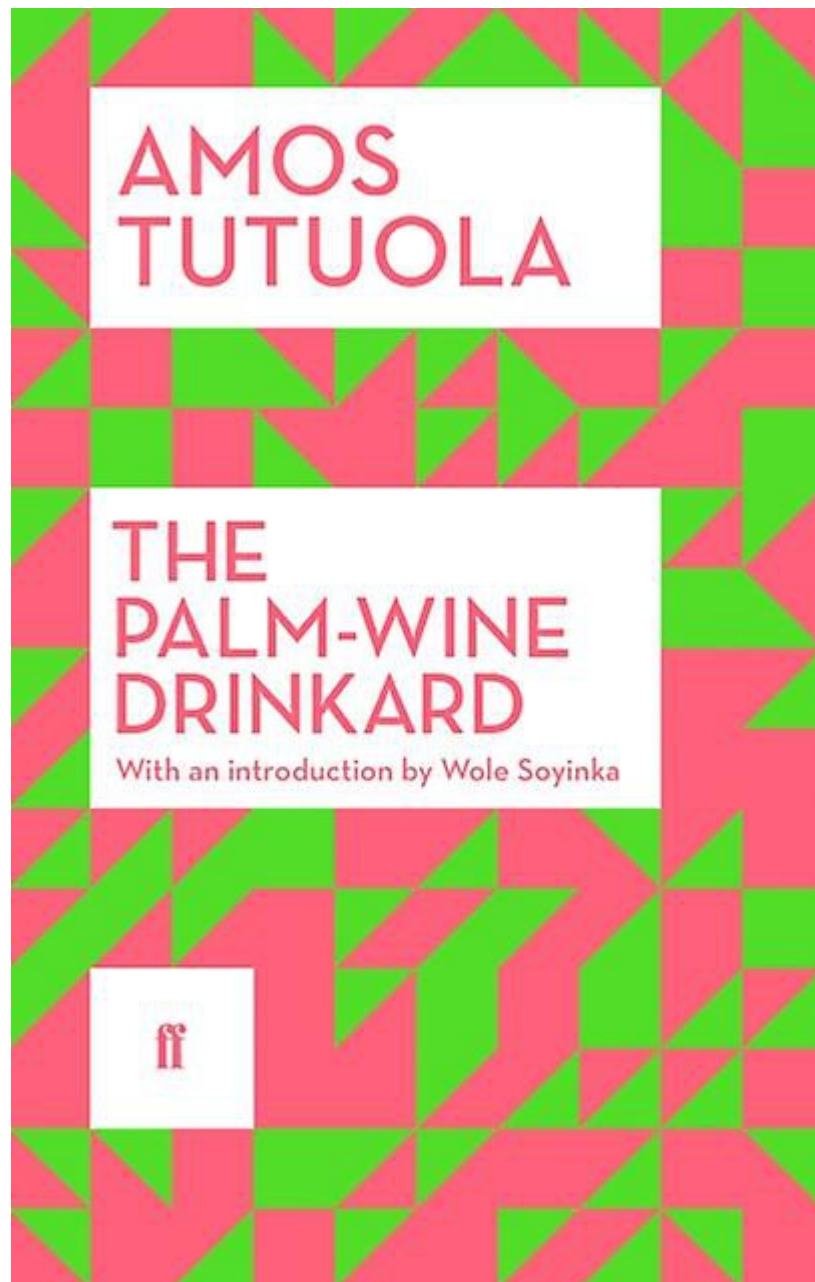
As "Laugh" was laughing at us on that night, my wife and myself forgot our pains and laughed with him, because he was laughing with curious voices that we never heard before in our life. We did not know the time that we fell into his laugh, but we were only laughing at "Laugh's" laugh and nobody who heard him when laughing would not laugh, so if somebody continue to laugh with "Laugh" himself, he or she would die or faint at once for long laughing, because laugh was his profession and he was feeding on it. Then they began to beg "Laugh" to stop, but he could not.

Jaliya is a Mande term for their bardic tradition. The jali is storyteller, musician, historian, geneologist, tutor, advisor and envoy. Jalimuso is the female counterpart of Jali.

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Front cover photograph of Amos Tutuola, from *The Conversation*.

The Encyclopedia of Rootical Folklore: Plant Tales of Africa and the Diaspora, by the author, will be published March, 2024, by Scorched Earth Press.



from *Fruugu*

The Palm Wine Drinkard

Tutuola Shrine

to T.S. Eliot, Wole Adedoyin and Olabode Ogunlana

I awoke,
Made a cold lemon drink,
Showered,
Coconut oil blessing,
Then I was ready:
Time for Tutuola Shrine.

Destination was close,
Not far away at all.
Took a few days off work,
Planned a route
And put on my walking boots.

The weather was mild,
Time was on my side,
My legs felt strong,
The day felt good,
So pilgrimage began.

You will not believe it,
But on that first evening,
Walking the Palm Wine Pathway
Who should I meet?
The poet Dylan Thomas.

You know how he looks,
With that curly hair,
And those searching eyes.
We sat and spoke,
Admiring a storyteller .

Under an Oak tree,
The giver of Milk Wood,
And all its great characters,
Spoke of Faithful Mother,
As well as the Skull.

It was good to hear him talk,
Bubbling about language,
And its potential to enthrall;
Jumping up and laughing,
Because he knew the magic of words.

Told me of Welsh folklore;
Of the Water Leaper,
And the Afanc.
I told him of Ijapa,
As well as Sasabonsam.

I see him now,
Jumping up,
Animated,
Emphasising a point,
Happy juggler of word and lyric.

The poet spoke of Laugharne;
Of the evening peace,
When sunset descended,
And the fisherman came in:
I saw water in his eyes.

He had a reading to give,
And the road was ahead of me.
I shared a Yoruba proverb,
Said a last thank you
And bowed my head in respect.

Found a quiet place by a stream;
Pitched my tent,
Said goodnight to the heron,
Gave thanks to the Most High,
Then sleep came soon and sweet.

Next morning,
Observed by some ducks,
Immersed myself in the stream;
Enjoyed water's interaction,
Before ritual of lemon and coconut.

The path veered to the right,
On to Bush Ghost Boulevard.
I saw the mangled spirits,
Victims of war and slavery:
I saw the Smelling Ghost.

Every journey creates reflection,
The aftermath of exchange.
While I was thinking,
On the roadside there,
I met artist Twins Seven Seven.

On my way to pay homage,
To a master of the word,
I met a doyen of the visual.
We spoke of Obatala Priest
And The Palm Wine Tapper.

We spoke of Oduduwa,
Ife of human embryo,
A goddess called Osun,
River that bears her name:
Talked of Osun-Osogbo.

He told me of royalty and clans,
Ibeji and Egungun.
But most of all,
We spoke of etchings and colour,
For the stories of the teller.

I happily listened,
While he spoke of Europeans,
Ulli, Susanne and Georgina;
Of UNESCO and exhibitions,
MOMA and Pompidou,

I went to celebrate an icon,
And met a hero of mine.
I have him on my wall,
We spoke face to face,
May the wonders of life never cease.

Then he sang a song for me,
Accompanied by talking drum.
Firefinch stopped to listen,
The lemon dove also,
As he offered a gift of beauty.

Could have sat for the rest of the day,
But he'd an exhibition to curate,
And the road was ahead of me.
I shared an Edo proverb,
And bowed my head in thanks.

I continued on,
Till the route pointed me,
In the direction of Simbi Street.
I heard a young woman singing,
Of her quest to know of life.

And standing on that street there,
Listening to her song,
Was one of the thinkers,
Who tried to understand:
Jean Paul Sartre.

Losing his sight,
I was glad to give my arm,
To steady him along,
To a cafe,
Where Simone was waiting for him.

The elder had much to say,
And I was the happy listener.
Of occupation,
Imprisonment,
Shared pilgrimage to freedom.

I asked him of Paris,
Miles Davies and James Baldwin.
Those of the colonies,
From Ouagadougou
To Yamoussoukro.

His support of Algiers,
Independence rendezvous.
We spoke of culture,
Debated Black Orpheus,
He sang of Aime Cesaire.

He spoke of global loss,
And what Africa had retained.
Significance of stories,
As the West went reeling,
Forever searching for itself.

I did not agree with all,
But it was a pleasure to listen,
To a life and its thinking.
I was the recipient,
Of the sprinkling from a sage.

He had a lecture to give,
And the road was ahead of me.
I shared an Igbo proverb,
Told him not to stand,
And bowed as I left the cafe.

Further on from Sartre,
I found a little hotel,
So I took a room there,
And sat on the terrace,
Till star gazing closed my eyes.

Waking next day,
After the early caress,
Of lemon, water and coconut,
I set out on the last leg,
Through African Huntress Avenue.

The great Adebisi,
Daughter of a legend.
I thought of Yaa Asantewaa,
And Queen Nzinga,
The sagas of our heroines.

Onward I went,
Over Feather Woman Freeway,
Through Ajaiyi Alley,
Witch Herbalist Way,
Wild Hunter Walk
To a passageway called Pauper Place.

And it was in that place,
That I met a titan;
A giant figure,
Of gargantuan spirit:
It was there I met Wole Soyinka.

You know how he looks,
With that bush of grey hair,
And the eyes that question.
Born in Abeokuta
Same as the storyteller.

He invited me to share pepper soup,
Which I gladly accepted.
Hadn't eaten much so far;
Too excited,
And sustained by that excitement.

He spoke of Ibadan and Leeds,
Autobiography and plays,
War and imprisonment,
Onaism and Achebe:
Of you and I.

Speak Mr Soyinka,
Talk until tomorrow;
Destination is close,
I am in no rush,
Speak until tomorrow.

Spoke of a writer,
Forest of a Thousand Demons.
Had to make a stop,
By Fagunwa Temple,
On my way to Tutuola Shrine.

As the fireflies began to light,
And the log fire burnt,
He told me stories;
Of Ijapa, Ekun and Opolo,
Oga, Etu and Ogongo.

Told him he was an ambassador,
Culture his embassy;
Going out in the world,
Representing Africa,
A Yoruba Emissary.

He had a speech to prepare,
And the road was ahead of me.
So I thanked him for the soup,
Shared a Hausa proverb,
Bowing as I left his presence.

Walking on another hour,
I came to the site of the dream.
Paintings embellished the walls,
First stories told in Ife,
Echoed by Twins Seven Seven.

Interspersed with the art,
Were excerpts and quotes;
From Taban Lo Liyong,
Soyinka and Sartre,
Thomas and other celebrants.

So good to be there,
Paying tribute to a man,
Who entertained all,
Made the children laugh,
Offering the gems of tradition.

People came and went;
Touching or kissing his photo,
Sharing anecdotes,
Swapping riddles,
And moments of quiet reflection.

Tell me Africa,
Have you named a street after him?
A library or a school?
Every village or city quarter,
Should have an Amos corner.

Where stories are told,
Songs are sung,
Riddles are solved;
Generations gather,
Round the glow of evening laughter,

As evening came in,
Candles were lit,
The telling of tales began;
Of Ajantala, Segi
And the child of the River Goddess.

Sweet hush descended,
As the guest speaker,
Ben Okri began to read;
Generating rapture,
Wizard of enchanted lexicon.

I was there,
I was so happy;
Paying my respects,
To the great storyteller:
The man called Amos Tutuola.

Below, from *Amazon*
My Life in the Bush of Ghosts
Published 1954

The background of the entire page is a vibrant blue, covered in a repeating pattern of yellow line-art skulls. The skulls are shown from various perspectives: some are front-facing, some are in profile, and some are shown from a three-quarter view. The pattern is dense and covers the entire surface.

AMOS
TUTUOLA

MY LIFE IN
THE BUSH
OF GHOSTS

ff

Yoruba Proverbs

When a king's palace burns down, the rebuilt one is more beautiful.

All lizards lie flat on their stomach, therefore it is difficult to determine who has a stomach ache.

Silence is the attitude of the dead: he who is alive speaks.

Truth came to market, but could not be sold; however, we buy lies with ready cash.

Medicine left in the bottle can't help.

Patching makes a garment last longer.

You can't stop a pig from wallowing in the mud.

If you don't sell your head, no one will buy it.

If you damage the character of another, you damage your own.

The pots get all the sweet, the lid nothing but steam.

If we stand tall it is because we stand on the backs of those who have gone before us.

If something that was going to chop off your head only knocked off your cap, you should be grateful.

The young cannot teach tradition to the old.

Words are like spears; once they leave your lips they can never come back.

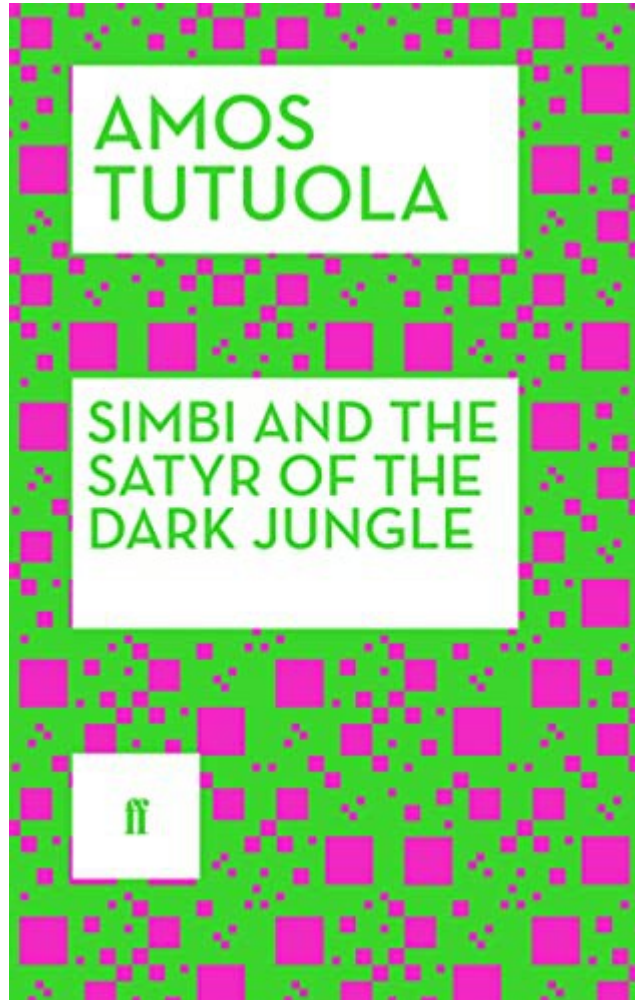
One who waits for chance, may wait a year.

Where you will sit when you are old shows where you stood in your youth.

The Great Cavalcade

Ogongo and Obo,
Akala and Asa;
All shall be there,
At the great cavalcade,
Of our laughter and learning.
Oya and Ojiji
Okin and Owiwi;
Young and old giving thanks,
For the hours of wonder.
Opolo and Iro,
Adaba and Aja;
We salute them all,
In the awesome procession,
Passing through our lives:
Massaging the hours of rest.

Ogongo – ostrich – **Obo** – monkey – **Akala** – vulture – **Asa** – hawk
Oya – hedgehog – **Ojiji** – electric fish – **Okin** – peacock – **Owiwi** – owl
Opolo – frog – **Iro** – baboon – **Adaba** – dove – Aja – dog



from *Amazon.com*

Simbi
and the
Satyr
of the Dark Jungle

published 1955

Iroko Man

to all the refugees

I heard you crying last night, Iroko Man.

Coming out from the shelving, a heavy chant from an unknown place. Taken from your forest to our city, your spirit trapped within the wood. Forced to leave the meditative and thrown into noise. You can no longer wander near the trees of your name, watching over them day and night. All your sunsets and sunrises are muted now; the brilliance of celestial masterpiece is dimmed. I heard you singing of displacement and for a moment, I wanted to accompany you with drum, but your song captivated me, as I shed a quite tear, listening to your yearning for home.

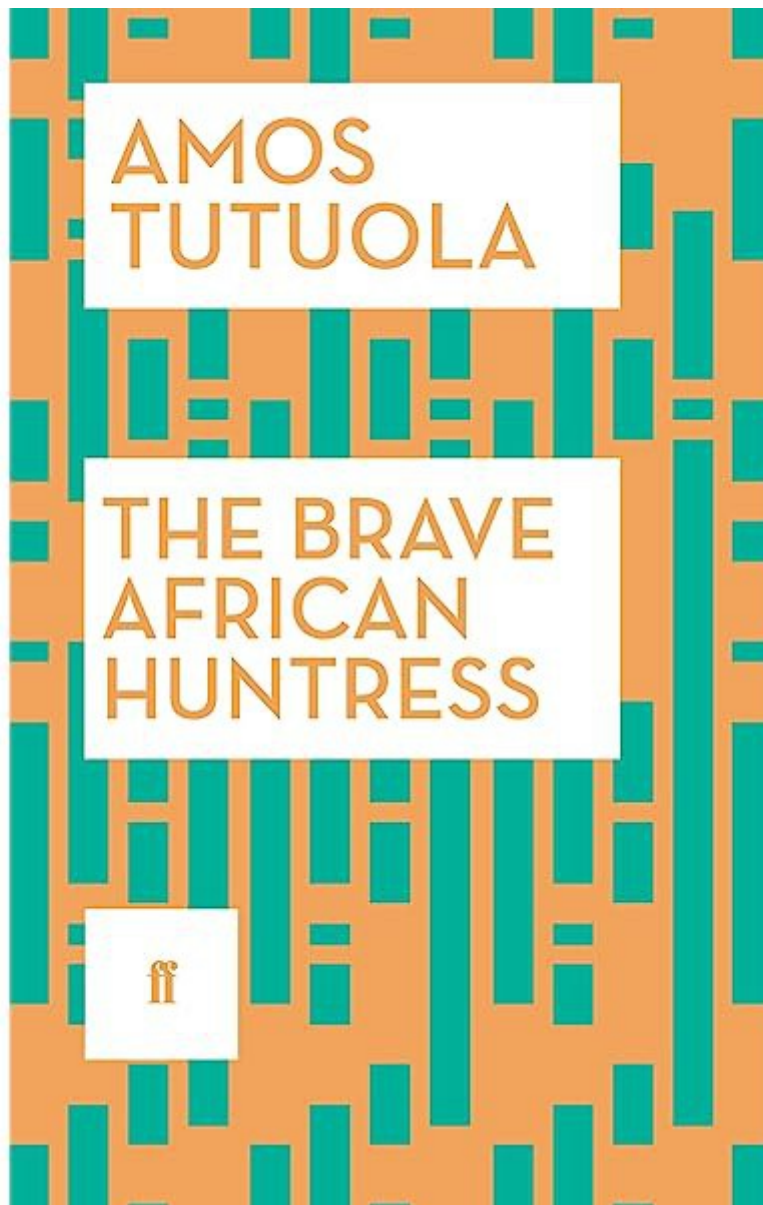
Oriki

to Andrew Olubodun

Come let us chant oriki,
A poem of praise for the parrot.
A reminder to each other,
That beauty comes from within.

Watch over us Ayekooto
Give us of your tail feather;
The necessary talisman,
Embellishment of mask and crown.
Around the evening fire,
After fufu and egusi,
We shall chant oriki for you.

Oriki – praise poetry – **Ayekooto** or **Odidere** – parrot: sacred to the Yoruba
Fufu – made from cassava – **Egusi** – a soup



from *Amazon.com*

The
Brave
African
Huntress

published 1958

Amos Tutuola

celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Palm Wine Drinkard publication

They're taking over and there's nothing I can do about it! The on-going invasion. Have you ever known occupation by books? Everywhere. The happy imposition.

Woke up this morning and once again, Maya Angelou was sharing my pillow, Chinua Achebe laid across the bed and Roger Mais at the foot of it; and Amos Tutuola here and there.

Went to the kitchen, to make my morning citrus drink and found Buchi Emecheta there, amongst the bowl of lemons and Gabriel Okara also, beside the box of museli.

Then time for my interaction with water. Sharing space with the shower gel and coconut oil, was Langston Hughes; James Baldwin nestled between the towels and resting on top of the toilet roll, was Alice Walker; and Amos Tutuola was here and there.

Following time with water and then coconut oil, I sat on the sofa, sharing it with Ben Okri and Amanda Gorman, while the big rug hosted Daniel Fagunwa, Wole Soyinka and others.

Books overloading the shelves, stacked on the rugs, around the bed and throughout the flat. Were you ever on the verge of being conquered by books? The happy intrusion. Everywhere. And Amos Tutuola here and there.



from Zaccheus Onumba Dibiaezue Memorial Lecture

AMOS Tutuola

June 1920 – June 1997

Glossary

Ijapa – tortoise trickster of Yoruba folklore - **Sasabonsam** – monster of Ashanti folklore

Laugharne – Welsh town and home of Dylan Thomas

Milk Wood – radio play by Dylan Thomas

Obatala Priest and **Palm Wine Tapper** – paintings by Prince Twins Seven Seven

Oduduwa – culture hero of the Yoruba, associated with Creation and Ife

Ife – Nigerian city in Yorubaland, where they believe humanity began.

Ibeji – orisha (deity) of twins

Iroko tree – sacred to the Yoruba and an eponymous orisha

Osun-Osogbo – Yoruba sacred grove

Egungun – masquerade, remembering the ancestors

UNESCO – United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, New York

Pompidou – arts and cultural centre in Paris

Ulli and Georgina Beier and Susanne Wenger – Europeans who were pioneering figures of the Osogbo Art Movement

Black Orpheus – from *Orphee Noir*, a book introduction by Jean Paul Sartre

Simone - Simone de Beauvoir, writer and life companion of Sartre

Ouagadougou – capital city of Burkina Faso

Yamoussoukro – capital city of Ivory Coast, formerly Abijan

Yaa Asantewaa – 19th/20th century queen mother of the Ashanti

Queen Nzinga - 16th/17th century monarch of northern Angola

Abeokuta – Nigerian city in Yorubaland.

Onasim – art movement based on traditional Yoruba motifs

Achebe – Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, from Igboland

Daniel O. Fagunwa – pioneering Yoruba novelist – author of *Forest of a Thousand Demons*: an inspiration to Tutuola

Ijapa – tortoise – **Ekun** – leopard – **Opolo** – frog

Oga – chameleon – **Etu** – antelope – **Ogongo** – ostrich