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The Archival Politics of the Postcolonial Writer's Collection: A Case Study in Literary Value and Amos Tutuola

Alexander Fyfe

Abstract: This essay takes as its starting point the problem posed by the increasing number of literary archives of the papers of postcolonial writers that have been acquired by American and European academic institutions. After registering the ethical problems posed by this trend, I argue that the existence of such archives represents an opportunity for postcolonial studies to interrogate its own archival politics in relation to constructions of literary value. Using the Amos Tutuola Collection (located at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin) as a case study, I demonstrate that while this archive's form makes certain claims for its value, a study of the author's letters, manuscripts, and documents contained therein suggests that alternative values are latent within the Collection. I discuss how these values differ from those typically sought by postcolonial critics and conclude by considering how a hypothetical digitized Tutuola collection might allow for the realization of new values. Inquiry into forms of value—and not simply the identification of existing literary ones—is, I suggest, an important aspect of the continued relevance of writers' collections to postcolonial studies.

Keywords: Amos Tutuola, Harry Ransom Center, value, archive, writer's collection, postcolonial studies

Few fields of inquiry have engaged the problem of the archive with the same intensity and political urgency as postcolonial studies. Central to the broadly defined intention to understand colonialism, its methods

of population management, and its legacy of oppression has been a preoccupation with the promise that archives—colonial and otherwise—hold for recovering repressed histories and for resisting the "epistemic violence" (Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 282) perpetrated against "subaltern" subjects in official written records.[1] While the "history from below" of the Subaltern Studies Collective has highlighted the necessity of archival work to the re-conception and affirmation of marginalized subjectivities, the archive has created opportunities for engaged scholarship that exceeds the terms of colonialism's manichean binary. The influential essay collection *Refiguring the Archive* (2002), which seeks to theorize an archival politics appropriate to the challenges posed in post-apartheid South Africa, and Anjali Arondekar's *For the Record* (2009), which explores the relations between the colonial archive and sexuality, are but two examples of the role that the archive can play in academic reconstructive projects. Such studies are in dialogue with and enabled by Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1998) and thus treat the archive's claims with a healthy amount of epistemological skepticism. A notion of the "archive-as-subject" (Stoler 44) (rather than as a neutral repository of information) has informed postcolonial scholarship and helped to bridge the gap between historical and literary inquiry. The idea that literature can engage and even challenge the colonial archive is now commonplace in the field.

Yet despite the widely accepted necessity of problematizing the archive, postcolonial studies has yet to adequately theorize one of its most frequently (and increasingly) consulted genres of institutional archive: the writer's collected papers.[2] As many postcolonial writers have achieved canonical status, their autograph manuscripts, personal papers, and letters have been acquired by wealthy American and European universities. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Anita Desai, Zulfikar Ghose, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Kazuo Ishiguro have relinquished their boxes of papers to the archival norms of grey fileboxes and manila folders, many of them doing so within their own lifetimes and at their own instigation.[3] While university collections' interest in archiving these writers is undoubtedly connected to the currency that the writers carry in both the world literary marketplace and within the

academy, this does little to minimize the irony latent in the imbrication of previously marginalized literary voices within centers of literary prestige. Nor should it obscure the questions that this raises for how literary scholars with a professed commitment to exploring the margins of literary discourse use such archives as an interpretive tool.

In this context of institutional archives that are broadly congruent with the contemporary currents and direction of postcolonial literary scholarship—in the sense that they appear to give institutional validation to writers who might once have been excluded from academic study—it becomes necessary to develop and refine existing critical attitudes towards the archive. While Derrida's influential archive theory provides a useful terminology for articulating the discursive problems and dangers inherent in reading the archive—one that I rely on in this essay—it is necessary to re-situate this theory in relation to the problems (and opportunities) raised by the writer's collection. The processes that produce these archives and present them to scholars are themselves part of a process of capitalist accumulation that is related, but exterior to, postcolonial literary studies. Remaining conscious of the relations between writers' archives and market forces is extremely important, not least because the large sums paid for writers' papers—sometimes in excess of one million US dollars—suggest that a certain value politics are in play that postcolonial studies, especially, would do well to examine closely.

The question of how, and to what extent, postcolonial texts challenge traditional academic expectations around literary value has been a persistent concern of postcolonial studies since the field's inception. Given that one of its primary imperatives is, to borrow the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (*Outside* 63) of colonial discourses, postcolonial scholars have interrogated the value assigned to metropolitan texts and thought about how non-European texts undermine this value system. Perhaps, however, because the primary locus of postcolonial literary inquiry is the Anglo-American English department, an inherited value system from European letters has introduced certain biases and conceptual problems into readings of postcolonial texts. Two much-cited critiques

of the field illustrate some of the biases that have troubled it during its entrenchment within the larger domain of Anglophone literary studies. As Neil Lazarus writes in *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, the field's claim that it has expanded the canon of texts is undermined by critics' tendency to focus on texts written in certain languages (mainly English) and "writers who adopt generic and modal conventions readily assimilable by Euro-American readers [rather] than . . . writers who root their work in other conventions" (26). While this tendency may arise partly from the persistence of normative literary values in the reading of postcolonial writing, it is also related to the commodification of difference that Graham Huggan has termed "the postcolonial exotic." Huggan argues that "a particular mode of aesthetic perception," widespread both within literature's marketplace and its academic study, "renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them" (13). In this sense, particular works become valued within the field precisely because they are perceived as exotic.

In light of the apparent intensification of archiving postcolonial writers' papers by Western institutions on the one hand and of the field's interrogation of its own critical practices on the other, it is an opportune moment to situate the textual politics of the archive with which we are so familiar in relation to notions of literary value. As I consider this question, it becomes feasible to assess some of the limits and possibilities of postcolonial studies' engagement with the writer's collection. In this regard, the writer's special collection-as-archive also raises important ethical questions about access. Does, for example, the geographical location of an archive effectively prohibit scholars from institutions in the Global South from accessing it, thus reducing the possibility of those with crucial knowledge from interpreting it and reinforcing the privilege of the center at the expense of the periphery? This concern is not marginal but central to postcolonial studies' engagement with writers' collections.

Focusing on the African context and specifically on the case of Amos Tutuola, whose papers are housed at the University of Texas at Austin's Harry Ransom Center, this essay interrogates the archival politics of the postcolonial writer's archive. Tutuola, whose first novel, *The Palm-*

Wine Drinkard, was published to significant critical acclaim in 1952, is a particularly instructive example for considering this issue. While his work has remained in print since the 1950s and received relatively constant attention within the field of African literary studies, Tutuola has not been endowed with the same Anglophone-postcolonial prestige as other African authors of his generation, such as Achebe and Soyinka. This is perhaps partly explained by the fact that Tutuola's apparent idiosyncrasy has made it difficult to categorize him in relation to normative literary values. While the initial reception from reviewers in the United Kingdom was positive, Nigerian critics "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" (Lindfors, *Critical Perspectives* xiii).[4] Furthermore, Gail Low persuasively shows that Tutuola's early success in the UK was partly attributable to his exotic qualities as a "natural artist" (16) and notes that it is possible to discern in Tutuola's relationship with his British publisher, Faber & Faber, a certain confusion on the latter's part "over how to manage the meaning of Tutuola's book" (21), especially given its distance from contemporary literary norms of the sort to which T. S. Eliot's publisher might have been accustomed. Low notes that as Tutuola's style of writing changed over the course of his career, a change marked partly by his drawing upon more elements from outside of Yoruba folklore, the disjunction between this new work and that of the earlier "natural artist" affected his critical reception: "The more literary Tutuola became, the less his works were valued and the more irksome his failings became" (30). The fact that the reception of Tutuola within literary circles has historically been somewhat uneven makes the archiving of his work in Texas particularly intriguing and suggests that his papers are an ideal case study for interrogating the value politics of the postcolonial writer's collection.

To begin such an exercise is to read against the grain of a formal archive. This mode of engagement with the archive has become common practice, especially in the wake of Derrida's work. Through such an optic, the

form of the archive—the manner in which its contents are catalogued, organized, and presented to the viewer—becomes one aspect of its status as what the anthropologist David Scott, drawing upon Michel Foucault's writings on the archive, calls a "generative system," one "that governs the production and appearance of statements" (82). Not merely a neutral store of information, the archive's own protocols and logics offer avenues of inquiry into how a particular group or society understands itself. In this sense, then, the archive generates more meaning than its creators intend. This essay highlights some of the ways a postcolonial writer's archive may generate meaning beyond what we might expect and provides insight into the complexity of the construction of value around postcolonial authors. In particular, it shows how the Tutuola Collection provides evidence that counters the implicit understanding of Tutuola's value, based on how he has been portrayed in studies of his work and in the public debate that surrounded the sale of his personal papers. My hope is that the example of Tutuola will raise the possibility of new strategies for reading and (re)making literary archives within postcolonial literary studies.

I. Literary Value and the Form of the Archive

In the early 1980s the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin (hereafter HRC) acquired the manuscript of Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* from the author for the sum of five thousand US dollars, a deal negotiated with the institute by Tutuola's friend and scholar Robert Wren.[5] According to Bernth Lindfors, Tutuola "was so pleased with the arrangement that he independently sold some of his later mss. to U.Texas, and after his death his family sold the same archive all the remaining papers of his that they could find (the box included his Yoruba bible, his royalty statements from Faber and Faber, and two pairs of his eyeglasses, among other things)" (qtd. in Harrow 152–53). In the years following Tutuola's death in 1997, most of the Tutuola papers were incorporated into the archive of thirteen boxes that is now at the HRC. Organized in four series, "I. Works by Tutuola, 1952–1996 (5 boxes); II. Correspondence, 1950–1997 (2 boxes); III. Works about Tutuola, 1972–1975 (2 boxes); and IV. Personal Papers,

1954–1997 (2 boxes)" ("Amos Tutuola"), the documents contain a substantial amount of information pertaining to Tutuola's relationship with his publishers, his non-literary professional life, and, to a lesser extent, his personal life. The *Drinkard* manuscript is accompanied by the manuscripts of some of Tutuola's later novels and numerous short works and fragments.

I argue that, upon their archivization, the Tutuola papers entered into a particular "regime of value," a term that I borrow from John Frow to refer to "the set of institutional and semiotic conditions that permit the construction and regulation of value equivalence and evaluative regularities for particular ends within a framework of shared understanding" (100–1). Crucially, Frow notes that "there is a plurality of such regimes operating within any complex social order" (101). Thus, while the papers enter into the regime of the literary archive, this particular regime intersects with countless others, many of which relate to literary value. This value is connected to a number of factors, perhaps the most obvious being the strength of a work's relation to the established literary canon and the extent to which it conforms with expectations around aesthetic value. Value is also indicated and enhanced by the conferral of prestigious prizes, awards, positive newspaper reviews, and high sales figures, all of which are part of what James F. English and Frow call "the literary-value industry" (46). Perhaps to a lesser extent, it is also conditioned by contemporary trends within the academic field. The "regime of value" into which the Tutuola papers entered upon their archivization did not therefore have only one determinant but was influenced by numerous intersecting regimes of literary value.

I have already noted that, in Tutuola's case, the author's literary value has always been somewhat unstable. Even if the initial British reviews of his first novel were positive, they exoticized the book considerably and the renown that he gained never translated into the all-out prestige of someone like Achebe, Soyinka, or Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.[6] And while one might understand this in terms of what Low sees as Tutuola's position as a natural artist or as derived in part from the value system that Huggan calls the "postcolonial exotic," there is still significant distance between

Tutuola's prestige and that of other authors. Nevertheless, Tutuola's papers do reside at the HRC, and the collection is presented to the public in exactly the same manner as authors as undeniably prestigious as J. M. Coetzee, Gertrude Stein, David Foster Wallace, Jorge Luis Borges, and Gabriel García Márquez, to name but a few.

Coetzee is a particularly pertinent point of comparison. Although he too is an African author often studied within the field of postcolonial studies, his novels' intertexts are highly canonical and his works are easier to locate within a tradition of English letters than Tutuola's. Indeed, Derek Attridge, writing about Coetzee's works, argues that "through their frequently overt *allusiveness* the novels offer themselves not as challenges to the canon, but as canonic—as already canonised, one might say" (169; emphasis in original). Through their allusions to canonical writers, he continues, Coetzee's novels "appear to locate themselves within an established literary culture, rather than presenting themselves as an assault on that culture" (169). That Attridge goes on in the same essay to argue that Coetzee's *Foe* (and, by extension, others of his novels) does not merely exhibit the traits of a canonical fiction but also challenges and subverts the canon is not particularly important here; what matters for our discussion is that the texts exhibit features consistent with the possibility of canonization.[7] In the years since the publication of Attridge's essay, this possibility has arguably been realized: Coetzee has received the kind of public celebration (his 2003 Nobel Prize being only the apex of it) that was less forthcoming for Tutuola.[8] The Nigerian author's papers are, however, kept in the same kind of box (in folders of the same color) and are subject to the same conditions of access as those of Coetzee. While not denying that Tutuola is as important as Coetzee and the other writers archived at the HRC, I want to stress that these authors have achieved a different kind of prestige. The Tutuola Collection therefore remains an anomaly of sorts. The HRC, however implicitly, makes a value claim by housing the papers of a considerable number of authors who have conventional prestige. And yet Tutuola's value is manifestly not that of these other authors. The fact that his papers were most likely purchased for their historical value as documents pertaining to an early African writer may explain the reason for their

acquisition, but it does not provide much insight into how to manage the mismatch between the regime of value of the HRC and the Tutuola papers. I suggest that the collection articulates values other than those related to canonicity, as one might expect to find in such an archive.

II. Biography, Tradition, Influence

"The archive," Derrida notes, "has always been a *pledge*" (18; emphasis in original). The particular pledge of the literary collection might be understood as a series of claims that it makes for literary interpretation. Two of the most common of these are the claims to provide biographical context and information about influence: the hard-to-dispute wisdom is that with knowledge of how writers lived (gleaned from unpublished letters, diaries and notes) and what they read, critics can better position them in terms of history and the literary tradition. While the HRC's description of the "Scope and Contents" of the Tutuola Collection ("Amos Tutuola") refrains from making strong claims about its importance, the organization of the collection implies the possibility of biographical reconstruction, with rubrics such as "Correspondence" and "Personal Papers" evoking a practice of reading documents for the details that inform contextualized literary analysis. This "pledge" is also an appearance of the archive's value within a normative literary critical domain.

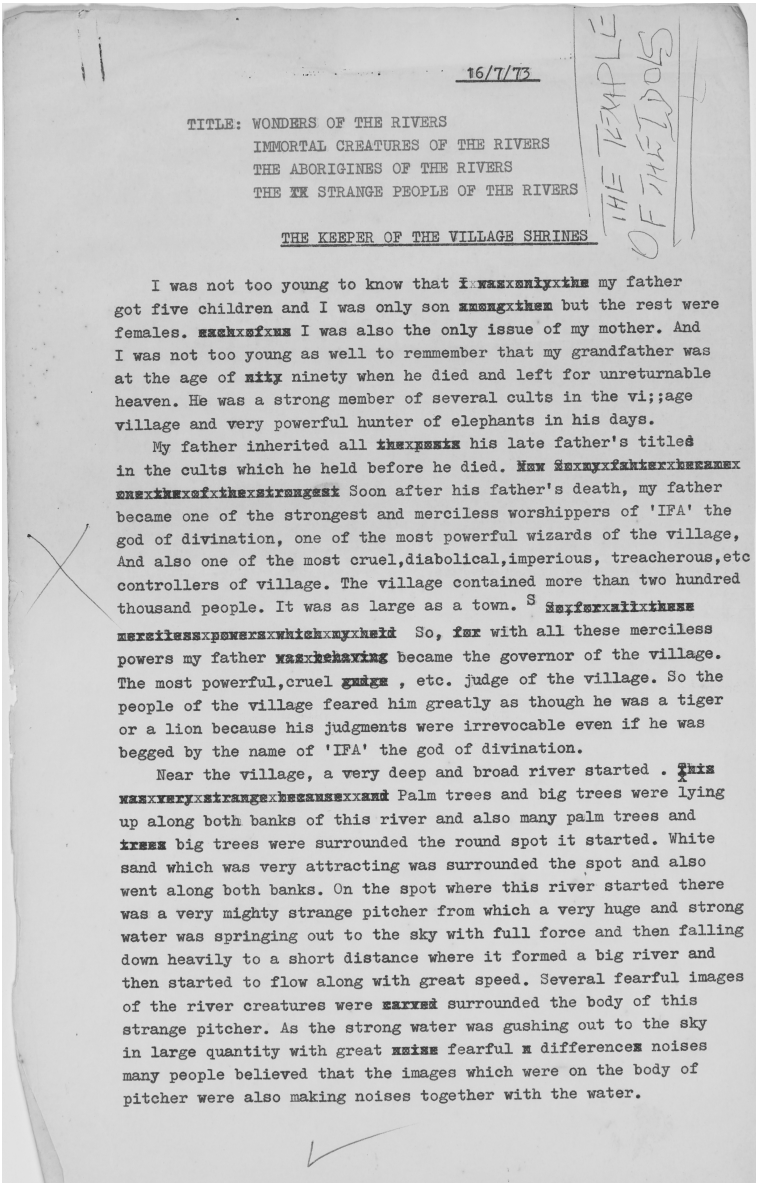
There is, I argue, a partial yet important mismatch between the "pledge" made by the archival form of the Tutuola collection and its content. With the exception of the substantial correspondence between Tutuola and his various publishers (a part of the collection that has been substantially mined by scholars), a large number of the preserved documents are not related to his practice as a writer. They include receipts, banking documents, and documents related to his careers as a Nigerian Broadcast Corporation storekeeper and as a freelance dealer in electronic goods. This is not unusual; many writers leave behind evidence of the mundane side of life, but it is interesting in this case because Tutuola's biography and his life experience have not traditionally been seen as the inspiration for his tales.[9] As Ato Quayson notes, criticism of Tutuola tends to "either to show his debts to Yoruba storytelling traditions" or "trace universal patterns in his work" (44). Quayson complicates the

question of Tutuola's texts' debt to the "indigenous resource-base" (6) by moving away from a directly mimetic conception of the relation between the two and locating the author instead as someone with "the simple desire to express marginal forms of the folkloric intuition in an idiom that would bring it to the centre of cultural debates" (62). But while Quayson effectively recovers "Tutuola's own role as a creative imagination" (44) and adds nuance to our understanding of the relations between the author's work and that of his Yoruba-language precursor, D. O. Fagunwa (60–61), the importance placed on the author's biography is still considerably less than in discussions of many other writers whose papers are held at the HRC. At the risk of making a crude and reductive comparison, while it is relatively easy to make the case that Coetzee's early employment at IBM as a computer programmer has some relevance to his literary work—not least because of his computational work on Samuel Beckett in his Ph.D. thesis—it is much harder to argue that Tutuola's decades of employment as a storekeeper for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (to which many of the collection's documents relate) are directly germane to an interpretation of his tales. This is not to deny that there might be some relevance—indeed, the well-known scene in Tutuola's second novel, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, in which the hero encounters a "Television-handed Ghostess" (161) would suggest that there is more work to be done to establish how the author's experience of the broadcasting industry influenced his literary work. I rather emphasize that within normative literary critical concerns, Coetzee's extra-literary activities seem more pertinent to his work than Tutuola's. The problem, then, is how to consider the collection as part of the Yoruba tradition—one that, as Quayson points out, "precludes cursory characterization" (10) and is only problematically categorized as a tradition. In addition to the English and Yoruba-language materials that preserve aspects of Yoruba folklore, the collection also provides insights into the embodied practice of being a writer in that tradition, thus closing the gap somewhat between the categories of biography and tradition.

The collection does provide significant evidence about Tutuola's reading habits. He demonstrates a particular appetite for folktales that may have

informed the non-Yoruba fantastical imagery of some of his later novels, such as *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955).[10] We also know that he read the Arabian Nights and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1948.[11] Reading through the documents myself, however, as someone consciously engaging with a tradition of Tutuola scholarship, I could not help but sense a disconnect between, on the one hand, the personal papers and letters and, on the other hand, Tutuola's tales. Apart from the occasional mention of Yoruba customs—usually in response to questions from readers or in the small number of archived interviews—the letters and personal papers are relatively silent on the world of the African bush depicted in the novels. The nature and structure of the "indigenous resource-base" (Quayson 6) on which Tutuola drew remains opaque, and there is little material that permits the scholar to reconstruct the creative choices and distinctions that the author made when he drew on it. What emerges from an examination of Tutuola's short story manuscripts and typescripts, however, is an alternative and unusual textual practice that provides important insight into his working style.

There are over eighty short works in the Tutuola Collection, some of which remain unpublished and many of which are drafts or alternative versions of his published short stories and episodes that occur in his novels. Tutuola appears to have had a particularly fluid sense of the relationship between story and title. There are numerous instances of stories that possess several titles, none of which are given clear priority in the typescript.[12] Figure 1, for example, shows the typescript of a short story that is principally catalogued under the title "The Temple of the Idols" with alternative titles also included in the listing. This title, however, has been added to the typescript in pen in Tutuola's hand. Beneath the date are five other titles, four in red ink and one in black, and their location between the date and the main text suggests that they were added at the time of composition and not later. While it is possible that Tutuola was suggesting titles from which a publisher could choose or to which he may have later returned, the difference between the proposed titles suggests a titling practice at odds with established convention. The fluidity of the relationship between title and content is reminiscent of storytelling in oral cultures where titles are



16/7/73

TITLE: WONDERS OF THE RIVERS
IMMORTAL CREATURES OF THE RIVERS
THE ABORIGINES OF THE RIVERS
THE ~~TR~~ STRANGE PEOPLE OF THE RIVERS

THE TEMPLE OF THE IDOLS

THE KEEPER OF THE VILLAGE SHRINES

I was not too young to know that ~~I was only the~~ my father got five children and I was only son ~~among them~~ but the rest were females. ~~Each of us~~ I was also the only issue of my mother. And I was not too young as well to remmember that my grandfather was at the age of ~~sixty~~ ninety when he died and left for unreturnable heaven. He was a strong member of several cults in the vi;;age village and very powerful hunter of elephants in his days.

My father inherited all ~~the powers~~ his late father's titles in the cults which he held before he died. ~~Now my father the~~ ~~one of the strongest~~ Soon after his father's death, my father became one of the strongest and merciless worshippers of 'IFA' the god of divination, one of the most powerful wizards of the village, And also one of the most cruel,diabolical,imperious, treacherous,etc controllers of village. The village contained more than two hundred thousand people. It was as large as a town. ~~So my father all these merciless powers which my hold~~ So, ~~for~~ with all these merciless powers my father ~~was having~~ became the governor of the village. The most powerful,cruel ~~judge~~ , etc. judge of the village. So the people of the village feared him greatly as though he was a tiger or a lion because his judgments were irrevocable even if he was begged by the name of 'IFA' the god of divination.

Near the village, a very deep and broad river started . ~~This was very strange because and~~ Palm trees and big trees were lying up along both banks of this river and also many palm trees and ~~trees~~ big trees were surrounded the round spot it started. White sand which was very attracting was surrounded the spot and also went along both banks. On the spot where this river started there was a very mighty strange pitcher from which a very huge and strong water was springing out to the sky with full force and then falling down heavily to a short distance where it formed a big river and then started to flow along with great speed. Several fearful images of the river creatures were ~~carved~~ surrounded the body of this strange pitcher. As the strong water was gushing out to the sky in large quantity with great ~~noise~~ fearful ~~a~~ differences noises many people believed that the images which were on the body of pitcher were also making noises together with the water.

Fig. 1: "The Temple of the Idols / The Keeper of the Village Shrines / Wonders of the Rivers / Immortal Creatures of the Rivers / The Aborigines of the Rivers / The Strange People of the Rivers," Tutuola

informal attributes of the work that serve only to designate it rather than being a part of the work per se, as is the convention for much written literature.

Tutuola's repurposing of episodes from his novels in his short fiction is further evidence of his non-standard practice. Over twenty-five years after the publication of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola wrote a story called "The Debt-Collector, the Money-Borrower, the Onlooker and the Money-Lender (Case Study)," which is an alternative version of the first of the court cases that the protagonist is asked to judge in the "mixed town" episode of the author's first book (Tutuola, *Palm-Wine Drinkard* 110–15). The short story version, while substantially the same in its main plot points, nevertheless contains some minor differences: the money borrowed is in naira rather than pounds sterling, the story includes quoted dialogue between the money-borrower and the money-lender, and the opening and closing narrative framing is more substantial. While certain phrases occur in both stories, there are enough differences between individual sentences to give the impression that this is not a revised version of the earlier text but an entirely new composition and new telling of the story. While this new iteration clearly undermines the publishing convention whereby published short stories can be folded into novels or other longer works of fiction, yet rarely vice-versa, it also troubles the received notion of intertextuality as it pertains to an individual author's oeuvre.

If the desire of the Tutuola scholar to reconstruct the nature of the author's influence from Yoruba oral cultures is, at least in the most obvious sense, frustrated by the archive, the collection does offer an alternative. Rather than show a linear progression from draft to final version, the collection offers evidence of a non-linear reworking of material. The collection, in effect, articulates its own protocols of influence and derivation, allowing an insight beyond constructed and reified notions such as the oral tradition. That these protocols are alien to the norms of literary production and publication suggests again that the Tutuola Collection demonstrates a mismatch between the value pledged by its archival form and that offered by its content—one that points towards new avenues of inquiry.

III. Sharks, Archives, and Agency

It may be tempting to construe a postcolonial inquiry into a writer's collection as a continuation of the processes of archiving practiced by colonial administrations. Carolyn Hamilton et al. note that

> [f]or much of the nineteenth century the treasures of the archive were forcibly relocated to imperial centres. At the turn of the millennium they continue along similar paths from poorer centres to richer metropoles as wealthy institutions snap up private collections, purchase microfilms and 'facilitate' availability. Based in Western centres, those institutions thus aggregate to themselves the power to define and delimit the archive. ("Introduction" 17)

While it would be highly irresponsible to ignore the manifest neo-imperial implications of this process of centralization of "peripheral" cultural artifacts, it is nevertheless important to understand it in terms of the broader context of capitalist accumulation and not simply as an isolated instance of the continued subjugation of former colonies by the imperial center. The writer's collection is in fact a product of the continuation of capitalist accumulation after the formal end of colonialism, but it nevertheless contains within it opportunities for (re) considering the nature of authorial agency in a particular context.

Tutuola's active involvement in the archiving of his papers—evidenced by considerable correspondence—provides an important counterpoint to the narrative of archivization described by Hamilton et al. A version of this narrative has haunted Tutuola studies since the infamous "Sharks" episode of 1978, when Lindfors, having discovered the manuscripts of *Drinkard* and the early then-unpublished work *The Wild Hunter in the Bush of Ghosts*, was flamboyantly accused of taking advantage of Tutuola in an article in the Nigerian *Daily Times* entitled "Amos Tutuola in an Ocean of Sharks" by Yemi Ogunbiyi. The article also alleged that Faber & Faber and Grove Press had underpaid royalties to Tutuola. Lindfors swiftly clarified the nature of his intentions in a rejoinder,[13] but the event—one that received significant coverage in the Nigerian press—demonstrates the extent to which Tutuola could

be politicized and construed as a victim. While the questions raised by Ogunbiyi in the "Sharks" article about the treatment of Tutuola by his publishers and the alleged imperialism implicit in the purchase of his manuscripts reflect a legitimate concern for the author and the situation of African writers more broadly (even if the precise allegations appear to have little basis), it is worth noting that Tutuola's agency is minimized throughout the article. Indeed, Ogunbiyi writes, Tutuola "is the victim of what might well be the greatest swindle of a living African artist by a foreign publishing firm." He states that "[t]o understand this horrendous situation is to understand that Tutuola is the victim of the combined circumstances of history and possibly, exploitative publishers. Trusting and unassuming, the shy, self-taught writer either did not feel the need for a literary agent in 1951 or was ignorant of the role of such an individual who could have driven a better bargain for him."

But the naive figure Ogunbiyi portrays, one who is simply at the mercy of the Western publishing establishment, is not supported by the letters. What emerges from Wren's letters to Tutuola and from Tutuola's letters to publishers and academics is the extent to which the author operated with considerable commercial sense.[14] There are numerous instances in which he chased people whom he believed owed him money, and the letters demonstrate a clear sense of how much he felt he should be paid for his work.[15] The correspondence concerning his involvement with the purchase of the *Drinkard* manuscript shows him keen to get the best price and demonstrates his awareness of the value of the document. Indeed, he rejects one offer for the combined sale of the *Drinkard* and *Wild Hunter* manuscripts, writing to Wren that "the offer is too poor! To pay $3000 for two original mss and again to give $1000 to the dealer out of it? I am afraid, I am not happy or pleased with this term at all" (Letter to Robert M. Wren, 30 Aug. 1988). Although he does, in the same letter, agree to a somewhat better alternative offer proposed by the dealer, Tutuola's displeasure appears to have led Wren to seek offers elsewhere (Tutuola, Letter to Robert M. Wren, 20 Oct. 1988), resulting eventually in the deal with the HRC for five-thousand US dollars for the *Palm-Wine Drinkard* manuscript. Lindfors' recollection that Tutuola "was so pleased with the arrangement that he independently sold some

of his later mss. to U.Texas" (qtd. in Harrow 152–53) reaffirms my sense that Tutuola was involved in the archiving of his papers. Indeed, in an 8 August 1989 letter to Don Congdon of Three Continents Press, in which he discusses his sadness at hearing of Wren's death, Tutuola expresses considerable satisfaction at the idea of an HRC Tutuola Collection: "I am very, very happy to read in Mr. Staley's [then director of the HRC] letter that they hope to build a Tutuola archive there at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. After this, I would like to know from Mr. Staley the type of the other kind of materials which he would like me to send" (Copy/draft of letter to Don Congdon). This does not, of course, negate the significant power imbalance that characterizes this archival process, but it does make clear that Tutuola participated in it with a certain level of agency.

We can also understand Tutuola's involvement in the archiving process in terms of the construction of literary value. A letter, written late in his life to Faber & Faber, suggests that Tutuola consciously tried to construct value around his name. In the letter, he asks the publisher not to cooperate with a man who is writing a biography about him; the man, he writes, "is not competent enough to write any accurate report on me. I have since cautioned him to refrain from such move" (Copy/draft of letter to Frank Pike). There is a clear attempt at reputation management in his letter, for Tutuola continues that "reports reaching me shows [sic] that he, if this man got his way through by carrying out his project, he is definitely going to write inaccurate biography on me and as you may know, it is going to have a negative effect on the image which I have laboured tirelessly to build over the past years." Although it is difficult to be sure whether he is concerned in this letter with his general personal reputation or with his professional one as a writer, the fact that the proposed biography would most likely have been of interest to his established readership and his statement that he has "laboured tirelessly" to construct this "image" suggest that his comment pertains to his reputation within the literary sphere. This self-understanding and presentation make it possible to read the pleasure that he expressed in having his papers archived at the HRC as part of an attempt, on his part, to construct a reputable persona.

Two important points arise from this discussion of Tutuola's interest and involvement in his own archivization. The first is that the agency that I am describing here is not a radical form—it is a kind that operates within rather than against the market forces of literary production and the academy and acts to produce value consistent with their expectations. Nevertheless, the example is an important one insofar as it demonstrates that Tutuola was not lacking in agency but was in fact more than able to participate in aspects of the literary marketplace for his own benefit. Second, this further demonstrates the complexity of the collection's relation to regimes of value and prestige. If the collection is, at least in part, a component of Tutuola's construction of his own prestige, this suggests that archives can be mobilized by authors as a means of conferring value upon themselves, even if the contents of that archive do not necessarily conform to the regimes of value that we would usually expect to surround a literary archive.

IV. Digital Horizons, New Values

If, as I have argued, the content of the Tutuola Collection points to values that are different from the canonical-literary ones suggested by its archival form, the prospect of digitization raises exciting possibilities for transforming the structure of the archive in order to allow new values to come to the fore. For inspiration, we might turn to the work of Elizabeth Povinelli and, in particular, her article "The Woman on the Other Side of the Wall: Archiving the Otherwise in Postcolonial Digital Archives," in which she describes a proposed (and, as yet, unrealized) project to create a digital archive of Indigenous knowledge in which Indigenous peoples control the archive. The project, she writes,

> would create a land-based "living library" by geotagging media files in such a way that media files are playable only within a certain proximity to a site. The idea is to develop software that creates three unique interfaces—for tourists, land management, and Indigenous families, the latter having management authority over the entire project and content—and provide a

> dynamic feedback loop for the input of new information and media. (148)

Crucial to Povinelli's proposed "living library" is the potential for digital technologies to decenter the authority of the traditional archive: digitization offers the opportunity for the archive to be re-appropriated as a site of knowledge production with new (or at least unorthodox) norms and conventions. "The dream," she writes, "is that, if done properly and with a rigorous and firm commitment, the postcolonial archive will create new forms of storage and preservation and new archival spaces and time, in which a social otherwise can endure and thus change existing social formations of power" (153). At stake here is not simply the transcription and uploading online of Indigenous materials (which might easily recreate existing power imbalances) but rather the creation of an original platform from which the production of Indigenous knowledge can continue.

In what follows I want to overlook the financial, institutional, proprietary, and technological constraints that would undoubtedly need to be overcome to create an archive of Tutuola works that is digitized in this manner. I rather want to imagine a digitized Tutuola collection to consider how a radically new archival form might allow for the collection to represent different values, values that are now currently latent in the collection and are distinct from those which are most evident in its current configuration. If, as Derrida writes, "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future" (17; emphasis in original), a radically different archival structure ought to provide a new perspective on its content. In other words, we might re-imagine the value of the Tutuola Collection outside of the normative values that currently influence researchers' engagement with it. Such an undertaking resonates with a postcolonial project that aims to understand the specificity of literary production and its material location.

I argue that the possibilities for new values to be realized from the existing collection of papers rely on the involvement of a broader

range of scholars. If the collection's current status more or less makes its transfer to Africa impossible—it is now owned by the HRC, which is unlikely to relinquish it—the digital's capacity to compress distance can, in some measure, compensate for this.[16] The digitized archive could benefit not only from greater expertise—of scholars with knowledge of Yoruba offering translations and interpretations of the materials—but also from being an active part of Nigerian society. In this sense, the digitized collection would not be a static online service but rather a platform, where the "technical structure of the *archiving* archive" (Derrida 17) could be created and modified in relation to contemporary Nigeria, reflecting the country's own progressing history.[17] It would not be simply a repository for scholarly research (although it could be this too) but a site at which Tutuola's writings could be engaged according to the exigencies of the contemporary moment. (Indeed, while the literary collections of the Global North might appear to be timeless and immune to history, the structure and presentation of their content is, of course, historically contingent.) Much as Povinelli's "living library" promotes a "dynamic" engagement with aboriginal history (148), the digital Tutuola Collection that I envision would allow for scholars globally to enter into a dialogue with the materials that has not, so far, been able to take place.

By its very nature, the digital archive precludes the stipulation of its exact technical parameters at this point, but I want to suggest a few possibilities. Scholars could begin a complex task of cross-referencing the documents, ignoring, as far as they might be restrictive, the categories of the current filing system. Re-ordering the short story manuscripts and cataloguing them according to the relevant aspects of the Yoruba folk tradition on which they draw (rather than chronologically) might provide new insight upon Tutuola's practice as a writer of folklore. If the platform were to allow the interactive cross-referencing of Tutuola's work with other African writers—perhaps with orators of oral epics, or with writers such as D. O. Fagunwa—scholars might reveal new insights into the nature and manner of transmutations of oral and written sources. Scholars might uncover a difference between the folklorist who writes and the writer who draws upon folklore. Likewise,

they may gain greater insight into the complexities of the "indigenous resource-base" (Quayson 6). In this vein, Tutuola's apparently idiosyncratic titling practice could be incorporated into the form of the archive: the documents with multiple titles could be archived several times under each title. I would also emphasize the possibility for other South-South or North-South comparisons, particularly those pertaining to relationships between oral and written practices. The point of the digital archive, then, is not to merely use the techniques of the digital humanities such as data mining or topic modeling but to allow for the creation of a Tutuola archive in which values that are not necessarily those of literary criticism can emerge. Such a project would not undo or reverse the problems of the accumulation of literary archives in America and Europe. Rather, it might attempt to exploit this imbalance by exploring what new values the project brings into relief. In this way, we might gain greater insight into how different African literary value-systems are constituted.

V. Conclusion

While the possibilities and potentials represented by digitization are ripe for exploration in the near future, postcolonial studies would, in the meantime, do well to take note of the opportunity that formal literary archives present for gauging and troubling the field's value system. As I demonstrate, thinking both along with and against the logic of standard archival practice (which, with collections increasingly concentrated in a small number of institutions, is likely to become increasingly homogenized) can provide important insights into how we read postcolonial literatures and how we might do so in the future. Treating the archive in this way ensures that the skepticism that postcolonial studies has so painstakingly developed towards the claims of the archive remain in conversation with the circumstances of the archive's material existence and with the uneasy position occupied by the scholar in an increasingly marketized academy. Thinking about the writer's collection in terms of value compels us to think through alternatives to—or at the very least supplements to—the existing collections and, in so doing, to develop new ways of reading them.

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Notes

1 I am, of course, referring to Spivak's use of the term "epistemic violence" in her "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (282) to describe the imposition of certain forms of knowledge onto colonial subjects and the resultant effacement of indigenous knowledges.

2 An important attempt to think about the issue of globally dispersed archives can be seen in the output of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network, a joint research project involving several international universities that has produced papers that deal with the theoretical and practical aspects of transnational modern literary archiving (*Diasporic Literary Archives*).

3 The papers of Achebe and Soyinka are at the Houghton Library, University of Harvard. Those of Desai, Ghose, and Ishiguro are at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Ishiguro hit the headlines in August 2015 when he sold his papers to the Harry Ransom Center for over one million US dollars (Reuters). Additionally, Salman Rushdie's papers are at Emory University and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's were recently acquired by The Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington.

4 Examples of critical Nigerian commentaries have been republished in Lindfors' *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 29–44.

5 Wren's letter on 13 December 1988 to Thomas F. Staley and his letter to Tutuola on the same day confirm that the manuscript was sold to the HRC for five thousand US dollars.

6 The early reviews of Tutuola's first novel have become so infamous that few critics go without mentioning them. Of particular note are the reviews written by Dylan Thomas and Arthur Calder-Marshall, both reprinted in Lindfors' *Critical Perspectives*, pp. 7–10. Both reviews, although forthcoming in their praise, nevertheless value in Tutuola a sort of primitivist aesthetic.

7 It should be noted, however, that canonization and value are not synonymous: in Attridge's formulation (with which I am inclined to agree) canonicity "confers *value*," albeit a value that "is necessarily understood as not conferred and contingent but inherent and permanent" (Attridge 175; emphasis in original).

8 This is not to deny that Tutuola received some international prestige in his lifetime. In the 1980s, when there was a resurgence of interest in his work, he received several invitations to do public readings abroad and actually travelled to the University of Iowa in 1983 as a Writing Fellow ("Participants by Genre"). He also received a number of prizes and was made an Honorary Fellow by the Modern Language Association ("Past Honorary Fellows"). The fact, however, that many of these achievements have been forgotten—there is little reference to them in much of the scholarship on Tutuola—suggests a critical desire to locate him locally, rather than globally.

9 It is not in any way my intention here to denigrate the contents of the Tutuola Collection. Despite the lack of material relating to the world depicted in his texts, it provides numerous insights into Tutuola's personal stance on a range of issues and much more. It also almost goes without saying that material that may not seem particularly useful or important within the context of much contemporary Tutuola scholarship may be of interest when read in a different context.

10 See Tutuola's 16 May 1968 copy/draft of letter to Lindfors, where he writes in response to a question from Lindfors that he reads "[f]olk tales written by African or European."

11 See Tutuola's 16 May 1968 copy/draft of letter to Lindfors.

12 See, for example, "Popondoro's Beauty of Magnet / Competition of a Wife" and "Songo on the Road to Heaven / From Earth to Heaven / From the Earth to the Under World."

13 See Lindfors, Typescript of "On Shocks."

14 In citing Wren, I am taking advantage of a particular feature of the Tutuola Collection. It is accompanied at the HRC by the papers of Lindfors and Wren, which include a significant amount of correspondence dating from the time of the acquisition of the Tutuola papers.

15 There are numerous examples of this in Tutuola's correspondence. Perhaps the most vivid instance of this occurs in a letter titled "Warning" written by Tutuola concerning an unapproved theatre adaptation of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, in which the author notes that "anyone staging the play either in Nigeria or anywhere else without his permission as from now does so at his own risk."

16 See Lindfors' *Long Drums and Canons*, pp. 147–55 for an account of the issues at stake in the potential establishment of a "Nigerian literary archive" (153) to house manuscripts such as Tutuola's.

17 Alternative African archives and modes of archiving have received some critical interest. The essay collection *Africa's Hidden Histories* (2006) explores a

fascinating array of personal papers and archiving practices that existed parallel to and survived the colonial ones. The online "Badilisha Poetry X-Change," launched in 2008, provides a platform for the exchange of poetry by African poets that bypasses the traditional publishing industry and embraces the oral tradition by allowing submissions in audio as well as in written text.

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