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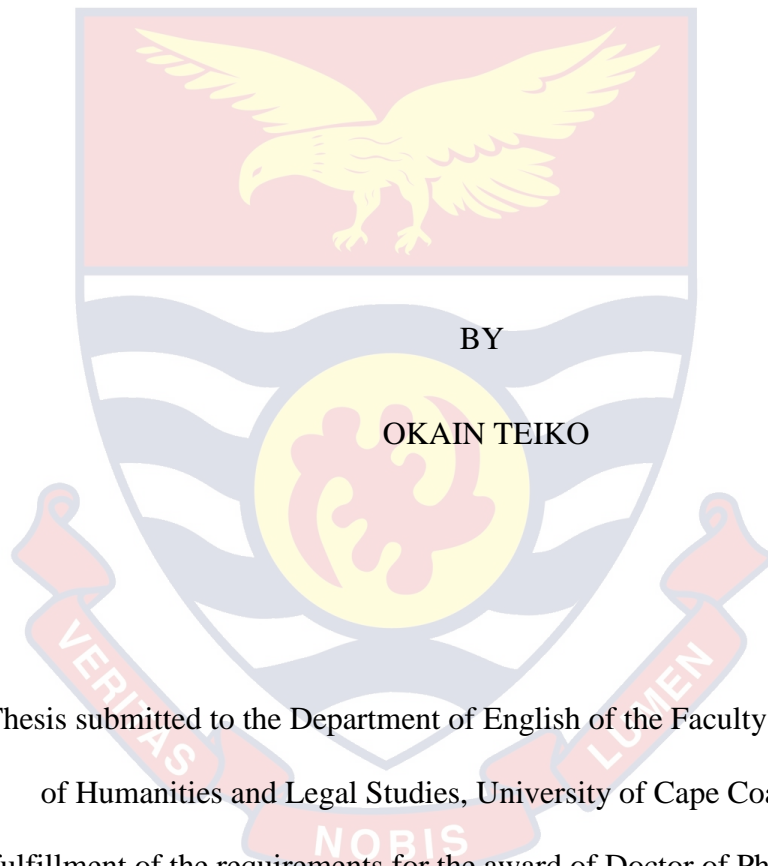
JONSON IN WEST AFRICA: A STUDY OF THE ELEMENTS OF
JONSONIAN COMEDY IN THE PLAYS OF SOYINKA AND



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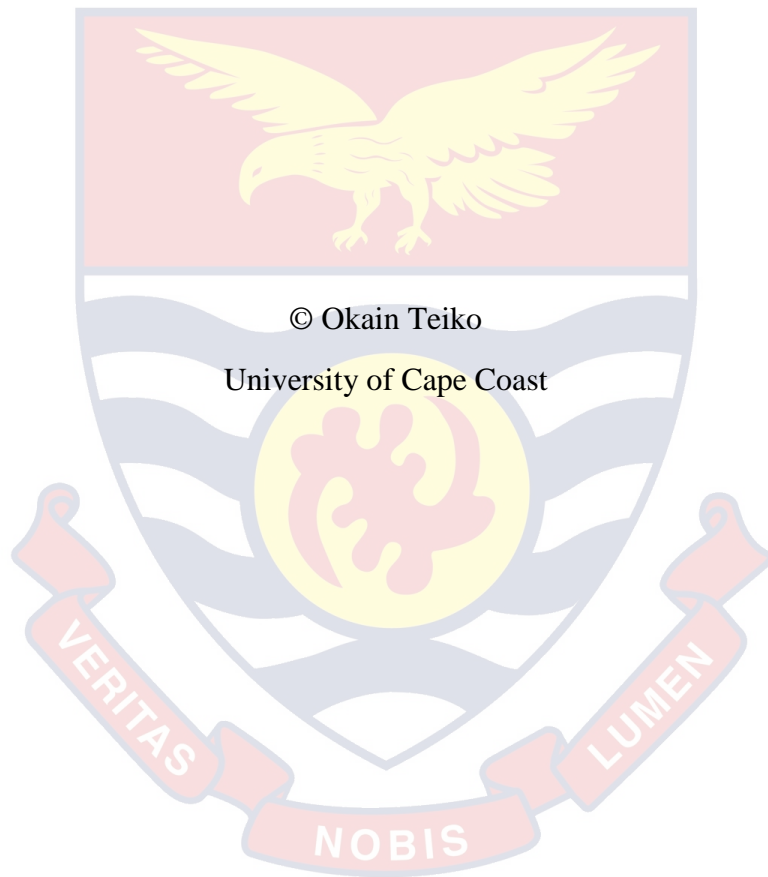
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

JONSON IN WEST AFRICA: A STUDY OF THE ELEMENTS OF
JONSONIAN COMEDY IN THE PLAYS OF SOYINKA AND
SUTHERLAND



Thesis submitted to the Department of English of the Faculty of Arts, College
of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree
in Literature in English

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University of Cape Coast

KEY WORDS

Influence

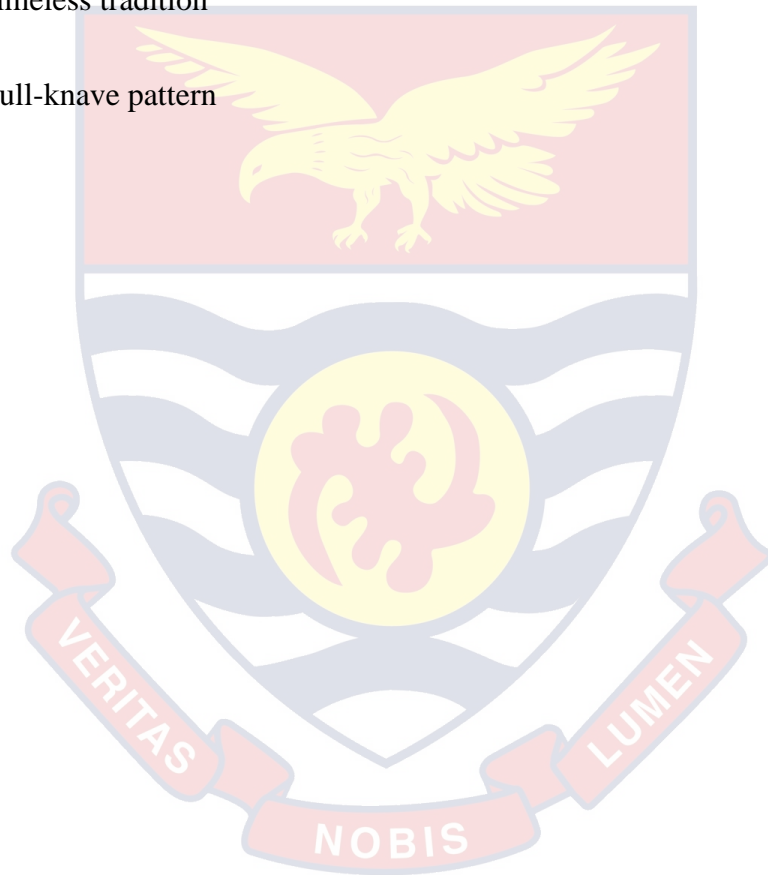
Echoes, semblances

Predecessors and modern writers

Archetypal trickster

Timeless tradition

Gull-knave pattern



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Finally my ceaseless praise and thanks go to God, the keeper and sustainer of my life

DEDICATION

To my family



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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature..... Date.....

Name: Okain Teiko

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature..... Date.....

Name: Professor Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang

Co-Supervisor's Signature..... Date.....

Name: Doctor Moussa Traore

ABSTRACT

The originality of this research is primarily grounded in its comparative nature with its substantial focus on the Renaissance English dramatist, Jonson and two West African dramatists, Soyinka and Sutherland. The study seeks to respond to a gap in comparative research which for a long time has been confined to studying the elements associated with Jonson's comedy on other European writers, but rarely on West African dramatists. The thesis investigates the relationship between Soyinka and Sutherland, on the one hand, and Jonson, on the other hand, in terms of their artistic choices, thematology, and stylistic modes; and also examines what echoes, semblances and parallels which exist between them, as dramatized in some selected plays of the three dramatists. The study draws interpretive insights from Bloom's poetics in his *Anxiety of Influence*, The New Historicism Theory, Frye's views on archetypes and Eliot's idea of tradition in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to shed light on whether modern twentieth century writers' art and skills are mere echoes of their predecessors or they demonstrate their distinct individual talents. The findings from the study establish that the three dramatists utilize a common archetype of the trickster image as the sub-structure of their plays as well as their individual choices and stylistic modes converge in the timeless tradition of literary production to express a confluence of their aesthetic energies. The thesis concludes that the West African dramatists select tropes and ideas from the realities of their socio-cultural environments to express their distinct originality, for they did not imitate Jonson's craft.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Jonson's influence as a dramatist during the Renaissance and later periods in literary history has been quite enormous, and writers like Marston, Field, Sheridan, Ibsen, Dickens, Moliere and other comic dramatists in the European tradition, both past and present, have exhibited some degree of reception of the comic theories Jonson developed. Several critics, such as Baskerville (1911), Kerr (1912), have pointed out the characteristic features of Jonson's comedy of humours and his defining comedic traits in the works of other playwrights. However, this study makes a claim that little or virtually no attention has been devoted to studying the elements of Jonsonian comedy as reflected in the works of some West African comic dramatists.

Harris (1895) in an essay titled, "The Origin of the Seventeenth Century Idea of Humours", traces the origins of Jonsonian comic theories of humours (which are a characteristic feature of most of his works) to the Greeks from whom sixteenth century England borrowed extensively to enrich their dramatic works. The popularity of Jonson's characteristic portrayal of his characters' humours, Harris maintains, could be seen in the works of the French dramatist, Moliere, and the poet, Rabelais. He concludes his essay by asserting that "a careful examination of the literature of France and Germany for this period...show[s] a rise and fall of Character and Humour writing commensurate with that in England... and with the great Renaissance movement", set on by Jonson (p.92). The view of Harris supports

the position of this work that studies in the elements of Jonsonian comedy in the works of other writers are confined to the European tradition.

In a related work, Baskerville (1911) in “A Study of Humours” examines the concept and the meaning of “humours” as Jonson conceived it. He explores how Jonson’s predecessors conceived the term; examines the relations between humours comedy itself, its association with morality and psychology; and concludes that the treatment of humours in the works of Lyly, Harvey, Nashe and others is obviously traceable to the influence of Jonson. Kerr (1912), another twentieth century critic, in three renowned essays on Jonson, published in *Influence of Ben Jonson on English comedy* also discusses the features that distinguish Jonson’s comedy of humours and examines his influence on other European playwrights such as Sheridan, Field, Brome, Dryden and others. Similarly, Donaldson (1985) in an “Epistle Dedicatory” to Jonson’s *Volpone* also makes a comparative analysis between Dante’s *Inferno* and Jonson’s *Volpone* and concludes that Jonson’s work was influenced by Dante’s in the structural and thematic construction, and the portrayal of fraud as the root of all evil. These elements, in the view of Donaldson, influenced Jonson’s idea of humours which later dramatists, such as Sheridan and Wilson, of the Restoration period, imitated.

These studies establish the importance of Jonson and his influence on other European writers. Eliot, one of the renowned critics of the twentieth century observes that Jonsonian influence on later writers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, and his reputation as a dramatist are quite revealing. In Eliot’s estimation,

the reputation of Jonson has been of the most deadly kind that can be compelled upon the memory of a great poet. To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries – this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval. (1932:104).

Though Eliot's view suggests that the effect of the approval of Jonson has been to condemn him to obscurity, however, it is in the obscurity that Jonson's influence manifests in the works of later centuries. The imitation of Jonson's poetic style manifests in the seventeenth century (in the works of Dryden, Donne, Herbert, and Marvel), the comedy of the Restoration as reflected in the eighteenth century (in the works of Sheridan, Congreve, Wycherly, and Davenant) and in the nineteenth century (in the works of Dickens). Jonson, in all these influences, provided the essential impulse to dramatic characterisation and the portrayal of human eccentricity.

Graham (1947), another critic, also observes that the imitation of Jonson's style by later Restoration dramatists during the last twenty years of the seventeenth century was enormous, but suggests that little attention has been given to D'Urfey's works. Graham provides an essay in which he studies twenty comedies of D'Urfey in a comparative paradigm with Jonson's use of allusions, humour characters, methods by which the humours are exhibited, and the emphasis upon gulling as dominant

features the former received from the latter. He concludes that D'Urfey “was a slavish imitator of Jonson” (p. 51).

Evans (1995), in *Habits of Mind: Evidence and Effects of Ben Jonson's Reading*, provides a scholarly treatment of some American writers' imitation of Jonson's poetic style. In a topical index, Evans demonstrates how “many of the same themes and concerns that seem to have been central to [Jonson's] own writing” manifest in the works of More's *History of King Richard III* and Maus' *Pace*. (p.19). He also discusses Jonson's skill on varied works, examining the methods used and the diverse intensions of the authors to represent different periods, genres, styles and thematic concerns in both European and American literature. Evans' work suggests an impressive range of Jonson's interests and how his theories served as a pattern for critics to use in examining his relation to other writers outside the English tradition.

Jonson's personality and the sterling characteristics of his art attract to himself many enthusiastic followers. The above studies foreground how Jonson's theories and skills provide a kind of a model which both writers and critics within the English and American tradition used in a comparative pattern to determine his towering literary posture. Such studies, however, are confined to the Western literary tradition in the sense that the imitation of his craft goes beyond the individual writer, Jonson, to his immediate contemporaries as well as later English and American writers. It is important therefore to examine Jonsonian theories and skills, in the broader context of literary discourse, on other dramatists outside the English and American tradition. This is the point of interest in the current study.

It is important to establish a full appreciation of the concept of ‘influence’ or imitation of a poetic style in understanding Jonson’s relation with other writers’ works. Aristotle’s *The Poetics* indicates that all arts are modes of imitation and that a writer imitates the real identity of nature, not the mere shadow of things. Thus, a poet creates something new according to his own “idea” of the original. Aristotelian sense of imitation is quite universal and provides a direction in viewing creative works as imitating Nature in general terms. Holman and Harmon (1986) intimate that writers and scholars of later centuries appropriated Aristotelian understanding of the concept, and later Greek and Roman schools of rhetoric used the term to indicate literary models as an accepted form of composition. These two views were accepted in English literary history during the Renaissance and the Neo-classical periods as the understanding of imitation of a poetic craft or influence.

Criticism, according to Holman and Harmon, therefore accepted imitation in the rhetorical sense of copying Classical models in the various forms of literature (p. 252). Imitation in this sense suggests a variety of meanings: writing in the spirit of the Greek and Roman models using their general principles; borrowing from the ancients with intent of accommodating the material to the writer’s own age; the collection and use of special “beauties” or tropes in the skills and craft of best writers; and the exercise of paraphrase, free translation and adaptation.

These differing interpretations of imitation have persisted in literary criticism and contemporary critics of the twentieth century have used the term influence in place of imitation, according to Holman and Harmon, to imply “the impact that a writer, a work or a school of writers has on an individual writer or work” (p.256). It is a

term applied in literary history to refer to the tracing and identification of a poetic skill or mannerism or a manifestation of a peculiar style, theme, or feature in the work of one writer as reflected in another writer's work. The trajectory of directions, therefore, in examining Jonsonian comedy on both English and American writers of later centuries, as discussed above, captures the various manifestations of Jonson's skill in the works of the other writers.

This study uses the term influence to mean an examination of the poetic skills and stylistic modes of earlier writers' understanding of the universal literary tradition, and how those poetic skills are manifested in other writers. Taking a cue from Armah's advocacy in his essays, "Larsony, or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction" (1976) and "The Lazy School of Literary Criticism" (1985), this study appropriates the term influence with a candour of honesty and open-mindedness to examine the relation between Jonson, on the one hand and two West African writers, on the other hand. As Armah puts it, in studying two writers' works, critics should "... address themselves to the author[s]' works; their conclusions and insights ... backed up with serious textual spadework and analysis" (p. 335). The mode of analysis, therefore, in this study is: first an identification of similar tropes or ideas, dramatic structure, and other stylistic features as textually presented in Jonson's works and studied alongside the works of two West African writers, Soyinka and Sutherland, and second, an examination of how the identified features or elements are utilized in the works of the two West African writers.

Statement of the Problem

It is a known fact among scholars, as pointed out in the introduction above, that the comedy of humours popularised by Jonson and his poetic style was variously seen in the works of later European and American writers. However, no substantial attention has been given to studying these elements of Jonsonian comedy in the works of West African dramatists despite the influence of Western dramaturgy on the first wave of West African dramatists, from the early twentieth century when Sekyi's *The Blinkards* (1915) was published to the early 1940s and 1950s when Fiawoo's *The Fifth Landing Stage* (1943), Ogunde's *The Garden of Eden*, and *The Throne of God* (1944), Ogunmola's *Ife Owo [Love of Money]* (1950) were published. Jonson's fame as a dramatist, some scholars such as Barish (1963) and Adams (1979) assume, has been dwarfed by the stature and art of his sixteenth century contemporary and compatriot, Shakespeare. Barish (1963), for example, argues that Shakespeare's handling of timeless and universal subjects and themes, in addition to his dexterous use of language makes him the focus of Renaissance English studies as compared to Jonson. Unfortunately, most African scholars have been blinded by these facts about Shakespeare and fail to look beyond him.

In the context of African literature three discernible patterns, according to Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980), have been identified to explain the various manifestations in the relationship between European literary artists and the works of West African writers. First, there is the idea of adaptation in which West African writers adapt the works of their European counterparts to create African equivalents. They cite examples from the poetry of Clark and Okigbo to illustrate

their point. Etheron (1982) in *The Development of African Drama* confirms the view of adaptation, but points out that most African dramatists are attracted to Shakespeare and the Greeks rather than Jonson's art. He cites some examples to attest to these influences which include Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* as an adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* as being an adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* as well as Sutherland's *Edufa* being an adaptation of Euripides' *Alcestis*. These studies exclude Jonson from the list of important dramatists in spite of his enormous contribution to the development of the theory of humour in the study of literature.

The second trend that explains the nature of relationship between European writers and their West African counterparts is the group of African writers who model their craft on elements from traditional African societies to simulate patterns in the West. Examples of such works include the poetry of Kunene, Awoonor, and p'Bitek. The third trend involves individual artistic voices of African writers, whose skills blend both Western and African tropes (and ideas) to express their originality. Examples of this trend manifest in Fiwoo's *The Fifth Landing Stage* (1943), Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975). The referential points from Western writers, according to Etheron in this third trend, include Shakespeare and Greek dramatists. However, Jonson is excluded from the list.

Gibbs (2009) examines the relations between Western dramaturgy and early West African drama and establishes that the relationship had been characterized by "varied, complex, and continuing tradition of indigenous performance, and

traditions, often linked with annual festivals, rituals, folk stories and rites of passage” (p. 36). He cites the example of Fiwoo’s *The Fifth Landing Stage* (1943) as manifesting some echoes from Shakespeare’s *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*, and argues that these echoes manifest Shakespeare’s reflections “on order, nature, the tempering of justice with mercy”, which invariably “provide ideas or lines which Fiwoo responds to or echoes” in his work (p. 88).

Studies on the elements of Jonson’s comedy of humour and how they have been utilized in a comparative paradigm have been lop-sided, however, towards European writers. Little attention has been devoted to studying the relation between Jonson and any West African writer’s work (in this study: Soyinka and Sutherland’s works). An initiative by Moyo (2010), however, in an essay titled, “Myth and Allegory in Drama: A comparative study of Ben Jonson and Wole Soyinka” provides a comparative study between Jonson and Soyinka in which he examines the dramatists’ exploration of some myths and allegories as motifs in crafting their works. He concludes that while Soyinka uses both Greek and African myths, Jonson uses Greek mythologies only. Moyo’s study focuses only on the writers’ use of myths and allegories as motifs in the sub-structure of their works. He selects two texts from Jonson’s *Masques* (*Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, and *The Golden Age Restored*) and compares them with two of Soyinka’s tragic plays (*Death and the King’s Horseman*, and *The Strong Breed*). Moyo does not mention or even discuss the distinguishing features of Jonsonian comedy, which apparently give the sixteenth century dramatist the commanding posture in Renaissance comedy and also have attracted the attention of scholars who obviously study his comic plays in

the light of those features. In addition, Moyo's work does not capture Soyinka's perspectives as dramatised in his comic plays in an affiliation study with Jonson's.

In tracing the trajectory of directions in the criticisms on Soyinka's works, Jeyifo (2001) provides a collection of the most significant and critical essays on the works of Soyinka over the past forty years to establish the international renown of Soyinka. He traces criticism on Soyinka from the early sixties. The criticism captures a vast body of critical discourse on Soyinka's writings which reflect his originality and talent his creative works have brought to the African literary scene. In the seventies and eighties, criticism on Soyinka has been meticulous and scholarly with the publication of Jones' (1973) *The Writings of Wole Soyinka* and Moore's (1971) *Wole Soyinka*. These critical works focus on Soyinka's deepening activism as a strong intellectual voice in Africa, whose writings are deeply propelled by Marxism. In the nineties, criticisms on Soyinka focus on his awakening of the African society's consciousness towards crises of state and culture in Pre-colonial Africa and how that transitioned into some ideological debates influenced by the feminist and post-modernist discourses of the time.

All the above criticism does not focus on Soyinka's relation with Jonson in a comparative study. Jeyifo's collection of essays, reflecting the early twenty-first century criticism on Soyinka, titled, *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity* exploits the major contemporary critical theories including analytic philosophy to recreated Marxism, "from poststructuralism to postcoloniality, and from feminism to recuperated phenomenology" to establish the varied theoretical perspectives and refreshing approaches that manifest in Soyinka's art (p. xiv).

These essays, in the view of Jeyifo, serve as a platform for Soyinka's "postcolonial politics and his literary aestheticism,...and the product of [an] extensive review of the scholarly aspects of the reception of Soyinka in the last three decades of his career as one of the most influential writers in Africa" (p. x). In addition, the essays "afford Soyinka's readers a heightened sense of the wit, humor, and eloquence of this leading writer-activist of Africa and the English-speaking world" (p. xiv). The extensive reviews and criticisms on Soyinka do not mention his relationship with Jonson, for which this study deploys as the basis to establish the gap in scholarship necessitating this research.

Critical perspectives on Sutherland's works, also, point to the gap in scholarship in relation to studies between Jonson and her. Most criticism on Sutherland's works, such as Brown (1981), Talbert (1983), July (1987), Wilentz (1988) and Ankumah (1998), focus on her pioneering role in the evolution of modern West African drama with special emphasis on her skill in blending traditional tropes with Western theatrical models to reflect the social convergence of the audience world, the social vision of her work, and the interest in the woman's role in easing the cultural transition. Adams and Sutherland-Addy (2007) in *The Legacy of Efua Sutherland: Pan-African Cultural Activism* provide a comprehensive collection of essays in memory of Sutherland. The essays discuss Sutherland's works as "a midwife to many a publication" and serve as the "legacy of Pan-African cultural activism" which abides in the "experimentation with the persistent presence of the trickster figure" in literary works (p.16). These essays and others do not point to any relationship with Jonson. The trajectory of directions in the criticisms on Sutherland

establish the fact that no attention has been given to studying Jonson in a comparative work with Sutherland, as well, hence providing justification for the intended study.

A study therefore in the elements of Jonsonian comedy and how those elements relate to the comic works of both Soyinka and Sutherland will address the gap in scholarship, since most studies on Jonson are confined to a Eurocentric sensibility which compares Jonson's works with other European writers to the neglect of West African dramatists. In addition, criticisms on Soyinka and Sutherland do not point to any relation with Jonson. The attempt by Moyo, as pointed above, does not respond fully to the lacuna in scholarship of addressing the refluence between Jonson and a West African writer. Consequently, this present study intends to examine the elements of Jonsonian comedy and how they relate to some selected comic works of Soyinka and Sutherland. The consideration will look at the dramatists' portrayal of realism and beauty of life as it pertains in the two socio-cultural environments and epochs [Europe (16th century) and West Africa (20th century)] and the need to contextualize their aesthetic energies within the comic form of the drama genre.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the two twentieth century West African dramatists, Soyinka and Sutherland, on the one hand, and the sixteenth century dramatist, Jonson, on the other hand, in terms of their artistic choices, thematology and dramatic skills; and also to find out the echoes, parallels and semblances the former receives from the latter.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do Soyinka and Sutherland's comic plays bear a semblance to Jonson's in their construction of "similar" structure, plot lines, thematology, and other stylistic choices?
2. To what extent do Soyinka and Sutherland's skills deviate from the Jonsonian tendencies to express their originality?
3. What are the implications for determining the relations between the writings of modern West African dramatists and their European counterparts?

Significance of the Study

Studies on Jonson, as already indicated, have been confined to European literatures and to confine such studies on Jonson in a comparative paradigm to only European writers raises an issue worth investigating. This study, therefore, sets out to bridge the gap in scholarship by examining the elements of Jonsonian comedy as they relate to some selected works of Soyinka and Sutherland who have demonstrated a substantial contribution to world literature. Scholars such as Moore (1978), Jones (1988), McPheron (1998), Witalec (2006) and Gibbs (2009) attest to the greatness of Soyinka and Sutherland in world literature. They argue that the successes of these West African dramatists in blending both European and African dramatic traditions have endeared them to many admirers. A study, therefore, of the relationship between both Soyinka and Sutherland, and Jonson in terms of their stylistic modes, thematology, and artistic choices as expressed in their comic works will contribute to a fuller understanding of these important dramatists.

In addition, the study will provide how the two West African dramatists' choices in their plays and other elements of style, or echoes of them feature in the dramatic works of Jonson, and also explain how the three dramatists are dexterous in their handling of the comedy genre in the ridiculous portraiture of society. Ultimately, their major preoccupation in drama is to uphold morality by attacking vice and folly, and instructing society on acceptable contemporary mores. While exhibiting such skills, they combine teaching with pleasure.

The study, also, is conducted to embrace the universal literary tradition (which includes both European and African literatures) with the intent of reflecting what Harold Bloom (1997) proposes in *The Anxiety of Influence* as a metaphor of “Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads” (a concept to be discussed in detail later in the first chapter of this study) and what Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1993) refers to as “a world flower garden” (p.12). Ngugi’s proposal of moving the centre of literary creativity and criticism from a purely Eurocentric West to include other regions in the world and his metaphor of a flower garden to illustrate the variety of world literature is relevant to any discourse on literary studies. He is of the view that a world literature should not have flowers of one kind (European) but must have a blend and a variety of ‘flowers’ (African, European, Caribbean, etc.) to represent what he regards as the “wholeness” or richness and variety of world literature and criticism. This study provides the refluence between Jonson and the two West African dramatists.

Scope of the Study

A study of this nature cannot examine exhaustively all the works of the three dramatists. Consequently, a representative sampling has been made from the corpus

of their comic works. Jonson's *Volpone* (1605) and *The Alchemist* (1610) have been selected for study primarily for their exemplary "expression" of what may be described as Jonsonian comic elements. The dramatist, in both works, recreates the extravagance of Renaissance Venice and London to make varied statements about the human condition, which is portrayed as frighteningly bestial. The plays are built on the tradition of Greek and Roman satire, manifested in the works of Menander, Lucian, Horace and Juvenal.

Jonson's selected texts will be studied alongside Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964) and *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975). The choice of one play from Sutherland's collection should not be seen as denigrating the artistic strength of the Ghanaian dramatist as less important. Rather, the choice is based primarily on the idea that this study intends to illustrate a particular thesis in respect of the dramatists' aesthetic energies as reflected in the choice of a trickster figure in comic plays, and *The Marriage of Anansewa* best fits our purpose of expressing the ridiculous posturing of humans. Considering her enormous contribution to the development of modern West African theatre, it will be unfair to isolate Sutherland completely from such a comparative study. What is of essence here is the extent to which her artistic choices and skills in her play, and that of Soyinka's seem to have exhibited Jonsonian elements to manifest some parallels and semblances among the three dramatists.

In examining the relationship between Jonson, and Soyinka and Sutherland, this study seeks to establish a kind of affinity consisting in resemblances as manifested in style, structure, mood, and treatment of theme in their works. Each dramatist's

work, admittedly, is unique and legitimately original and to argue that Jonson influenced Soyinka and Sutherland in the construction of their texts will undermine the literary geniuses and originality of the latter. And to suggest that Soyinka and Sutherland depended on Jonson (or 'imitated' him) in the creation of their works will be a difficult exercise (if not impossible) to prove as manifestation of imitation.

The study, however, argues that there is the manifestation of some elements or features or echoes or traces identified in Jonson's works being reflected in the works of Soyinka and Sutherland, either in the same form or a variant form. A reflection on this kind of imitation can lead a literary critic to go back to antiquity (as far as Plato, Aristotle, Horace, etc.) in examining how the Ancients conceived and utilized some literary ideas and how those ideas either have been retained or modified by modern writers. However, for our purposes, this study is interested in discussing the conscious references or echoes (or revisions) that a critic can point out in the works of Soyinka and Sutherland as earlier portrayed in the craft of Jonson.

The perspective adopted for studying the afore-mentioned texts will draw on some theoretical formulations similar to Borowy's model which outlines some categories in studying the relationship between two writers in literary studies. In his essay, "On Influence and Dependence in Literature" (1983), he discusses five categories which are ideational, technical, thematic, stylistic, and phraseological. Ideational, Borowy explains, deals with the recurrent ideas or archetypes reflected in the received works. Technical is the structure and how a work is composed. Thematic obviously deals with recurring themes or main ideas in the work. How a writer

exhibits his/her artistic skill constitutes the domain of stylistic, and phraseological discusses particular instances of intertextual relations. This study therefore adopts a perspective of reading Jonson's *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* and determining whether Jonsonian elements are reflected in Soyinka and Sutherland's texts. The examination will focus on finding out whether the relationship is a mere coincidence or the dramatists created their works from a universal dramatic structure.

Methodology

The thesis of the study will employ the qualitative research approach. This is a textual-based research in which the selected written texts will be used as the focal tools for the research and analysis. To enhance the analysis, this study will gather relevant information from books, journals, articles and other relevant texts of other writers and secondary sources.

Jonsonian Elements in Soyinka and Sutherland

The study is targeted to establish how Jonsonian elements are manifested in the works of Soyinka and Sutherland. The two West African dramatists' works provide echoes of Jonson's thematology and dramatic skills in the construction of their plays. The pivotal areas of Jonsonian elements echoed include:

- i. The gull-knave structure;
- ii. The antics of the witty parasite;
- iii. The satire upon professional men;

- iv. The legacy-hunting motif; and
- v. Judgement on human folly

A careful reading of Jonson's two plays and an analysis of their thematology and dramatic structures reveals a certain pattern. This pattern manifests in the following forms: the gull- and-knave structure, the antics of the witty parasites, the satire upon professional men or personalities, the legacy hunting motif, and the judgement on human folly. The gull-knave structure is the dominating quality of Jonson's plays. This structure provides a system in which a group of characters (or an individual) act in concert as a knave to deceive and defraud an individual or group of individuals who invariably are portrayed as dupes or dunderheads and unthinking. The capacity of the knave through wit, subtlety and flattery to outwit the gulls is the essential quality of Jonson's comedy in portraying human predatoriness and folly. The skill of the dramatist creates the impression that humans readily degenerate into beasts and irredeemably lose their distinctive humanness or virtue. In *Volpone*, Jonson's portrayal of the relation between Volpone and Mosca, on the one hand, and the four legatees – Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio and Lady-Would-Be – on the other, illustrates the gull-and-knave structure. In *The Alchemist*, the pattern is illustrated in the portrayal of Subtle, Face and Dol's interactions with Dapper, Drugger, Mammon, Ananias and Tribulation, Surly, Kastril and Dame Pliant. This element in Jonson's works also features in Soyinka and Sutherland's works which we shall discuss later in Chapters Three and Four of this study.

Closely connected with the gull-and-knave structure are the antics of the witty parasites whose fortunes are inextricably tied to the knaves. The reader is amused

not only at the gloating exchanges between the knaves and the parasites but also at the display of wit, dexterity and pretentious behaviours of these “parasites” whose presence in the plot provides mirth and complicates the schemes designed to exploit the gulls. Jonson’s portrayal of Mosca, Androgyno, Nano and Castrone in *Volpone* manifests the antics of the witty parasites. In *The Alchemist*, we see examples of the antics of the parasites in the portrayal of Subtle, Dol, and sometimes in the roles assigned to Face in the plot. Soyinka and Sutherland’s works reflect the portrayal of these parasitic characters in their works as manifested in the roles of Sadku in *The Lion and the Jewel* and Chume in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and Christie in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

Another pattern that emerges in Jonson’s dramatic skill is the deliberate ploy to satirise professional men or personalities whom society reveres and accords great respect and benevolence. These professionals apparently are the same gulls upon whom the knaves inflict their knavery and thievery. In *Volpone*, all the four legacy hunters who attend upon Volpone are fittingly satirized and “abused” for exhibiting vices which the dramatist portrays as emblems of stupidity and daftness. This element in Jonsonian comic plays also features in the texts of the two West African dramatists selected for study.

The legacy hunting motif, as utilized by Jonson in his works, draws inspiration from the satirists of Greece and Rome (especially in the works of Lucian and Horace). It is a practice in which greed and avarice propels some humans to offer both solicited and unsolicited “gifts” to an invalid rich man with an intent of enticing him to name them as successors to his wealth. This practice became a favoured theme of the

Greek New Comedy and later Roman satirists such as Horace and Petronius also employed it in their works. Jonson's use of this favoured theme, coupled with the dramatic unity, portrays the extravagance of Renaissance Europe, their hypocrisy, greed and lust for wealth which apparently Jacobean moralists severely criticised. Soyinka and Sutherland's dramaturgy also exploits some tropes, from within their socio-cultural environments, to reflect the voracious and evil propensities in humans that attract the dramatists' censure.

Jonson's dramatic skill and elaborate characterization in his plays illustrate the human eccentricity as demonstrated in his humour theories. His commitment to these theories dictate that the human eccentricities of the characters will have to be fittingly punished. Soyinka and Sutherland's stylistic modes in their works also manifest a punishment for the gulls, upon whom the dramatists design a kind of moral judgement on them.

These skills provide a pattern that a critic can use to examine what is Jonsonian in the comic works of Soyinka and Sutherland. The details of these elements and how they are utilized in the plays of Soyinka and Sutherland will be discussed in the third and four chapters of this study.

Structure of the Study

The study is structured in six chapters with a preceding general introduction to the entire work. The Introduction includes background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, and the structure of the work.

Chapter One explores the relevant literature related to the study, which exploits four theoretical perspectives relevant to various aspects of the discussions in the work and how these perspectives manifest in the craft of Soyinka and Sutherland, as modern writers. The theories include: Harold Bloom's poetics as captured in *The Anxiety of Influence*, Harold Aram Vessel's view on The New Historicism, Northrop Frye's view on mythos and archetypes as presented in his *Anatomy of Criticism* and T. S. Eliot's ideas as expressed in his essay, "Tradition and Individual Talent". These perspectives are synthesized to direct the discussions in the textual analysis of the selected plays.

In the second chapter, "Setting the Echoes of the Universal Comic Tradition: Jonson in Perspective", the study examines the characteristic features of Jonsonian comedy as presented in *Volpone* (1605) and *The Alchemist* (1610) to discuss the revolution and transformation that Jonson's craft has brought to the comedy genre. In addition, this chapter establishes Jonson's theories on humours as an enormous contribution to the Renaissance comic tradition.

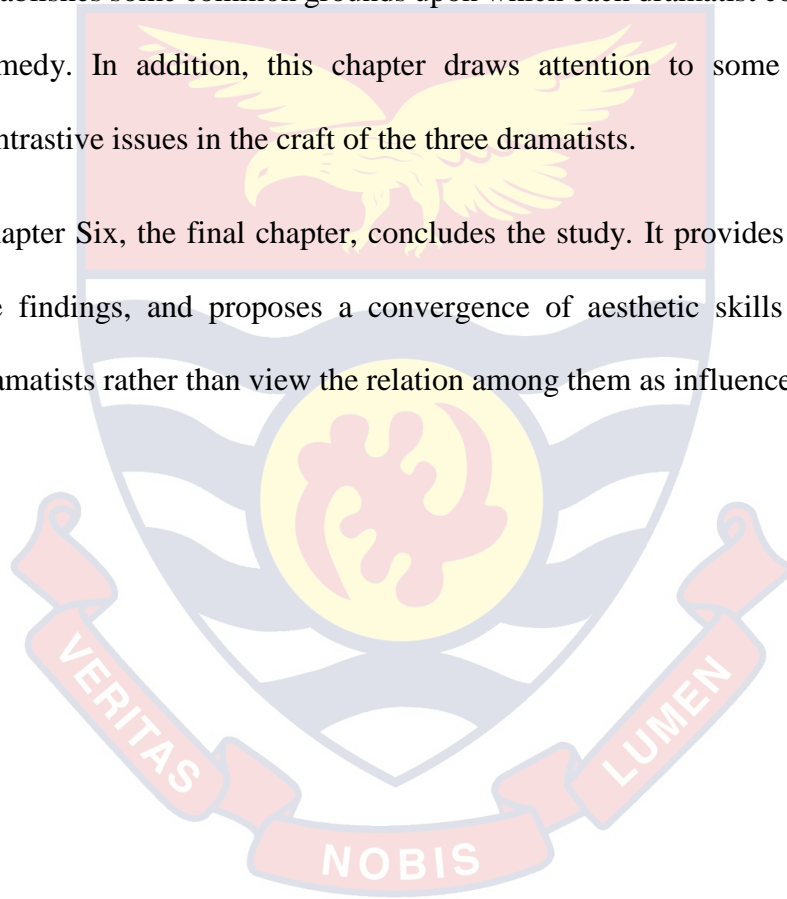
The third chapter, "Manifestation of the Universal Archetypal Tradition in the Craft of Soyinka", discusses Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) and *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964) to demonstrate how the dramatist's choice of theme(s) and his dramatic skill in the plays bear semblances or echoes from the universal tradition as handled in Jonson's characteristic features, and also to examine some key elements which establish Soyinka's originality.

Chapter Four, "Re-Membering the Echoes of the Universal Archetypal Tradition in the Craft of Sutherland", examines *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) to explore

ways in which Sutherland's skill in the play utilizes the universal archetypal tradition to exhibit semblances with the Jonsonian characteristic features, and also manifests her genius as a distinct West African dramatist.

The fifth chapter, "Equalisation of Aesthetic Energies: Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland in Perspective", leverages the echoes from Jonsonian comedy and establishes some common grounds upon which each dramatist constructs his or her comedy. In addition, this chapter draws attention to some comparative and contrastive issues in the craft of the three dramatists.

Chapter Six, the final chapter, concludes the study. It provides the summary and the findings, and proposes a convergence of aesthetic skills among the three dramatists rather than view the relation among them as influence.



CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL FORMULATIONS AND HOW THE ECHOES OF THE ANCIENTS MANIFEST IN THE CRAFT OF SOYINKA AND SUTHERLAND

Introduction

The relation between Ben Jonson (the sixteenth century English dramatist), on the one hand, and Wole Soyinka and Efua Sutherland (twentieth century West African writers), on the other hand, must be situated within the general discourse of literary discussions which seek to define and implicate a matrix of ideas as expressed in terms such as *forerunners* and their *sons/daughters*, *elders* and their *progeny*, *Ancients* and *modern writers*, etc. These relations between “forerunners” and their “sons/daughters” or progeny in literary studies have been quite interesting and they have manifested in several forms. Some of the forms include direct imitation, translations, importation and refashioning of similar myths, simulations of dramatic skills, varied treatments of same themes, and others. In all these forms, scholars and critics have theorized on the various manifestations of these influences, and attempts have been made to systematise these views within specific socio-cultural norms.

In fashioning out the theoretical agenda which will underpin this study, four varied theoretical perspectives have been selected and synthesized as a single set to explicate the relationships between Jonson and the two twentieth century West African dramatists selected for study. The theories are Harold Bloom’s poetics, Northrop Frye’s views on mythos and archetypes, Thomas S. Eliot’s view in

“Tradition and Individual Talent” and Harold Aram Vesser’s concept of New Historicism. The first three provide different but related perspectives which connect the three dramatists’ works to antecedents as well as postcedents in examining relationships that exist among writers in the continuum of literary creativity and criticism, whilst The New Historicism links the works of the three dramatists to their respective socio-cultural contexts to which varied aspects of influence will be discussed within the overall objective of examining the relationship among the three writers.

Harold Bloom’s Taxonomy

Bloom’s poetics in *The Anxiety of Influence* (1997) provides a lamppost to our discussion on the concept of literary influence and how it relates to the subject of this work. Bloom discusses the relations between writers and their predecessors and argues that great poets are always imitated or copied, for their voices come alive not by mere imitation of their craft but by what he refers to as “the agonistic misprision performed upon powerful forerunners by only the most gifted of their successors” (p.xxiv). The implication is that successors of the great writers must be talented and must possess the capacity to craft their own identities after a conscious revision of the earlier models.

Bloom sets a discourse between the great writers and their dominance on the literary scene, on the one hand, and “modern” post-Enlightenment writers, on the other hand, using the metaphor of “Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads in a battle between strong equals, father and son as mighty opposites” (p. 11). He argues that there is always an anxiety of the “modern” writers as they define their identities so

as to create imaginative spaces for themselves which are distinct from their predecessors. It is this anxiety that makes originality more difficult to achieve than mere imitation.

In his taxonomy, Bloom cites examples of Shakespeare, Milton and Keats (as Fathers in the English literary tradition) and argues that Milton's poetic style was so strong that it dominated all poetry written after him. Each poet after Milton had to struggle against Miltonic influence to create his own original voice culminating in "an inescapable oedipal experience" for all poets in English literature after Milton. It was an experience of anxiety in which each writer made an effort to overcome the influence of his predecessors. Influence in this sense becomes actually like a pull to imitate the literary style of former writers while at the same time creating one's own independence. This of course requires enormous originality since it is more difficult to fashion an original poetic style while remaining within the dominance of a predecessor.

In exploring an old subject, the modern writer may easily fall into the temptation of repeating the craft of their predecessors. The anxiety of influence therefore is what creates the difference between originality and imitation. Real imitation is the act of a new writer being completely submerged under the influence of a predecessor, but originality is a state of a writer getting his/her own artistic voice across. It is not necessarily about an author's imitation of another but about an author's development in relation to other writers or intermediaries and the effort to escape the influence of a major predecessor.

Bloom's view suggests that influence is an irresistible anxiety "embedded in the agonistic basis of all imaginative literature" wherein the precursors refuse to be buried or replaced by what he succinctly refers to as "post-Enlightenment writers" who struggle to carve their personal idiosyncrasies. This view of influence therefore makes room for originality wherein the modern writer exhibits his/her skills by emphasising on the tradition of the predecessors and making better a new craft out of the old. Influence, according to Bloom, must be seen as a metaphor implicating "a matrix of relationships- imagistic, temporal, spiritual, psychological- all of them ultimately defensive in their nature" arising from a strong idiosyncratic misreading of earlier writers (p. xxii). He cites Oscar Wilde's views as expressed in Lord Henry Wotton's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to disprove the simplistic interpretation of influence which suggests to Dorian that "all influence is immoral":

Because to influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him (p.6).

Wilde's view leans towards mere imitation or mimicry rather than influence, which need not make modern writers less original.

Influence, in the view of Bloom, rather should make writers more original but not necessarily 'better' than their predecessors. It should involve the study of the life-cycle of the predecessors purely as writers considering the variables of the context

in which the life-cycle is explored, the relations with other writers and the signal phases of historicity in the relations (similar to Augustine Sainte-Beuve's theory of "Positivism and Determinism"). To establish influence therefore in literary studies, the discussion should go beyond filial relationships between the Ancients and the modern writers to what Bloom describes as "the larger phenomenon of intellectual revisionism" (p.28). He opines six revisionary movements that critics need to use to examine the concept of poetic influence, and concludes that the anxiety of influence makes originality in modern writers more difficult to achieve since every attempt seems to 'resurrect the Ancients'.

By virtue of Bloom's poetics, we can argue that a modern writer's originality is best elicited through the influence he/she receives from the Ancients or "the elders" and the modern writer's ability to create his/her own work to reflect the culture of the period. It is probable therefore to locate, or trace semblances rather than real influence in either a filial relationship like father and son (as exemplified in Western literature in Homer and his "sons" or Jonson and his "sons") or an analogical study which uncovers echoes, parallels and resemblances in two works or writers (as portrayed in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Fiawoo's *The Fifth Landing Stage*, or Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*) through a juxtaposition of what is common to them.

This obviously is similar to parallel study or intertextuality, which is discussing one work in the light of a previous one drawing in issues like intentionality of the author, broad background knowledge, historically factual events, artistic choices and skills, etc. These views throw light on the argument of this work which seeks

to situate Jonson in the comic tradition initiated by the Greeks and later the Romans, and popularised by the entire Western literary tradition. As to whether this comic tradition influenced other literatures and the practice thereof, or a literary genius among the “ancients” influenced the “modern writer” has been a subject of debate over the centuries. There emerges two kinds of relationships here: the intertextuality that comes from sharing a tradition, and the influence that comes from a later writer adopting the poetic skills of his/her elders – consciously or not. This is the realm of Bloom.

What is of importance therefore, according to Bloom’s poetics, is for criticism to point out echoes, traces, parallels and resemblances in the “Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads” relationship. Consequently, Jonson will be positioned as a ‘genius among the ancients of the Renaissance’ and his relationship with other post-Renaissance and ‘modern writers’ (in this work, Soyinka and Sutherland) will be explored to find out what kind of relationship exists between the earlier artist and the latter ones. The relevance of Bloom’s poetics to this study is to provide the framework within which to examine the relationship between Soyinka and Sutherland, on the one hand as “post-enlightenment” writers, and Jonson, on the other hand as the “predecessor”, to find out what echoes and semblances the former receives from the later and also establish how the former manifests their originality within the continuum of literary creativity.

In examining the relation between Sutherland and Soyinka, on the one hand, and Jonson, on the other hand, and in making a determination of how the former’s craft demonstrate the intellectual revisionism in the metaphor of the “Laius-Oedipus at

crossroads”, the study takes cognisance of the distinct socio-cultural contexts of the three dramatists’ works and how the dramatists utilize those contexts to create their originality within the established comic tradition. The relevance, therefore, is to connect the dramatists’ stylistic modes to the overall objective of examining the nature of the relationship between them within specific socio-cultural environments. This is the link with The New Historicism theory, which the study utilizes to examine the nature of the relationship.

The New Historicism

As a post-modernist literary theory, The New Historicism gained currency due to the pioneering work of Stephen Greenblatt in the early 1980s. His approach was aimed at understanding a literary work through its cultural context and intellectual history; what Mikics (2007) later refers to as the “cultural poetics” of literature. The New Historicism as a concept draws inspiration from the work of Levi-Strauss, particularly his idea of culture as a “self-regulating system” and the Foucauldian notion of “epistemes or structures of thought that shape everyone and everything within a culture”. In this study, “sub-literary” texts and non-literary texts were considered important in interpreting “great works of literature”. The theory is anchored on the idea that literature as a discipline should be studied and interpreted within a particular context of both the history of the author and the current cultural contexts of the critic whose responses to literature are shaped largely by his environment, beliefs and prejudices.

Vesser in his “Introduction” to a collection of essays outlines some key issues in *The New Historicism* discourse. These include:

- i. that every human action is largely a result of a network of socio-cultural practices;
- ii. that every act of humans to unmask or critique a particular foible reneges on the same practice it exposes;
- iii. that all discourses (imaginative, scientific or historical) accentuate the unchanging truths about human nature.

These views crystallise in reconstructing a cultural milieu and a complex social politics which perceive society as consisting of texts that relate to other texts, what Williams (1973) describes as “the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production” (quoted in Brewton, p. 9). The New Historicism then becomes a form of postmodernist theory applied to interpretive history, and the critic therefore analyses a text with his lenses focused on history and how those issues manifest the economic and social realities, especially as they produce ideology and represent power or subversion.

Thus, the concept focuses on exploring the connection between literary texts and their historical contexts. In applying this theory a literary critic attempts to look at other texts, both literary and non-literary, to establish the relationship between a text and the social, political and economic conditions that are reflected in it. The focus of this approach is to foreground the context which rejects the notion that human nature transcends history, a view that Greenblatt’s pioneering work on Shakespeare and English Renaissance theatre studies espouses. The view suggests that Renaissance Man belongs exclusively and inescapably to the Renaissance

period. Consequently, a critic needs to understand the socio-political reality embedded in the text being studied, mediate those with the current ideological experiences with the aim of understanding the past on its terms. For example, in studying Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, there is a lingering question as to whether the play shows Shakespeare as anti-Semitic. In exploring the question, the play must be examined in the context within which it was written, its cultural history in reference to the use and dispersion of power and the marginalization of social classes (the abhorrence of the Jews) as reflected in the text. In effect, studying the history of the time and the socio-economic realities as presented in non-literary texts produces new literary perspectives. What a critic therefore hopes to accomplish in The New Historicism criticism is as Besley asserts, "to use the text as a basis for the reconstruction of an ideology" (p.144).

Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland, like most dramatists, do not create their works out of a vacuum but create their works to reflect a certain distinct socio-cultural milieu. They recreate the socio-cultural realities of their times to make distinct statements of the enduring, competitive and compulsive human acquisitiveness which often disregards socio-cultural moral considerations. The reader of the above-mentioned dramatists' works has an uncanny feeling of 'unlearnedness' when their works are approached without a study of their socio-cultural contexts. The preoccupations of Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland's works are but a mirror of the English, Yoruba and Akan socio-cultural environments respectively and the reader needs to be apprised of the literary and non-literary texts of these socio-cultural contexts to internalize, negotiate and mediate meanings from the selected texts. Consequently,

in applying the theory of The New Historicism to the dramatists' works, the reader, according to the description of Jauss, needs to have a "horizon of expectation" which Griswold (1993) asserts should aid the readers to "construct a set of aesthetic criteria which they then use for literary evaluation" (p. 478).

The New Historicist theory, as applied to this study, will help unravel the skills in understanding human foibles as dramatized in the selected dramatists' works and their artistic portrayals of the depraved sense of humans as reflected in the socio-cultural contexts of the English, the Yoruba and the Akan environments. Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland's selected texts discuss the subject of the compelling acquisitive instinct in the Renaissance and Twentieth century Man who pursues wealth, fame and has an unbridled desire for riches without respect to societal mores. The affectations of the affluent coupled with the hypocrisy of the supposed religious leaders and the flirtatious life of the middle class as contrasted with the loose life of the commoners in both the sixteenth century Europe and the twentieth century West Africa are the signifiers of the "sub-literary texts" to be analysed in studying the core texts of this study.

In examining the signifiers of the sub-literary texts in each socio-cultural environment as utilized in the selected works of Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland and the aesthetic energies of the dramatists, there emerges some parallels, echoes and semblances which suggest the West African dramatists' skills bear some semblances to the craft of Jonson. However, an analysis of each dramatist's choices and skills within the distinct socio-cultural contexts reveals that the stylistic modes

employed, by each dramatist, point to the utilization of common tropes and ideas in their works. This is the relevance of exploring Frye's ideas in this study.

Northrop Frye's Criticism on Mythos and Archetypes

Frye (1957, 2006) in *Anatomy of Criticism* stretches the argument on influence studies further beyond parallel study to mythos and archetypes. He argues that literary criticism has been stereotypical or confined to regionalism or specific ideologies. He suggests that common elements be established in worldwide multiplicity of literary traditions in which literature and other art forms must be seen as manifestations of universal myths and archetypes that cross cultural boundaries. Frye introduced archetypal criticism in which basic patterns are identified and discussed as found in myths, literary genres and the reader's imagination. He defines archetype as a "symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience" (p.99). His purpose is to launch "a grammar of literary archetypes which will reveal that Western literature is a coherent and unified structure" that can respond to a scientific global critical analysis (p. 99).

Frye argues that there is a difference between what is comparable in Western literature and what is merely analogous in archetypal criticism so that for a critic to make a value judgment in influence study he or she must first determine the categories of comparison, and the broad knowledge of literatures. These include the "recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes and images" which are identified in an array of literary works, as well as folklores, dreams and even rituals that involve the entire community. Such recurring patterns

and items are believed to be the product of certain “elemental and universal forms or patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader”, primarily because the reader also shares the archetypes conveyed by the author.

Frye’s view indicates that influence study is not merely listing similarities and differences between authors or their works, but a critic’s ability to identify repeated patterns of experience in an earlier author or work taking cognisance of the source, causes of influence, comparison in taste and period, what he calls “the spirit of the Age”. He advocates a comparative paradigm in which we can gauge influence above the authors and national frontiers, involving an entire age and the entire world. Through such a study we can understand the genetic make-up of a people, their character and nature.

Frye’s poetics further discusses the concepts of mythology and archetypes, which obviously are not the focus of this study, but the interest in Frye’s view is the proposal that the corpus of literary works constitute a “self-contained literary universe” which has been fashioned over a period of time by the human imagination with a purpose of assimilating the “alien and indifferent world of nature into archetypal forms that serve to satisfy enduring human desires and needs” (p. 36). In such a literary universe the issues of taste, habit and the general prognosis of a particular ‘spirit of the age’ are identified; and the critic’s duty is to find out how these elements reflect in other literatures in the entire world. He argues that “archetypes can be found in nearly all forms of literature with their motifs being predominantly rooted in folklore” (p. 36). His proposal of a systematic form of

criticism indicates that archetypes generally can be categorized into two major forms, which are characters and situations or symbols.

Through such a study, a critic can place each writer (or work) in its proper geographical and literary space and demonstrate how echoes or semblances of the 'spirit of one age' manifest in another writer (or work) of another age. Real archetypes repeat themselves across cultures: they are fundamental stories of human experience. Clearly, the myth of Phaedra, for example, has been variously associated with the Greeks, as dramatized in the works of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, who are the initiators; but this myth has been used by the Romans, as manifested in the works of Seneca, and later seventeenth century French dramatists, as revealed in the work of Racine. Similarly the Myth of Oedipus, as portrayed in Sophocles' (the Greeks) *King Oedipus*, has featured in Shakespeare's (the English Renaissance) *Hamlet*. The import therefore in Frye's argument is to identify first the categories of influence, which include the archetypal narratives or character types and the situation or symbols in their historical contexts and then understand how these categories have been "reborn" in the succeeding generations of literary production and criticism.

Jonson's thematology and dramatic skill in three of his famous works, *Volpone*, *The Alchemist* and *Devil is an Ass* capture a notorious practice - "The Captatio" or "Legacy Hunting Motif", inherited from the Romans. Jonson situates this practice within the socio-cultural environs of Renaissance Europe to portray the "Spirit of the Age". Several centuries later, one can argue that, Soyinka and Sutherland in two

distinct socio-cultural environments portray a literary representation of the voracious propensities in humans in their works selected for study.

Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland's works reflect the recurrent narrative designs in the portrayal of the compelling acquisitive human tendencies for a kind of a "prize" in the form of wealth, fame and materialism. The dramatists' characters demonstrate certain patterns of action in their cravings for wealth and disregard for the moral codes that regulate human interactions. The main characters take advantage of this evil propensity in humans to cozen their fellow humans who then become emblems of character-types and images of the ridiculous. As part of the methodology in applying Frye's archetypal criticism to this study, the features of the *commedia dell'Arte* and its insistence on characterization as a dominant trait of comic works will be studied in the dramatists' works, and their aesthetic energies of exploiting the archetypal trickster hero to portray the eccentricities of humans will also be examined.

Within the overall objective of examining the relationship between Jonson, the sixteenth century writer, and Soyinka and Sutherland, the twentieth century writers in terms of their artistic choices and dramatic skills utilized, the study is conscious of the fact that the three dramatists create their works to reflect the universal comic tradition of written literature. This obvious fact of the three operating within the tradition, coupled with the dramatists' aesthetic energies in exploiting "similar" tropes and ideas in their selected texts raises the question of how each dramatist fares within the tradition. Since Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland are not originators of the timeless comic tradition, it is important to find out first how their works

contribute to the tradition, and second to what extent each dramatist either follows after, or deviates from the existing tradition. It is in responding to this quest that this study finds the view of Eliot as expressed in his essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent” relevant. Eliot’s view synchronises with the earlier three literary perspectives to provide the parameters in making the final determination in respect of the nature of relationship that exists between Jonson and the West African writers.

Eliot’s View in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”

In the essay, Eliot defends the role of tradition in helping new writers to be modern. He discusses the relation between forerunners and their progeny in terms of following tradition. He argues that tradition is located in time and has both synchronic and diachronic relevance. Synchronically, tradition is always relevant to the present and diachronically it is relevant for all time. The concept of tradition foregrounds how important older writers are to modern writers. Consequently, Eliot argues that a modern poet should write with the literature of all previous ages ‘in his bones’, as though Homer and Shakespeare were his (or her) contemporaries. This historical sense, he claims, is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal together that makes a writer belong to the tradition. And it is at the same time what makes a writer very conscious of his place in time, and being contemporary.

Eliot argues that though Homer and Dante wrote in different centuries and periods of literary history, they were his contemporaries because their works informed his work as much as other writers in the twentieth century. He cites the example of

Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922) to illustrate the relevance of tradition to the artistic enterprise. Joyce's work looks back to ancient Greek myth (the story of Odysseus) for his novel set in modern Dublin. He also makes references to Ezra Pound's works which often look back to the troubadours and poets of the Middle Ages. These references, he intimates, unites all the writers as belonging to the same tradition.

For Eliot, "tradition" is saturated with a special and complex character. It represents a "simultaneous order," by which he means a historical timelessness – a fusion of past and present – and, at the same time, a sense of "present temporality". He advocates that a writer must embody "the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer," while, simultaneously, expressing their contemporary environment. Eliot challenges the common perception that a poet's greatness and individuality lie in their departure from their predecessors. He submits that "the most individual parts of his [the poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (p. 42). He explains that this "historical sense" is not only a resemblance to predecessors' works but an awareness and understanding of their relation to modern writers' works.

This loyalty to tradition, Eliot however suggests, does not demand that a writer should forfeit his novelty in a willful act of just imitating the craft of their predecessors. Rather, the dynamic and progressive nature of the poetic process require novelty which is only possible through tapping into tradition and then asserting one's originality. When a writer creates a new work, he/she realizes that there is an aesthetic "ideal order", established by the literary tradition set before

him/her. Hence, the act of artistic creation does not take place in a vacuum. The creation of a new work therefore alters the cohesion of this existing order and causes a revision of the old to accommodate the new. The inclusion of the new work in the tradition alters the way in which the past is seen and simultaneously to all the works of art that preceded it.

Eliot's concept of tradition as a manifestation of imitation in literary studies suggests that Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland can be studied in relation to the earlier models (or predecessors). His main argument is that critics study how the present twentieth century works affect the way we see or appreciate the "powerful forerunners" (ancients) who represent the existing tradition, and to what extent they both metaphorically "bury the ancients and recreate a new path" or maintain the tradition (p.12). It therefore involves an evaluative and critical study both synchronically and diachronically of various approaches employed to examine the relations between Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland who write in the same comic tradition. From Eliot's viewpoint the issue will be an examination of the extent to which Soyinka and Sutherland's works affect our understanding of the Jonsonian tradition of comedy.

Consequently, it will be needful to situate Soyinka and Sutherland, who are the twentieth century writers and the focus of this thesis, within the continuum of literary practice and production, as advocated by Eliot, to determine how Bloom's poetics as well as Frye's poetics synchronise to serve as a useful framework in determining originality in the works of the writers.

Soyinka and the Literary Tradition

Soyinka's renown as one of the foremost leading African literary artists within the literary tradition primarily is credited to his ability to blend traditional African cultural elements in his socio-cultural orientation as a Yoruba with some influences he imbibed from Western European culture. His admission in one of his famous articles, "Neo-Tarzanism: The Poetics of Pseudo-Tradition", that "the aesthetic matrix" is the fountain of his ingenious inspiration and that it shapes his "critical responses to other cultures" is worth our attention. This foregrounds the claim that two worlds have influenced him and his works. He argues that "every productive being, scientist or artist" engages in what he refers to as "selective eclecticism" in the creative industry to carve his own niche and assert his independence. By implication almost every artist selects images and paraphernalia from his/her "forebears" or "ancients" to achieve stylistic ends in their work. Critics and scholars have provided useful insights into the influences on Soyinka as an artist drawing ideas from his socio-cultural Yoruba background. The focus of this segment is to explore both the Yoruba influences and the Western cultural elements, within the overall literary tradition, in Soyinka's works and how these contribute in establishing Soyinka's individuality.

Gilbert (1999) argues that of all the known sources of Western influence on African writers, language has been the most powerful tool in the colonial indoctrination. In the context of West Africa, English and French languages were used as the official language of colonial government and business in addition to the languages being used by the missionaries in the educational curricula to serve their colonial agenda.

By default the culture (including the literature) of the foreign languages was imposed on the West African writers who had to learn and be influenced by them. As part of the colonizers' agenda, anything African was demonized and relegated to the background. It was common knowledge that civility and decorous life was associated with imitating the culture of the colonizers while a barbarous and uncivilized life was linked to the Africans who rejected the ways of the foreigners. The paramount aim of the colonizers/missionaries was to create "Anglicised" and "Frenchified" Africans. Herskovits and Herskovits (1965), for example, intimate that the British had high expectations from the Yoruba men and women. Ultimately the British expected them "to become a homogeneous group of Black English men" who were well nurtured in the ways of the British (p.79).

The expectation of the British from the Yoruba people generated a mixed reaction among the Nigerians who exhibited the attitude of cultural rejection and resistance on the one hand and a compromise on the other hand. Herskovits and Herskovits's description of the Yoruba cultural response to the European influences captures a revealing phenomenon:

The possibilities of cultural response to the West ranged along a continuum, paralleling intellectual responses. At one end was the complete rejection of Western culture. At the other was imitation of Western ways by the staunchest advocates of Europeanization. In between came a range of "syncretisms", both practiced and prescribed with

varying cultural mixtures. Such syncretisms by definition merged Yoruba and Western thought (p. 81).

This flirtatious syncretic phenomenon described among the Yoruba is a characteristic feature of most writers, especially African creative artists, who have been colonially indoctrinated by the language and culture of the Europeans. Shalaby (2013) argues that a majority of Yoruba people adopted a middle mode between the rejection of Western culture and a complete imitation of it, and their attitude manifested in echoes of syncretism. He cites Omotoso's humorous portrayal of this syncretism among the Yoruba people and their desire to recreate a new society in a song sung by school children as they filed into their classrooms in the morning:

A O So 'yinba, Yes!

A O So 'de wa, Are!

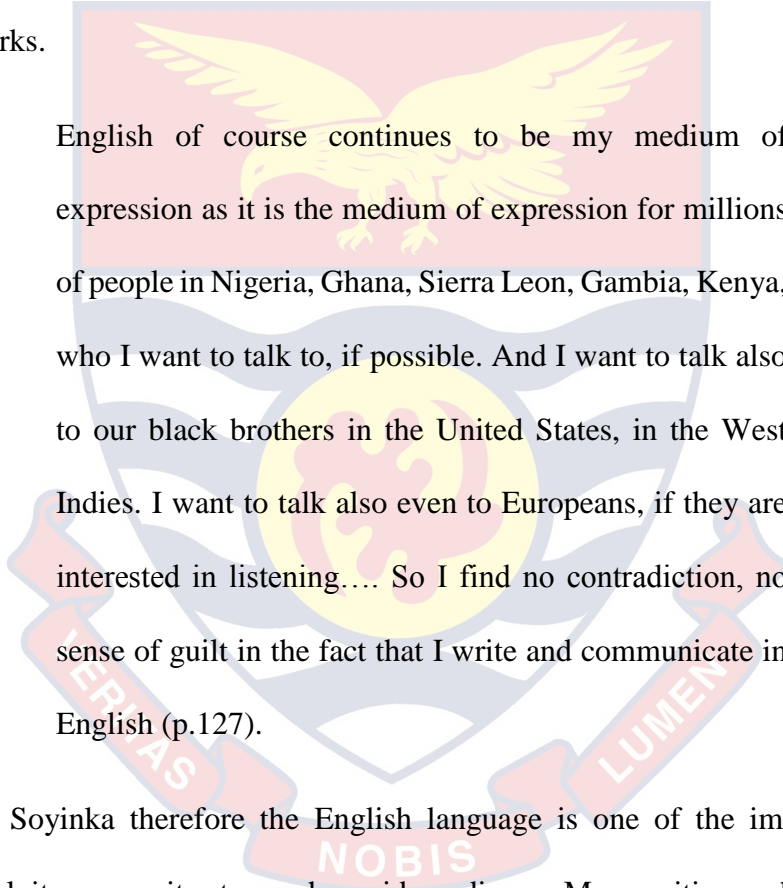
[We shall speak English, Yes,

We'll speak our tongue, Hurrah!]

According to Omotose, "the syncretism implicit in this position is an aspect of modern Yoruba culture and forms a major aspect of Wole Soyinka's writing" (p.10).

Lindfors (1975) in "The Early Writings of Wole Soyinka" opines that Soyinka is one of the few highly productive African writers whose writings in English are "original, creative, imaginative and satisfying" (p. 64). These prodigious accolades gleaned from the essay point to the fact that Soyinka really imbibed the legacies from the Western culture and by his use of the language and craft distinguished

himself “as a writer of world stature” (p. 64). Soyinka has learnt the nuances of the English language and knows how to use it for the benefit of his art and readers. Contrary to the advocacy from Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and other African scholars, Soyinka insists on using the English language as the medium of expressing the spirit and soul of his indigenized culture in all his art forms. In *Conversations with Wole Soyinka* (2001), he succinctly declares his reasons for the use of English in his works.



English of course continues to be my medium of expression as it is the medium of expression for millions of people in Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leon, Gambia, Kenya, who I want to talk to, if possible. And I want to talk also to our black brothers in the United States, in the West Indies. I want to talk also even to Europeans, if they are interested in listening.... So I find no contradiction, no sense of guilt in the fact that I write and communicate in English (p.127).

To Soyinka therefore the English language is one of the important means he exploits as a writer to reach a wide audience. Many critics such as Gibbs (1993) and Msiska (2007) affirm that during his school days, both in Ibadan and Leeds, Soyinka was a voracious reader of the classics; he read and learnt the literature of the Greeks in their original language similar to what Jonson also did with the classics. Gibbs, for example, intimates that Soyinka’s interest in Euripides and his ritual drama dates back to his college days at Ibadan, a view which Msiska (2007)

also affirms. Soyinka's encounter however with Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Msiska argues, is "part of a cultural corpus available for Soyinka" to use as a model in patterning his conception of Yoruba ritual drama. Msiska intimates that:

The play which Soyinka had studied as an undergraduate student at the University of Ibadan, must have been one of the early texts that introduced him to ancient Greek writing and culture which have provided him with an important cultural resource in terms of which and, perhaps also against which to rethink and elaborate Yoruba cosmology into a modern poetics of tragedy (p. 66).

Soyinka himself acknowledges this influence from the Greeks in the Introduction to his adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* in his work *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communication Rite*. He admits thus, "a twenty-year rust on my acquaintanceship with classical Greek made it necessary for me to rely heavily on previous translations for this adaptation of *The Bacchae*" (p. iv). His choice and dependence on Gilbert Murray and William Arrow-Smith's translation of Euripides' text for his work are meant to rethink the concept of ritual drama. He believes that ritual drama was the heart and soul of both Greek and African tragedy.

Davis (1980) argues that "Soyinka's theory of drama is constructed on the reformulations of the terms of previous ritual approaches to drama... from the origin of Western dramatic theory in Aristotle's *Poetics*" (p.147). She discusses the

dramatic theory of Soyinka, tracing the influences from the Greeks and two theories from the German and English as manifested in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche and George Wilson Knight respectively in their interpretation of the Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus. Davis intimates that Soyinka deconstructs the image of Dionysus as presented by Euripides, and interpreted by Nietzsche and Knight. Soyinka reconstructs this image of Dionysus to reflect the Yoruba view of myth and ritual in his tragic plays. Soyinka's theory, Davis concludes, is "concerned with a metaphorical rather than a historical link between the experience of ritual and the experience of drama" and stresses the audience effect as manifested in the "ontological postulates of Yoruba metaphysics" (p.149). It is imperative to add that Nietzsche's atheistic and political posturing in *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (1887) targeted at a criticism and rejection of Christian values in his work greatly influenced Soyinka's understanding and his elucidation of the Dionysian rites in *The Birth of Tragedy*; further sharpened by the critical and literary sensibilities of the renowned English scholar of Shakespeare, George Wilson Knight. Soyinka himself refers to *The Birth of Tragedy* in his essay "The Fourth stage" taking the stance of Nietzsche in deconstructing the ritual between the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus to postulate his poetics and aesthetics of the tragic.

Soyinka's view of tragedy is purely African, a lived community experience. As he explains in his essay, "The Fourth Stage", "it is a drama in which the values of conflict or of the revolutionary spirit are excluded, attesting in their place the adequacy and inevitable aftermath of harmonious resolution which belongs in time and human faith" (p.119). For Soyinka, tragedy does not always portend the death

of the hero as it meant for Sophocles in *King Oedipus*. The tragic moments, for Soyinka, “are often those when the central character courageously enters the gulf of transition, confronts the forces that guard it, and finally emerges with new knowledge” to energise his society as dramatized for example in *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Soyinka’s tragedy is therefore an individual experience on behalf of the entire society. There is no doubt that the roots of Soyinka’s dramatic works are deeply steeped in the traditional African performative concepts such as myths, rituals, songs, festivals and others. He exploits these concepts and blends them with Western theatrical modes into what Mathuray refers to as his “mythopoeic project - a project that simultaneously affirms and disavows a religious perspective, a vision that upholds and subverts the mythic paradigm” (p. 46).

The influence of many European literary personalities on Soyinka’s literary career cannot be denied, and many critics have pointed out those European ancient dramatists such as Sophocles and Euripides; Renaissance dramatists such as Shakespeare and Synge; and modern writers such as Beckett and Brecht have exerted some influence on him. Ojaide (1988) lists some European writers and movements which have influenced Soyinka and he provides logical reasoning as to how the influences came about. He argues that:

The curriculum of the English Departments at the Universities of Ibadan and Leeds in Soyinka’s undergraduate days would have included Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, the Metaphysical poets, Jacobean dramatists, and the twentieth-century writers such as

W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas and James Joyce.... Soyinka has also taught literature at Lagos, Ibadan, and Ile-Ife, and this would have exposed him to many literary figures and schools (p. 772).

Ojaide's argument suggests two sources of influence on him: the curriculum run at Ibadan and Leeds and Soyinka's teaching experience both at home and abroad. A blend of the two influences and his voracious capacity for reading the works of European writers, he admits, nurtured him. In *Conversations*, Soyinka opines that "I do know that I enjoy works of literature from the European work, I'd be a liar if I said I didn't" (p.127). His candid admission leads him on later to confess that "I grew up, as many of us did, on the fare of European literature. Even in school we didn't have too much problem understanding the worlds of William Shakespeare, Bernard Shaw, Galsworthy, Moliere, and Ibsen" (p.131).

As hinted earlier, Soyinka's poetics as a writer is hinged upon his ability to blend both the Western influences and his Yoruba cosmology and culture. He has succeeded in defining himself in relation to both traditions by incorporating rituals, masquerade dances, Agemo rites and a New Yam Festival into his plays and composing poems "after" James Simmons, Thomas Blackburn, Wilfred Owen, John Donne and the Metaphysicals. These influences help Soyinka to explore the socio-cultural underpinnings of his Yoruba world and redefine them in relation to world literature. In fact, Gibbs asserts that

He is allusive and eclectic; he borrows, commandeers, steals or requisitions as suits his purposes. He knows that

there is a limit to originality and that the way material is used is more important than its source (p.169).

Gibbs assertion opens a new vista in understanding Soyinka's poetics which ties in with our central argument from the poetics of Harold Bloom that a critic is able to define the originality of modern writers by examining their relationships with their predecessors. How a modern writer like Soyinka exploits the works of his predecessors and refashions them into a complex literary work to serve specific artistic ends within the socio-cultural matrix of society is the key indicator of his originality.

Perhaps, this is the error of judgment that renowned African critics Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980) commit in examining the dominant trends in contemporary African literature and literary criticism in *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature*. They opine that among the three major tendencies discernible in African literature is the influence of Eurocentric voices and practices on African literature resulting in the creation of what they refer to as "euro modernists who have assiduously aped the practices" of 16th century and 19th century British writers (p. 163). In their analysis of African poetry (and poets, who they describe as "the Ibadan–Nsukka poets") they point out the characteristics, origins, motivation, wrong-headedness and neocolonialist sensibility of this euro modernist tendency as manifested in the works of Soyinka, Clark, Echeruo and the early writings of Okigbo, whose language has been described as "archaic" and their arts characterized by "Hopkinsian syntactic jugglery, Poundian allusiveness and sprinkling of foreign phrases, and Eliotesque suppression of narrative and other

logical linkages of the sort that creates obscurity” (p.173). According to the critics, “The Ibadan-Nsukka poets are for the most part ineffectual imitators. When they imitate the European tradition, they too often botch it; and when they consciously attempt to write in the African manner, they also botch it” (p.172).

These views are quite critical and severe to Soyinka and his compatriot writers as well as all other African writers who have been accused of suffering from “The Hopkins Disease”. To assume and conclude that once a critic can identify some “traces” of an earlier writer’s work or style in a modern writer’s work as proof of imitation portrays a misreading of the concept and workings of influence studies in Literature. Such a view points to the fact that modern writers are just mere echoes of their predecessors, devoid of any identity as authentic creators of art. It betrays a distorted and stifling image of literature confined only to the works of the Ancients. The beauty of criticism in influence study, I argue, lies in a critic’s ability to point out the manifestations of the Ancients in the craft of modern writers, bringing into sharp focus the creation of a kind of lineage or ancestry where the past influences the present and the present points to the future in a continuum. Each modern writer’s work therefore must be looked at within the continuum of the tradition of ancient writers and a determination must be made as to how original or authentic one has been to the tradition, or how does the new writer’s work affect the old, or to what extent the new has “deviated” from the tradition.

Another literary giant among the Renaissance ‘ancients’ or elders who greatly influenced Soyinka is Shakespeare, a contemporary of Ben Jonson. Shakespeare’s greatness in world literature is without doubt acknowledged by all scholars

beginning from the Renaissance through to modern criticism. Gibbs (1980) suggests that there are some links in the structural constructions and characters between Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and some of Shakespeare's works. He makes reference to Lakunle as a Holofernes-type in *Love's Labour Lost* and Baroka as possessing a Falstaffian characteristic to illustrate the similarities in characterisation. With the structural construction he makes reference to both Soyinka's wooing scenes and his "festive comedy" to other linkages with Shakespeare.

Soyinka's dramatic art is an admixture of ancient convention and bold experiments he espouses in his concept of the "aesthetic matrix" where he likens a dramatic play to poetic creativity, which Adedeji (1987) explains as "a thematic composition ... coloured by human sounds and textured human sensibility" (p.114). It is a manifestation of a concept, idea or myth or fact or legend re-garnished to produce an aesthetically pleasing sound. Incidentally Soyinka has demonstrated his genius not only in his tragic vision of life as revealed in his re-interpretation of the Dionysian and Apollonian rites but also in his deep affection for what Rasheed (2006) describe as the "comical and satirical theatricalization" (p. 225). Rasheed intimates that Soyinka's comedies and satirical works are "undoubtful platforms for social discourse and the assemblage of theatrical manifestations for buried, forgotten, hydra-headed and common problems that constantly affect the society" (p. 225). He lists some plays of Soyinka as falling within the comico-satirical tradition inherited from the Greek and Roman ancients, but he does not cite specific examples of the influence.

Lindfors (1975) traces the early writings of Soyinka from 1951 to 1962. He provides references to Soyinka's delightful combination of humour, suspense and satirical vituperation at the absurdities and bad manners of humans in his short stories, poems, playlets and magazine articles. These references exude the resemblance in narrative styles of eighteenth and nineteenth century English prose and verse forms. They represent Soyinka's blend of witticism and light criticism gradually maturing into heavy criticism in his mature comedies.

Gibbs' (1980) commentary on Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* as a good comic play reinforces one of the arguments (of this work) that Soyinka has been influenced by the comic dramatic tradition of the West. He opines that the play:

represents a dialogue with the European tradition of comedy and of plays about impatience from Terence's *Eunuch* to Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (p. 29).

This "dialogue with European tradition of comedy" draws inspiration from the Greek Aristophanic and Menanderian sources through the Italian commedia dell'Arte which Jonson revived during the Renaissance. No doubt Soyinka has been influenced greatly by the European comedies and other works he studied at Leeds, particularly the commedia dell'Arte. However, he is concerned with using his "art to assess the world around him and to influence it" to reflect the social and political realities of modern Africa. In his comic works, the characters are presented as portraits of particular social roles, which enhance the understanding of the

referential systems of the consciousness of humanity rooted in what he refers to as “the vortex of archetypes and kiln of primal images” (p.36).

Aubrey (2009) argues that Soyinka in constructing *The Trials of Brother Jero* does not operate in a vacuum but follows a universal tradition which dates back to the Greeks and Romans. He examines the archetypal characters in the play and cites examples of such characters in some Shakespearean plays. He admits that in order for Soyinka to accomplish his satirical goals in the play he draws on a long tradition in literature (and later in film) of the lovable rogue, the character who repeatedly cheats and schemes to his own advantage but does so with wit, verve, and often such great charm that the reader cannot help but find him amusing and may even admire him, even if they cannot admire what exactly he does. Aubrey comments thus:

The lovable rogue par excellence is Shakespeare’s Sir John Falstaff, who appears in *Henry IV, Part One* [and] *Henry IV, Part Two* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Shakespeare’s character Antolycus, the paddler in *The Winter’s Tale*, comes from the same tradition. The Artful Dodger, the boy pickpocket in Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838), is a lovable rogue, as is Tom Sawyer in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) . . . Soyinka was therefore not working in a vacuum when he created one of his most popular characters to make his satirical points (p. 12).

However, Soyinka employs a dramatic tradition which is apparently different from what obtains in the European tradition in order to present caustic satirical jibes at the effect of modern Christianity on the psyche of the African.

Soyinka draws on the wealth of Yoruba tradition in the portrayal of the archetypal lovable rogue character, a trickster associated with the Promethean figure that interacts with and upsets the world of the gods. In Yoruba metaphysics, one of the most interesting trickster figures is Eshu-Elegbara, one of the *Orisha*, worshipped in many related forms in West African deities. Eshu-Elegbara expresses many elements of the trickster such as deceit, humour, disorder, sexuality (similar to the Akan folktale trickster, Kweku Ananse) and it is believed that he is also the god who supervises communication and decorous use of language. Davis (1991) intimates that Eshu-Elegbara “is the gatekeeper between the realms of man and gods, the tangled lines of force that make up the cosmic interface, and his sign is the crossroads. In the figure of Eshu-Elegbara, the West African tradition makes a profound argument about the relationship among spiritual communication, divination, and the peculiar chaotic qualities of the trickster” (p. 45). As typical with Soyinka, he exploits his Yoruba world view of life to reflect a certain perspective of world literature in his artistic works. His creations of the Brother Jero and Baroka figures obviously draw influence from the Eshu-Elegbara figure.

The discussion so far has focused on the influences which have directed Soyinka’s craft as a writer, making him part of the universal tradition, and how he has domesticated these influences to serve his specific artistic ends as an authentic modern writer. Scholars and critics have pointed out the influence on Soyinka from

specific literary personalities among the Greeks, Romans, Germans, English and his own socio-culture milieu. The reference by Gibbs to Jonson's *Volpone* to illustrate the impotence theme in comedic works during the Renaissance and obviously the stock archetypal characters Aubrey alludes to certainly have echoes in Jonsonian comedy. These reference points serve as the index to synchronise the theoretical perspectives outlined to direct the study. For in situating Soyinka within the timeless tradition, we observe that his skills bear some affinities with Jonson's, the Renaissance elder, but at the same time his authentic artistic voice manifests in the distinct socio-cultural choices he makes in selecting his tropes for his creative works. Jonson's handling of Volpone and Mosca, (in *Volpone*), Face and Subtle (and Dol) (in *The Alchemist*) throws light on Soyinka's handling of Brother Jero and Chume (in *The Trials of Brother Jero*), Baroka and Sadiku (in *The Lion and the Jewel*). Both dramatists seem to be drawing on the stock archetypal characters to express 'similar' ideas within distinct socio-cultural contexts. The suggestion therefore is that both Soyinka and Jonson employ an archetypal trickster figure which recurs in literature, whether European and African.

As part of the influences on Jonsonian comedy is the reference to the commedia dell'Arte, which started in the early sixteenth century in Italy and spread throughout Europe, creating a lasting impression on some dramatists and the arts in general. Wilson (2010) traces the history of the Commedia dell'Arte and discusses the style of its performance. He identifies characterisation as the main feature of the style in addition to its use of "masks, improvisation and physical comedy". The recognisable types of character according to Wilson are categorised into four: The

“Servants or Zanni”, “The Old men or Vecchi”, “The Lovers or Innamorati” and “The Boasting Captains or Capitani”. Later comedic works in the Renaissance were patterned along these four categories which crystallized, in my view, into three forms: the master-servant relationship, the male-female lovers and the boasting but fraudulent hero, famous for their sonorous and bombastic names and mannerisms but still appealing to the audience. These features therefore characterised the key English playwrights’ (Marlowe, Shakespeare and Jonson) works.

Jonson’s success in refashioning these recognisable character types into his humours paradigm (which embraces the ridiculous, the satiric, the absurd the sonorous, and the farcical) gains recognition during the Renaissance and beyond. His first essay in the comedy of humours, according to Kerr (1912), carves a niche for him as a writer of originality blazing a new path in English comedy among his contemporary craftsmen who enthusiastically applauded him and imitated his new method of projecting characters rather than plots. In his comedic works, he conceives the characters and then invents the plots to exemplify the predominant qualities from different possible angles. Woodbridge (1898, 1996) observes that in a typically Jonsonian comedy the “dramatic personae” can always be divided into two groups, a large group of victims and a small group of victimizers, or those possessed by folly and those possessed of guile” (p.42). Obviously the characters in Jonson’s plays do not grow, similar to Soyinka’s comic characters but remain static to achieve the dramatists’ artistic ends of a revelation and not a development of the characters. This skill of both Jonson and Soyinka makes them achieve the classical unity of time and action as espoused by the ancients. In addition, both

dramatists recreate the realities of their immediate socio-cultural environments in a satirical portrayal of contemporary manners.

Immediate contemporaries of Jonson such as George Chapman, John Marston, William Shakespeare and younger dramatists such as Nathaniel Field, Robert Davenport, Jasper Mayne who deliberately took the attitude and posture of disciples towards Jonson, distinctively styled themselves “Sons of Ben”, and modelled their comic characters and satirical portrayal of existing life on Jonson’s comedy. These contemporaries and younger dramatists’ works, as already pointed out, Soyinka read during his formative years at Ibadan and Leeds. Soyinka, however, is not a slavish imitator of Jonson but reading through his comic plays one observes that the Jonsonian dramatic structure and some elements of the gull-knave structure, the antics of the witty parasites, the satire upon professional men and the appearance of a character conceived according to the theories of Jonson’s humour echo in Soyinka’s plays.

The irresistible quality of Soyinka’s characterization (as manifested in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Lion and The Jewel*) in portraying the gull-knave structure and the trickster or willy-nilly attributes of the hero not only echoes Jonson’s comedy but also portrays Soyinka’s acquaintance with the universal archetypal boasting but fraudulent lovable rogue. This is the parameter which points to the important fact that Soyinka, in fact, did not consciously imitate the craft of Jonson. It is obviously a suggestion of convergence of artistic choices and aesthetic energies within the timeless tradition where the present points to the past and the past to the present. Soyinka exploits the quality characterization to portray humankind

everywhere as basically the same, highlighting the fundamental instincts, impulses and weaknesses as being universally applicable to Volpone, Mosca, Face, Brother Jero, Baroka, Lakunle, Kweku Ananse and others. Indeed, we will be dealing with a Soyinka who exhibits originality and inventiveness in acquiring lessons from the Ancients and applying them with independence to serve his artistic ends.

Sutherland within the Tradition

Efua Sutherland's dramatic works have been greatly influenced by the rich cultural artistic elements in her immediate Akan environment, and the ingenuity of modernizing these artistic elements by adopting some Western theatrical modes and authentic African narrative and creative forms including folktales, proverbs, plays and religious practices. By skillfully blending these art forms Sutherland has demonstrated her own legitimacy as an authentic voice not only in the Ghanaian theatrical landscape but also as one who has carved a literary space for herself in the West African conventions of drama. Greenwood (2008) in a review of Sutherland's works opines that "she deserves a place in the West African literary tradition because she has earned it through that literary process of revision which T.S Eliot considers as being necessary for the affirmation of individual talents and the existence of literary traditions" (p. 84); what Bloom metaphorically refers to as the "Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads" relationship.

To place Sutherland, a twentieth century writer, within the literary tradition of Eliot's advocacy and trace the influences on her works, which most critics affirm are often based on a blend of Ghanaian myths and legends and some Western

sources, it will be important to isolate some key issues in her biographical sketch. The biographical sketch, as proffered by the Ghanaian poet, Kofi Anyidoho, and other critical sources validate Bloom's claim that constant "revisionism of the Ancients" is the surest path for a critic to determine the originality of modern writers and to what extent they either maintain the tradition or deviate from it.

Anyidoho's biographical sketch (2000) of Sutherland points out that her father, Harry Peter Morgue, "was a well-known teacher of English who once taught at Accra Academy" in the early 1930s (p. 77). This privileged position of the father obviously exposed her to the English language and some classical texts. In her early teens at St. Monica's Teacher Training College in Asante-Mampong, Anyidoho establishes that Sutherland was exposed to Greek drama such as *The Medea*, *Antigone and Alceis* and other classics. Later at age twenty-three she went to England for a two year course at Homerton College, Cambridge. While there, Gibbs (2009) observes that:

She was impressed by the high standards at the college, the fearless experimentation, the bold planning, and the way in which her lecturers encouraged her desire to orient all her college work to Africa. During her time at Homerton, ... she conveyed to her geography classes a vivid sense of what it was like to live in Africa. Apparently, her English classes included not only textual analysis of Shakespeare's plays but also a storytelling session (pp. 94-95).

These exposures and experiences of Sutherland (perhaps similar to most West African literary artists) are distinctive features of the influences she received from both the works of the Greeks and the curricular in England. They also specifically provide the strong kinship tie among Grecian, Roman and West African literary art forms, especially during the colonial era in the then Gold Coast. Albeit, there was great respect for Latin and Greek as emblems of classical scholarship and obviously the two languages were imported along with the colonialists' idea about education.

In the Gold Coast (Ghana) the British-style educational system introduced the classics and several performances of Greek plays were put up. Gibbs (2009) provides an account of the study of Greek as a subject in schools in the Gold Coast, dating from 1876 when Mfantshipim School was established. He cites Sophocles' *Antigone* as one of the first performances of Greek plays put up in the Gold Coast at the then St. Nicholas Grammar School (now Adisadel College) in 1934 to mark the "School's Silver Jubilee" celebration. According to Amissah (1980), cited by Gibbs, the production which was directed by the then headmaster of the school, Rev. Stephen Richard Seaton Nicholas was "well received by the public". Hence

By Public request, there was a repeat performance before a full house at Cape Coast. It was later staged at Sekondi, and then moved to Kumasi. The theatrical scenery as well as their histrionics contributed much to its success (p. 9).

Gibbs further intimates that after the successful production of *Antigone* “the *Agamemnon* was put up in 1936 and *Alcestis* in 1944-1945” (p. 40). All the dialogue in these plays was in English but the choruses were rendered in the original Greek (Amissah, p. 9). These performances, especially the one performed at Adisadel, according to Gibbs “provided a vital encounter for a sensitive and alert young woman, Efua Morgue, who later as Efua Sutherland, explored the overlap between one of the plays she saw at St. Nicholas, *Alcestis*, and Ghanaian culture in composing *Edufa*” (p. 41). In her play, Sutherland employs the Ghanaian belief system in divination and the interaction with local European ceremonies as portrayed in the village women acting as the Chorus to present *Edufa* as a successful modern man revered by his people. However, the rituals and symbolism of the play within the context of *Edufa*’s depraved moral ethos and his overly capitalistic sensibilities which predispose him to abandon his moral commitment to his wife make the play one of the good examples of influence from the Greeks and an African adaptation of the play. Amankulor (1980), commenting on Sutherland’s craft in the play and her works in general, observes that Sutherland’s works “show her development within the European dramatic tradition as well as her determination to create a new dramatic aesthetic . . . for a truly African theatre” (p.149).

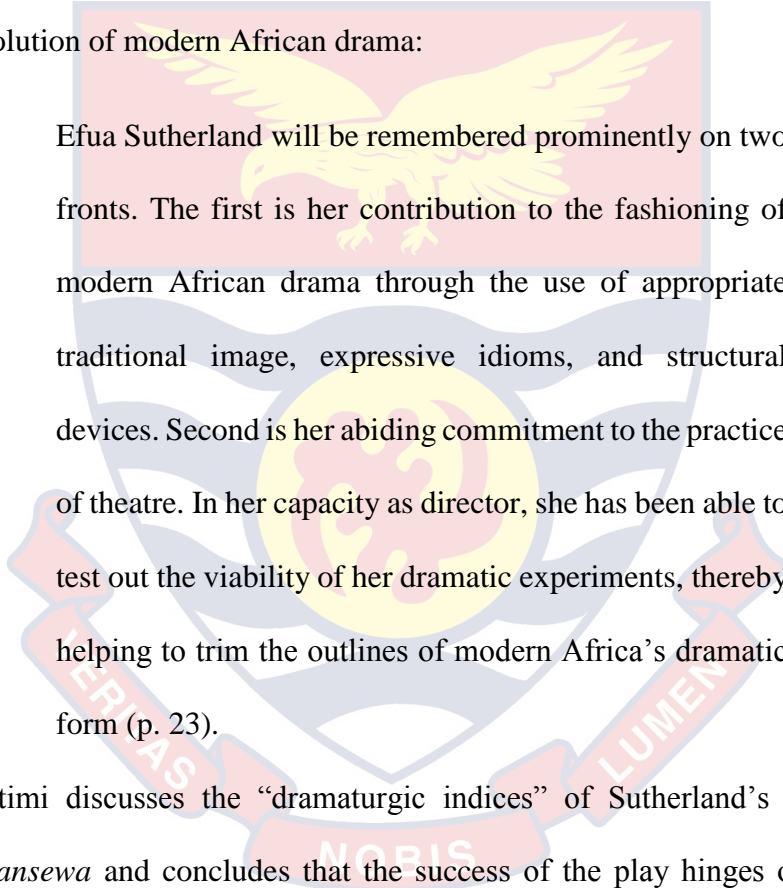
In the context of Ghanaian theatre development, later attempts made by playwrights to adapt influences from the Ancients to suit “local” conditions resulted in the creation of varied and complex practices of fusing indigenous performance mostly associated with festivals, folk stories, rituals, funerals and other rites of passage. These imported theatrical influences from Europe have been absorbed and modified

to create what Gibbs refers to as the “syncretic fusion, [and] adaptation or relocation” of the continuing tradition of indigenous performance traditions in Ghana (p. 36). Gibbs provides several examples of these influences vying for attention among Ghanaian playwrights during the 1930s when Ghanaian concert party “trios” were emerging. Among the examples were: cantatas or oratorios, pantomimes (*Aladdin and his Magic Lamp*), morality plays (*Everyman*), Biblical dramas (*Esther the Beautiful, The Good Samaritan*), Chinese theatre (*Lady Precious Stream*), the Absurd (Ionesco’s *The Leader*) and the radical, anti-illusionist theatre of Bertolt Brecht (*The Good Woman of Setzuan, Mother Courage, The Caucasian Chalk Circle*).

These source influences created a whirlwind of responses among local Ghanaian playwrights who fused the imported materials with indigenous elements. Prior to the 1930s, Sekyi’s *The Blinkards* (1915) demonstrates a blend of Bernard Shaw’s witticism and elegant style with a flexible local structural composition of a drama aimed at satirizing the stupidity of Africans uncritically imitating the ways of Europeans. Dove’s *Women in Jade* (1943), Danquah’s *The Third Woman* (1943) and Fiawoo’s *The Fifth Landing Stage* (1943) draw inspiration from the prescriptive neo-classical 18th and 19th centuries British characteristic features of the drawing-room comedy, blending them with local concessions in subject matters and characterisation aimed at robustly debating European perceptions about Africa.

There is no doubt that Sutherland has been influential to the emergence of the modern West African dramatic arts primarily due to the pioneering role she played during the early 1950s to the late 1980s in Ghana. However, there is evidence that

she drew inspiration from European sources which she later refashioned into indigenous art forms to reflect her African background. One of her greatest successes in blending the European dramatic art form with African folk drama is manifested her play *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975). The Nigerian dramatist and critic, Rotimi (2003), in an essay titled, “The Attainment of Discovery: Efua Sutherland and the Evolution of Modern African Drama”, argues that in the evolution of modern African drama:

The logo of the University of Cape Coast is a watermark in the background. It features a yellow eagle with its wings spread, perched on a shield. The shield is divided into four quadrants with different colors and symbols. Below the shield is a red banner with the Latin motto 'VERITAS NOBIS LUMEN'.

Efua Sutherland will be remembered prominently on two fronts. The first is her contribution to the fashioning of modern African drama through the use of appropriate traditional image, expressive idioms, and structural devices. Second is her abiding commitment to the practice of theatre. In her capacity as director, she has been able to test out the viability of her dramatic experiments, thereby helping to trim the outlines of modern Africa’s dramatic form (p. 23).

Rotimi discusses the “dramaturgic indices” of Sutherland’s *The Marriage of Anansewa* and concludes that the success of the play hinges on the dramatist’s innovative mind in employing a language suitable to the socio-cultural environment of Africa, a structure modelled after the “European-style” and the dramatist’s creation of a “tradition-based, multi-roled figure tirelessly assuming the disparate parts of property man/storyteller/confidant/commentator and actor” (p. 20). These features of the Greek Chorus, “musical interlude” and the creation of a hero

artistically manipulated to exhibit traits of wit, and cunning within the archetypal lovable rogue tradition are emblems of Sutherland's adaptation.

Sutherland's success in recreating the archetypal lovable rogue, within the Ghanaian (Akan) tradition, of Ananse (whose wit and dexterity is similar to Jonson's artistic creation of Volpone and Face, and Soyinka's Brother Jero and Baroka) suggests a kind of a universal pattern which a writer can create a version of. A critic therefore can examine how Sutherland exploits this archetype and also examine the "filial" relationship among the three dramatists selected for study. Sutherland's skill in artistically making Ananse a master schemer, in his dealings with the other characters, manifests her humour paradigm that reflects the ridiculous, the absurd, the sonorous and the farcical.

The interest in this study is to explore how the universal lovable rogue is exploited by Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland within the socio-cultural contexts of their works in the portrayal of basic human instincts, impulses, weaknesses; and establish how echoes of Jonsonian dramatic skill are reflected in the works of the latter two.

One of the echoes of Jonsonian dramatic skill in Sutherland's craft in the play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, is the creation of stock characters. Jonson's creation of the stock archetypal characters and his skill in manipulating events in the drama to reflect his humour paradigm of exaggerated characterization involving songs, dance, the ridiculous, slap stick situations, comic gags in most of his works "echo" in Sutherland's play. She draws on the universal character archetypes from the comic tradition and blends them with the folk dramatic morality plays of the concert

party tradition that evolved in the early 1920s in Ghana. Sutherland's thematology, elaborate characterization of the hero, Ananse, and dramatic skills in *The Marriage of Anansewa* bear a semblance to Jonson's handling of same features in the play *Volpone*.

The reader of Sutherland and Jonson's texts will observe some points of simulations in which the former's craft reflect the latter's. For example, Sutherland's creation of the 'mock-death scene' of *Anansewa* in which the four chiefs - Sapaase, Akate, Mines and Chief-who-is-Chief - clamour for their "prize" simulates Jonson's in which *Volpone*, the hero "lies in state dead", as the four legatees (Corbaccio, Corvino, Voltore and Lady-Would-Be) pry around his house like scavengers ready to grab their "prize". Furthermore, a specific dramatic pattern emerges in Sutherland's play which recalls Jonson's. There is an objectified craving amongst Jonson's characters for wealth, fame, property or prize. Similar echoes could be delineated in Sutherland's craft. In addition, Jonson's characters are structured and categorized into two kinds: the gulls and the knaves, similar to Sutherland's categorisation. The knaves most often succeed by wit, subtlety and roguery to outdo the gulls who are most often portrayed as daft and unthinking. Details of Sutherland's dramaturgy that exhibits these parallels from Jonsonian craft would be discussed later in Chapter Four of this work.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the relation between 'modern' writers and their 'predecessors' and how that relation manifests to create a synergy in the craft and

practice of literary criticism. In examining the relations between Jonson and Soyinka, on the one hand, and Jonson and Sutherland, on the other hand, Bloom's poetics is exploited to argue that a modern writer's originality is best elicited when he/she, while submerged under the dominance of the universal tradition as utilized by his/her predecessor(s), creates his/her own work to reflect the culture of the period and gets his/her artistic voice across forcefully. Each writer's work selected for study is looked at within the continuum of the comic tradition (in portraying the absurd and ridiculous posturing of humans) received from the Ancients and revived under the tutelage of the Renaissance "elders" who provided a kind of a pattern for modern writers to follow. Bloom's poetics, therefore, provides a framework for this study to examine the echoes, parallels and resemblances in the metaphor of the "Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads" relationships between Jonson (identified as the Renaissance "elder") and Soyinka and Sutherland (positioned as the twentieth century modern writers).

In examining the relationships, the chapter makes a claim that though Soyinka and Sutherland's works exhibit echoes of Jonson's thematology and dramatic skill in the construction of their plays as manifested in the gull-knave structure, the antics of the witty parasite, the satire upon professional men, the legacy hunting motif; each dramatist is unique in the sense that they select tropes and images from their socio-cultural environments to portray the compelling acquisitive human tendencies for greed and materialism.

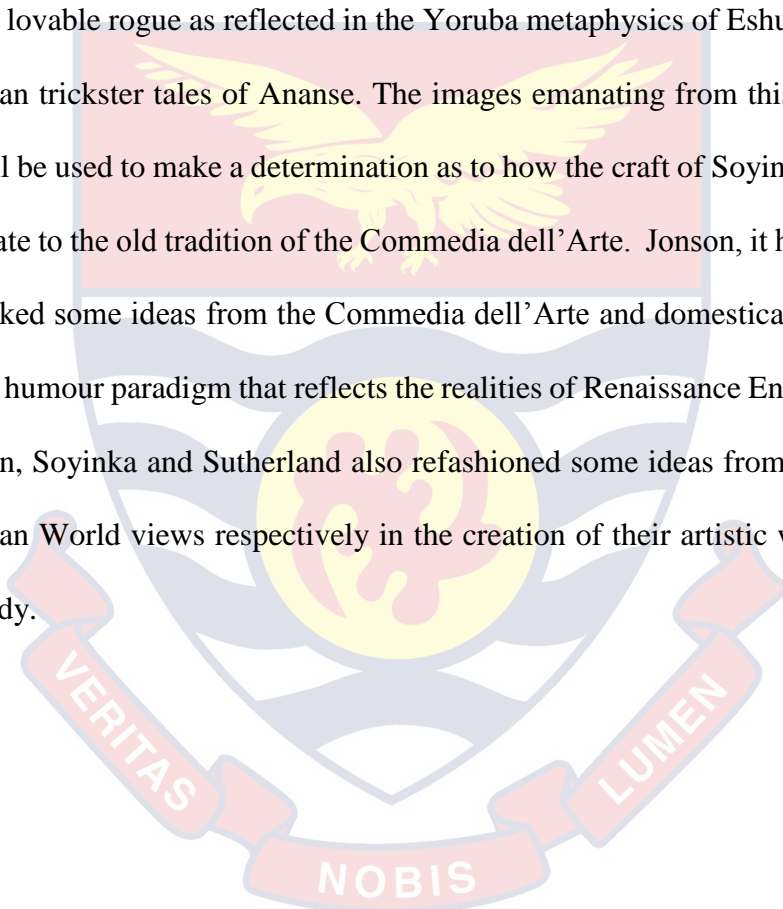
In further exploring the relationship, this chapter makes a case that a determination will have to be made as to how original or authentic Soyinka and Sutherland have

been to the tradition, or how their stylistic modes affect the tradition, and to what extent their skills deviate from the tradition. It is in making this determination that Eliot's poetics of the concept of tradition and the individual talent becomes relevant to this study, in imposing a socio-cultural matrix within the compass of The New Historicist theory which both unites the three dramatists selected for study and at the same time isolates their individual talents. The New Historicist theory is utilized to explore the connections among the texts selected for study, and their historical contexts as revealed in other texts, both literary and non-literary. The purpose is to establish how each dramatist's "talent" manifests in their portraiture of the lovable rogue. This is the essence of imposing Frye's critical formulation on the study, which provides that archetypes are universal symbols that connect one work with another and integrates the literary experience.

One argument that emerges from the discussion, so far, is the point that modern literary artists, in creating their works, consciously or unconsciously revise the craft of the ancients in several forms. A critic's duty in examining the relation between writers in the "Oedipus-Laius at the crossroads" relation is to point out how one author's work or parts of the work "echo" in another's without the artist being aware of his or her predecessor as an artist, or of the totality of his/her works. This is the scenario in which Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland's works are situated within the context of this study. In portraying the socio-cultural realities of their times, both Soyinka and Sutherland may be unaware of Jonson's works. However, their dramatic craft echo Jonson's works. A study of both Soyinka and Sutherland's dramatic works imposes a task on the literary critic to explore what accounts for

the seemingly treatment of ‘similar’ plot lines, themes and portrayal of ‘similar’ dramatic elements.

In exploring these issues, as already intimated, interpretive insights will be drawn from Bloom, and Eliot’s poetics as well as Frye’s archetypal criticism will be exploited to examine the dramatists’ use of common archetypes in the portrayal of the lovable rogue as reflected in the Yoruba metaphysics of Eshu-Elegbara and the Akan trickster tales of Ananse. The images emanating from this archetypal study will be used to make a determination as to how the craft of Soyinka and Sutherland relate to the old tradition of the *Commedia dell’Arte*. Jonson, it has been observed, picked some ideas from the *Commedia dell’Arte* and domesticated them to create his humour paradigm that reflects the realities of Renaissance England. In the same vein, Soyinka and Sutherland also refashioned some ideas from their Yoruba and Akan World views respectively in the creation of their artistic works selected for study.



CHAPTER TWO

SETTING THE ECHOES OF THE UNIVERSAL COMIC TRADITION:

JONSON IN PERSPECTIVE

Jonson in Renaissance Literature

This chapter sets out to isolate Jonson as a Renaissance writer whose poetics coupled with his thoroughness in the innovation of the theories of humour, his close approach in the technique structure of his plays and his skill in crafting a realistic drama. His skill not only reflect English life and give him an impressive posturing among the Renaissance dramatists and other enthusiastic followers during later centuries, but also presents him as a writer who patterns his craft after the universal comic tradition in the portraiture of the trickster hero. Several reasons account for this posturing and it would be worthwhile to explore some of these with the intent of examining how they relate to his art. The discussion in this chapter is organised to explore firstly Jonson's theories of literature, isolating the major concerns of his writing, and secondly examine how he utilizes these concerns in his artistic choices and skills to create his version of the archetypal lovable rogue in the two texts selected for study.

It is common knowledge among Renaissance scholars that Jonson's art and dramatic works had been directed by his theories of literature as obtained from the Classicists and portrayed in his *Timber*, *Conversations with Drummond*, and Prologues, Epilogues, and Prefaces of his plays. He has a notoriously disdainful attitude towards the prevailing literary taste of his age, especially to contemporary writers. Schelling, (1898) for example, intimates that Jonson "despised the popular

judgement” with an arrogance unknown in the literary history of English literature and many of the criticisms Jonson launches against his contemporaries were a little sour, although he constantly “professed himself solicitous of the favourable opinion of the judicious” (p. 12). Schelling provides examples of the criticisms Jonson launched on his compatriots. Sidney is criticised for portraying all the characters in the *Arcadia* to speak like “gentlemen and gentlewomen”. In addition, Schelling discusses Jonson’s objection to the insignificance and irregular verse patterns of Donne; his censorship of the pastoralists for their unreality; his critical attitude towards the sonneteers, especially Daniel, in some of his “satirical plays for their sugared sweetness and frivolity” with a crudeness of pride, envy, or even an impudence that he could not restrain (p. 15).

However, Jonson had a strong attraction from the writers of his time, according to Baskerville, (1911), as one of the cherished living English writers who borrowed from the classicists and claimed conformity to local conditions. His broad knowledge of English life, his love of the classics, his dominant personality and his enthusiasm to give expression to his art mark him out as a distinctive figure of the Renaissance, whose treatment of life is based on direct observation and his firm belief in the worth of English life. In the Prologue to *The Alchemist*, for example, Jonson intimates that:

Our scene is London, ‘cause we would make known,
No country’s mirth is better than our own:
No clime breeds better matter for your whore,
Whose manners, now called humours, feed the stage (p.4).

This vision of focusing on his society's "humours" dictates Jonson's concept of imitation as a poet whose commitment is not to "writing truths, but things like truths, well feigned" to reflect the socio-cultural realities of his times (Schelling, p. 73). In *Discoveries*, Jonson expresses this idea earlier regarding the role of the poet to portray "feigned truths of the time". This principle of the poet's role (as postulated by Jonson) echoes Platonic and Aristotelian views which most Renaissance writers of the time shared. However, Springarn (1908, 1963) in *A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* argues that the relevance of the principle in Renaissance thought was brought to life by Jonson's domestication of the poet's role to portray feigned truths of the time. Jonson's vision is not any different from most literary artists who do not write out of vacuum. Soyinka and Sutherland (selected to represent West African dramatists) also create their dramatic works to reflect the socio-cultural realities of their times. As we shall see in subsequent chapters of this work, Soyinka and Sutherland's artistic credos in their comic works rest in the nexus of their socio-cultural environments, and their abilities to recreate the realities of life to reflect universal truths are distinctive features to be discussed later.

Jonson's solid grounding in the classics and his ability to assimilate this into the art of his time provide a guide to his theories as to what are the requisites of a good poet. These have been clearly discussed in the *Discoveries*. He outlines four requisites in a poet: *ingenium*, or "goodness of natural wit"; *exercitatio*, or practice; *imitation*, by which Jonson advocates, not an imitation of life, but imitating those writers who have demonstrated a clear understanding of life; and fourthly *lectio*,

which he translates as “exactness of study and multiplicity of reading”. To all these, Jonson advocates that the poet must add “art” which reflects the poet’s own ingenuity and reflection of his age. In addition, the poet may seek material anywhere - either from books, referring to the Classics, or the age - so long as he can unify the material making it his own by his art. This is the meaning Jonson advocates, according to Baskerville, (1911: 6), for originality and hence, his acceptance among the Renaissance writers. For him, a poet’s ability to “convert the substance or riches of another poet to his own use ... and not to imitate servilely, as Horace saith, and catch at vices for virtue, but to draw forth out of the best and choicest flowers, with the bee, and turn all into honey, work it into one relish and savor” are the means of a poet’s acceptability into the literary instinct of his age (p. 6).

One of the important issues that Jonson stresses in his theories is the domestication of the classicists’ ideas innovated to suit local conditions. In respect of the comedy genre specifically, he argues in the *Discoveries* that writers who come after Aristophanes “altered the property of the persons, their names, and natures, and augmented it with all liberty, according to the elegancy and disposition of those times wherein they wrote” (p.7). Frye’s poetics in “Culture and Displacement” therefore becomes relevant in aiding the discussion on how Jonson “localises” the archetype of the lovable rogue(s) in his sixteenth century England to portray the realities of greed and avaricious life among the English. In the same vein, we will see later how Soyinka and Sutherland “localise” the selection of the archetype of the lovable rogue to reflect the realities of greed, avarice among West African

people. Jonson's insistence on writing poetry to reflect the "disposition of those times" (as captured in the *Discoveries*) is re-echoed in *Jonson's Conversations to Drummond*, some twenty years later in a censure of Drummond's own poetic works. Drummond admits that Jonson's criticism of his verses was:

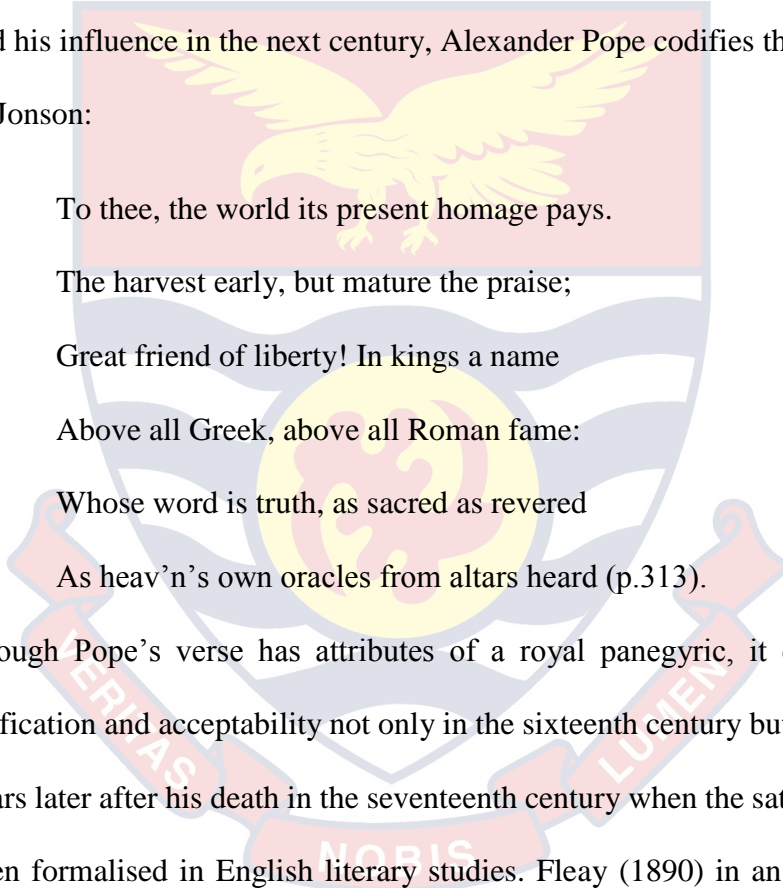
That they were all good, especiallie my Epitaphe of the Prince, save that they smelled too much of Schooles and were not **after the fancie of the tyme**: for a child (says he) may write after the fashion of the Greeks and Latine verses in running; yett that he wished, to please the King, that piece of forth feasting had been his owne (p. 12).

(Bold print, mine).

Perhaps, one of the strongest arguments that account for Jonson's impressive posture among the Elizabethan writers is the fact that despite an exceeding strong classical influence as reflected in the Renaissance spirit of the time, his works reflect both the knowledge and literature of English life. In his treatment of types and situations, not only do his works reasonably portray English life consistently but very often too liberally.

Jonson's liberality in his treatments of a variety of themes in his dramatic works suggests his studiousness and exploration of several fields of the complex life of the London and England he knew very well. He knew life as lived in the court and the city of London and could provide texts pertaining to the nobility and the low life. He takes the reader to the inns, the bawdy houses, the fairs, the market-places, the tradesmen shops, the courts of justice, the theatres, the aisles of St. Pauls', and

portrays to the reader the average person in the public and private life of contemporary London. He wrote on varied subjects (though surpassed by Shakespeare) such as alchemy, cookery, botany, cosmetics, marriage, drunkenness, etc. Furthermore, he was the only playwright, according to Kerr (1912), of the time who deliberately avoided the use of anachronisms. Rather, he was conscientious with regards to historical accuracy. In obvious development of Jonson's liberality and his influence in the next century, Alexander Pope codifies this verse in honour of Jonson:

The watermark is a large, semi-transparent crest of the University of Cape Coast. It features a yellow eagle with wings spread, perched on a shield. The shield is divided into four quadrants with various symbols. Below the shield is a banner with the Latin motto 'VERITAS LIBERABIT VOS'. The crest is centered on the page, behind the text.

To thee, the world its present homage pays.
The harvest early, but mature the praise;
Great friend of liberty! In kings a name
Above all Greek, above all Roman fame:
Whose word is truth, as sacred as revered
As heav'n's own oracles from altars heard (p.313).

Though Pope's verse has attributes of a royal panegyric, it captures Jonson's deification and acceptability not only in the sixteenth century but also seventy-five years later after his death in the seventeenth century when the satirical comedy had been formalised in English literary studies. Fleay (1890) in an introduction to *A Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, nearly two centuries later, also bears testimony of Jonson's central position and power in English literary studies. He argues that "although Shakespeare is the central figure in our dramatic literature, Jonson certainly is the central figure in our dramatic history" (p.13).

The centrality of Jonson in the Renaissance English dramatic history is best illustrated in the ethical aim of literary works, which he gave foremost attention to in his theory of comedy. To him, comedy should be consciously didactic and must be structured with intent of battling against vice and folly among the English. Obviously, Soyinka and Sutherland's artistic aims in their comic plays are inclined to both providing merriment and also serve as platforms for social criticism of societal evils. As we shall see later in subsequent chapters, both dramatists' satires are deep penetrative instruments crafted to pierce the psyche of society and produce a kind of 'refined' society.

In Jonson's dramatic career, he took the position of a censor and a revolutionary reformist whose aim is to improve morals and correct taste through the laughter of comedy, ensuring "that rule of the best artist, to suffer no object of delight to pass without his mixture of profit and example" (Cunningham, p.45). In pursuance of this aim, most of Jonson's prologues, epilogues, prefaces, and other extracts, according to Kerr (1912), plainly capture this moral intent in passionate bitterness to "scourge the English out of follies and vices and to spur them by negative teaching to truth and acceptable virtues" (p. 7). In *Every Man out of His Humour*, for example, Asper (the main character representing Jonson himself) opines that "with an armed and resolved hand, / I'll strip the ragged follies of the time/ Naked as at their birth". Later in the play Asper declares:

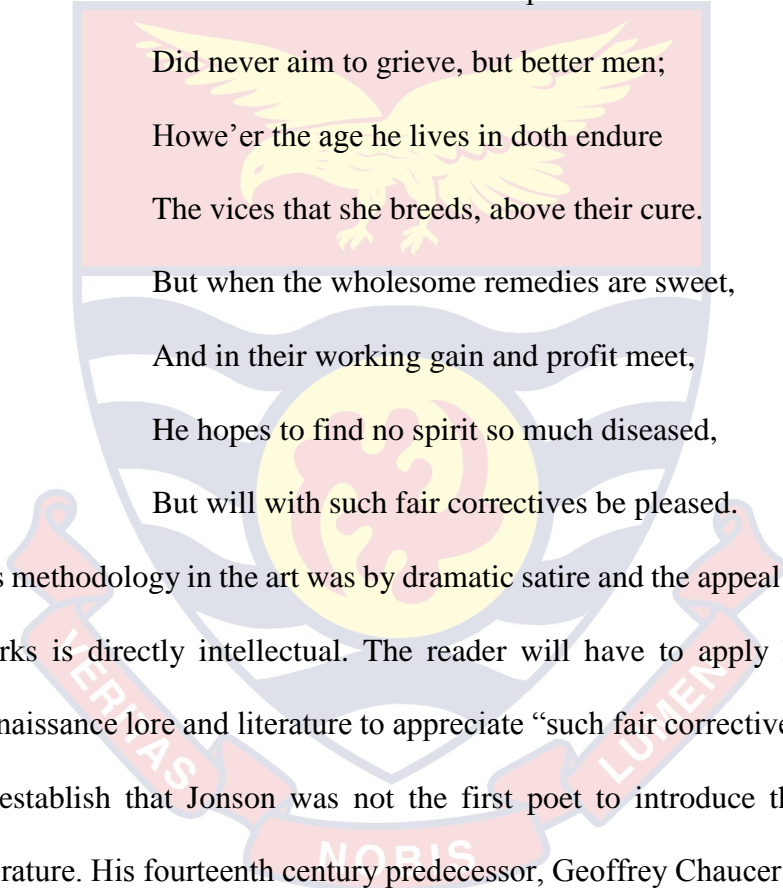
Well I will scourge those apes,
And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror,
As large as is the stage whereon we act;

Where they shall see the time's deformity
Anatomised in every nerve and sinew
With constant courage, and contempt of fear.

(Jonson, *Works*, p. 67.)

In the prologue to the *Alchemist* Jonson asserts that:

...this pen



Did never aim to grieve, but better men;
Howe'er the age he lives in doth endure
The vices that she breeds, above their cure.
But when the wholesome remedies are sweet,
And in their working gain and profit meet,
He hopes to find no spirit so much diseased,
But will with such fair correctives be pleased.

His methodology in the art was by dramatic satire and the appeal in all his dramatic works is directly intellectual. The reader will have to apply his knowledge of Renaissance lore and literature to appreciate “such fair correctives”. It is important to establish that Jonson was not the first poet to introduce this ethical aim in literature. His fourteenth century predecessor, Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, sets in motion series of experiments in exposing the ills of the English people and his work performed similar poetic roles as Horace and Plautus’ work did for the Romans, and Aristophanes and Terence’s did for the Greeks during the Classical periods.

However, Jonson's unrivalled posturing must be viewed against the background of Renaissance spirit where knowledge explosion in the Classics abounded and society had consciously become sophisticated and clothed in stoic terms; the imagination of Renaissance Man is almost purely negative. Adams (1979) avers that the negative imagination in the Renaissance Man puffed up to ridiculous proportions, making "vulgar English knights to see themselves as decadent Roman emperors, and stupid, stubborn sectarians to think themselves as vehicles of Divine Grace" (p. 457). The moral circle in Renaissance imagination and rhetoric was the love motif (which was so universally dear to Renaissance men/ women) under a cloak of factual realism beneath which lies what Adams refers to as "a deep ground of gourmandize streaked with fecality. Varying a few necessary variables, the whole construct most resembles that found in Rabelais. Gut and groin lie at the center of the circle, a severe stoic ethic rings the periphery" (p. 487).

Jonsonian comedy therefore sets out to subordinate this love motif throughout his dramas and shrink these delusions which promise "to turn the dross of men's real lives to gold". For example in *The Alchemist*, Face is not given the opportunity to enjoy the elixir of youth but he is reduced to the reality of becoming a slave. Mosca in *Volpone* is reduced from his moment of glory as a rich Venetian dignitary to a piece of human vermin chained to his bench and groaning at his oar.

Jonsonian comedy is reductive, corrective, and ends with true judgements in which the characters get what they deserve or a little worse according to his ethical aims in drama. The emphasis on correction and deflation according to Adams grew out of Jonson's uneasy relation to the unruly Elizabethan playhouse audience which

had an appetite for novelty, for vulgarity, for marvellous and sensational effects. Though, as a dramatist, he had to cater for that appetite but he sought to correct and improve it; a posture he maintained in all his dramatic works for which Cicero and Seneca, and even Juvenal and Tacitus could stand as sureties of his true art. Shakespeare, the giant of Renaissance drama, does not enforce this ethical aim.

His comedies end typically with a festival or a sacrament in which everybody participates with no moral intent of punishing vice. The evil characters are forgiven or reconciled or allowed to join silently with the circle of celebrating humanity. However, in Jonsonian comedy there is justice or a simulation of it and his ultimate aim in his dramatic works is the desire to refine public taste. In the Soyinka and Sutherland models we shall look at later in the selected texts, there is a simulation of a kind of 'justice system' in which the dramatists initiate punishments for the follies of humanity's inconsequential behaviours which threaten the stability of society.

Perhaps, one of the greatest testaments of Jonson's renown among the sixteenth century dramatic writers is his emphasis on character portrayal (rather than on plot development) to elucidate his theory of humours. He infuses into his treatment of characters both superficial peculiarities and eccentricities that hit into the core of the characters by the use of oddities of dress or mannerisms which reflect individual twists and imperfections, most often with a conscious or unconscious affectation that dominates the individual in all he/ she does and says. Jonson himself calls this a *humour* and he explains it in *Everyman out of His Humour* thus:

As when some one peculiar quality

Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his effects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluents, all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humor.
But that a rook, by wearing a pyed feather,
The cable hatband, or the three-piled ruff,
A yard of shoe-tye, or the Switzer's knot
On his French garters, should affect a humor!
O, it is more than most ridiculous. (p. 67).

Humour is used to express a quality of the inner man of a character, but that quality itself is often manifested by the outward idiosyncrasies and fashions. Hence both the inner and the outer manifestations of the disposition in humans is signified by the term. It is a term manifesting a fixed meaning connected with the comedy of manners suggesting an essential defect in an individual and emphasizing an abnormality. For “Whatsoever hath fluxure and humidity, / As wanting power to contain itself, / Is humour. So in every human body, / The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood, / By reason that they flow continually / In some one part, and are not continent, / Receive the name of humours.” (*Every Man out of His Humour, Induction*, (p. 67). Thus, Jonson’s explication of the term and use of it in his dramatic works capture notions of a character “whose moral and emotional nature lacks sanity, whose mental attitude exalts follies” (p. 67).

The basic but important conception of humour as Jonson conceived it is something temperamental, “something more or less permanent in character bent” (Baskerville,

p. 35). To clearly illustrate this kind of humour types in his plays, Jonson creates the balanced character (man or woman) as an ideal in contrast to the humour character whose eccentricities attract the dramatist's censure. In essence therefore, an outward manifestation of a particular tendency or a whim, fancy, or momentary inclination of whimsical attributes such as envy, wrath, drunkenness, avarice, folly, whims and affectations of the day or era, suggestive of both mental and moral weakness are all captured in Jonsonian use of the term. In fact, Baskerville asserts that "Jonson's most characteristic use of the word *humour* was new in the drama at any rate, and that the comedy of humours sprang full-grown from the brain of Jonson in *Every Man in His Humour*" (p.37).

Jonson's conception of the theory of humours, according to Baskerville (1911), developed with it the accompaniment of character sketch or character study which became the main thrust in the Renaissance dramatists' works. His theories gave life to the characterization and dwelt more on the eccentricities as distinctive qualities to be highlighted more than the humanity of the characters. In previous centuries, specifically the fourteenth century, characterization focused on the physical dispositions and its associations of certain "mental or nervous conditions with the preponderance" of some humours that reflected the thought of the age (p. 26). The social classes of characters were highlighted more than the individual natures.

Baskerville intimates that the characters were allegorized with a focus on "abstract virtues and vices" rather than the human types (p. 27). The characters were seen as a reflection of the socio-cultural realities of the times. For example, Chaucer's characterisation analyses humans, through the lenses of the details provided of

manners, social class and vocation, and they do not generalize according to the inner nature or trait of the character. However, Jonson's classical upbringing directed his vision of characterization to focus on the individual quality of the characters rather than see them as a reflection of a class or age. He throws a certain colouring on his characters by highlighting a single dominant quality which becomes the focus of character treatment, combining the study of the type and the study of an abstract folly or vice. In Jonsonian world view, a man's character is destiny sealed with a humour that has only one plane of existence. Such a humour does not permit any real "change" or transformation for the characters, since before the play begins all the characters have been predetermined.

Jonson's methodology in the creation of these character types echoes the abstractions and allegorical creations of the morality plays of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, his personages, as hinted earlier, set forth a predominant characteristic exhibited under many conditions. The reader remembers them not only because of their universal characteristics and appeal to contemporary life but for the lasting impression they create. Though Jonson achieves the same kind of effect which Bunyan provides in his *Pilgrim Progress* and Chaucer in his *The Canterbury Tales*, but in Jonson the reader focuses more on the inner trait embodied in a person other than on the individual possessing a certain quality.

Jonson's treatment of characters portrays a sense of realism in literature than Chaucer and Bunyan's, for in real life people make certain impressions on us by their exhibition of a certain quality (jealousy, hypocrisy, anger, greed, self-assertion

etc.) even before we experience their human personality. This explains why these creations of Jonson, such as Volpone, Face, Mosca, or Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, Sir Politic-Would-Be etc. are memorable. Both Soyinka and Sutherland create characters who exhibit particular peculiarities which identify the creations with certain eccentricities. Later in Chapters three and four, we will encounter characters such as Lakunle, Sadiku, Sidi in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, Chume, Amope, The Penitent, Member of the Federal House in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and Ananse, Anansewa, Christie, Togbe Klu, Chief of Mines in Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*. These characters exhibit some oddities either in dressing or mannerisms that echo Jonson's characters.

Jonson's skill focuses on highlighting recurring character types who exhibit vice and folly worthy of denunciation and reproof. For example, in *The Alchemist*, *Volpone*, *Devil is Ass*, *The Staple of News* and *The Magnetic Lady*, the celebrations and undying devotion of the characters to wealth is exposed and satirised. In addition, the reader is exposed to the skillful portraits of seemingly "clever" rascals in Mosca, Face, Subtle, or Brain-worm as well as simpletons, town and country gulls as reflected in Voltore, Corvino, Stephen, Mathew, La-Foole, John Paw, Kastril and Cokes. Such masterful portrayals have obviously affected the imaginations of Jonson's contemporaries and later literary descendants of him. The treatment of character in English Literature had firmly been established long before Jonson but his scheme and dexterity in developing characters of the so-called Theophrastus type provides the basis to argue that he did domesticate character portrayal to the development of the satiric comedies during the Elizabethan period.

The Theophrastus character describes a type which represents, not the social group (as Chaucer outlines) but the overriding mental or moral quality in the individual. Such a type is pre-eminently suitable to the satiric purpose of the comedic genre. Baskerville opines that Jonson “has often been considered an innovator” in the use of humour according to the Theophrastus character sketch (p. 27). However, he argues that Jonson might have been influenced by earlier English writers. He cites three of such writers: Fenton, Lyly and Harvey. Fenton employs the word (humour) to suggest disposition or distinguishing inclination but applies the term to mean vicious tendencies. With Lyly and Harvey the word is applied to follies. Jonson however adopted the figurative use of the term to describe persons (Characters) possessed of an affectation to foster his satiric purposes.

Characters were analysed based on their individual qualities, manners, traits and their capacities to exemplifying the supremacy of one passion. Consequently, it then became more usual to look at a character from the point of view of a prevailing tendency rather than that of social cleavage. Interestingly, this tendency was even exhibited by tragic playwrights in the sixteenth century. Marlowe, for example, constructs each of his great tragedies to reflect the hero being driven by an overpowering passion that ultimately leads to the tragic denouement. The comedies of the sixteenth centuries also exhibited this prevailing tendency in character portrayal as reflected in the works of Chapman, Marston, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger and later self-styled “Sons of Ben” (Field, Brome, etc.).

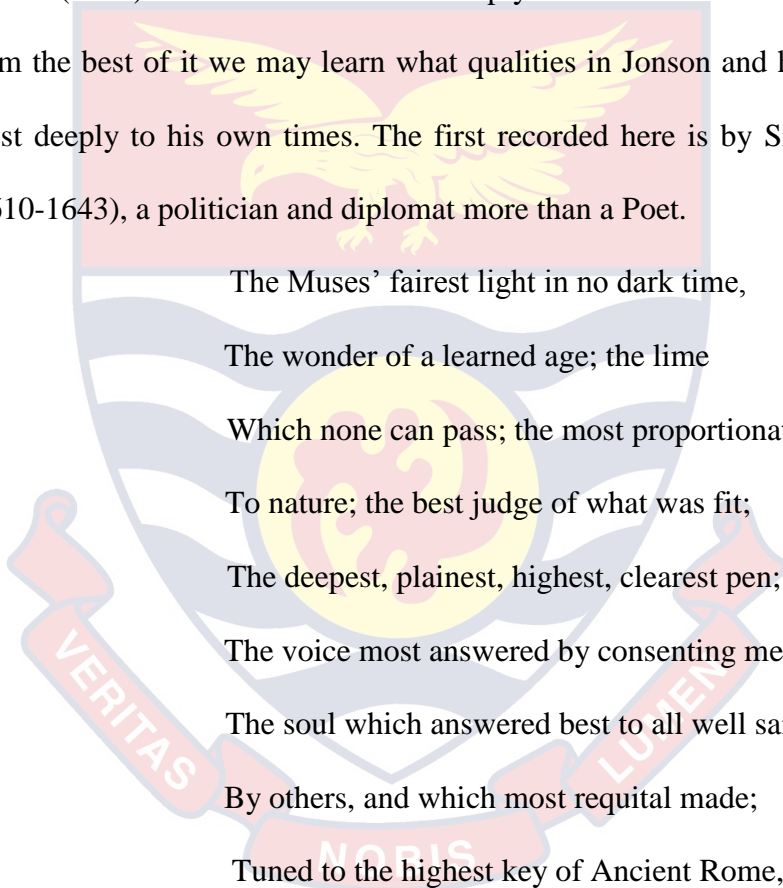
Linked with Jonson’s innovation in the use of the Theophrastus character sketch is the portrayal of a variety of characters, mannerisms and humours of men we will

conveniently categorise into the character of the gull and the character of rogues. The former is used to suggest humours that portray an individual as a fool with his particular whims and inclinations. Baskerville provides an insight into such characters. He explains that Jonson's use of the character of the gull suggests a "folly that comes not from perversion or lack of breadth of view in a man of possible worth, but from shallowness of mind accompanied by pretensions to gentility", stupidity, foolish bravery, etc. (p.111). Indeed, every act of the dupe merely emphasises his coarseness, cowardice, and stupidity. The latter (character of rogues) manifests several callings from purse-cutting to enacting the elixir of youth, to fortune-telling, knavery, and initiating and exacting cunning on foolish victims with new tricks. The rogue characters, in exhibiting their tricks, manifest the resourcefulness of buoyancy, arrogance, wit, deceitfulness and a perpetual success story to cow their victims. The gull-knave pattern as perfected by Jonson finds a similarity in Soyinka and Sutherland's creation of character types to reflect both the roguery and dunce natures of humans. In the third and fourth chapters, we will discuss how the West African dramatists – Soyinka and Sutherland – create this pattern and to what uses the dramatists utilise the character types.

Jonson's use of these character types was applauded by his contemporaries such as Marston, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher and his followers who imitated this style. Kerr (1912) suggests that Jonson's methodology in character portrayal and vocabulary contributed enormously to popularize the English comedy of the time and also introduced a number of words which particularly apply to his plots and types of character, such as "gull", "cozen", "engine", "project", "humour" "device"

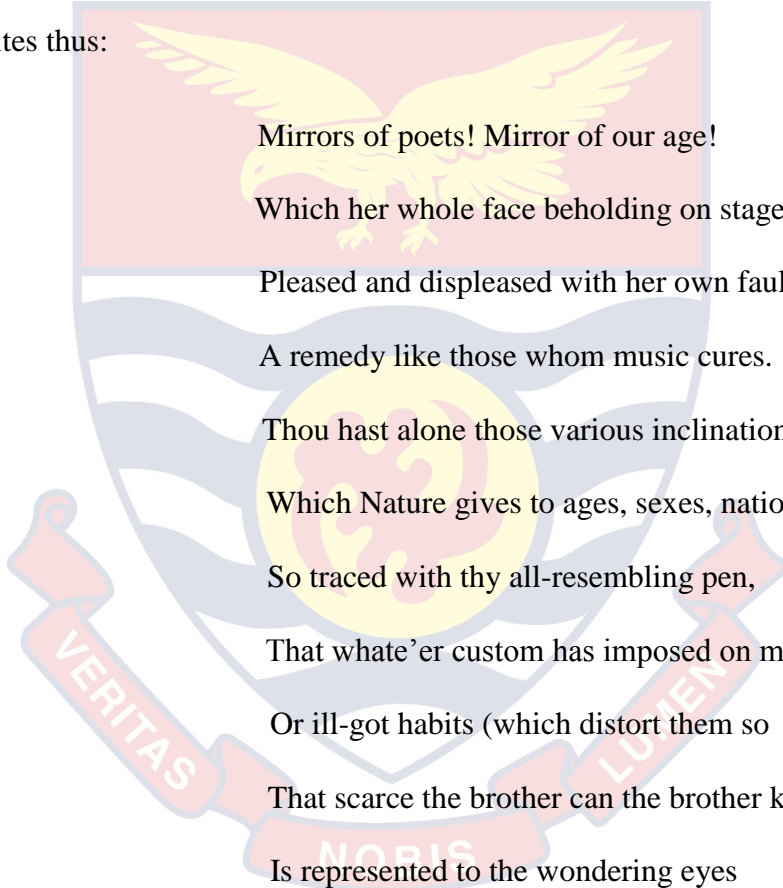
and also many invectives, terms of protestation and certain common expressions used in the street language of the day (p.16).

Perhaps it will be instructive to end this introductory segment of chapter three with two poems captured in a volume of complimentary tributes, *Jonson's Virbius* (Jonson Reborn), which appeared a year after the death of Jonson, as captured by Adams (1979). Much of this verse is simply social or ceremonial in character, but from the best of it we may learn what qualities in Jonson and his work appealed most deeply to his own times. The first recorded here is by Sidney Godolphine (1610-1643), a politician and diplomat more than a Poet.

The watermark is a large, semi-transparent crest of the University of Cape Coast. It features a shield with a yellow eagle with wings spread, perched on a globe. Below the shield is a red banner with the Latin motto 'VERITAS LIBERABIT VOS'. The crest is centered behind the poem.

The Muses' fairest light in no dark time,
The wonder of a learned age; the lime
Which none can pass; the most proportionate wit
To nature; the best judge of what was fit;
The deepest, plainest, highest, clearest pen;
The voice most answered by consenting men,
The soul which answered best to all well said
By others, and which most requital made;
Tuned to the highest key of Ancient Rome,
Returning all her music with his own;
In whom, with nature, study claimed a part,
And yet who to himself owed all his art;
Here lies Ben Jonson. Every age will look
With sorrow here, with wonder on his book (p.485).

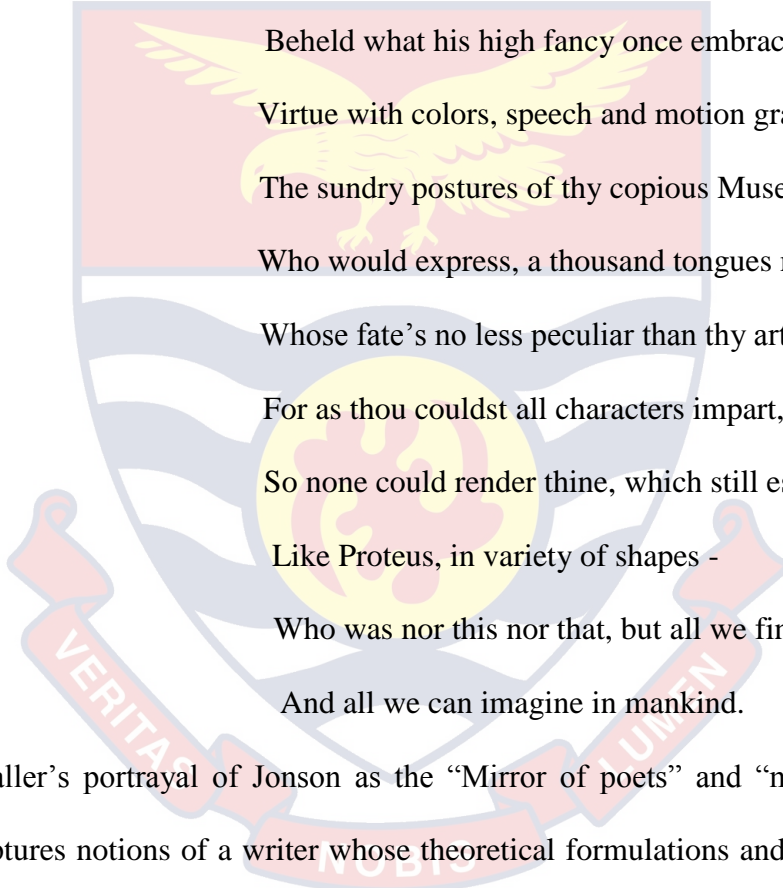
The metaphor of music (emanating from Jonson's "clearest pen") which runs throughout the poem is what Godolphine uses to portray Jonson's unrivalled posturing, his contribution to Renaissance lore and his influence on succeeding artists. Waller (1901), a Restoration poet who survived the Civil Wars to exercise a strong influence on the polished and graceful poetry during the era, emphasises the universality of Jonson's vision and the therapeutic powers of his dramas. He writes thus:

The watermark is a large, semi-transparent crest of the University of Cape Coast. It features a yellow eagle with wings spread, perched on a shield. The shield has a red top section and a yellow bottom section with a red emblem. Below the shield is a red banner with the Latin motto "VERITAS NOBIS LUMEN".

Mirrors of poets! Mirror of our age!
Which her whole face beholding on stage,
Pleased and displeas'd with her own faults, endures
A remedy like those whom music cures.
Thou hast alone those various inclinations
Which Nature gives to ages, sexes, nations
So traced with thy all-resembling pen,
That whate'er custom has impos'd on men,
Or ill-got habits (which distort them so
That scarce the brother can the brother know)
Is represented to the wondering eyes
Of all that see or read thy comedies.
Whoever in those glasses looks, may find
The spots return'd, or graces, of his mind,
And by the help of so divine an art,
At leisure view and dress his nobler part.

Narcissus, cozened by that flattering well
Which nothing could but of his beauty tell,
Had here, discov'ring the deformed estate
Of his fond mind, preserved himself with hate.

But virtue too, as well as vice, is clad
In flesh and blood so well, that Plato had



Beheld what his high fancy once embraced,
Virtue with colors, speech and motion graced.
The sundry postures of thy copious Muse
Who would express, a thousand tongues must use;
Whose fate's no less peculiar than thy art;
For as thou couldst all characters impart,
So none could render thine, which still escapes,
Like Proteus, in variety of shapes -
Who was nor this nor that, but all we find
And all we can imagine in mankind.

Waller's portrayal of Jonson as the "Mirror of poets" and "mirror of the age" captures notions of a writer whose theoretical formulations and works reflect the beauties of both Classicism and Renaissance literature from which infinite variety of shapes can emerge.

The supremacy of Jonson among the mental colossuses of Renaissance poets is not more unquestionable; perhaps, similar to the assertion by Swinburne (1898, 1969) that Shakespeare is a towering figure "among the gods of English verse" (p. 4).

Swinburne later intimates that the glory that crowned the “Titanic labours” of Jonson’s works is “something heroic and magnificent in his life-long dedication of all his gifts and all his powers to the service of his art”. The result of Jonson’s art, Swinburne further observes, is magnificent in the sense that the “flowers of growing have every quality but one which belongs to the rarest and finest among flowers... the one thing they want is fragrance” (p.4). The construction therefore of *Volpone* (1605) and *The Alchemist* (1610) is a testament of the congruent fragrance which helps to build the composite genius of Jonson in Renaissance literature.

Jonson’s Artistic Vision in *Volpone*

Jonson’s literary ideals and dramatic skills in *Volpone* not only open a new era in the Elizabethan comic drama but also demonstrate his resourcefulness in exploiting some popular motifs and archetypes drawn from the models of Aristophanes, Plautus, and Juvenal to reflect the realities of the extravagance of Renaissance Europe. The Aristophanes figures of the *alazon* and *bomolochos* which portray the character traits of an *Imposter* and a *Buffoon* respectively, underlie the relationship a critic can draw to link Jonson’s dramatic skills in *Volpone* in which the characters exhibit varying degrees of impostering, buffoonery, churlish, rusticity and downright stupidity. The manifestation of the patterns of Aristophanes figures in Jonson’s play and the poetic splendour (as portrayed in *The Birds* and *The Wasps*) suggests what Davison (1963) describes as Jonson’s use of “mythic or fantastic incidents” in which persons of absurd or extravagant pretensions both individually and collectively overlap in the play.

Jonson exploits the legend of the death-feigning fox to construct the mythical structure of the play. The play itself (acted in the year 1605 by the King's Majesty Servants or Players) titled *VOLPONE, OR THE FOXE*, reveals the dramatist's artistic ingenuity in dramatising an age-long animal fable or legend associated with the "cunning", "crafty" and "sly" traits of the fox's predatoriness in taking advantage of lesser or baser creatures. The development of the animal fable itself is associated with the Greek, Aesop, whose compilation of fables dates back to around 600BC. These stories had been transmitted orally for several centuries. Aesopian fables were normally brief narratives which described a single incident and these narratives were meant to teach both wise and decent conduct to the listener. The animals used in the tales were endowed with particular characteristic traits which eventually became signification for various types of individuals and their weakness.

In early societies, animals were used as suitable portrayal of the human world and its complex goings-on and they could easily be associated with a single human quality. One of the most famous of Aesop's fables, which illustrates the fox's cunning, apparently exploited by Jonson is "The Fox and the Crow" which has been refashioned in different forms over the centuries. The story is told of a crow sitting in a tree and holding in its beak a piece of meat, most probably, that he had stolen. A fox sees the crow and he is determined to get the meat, so it stands under the tree and tells the crow that it was a beautiful bird fit to be the king of all the birds if only it had a good voice as well. The crow, carried away by the flattery and zealous to prove that it had a good voice, drops the meat and opens its beak to demonstrate its

worth by croaking loudest. The fox picks up the meat and tells the crow that he truly would have been an ideal king if he added brains to the afore-mentioned qualities. The fox represents one of the most recurring animals portrayed in the anthropomorphic tale to discuss the theme of flattery and deception in literature.

Chadwick (1994) suggests that the fox was a fraudulent and ingenious animal in medieval bestiaries. She describes a 5th century BC dish in the Vatican museum showing a fox recounting to Aesop the exploits of the animals. According to Chadwick, the description formed the basis of the fox's fables, implying that it was the fox who originally conceived them. She cites White's bestiary translation of *The Book of Beasts* (1960) to establish a claim that "the fox's taxonomic name, *Vulpis*, is derived from the name of the person who winds wool", because "he is a creature... who never runs straight but goes on his ways with tortuous windings" (p. 2). The image of the fox's wily and crafty nature is best described in a medieval bestiary in which the fox is presented as hungry and desperate because no animal turns up for him to devour. He conceives a plan by rolling himself in red mud to make him look like he was mortally wounded. Then he pitches himself on the ground and holds his breath to deceive other carrions that he was dead. The birds, observing that he is not breathing, and that his body is covered with blood with his tongue sticking out, think that he is dead and come down to perch on him. He quickly grabs them and gulps them up. The fox in this context represents the wily, clever hero outwitting other humans who live by carrion flesh.

Jonson's *Volpone* or *The Foxe* dramatises a blend of the Aesopian fable and the didactics of the medieval beast fables to represent the fox as a trickster figure who

is used to attack various institutions such as the legal, marriage, and church piety in Renaissance Europe. The character of Volpone, the hero, represents the wily and greedy aristocrats who like the fox devises ways of fleecing the voracious birds of prey characterized by Jonson in the personalities of the four legatees. Jonson exploits the analogy between the trickster figure of the fox (in the personality of Volpone) who maintains itself by cunningness (and deceit), and the ancient Roman practice of *captatio* - legacy hunting motif - in which the aristocrats feigned disability as a ploy to attract gifts and pretentious friendship from expectant *captores*. The dramatist's vision in the play therefore is to portray various manifestations of social imbalance in Renaissance Europe controlled by various trickster figures and gulls who exhibit traits such as self-centredness, buffoonery, daftness, mischief, gullibility, and fraud to produce a new order of greed in contemporary society.

The fox then serves as an appropriate resemblance for the kind of trickster hero Jonson depicts in the play. The reader clearly understands Volpone's cunning which is instinctual and amoral manifested to demonstrate his prime aim of seeking to satisfy his fundamental egoistic appetites. Similarly, Soyinka employs the archetype of the fox in the portrayal of Baroka in his play, *The Lion and the Jewel* and Brother Jero in the play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*. Baroka and Jero's cunning and predatoriness echo their sixteenth century fox counterpart, Volpone. Soyinka's portrayal of Baroka and Jero will be discussed in the next chapter. Jonson's fox, Volpone, exhibits a life-style craft of pulling a prank on the capitalist privileged people and his narrow world in which knavery is carried out as the dominant image

in the play. This skill, though, is not new to Renaissance dramatists who following in the dramatic tradition of Plautus and Terence portrayed the figure of the trickster as a romantic hero.

The romantic trickster figure, however, did not attain his full dramatic potential in the intrigue comedy as Jonson's. In the classical models they imitated, the romantic hero was portrayed as a slave whose wits were exploited by the master in pursuance of love, or a repentant parent or an intimidating rival. The figure was allowed to manifest several cloaks and given a freer range to operate in multifaceted intrigue plots. Such a hero, to quote Beecher (1985), remained "a low-life character, mono-dimensional, subservient to his betters and ever restrained by the variables of plotting which led only to happy issue for the lovers accompanied usually by reconciliation and the promise of carnival" (p.44).

Chapman and Marston's works reflect a portrayal of such a hero whose intelligence of the nature of trickster figures provided him the opportunity to exhibit folly in high places. In Chapman's *Blind Beggar of Alexandria* for example, the hero is not only portrayed as a prankster of the highest order but conducts his affairs as an ornamental magnifico headed to becoming king of Egypt throughout the episodic multi-disguise plot. Irus, the hero, schemes an elaborate manoeuvre in which he poses as a clever telepathic who gives prophecies he succeeds in fulfilling through a series of adopted disguises. His dupes include an aristocrat, three beautiful sisters and the Queen herself. His most despicable achievement is to marry two of the sisters at once, giving the third to Pego (his parasite), and then he deceives himself twice by seducing each wife posing as the husband of the other. The play prefigures

the ambitious master trickster who falls in love and exhibits sheer devilry and the dramatist's artistic aim points to the portrayal of a mono-dimensional figure who does not exhibit those qualities which pertain to the trickster of Jonson's *Volpone*.

Jonson's greatest success in *Volpone* is the superimposition of the fox as a hero, not only in the trickster of folklore tradition but as Beecher (1985) observes, one "fully accommodated to the English stage, whose rising and falling destiny is redeployed in the context of an intrigue drawn from the conditions of contemporary England" (p. 46). By the end of the sixteenth century the buoyancy of the Renaissance temper together with individual accomplishments waned. On the political front, Queen Elizabeth was growing old and the future conditions were uncertain. Puritanism, which was becoming more dominant ushered in greater bitterness to life. Despite the fact that the wealth of England was booming during the century, the masses felt the negative impact in the soaring prices of goods and services on the one hand while the rich and the new middle class felt perhaps the clash of social readjustment on the other hand. Some acts of chivalry and platonic love were cultivated by the emergent middle class to add to the dignity and elaboration of formal manners, manifesting in the conceit associated with the pretentious gallant's life: such as smoking, drinking, dressing, bowing, talking, walking, riding, duelling. To the middle class, the surest way to social integration was through the exhibition of the forms of gallantry.

The decadence of Italian culture paved way for greater attention to economic conditions. Numerous gulls and claimants emerged to manifest the struggle inherent in their social re-adjustment. A kind of pessimism and rather harsh outlook

on life manifested in themes suggesting what Baskerville (1911) describes as “England developing too fast for stability, that she had allowed the same zestful ferment in economic and civic affairs as in international pursuits and was now being forced to take reckoning” (p. 21).

In 1603, with the death of Queen Elizabeth and subsequent installation of King James I, and series of attempts made on his life culminating in the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, apparently set in motion by Guy Fawkes, brought in its wake an uncanny feeling of disillusionment, which served as sufficient literary materials and themes for Jonson’s satire. The event of 5th November 1605 when Guy Fawkes was arrested while keeping guard of the explosives the plotters had placed beneath the House of Lords is one of the groundings likely to suggest Jonson’s creation of the character of Volpone in consonance with the wily nature of the fox. Antonia Fraser (2005) describes Fawkes as “a tall, powerfully built man, with thick reddish-brown hair, a flowing moustache in the tradition of the time, and a bushy reddish-brown beard”. Fawkes was a “man of action... capable of intelligent argument as well as physical endurance, somewhat to the surprise of his enemies”. These descriptive attributes of Fawkes suggest Jonson’s creation of his hero. Volpone does not behave as the romantic hero (similar to the Chapman’s portrayal of Irus) nor does he exhibit the tragic romantic temper of Marlowvian hero as portrayed in *Tamburlaine Part One*.

Jonson’s hero, unlike Chapman’s portrayal, is elevated to the status of a rich magnifico and an egocentric rogue who is driven by passion to satisfy his appetite and greed, while attracting others to his personality. From the opening scenes of the play to the very end, Volpone is portrayed as a self-styled accomplished

performer whose inventiveness, plotting, and clever mimicking over-run the reader to an ecstatic point of comic bliss that we rejoice at the hero's successes rather than condemn him. The gloating exchanges between his parasite, Mosca, and him, and his attendant grotesques - Nano (Dwarf), Castrone (Eunuch), and Androgyno (Hermaphrodite) – take on a significance which dominates the play; that is, the hero's capacity to deceive the birds of prey “letting the cherry knock against their lips/ And, draw it, by their mouths, and back again” (1.i. 89-90). He is irreverent of his victims' pathetic gullible plight or the gullibility of the entire society represented in the role of the dupes. Here is a man who glories “more in the cunning purchase of [his] wealth, /Than in the glad possession”; since he gains by tearing “forth the fathers of poor families/ Out of their beds, and coffin them alive/ In some kind, clasp[ing] prison, where their bones/ May be forth-coming, when the flesh is rotten”. He also loathes “the widow's or the orphan's tears ... or their piteous cries” (1.i. 44-47).

The imagery employed by the dramatist, coupled with the metaphor studded with irreverently fleecing, portrays a hero whose moral codes have been turned upside down. He seems free from all the restraints of both the legal and moral psyche that regulate society's conduct. The dramatist invests a double nature into the hero's freedom to make him both the contriver and the contrived, the hunter and the hunted, all within the fully realised state of a prankster. He is an outsider in the true sense of an existentialist hero (similar to Albert Camus' Caligula). He is, as Beecher (1985) describes him, “a marauder and a mocker, who shames his victims into conformity”. He maintains a posture synonymous to that of a prophet and an

apostate, the benefactor and the bandit. It is this inter-relationship of opposites in the hero's personality that serves as the key to unlock the complex nature of Jonson's creation.

In developing this inter-relationship of opposites in the hero, Jonson devises a structural pattern which forms the basis of the play's artistic success. Jonsonian technique finds a comparison in Soyinka and Sutherland's comic plays in which the latter twentieth century dramatists create seemingly similar structural pattern to echo the sixteenth century dramatist. This details of the technique will be discussed in subsequent chapters. The excitement of Jonson's design manifests in the gull-and-knave pattern of comic episode. Though this design is not a creation of Jonson in the sixteenth century, for it dates back to Aristophanes and Plautus' works (trickster tales in which the country visitor is out-smattered by a local or city chieftain), but it is Jonson who fully develops the pattern to accommodate the gulling of both professionals and the highly respected in society made real with the prevailing *Captatio* practised in Venice. Jonson devises the roles of the knaves (the imposters and the buffoons who plot the mischiefs) and the gulls (the dupes who exhibit the buffoonery and stupidity) to conform to the social realities in Renaissance Europe; a society in which economic considerations, manifested in greed and avarice, controlled the psyche of humans rather than express true warmth and affection towards one another.

Jonson's choice of Venice as the setting of the play transposes the glories, exoticism and apparently the sinister happenings in Italian culture into the staple of Elizabethan and Jacobean societies in which murderous intrigue, rampant and

corrupt clericalism were the order of the day. Venice, in Jonson's play, becomes a metaphorical version of London; what Maurer (1940, 1999) refers to as the "mother-city of splendid vice", which is famously liberal and "one of the commercially vibrant overseas empires" (p. 14).

The setting therefore raises an important concern in the structural pattern of Jonson's play similar to Shakespeare's use of Venice in his plays, *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. These two plays, like Jonson's *Volpone*, are concerned with the mercantile spirit and its associated vices of greed, selfishness, jealousy, etc. All three plays portray Venice as a vibrant master economy, fitting to treat humans as golden fleeces and gulls as garbage, for as Coryat (1999) observes, "here you may both see all manner of fashions of attire, and heare all the languages of the Christendome, besides those that are spoken by the barbarous Ethnicks, that ... a man may very properly call it... a market place of the world, not of the citie" (p. 32). Though historical accounts do not support the claim that both dramatists ever visited Venice, but they were familiar with travellers' tales recounted by visitors and tourists such as Jonson's Sir Politic Would-Be. Jonson's Venice is really a product of his imagination, "a wholly materialist city" (p.23).

Though Jonson's *Volpone* is like the characteristic "city comedies" of Jacobean London, he focuses on the "jostling city hustlers" as Steggle (2011) calls them; that sense of the world which reflects "the London-rooted Alchemist" with its clamour for wealth, fame and sordidly gathered commodities (p. 43). The dramatist provides concrete idea of this economic malaise in the opening scene of the play where we witness the hero recounting the glories of gold (his object of worship, *saint*) which

“the teeming earth,” wrapped in darkness longs to see the sun. Hence humanity is prepared to “peep through the horns of the celestial Ram” to view its splendour. The metaphor of peeping through the horns associated with “that age” is dramatized as “...far transcending/ All style of joy in children, parents, friends, / Or any other waking dream on earth” (1.i.4-6). Jonson therefore transposes the ills of “that age” in his creation of the artistic world of Venetian city to reflect a society diametrically divided between the possessors of the gold, the knaves who pretend invalidity with the sole purpose of attracting gifts from the gulls, who equally feign friendship and generous attitudes as a bid to win the affection of the legator.

Jonson’s craftsmanship in portraying this gull-knave pattern is predominantly revealed in his choice of the character names of the gulls in *Volpone*. The characters are carefully chosen and related to the action, thereby providing a multi-levelled perspective in the plot of a Venetian magnifico who succeeds in gulling his legacy-hunters. The choice of the character names evokes the beast fable of the sly fox who feigned death to attract the carrion birds - Voltore (vulture), Corbaccio (raven) and Corvino (crow) - through deception. The actions of these birds are portrayed as hungry not for flesh but for the wealth of Volpone. Also the actions of these abnormal individuals are shown within the scope of natural behaviour because the legacy hunters’ visits to Volpone are in the same consequence as the feeding of the scavengers they denote. These character types are used by Jonson to expose the moral distortion, the debased state of humans that portrays their avaricious actions and attitudes.

Thus, the dramatist infuses the knaves with a quality of wit and intelligence to take advantage of the privileged position of the gulls who are portrayed as buffoons; capitalist masters who in their quest for materialism condescend to exhibit traits of daftness and stupidity. In developing this structural pattern of the intrigues of the tricksters in the play, Jonson switches the roles of the main characters (in the play) to exhibit oppositional disguises which seem to be the dominating element in the pattern. This dominating element of oppositional disguises in the structural pattern has also been exploited by Soyinka and Sutherland in their depictions of the tricksters interacting with the gulls in the plays, *the Lion and the Jewel*, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, *The Marriage of Anansewa* respectively. The details of their skills will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Jonson's *Volpone*, at several points (in the play) manifests the role of a wily imposter (similar to the fox) to fleece his clients while at some points he condescends into a state of morbidity to manifest the role of a buffoon. In the main action he is the principal imposter, aided by Mosca, to act the disguise of a magnifico receiving gifts from the legacy hunters – Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio, and Lady Would-Be. However, later in the play when Volpone disguises himself as dead and the legacy hunters come hunting for his wealth they act as lesser imposters while Volpone acts the buffoon (V. iii). In earlier scenes, Volpone and Mosca join forces to defraud the lesser imposters but later the roles shift, and change. Volpone's buffoonery is particularly manifested when he acts his disguise as a mountebank (as portrayed in II. ii) and a Commendatore (as portrayed in V. v – viii). In the mountebank scene Jonson debases his hero as a buffoon, making him

speak in a prosaic language full of verbiage and “turdy-facy-nasty-paty-lousy-fartical rogues” (II. ii. 59) compounded with abusive improvisations which ironically attract an applause from the audience. In the same scene, Celia (the supposed ‘chaste’ wife of Corvino, a magnate) is portrayed as an imposter when she appears at the window and throws down her handkerchief as a bait to attract Volpone who is acting the buffoon. Corvino, with a hypocritical air of arrogance describes Celia as a “Lady Vanity” who “fans her favours forth, / To give [her] hot spectators satisfaction!” (II. v. 21-22).

The dramatist later swaps these roles by fake pretences connected with the legacy-hunting motif and associated with the trickster plot by making Corvino to condescend into a buffoon in prostituting his wife to Volpone who now becomes an imposter. In the scenes where Volpone wears the disguises as a Commendatore, his buffoonery reaches its height when he teases Corbaccio, Corvino, and Voltore with a tinge of irony, deception and flattery. Jonson’s design ensures that there is wit in deception and there is glory in changing roles. Ultimately, the characters and situations in the play change appearance with rapidity, what Brockbank describes as “exhilarating and bewildering pace until all human identities are disfigured, all relationships confused, and the truth made inaccessible to reason and law” (p. xxvi).

Jonson is clearly aware of his role as the plotter of the play’s design and he employs his dramatic skills to exploit the potentials of the knaves – Volpone and Mosca – who actually execute the mischief and wit inherent in the gull-knave pattern. The knavery and resourcefulness displayed by Volpone and Mosca in contriving ways of exploiting the gulls, weaving intricate webs in and out of difficult situations,

putting up appearances and acts, and the adulations involved in the gloating exchanges between them serve as useful insights in the dramatist's artistic design. The artist uses Mosca's self-confessed role as a "fly", with its parasitic imagery of feeding fat on the sores and putrefaction of others, coupled with his accolade as the "devil" (as Volpone describes him) to portray frightening insights about humans. When Mosca declares that "Success hath made me wanton. I could skip / Out of my skin, now, like a subtle snake, / I am so limber," (III. i. 5-7) the reader gets the indication of an over reaching imposter whose subtlety is applied to the snake to signify his elusive movement, his texture and his traditional cunning. He sees himself as the "fine, elegant rascal, that can rise, / And stoop almost altogether like an arrow" (III. i. 23-24).

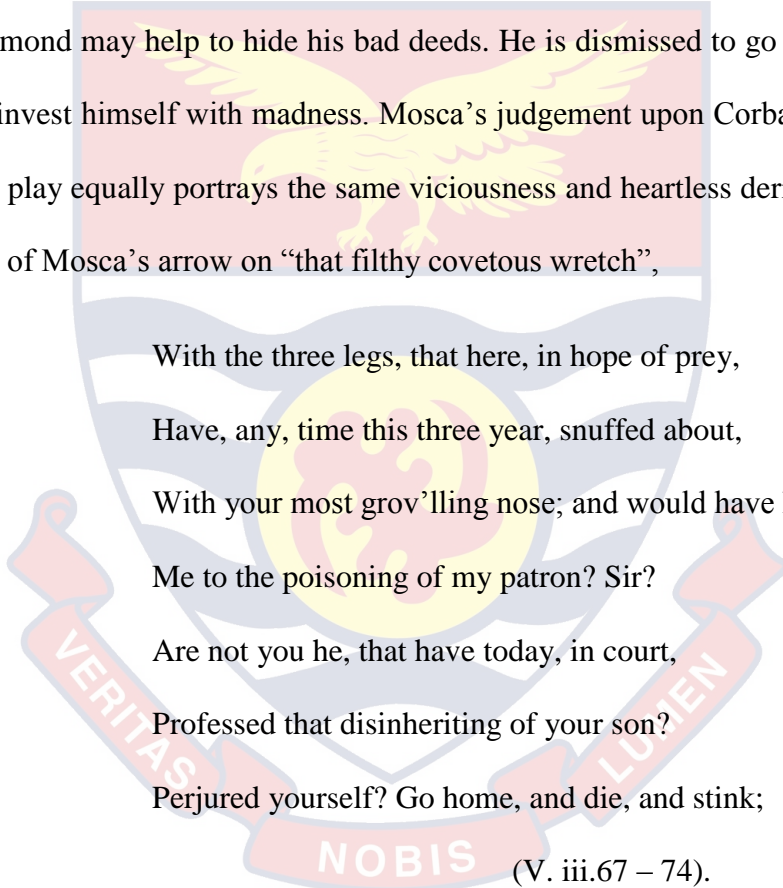
The imagery of the fine, outward, and appealing texturing of the snake coupled with the poisonous destructive jab of an arrow suggests the dual function of Mosca in the play. He is both the enchanter and the enchanted, the cozener and the cozened, the conjurer and the conjured. In his dealings for example with Bonario, Mosca engages him under the guise of friendship and love (III. ii). Mosca is like hypocrisy or dissimulation, pretending to be of good companionship in order to serve the devil's end. His mastery of the appearance and language of virtue as Brockbank suggests "moves him to tears and overcomes all the resistance of his victim" (p. xi). In his dealings with the four legacy-hunters Mosca exhibits the same cunningness and texturing of the snake but in reality his intentions are metaphorically portrayed in the poisoned jab of an arrow. By the end of the play, the gulls are rightly abused and tormented by Mosca.

The reader appreciates the degree of Mosca's intelligence, wit and touch of comic villainy as he passes his derisive sentence on each of the gulls later (V. iii). For Lady Would-Be, Mosca drums home her "fairer answer" in relation to the question of her being considered a legatee. He reminds her ladyship "what she did for her maintenance". In earlier scenes (I. v.; III. iv. & v.), Mosca as a prankster gives us hints of how he *used* Lady Would-Be to satisfy his sexual desires, for she was "a beauty, ripe, as harvest! / Whose skin is whiter than a swan, all over! / Than silver, snow, or lilies! A soft lip, / Would tempt you to eternity of kissing!" (I. v. 109-112). Now Mosca dismisses her to "go home, and *use* the poor Sir Pol, your knight well" (V. iii. 44).

Mosca's frequent reference to the words: *use, some riddles* in his address to her suggests the irony of a woman who had allowed herself to be *used* by the knaves to achieve their aim but now she has to go home empty-handed and "be melancholic". The dual function the dramatist assigns Mosca in his interaction with Lady Would-Be, as a subtle snake that entices its victim with a cozening tongue of an expected blissful end (or gain) and ironically as the executor (in the end) who stings the victim with a jab that sends her straight home is quite appropriate. This serves the artistic interest of criticising the middle class English women. It is similar to the Biblical allusion of the serpent which entices Eve with a glamorous vision of becoming like a "god" but in the end she loses her dignity and self-respect.

The dramatist's portrayal of the gulling of Corvino and Corbaccio through the dual function assigned Mosca manifests an excitement from the snake imagery coupled with a derisive deviousness of disgust against the middle class capitalist masters

who are “declared cuckold”. How can merchants and land owners of their calibre be so daft not to see through the trickery of Mosca? As part of the artist’s aim the “fine, elegant rascal” must rise with Corvino to make him part with his riches and honour by giving tons of diamond, pearls and even his legal wife in exchange for the supposed legacies of Volpone. Mosca exacts a perverse judgement of a jab from his fangs on Corvino who thinks that his supposed good works of giving out a diamond may help to hide his bad deeds. He is dismissed to go home melancholy or invest himself with madness. Mosca’s judgement upon Corbaccio at the end of the play equally portrays the same viciousness and heartless derisiveness from the jab of Mosca’s arrow on “that filthy covetous wretch”,

The watermark is a large, semi-transparent crest of the University of Cape Coast. It features a central shield with a yellow eagle with wings spread, perched on a red and white circular emblem. Below the shield is a red banner with the Latin motto 'VERITAS LIBERABIT VOS' in white capital letters. At the bottom of the crest, the word 'NOBIS' is written in white capital letters on a red background.

With the three legs, that here, in hope of prey,
Have, any, time this three year, snuffed about,
With your most grov’ling nose; and would have hired
Me to the poisoning of my patron? Sir?
Are not you he, that have today, in court,
Professed that disinheriting of your son?
Perjured yourself? Go home, and die, and stink;

(V. iii.67 – 74).

Earlier, Mosca enchants Corbaccio to bring “a bag of bright chequeens” and also deceives him to disinherit his son, Bonario, for the benefits of Volpone’s legacies. Mosca’s judgement on Corbaccio also brings to the fore the dual function assigned him in the plot. He is to deceive through his texturing as a fine, elegant being and later strike with the poisonous jab from his arrow. This same manifestation is

evident in Mosca's interaction with Voltore. The former 'humours' the latter to give out a gold plate, a free legal consultancy service, and act as an advocate and a defense counsel in court. Mosca's gulling of Voltore and his subsequent mortification of him exhibit a virulent disgust and disdainful insolence at lawyers who have so much education but lack conscience not to be covetous of what is not theirs. Jonson's satirical portrayal of Voltore reveals his virulent disgust at the corruption in both the advocatory and judicatory systems in London during the sixteenth century. Voltore's appearance in court to lie about Celia and Bonario's supposed guilt of adultery and felonious murder (IV. v.) and his subsequent epileptic feats in court (V. xii) coupled with the court's inability to see through the lies and deceit of Voltore are emblematic scenes Jonson uses to show the decadent disease of rot and putrefaction in the judicial system in the English society.

Robbins (1959) captures an anonymous fifteenth century popular poem titled, "London Lickpenny" in which a Kentish husbandman seeks legal redress in the Westminster courts. The poem provides an insight into the social realities which most probably Jonson captures in the portrayal of Voltore's role.

To London once my steps I bent.
Where truth in no wyse should be faint,
To westmynster-ward I forthwith went,
To a man of law to make complaint.
I sayd, "for marys love, that holy saynt
Pyty the poore that would proceede".
But, for lack of mony, I could not spede.

(pp. 130-34)

The portrayal manifests the distortion in the legal system which apparently explains the dramatist's disgust and subsequent gulling of such "men of letters" whose intelligence could be taken advantage of by knaves and rogues such as Mosca and Volpone. Evidently, these anticipate Dickens' view that the law is writ down an ass.

Brockbank (1968) opines that the gull-and-knave structure as Jonson contrives it allows the knaves – Volpone and Mosca – to prevail over the gulls because of their superior know-how. Jonson's skill in the gull-knave structure also permits the knaves to prevail because of their superior moral insights. This superior moral insights assigned by Jonson to the knaves is also present in Sutherland's portrayal of Ananse's interaction with the gulls who come claiming Anansewa's hand in marriage. Ananse, the knave, prevails over them. In Soyinka, we find the same skill exhibited as the knaves- Baroka and Jero- demonstrate a superior know-how to prevail over the gulls. We will discuss the details of these skills in the subsequent chapters.

In Jonson, the knaves are presented as the scourge of the inadequacies and follies of the gulls, and even of the crimes, that the society would have tolerated or overlooked. Jonson's scheme in the play portrays society itself as directly gulled, metaphorically portrayed in the scenes of the public in the piazza acclaiming the fake mountebank (himself a charlatan, II. ii.) and as a formal body in the court scenes where the Avocatori is tricked by a knavish display of mock obsequiousness and indulgent moral indignation (IV. iv, v, vi). In these scenes, the dramatist

portrays the rot in the justice system and conveys an anatomy of the time's deformity wherein humans place value on the importance of wealth and riches to the detriment of traditional acceptable values of honesty and truthfulness, which are the hallmarks of a true justice system.

In *Volpone*, Jonson's gulls are so gift-wrapped up in becoming Volpone's heir that they really forget all sense of honour and dignity. They fancy themselves a jump ahead of the other with an unnerving he-goatish slippage. The dramatist wedges the *carpe-diem* motif into the main plot to reflect this insatiable desire among the gulls who are in a hurry to outdo one another. This motif is contrived to link the various episodes and scenes in the trickster comedy structured to reflect a parody of a tragedy. Events and actions seem to move with a dizzying speed towards a denouement.

From the beginning of the play (1. ii), Voltore, the advocate, is introduced with his usual "rapacious knock" and "early visitation" to his patron ready to win the legator's consideration. The succeeding scenes (1. iii, iv, v.) portray the morning visits of the other "clients" outdoing one another through the wit, subtlety, cunning and blazoning boldness of Mosca's knavish tricks. For example, Mosca is able to convince Corvino to accept making his wife, Celia, Volpone's mistress without thinking, because Corvino must outsmart the Physician. Corbaccio is made to bring a bag of pearls in place of an opiate, and he has to disinherit the son, Bonario, without considering both the legal and moral implications. Voltore is made to prostitute his profession and education without exhibiting a restraining order on his legal brains. Lady Would-Be is cozened to accept the role as a false witness against

her own husband (himself a buffoon), and Celia and Bonario. She is also cozened to defile her marital vows to Sir Politic.

The various events in the plot are worked out with a web of complexity to simulate a dizzying speed heading towards a tragic denouement. In Jonson's artistic world, events move to a climax as the "clients" strive to outdo one another, goaded on by Mosca who deceives them to believe that his, "purpose [is] to urge / My patron to reform his will; ... / ... whereas before / You were but third, or fourth, You shall be now / Put in the first". (IV. vi. 96-100).

Herford and Simpson (1952) commenting on this mad rush for the first place in the patron's will describe it as "the fatuities of the overweening", for the more complicated, tricky but frightening the exploits, the greater the risks of being cashiered. Self-confidence and assurance blind both the gulls and the knaves invariably leading them towards error and betrayal at the denouement of the play. Mosca's knavish contribution to the satiric exposure of the gulls serve the artistic interest of fostering Jonson's moral posturing in the play.

The dramatist is well aware of his role as a Renaissance writer interpreting the views of the Ancients to a sixteenth century society that believes that literature must both delight and teach, and that the fact that "comedy is an imitation of characters of a lower type" does not suggest that comedy should portray only the ridiculous and funny aspects of humans. In Jonson's view (as expressed in *Discoveries*) "jestes that are true and naturall, seldom raise laughter ... for that is right and proper". However, the further these jests and laughter "run from reason, or possibility with them, the better it is" for the artist (p. 45). Here, indeed, we have a canonical basis

of Jonson's realism in *Volpone* in blending the teaching aspect of poetry with pleasure. He is portraying the dizzying speed for the scramble of wealth and materialism that he sees in his society and how cherished traditional values in human relationships are trampled upon. Through the relationships exhibited, for example, between Corvino and Celia (husband and wife), on the one hand, and Corbaccio and Bonario (father and son) on the other hand, Jonson is portraying the ugly effects the scramble for wealth has on traditional values.

The relationships between husband and wife, and father and son are sacred and almost every society considers them as such. But once Corvino and Corbaccio are impressed upon that the only way they can become Volpone's heir is to prostitute a legal wife and to disinherit a biological son (respectively), Jonson, by implication, is criticising the "upside-down" values of society and he seems to be posing the moral question Celia remarks to the husband,

What spirit / Is this hath entered him?

Oh God, and his good angels! Wither, wither

Is shame fled human breasts? That with such ease,

Men dare pit off your honours, and their own?

Is that, which ever was a cause of life,

Now placed beneath the basest circumstance?

And modesty an exile made, for money?

(III. vii. 133-38)

However, for Corvino, *honour* is "... a breath; / There's no such thing, in nature: a mere term / Invented to awe fools" (III. vii. 133-38). For Corbaccio also, *honour* in

his son is “the mere potent of nature ... utter stranger to his loins ... / Monster of men, swine, goat, wolf, parricide” (Iv. v. 118- 110).

These individuals are willing to give up such sacred values in human interactions in exchange for wealth and materialism. Primarily for these reasons does Jonson’s structuring of the play allow the knaves (themselves, though charlatans) to execute the moral judgement on the gulls. This is probable not because of their superior knowledge of the moral penal code but for the fact that the excitements of the trickster play and the nature of the dramatist’s insights, as suggested by Brockbank, “owe much to the wit and understanding displayed by Mosca and Volpone as it were on Jonson’s behalf” (p. x).

The dramatic skill of Jonson in creating a trickster tale in which the knaves contrive ways out of difficult situations, put on appearances and acts to exploit human weaknesses as a means to prosper exhibits a master craftsman who demonstrates a perverse mastery of the comic law in which knavery and impostering are the key ingredients of comedy. It is, as Don Beecher observes, “a by-product of the tricksters’ own pursuit of wealth, pleasure, and above all, the joys of artful intrigue in which we admire the knaves in spite of the lingering moral reservations” (p.46). In subsequent chapters (Chapters Three and Four), we shall examine how Soyinka and Sutherland also exhibit their skills in creating tricksters who exploit human weaknesses for their advantage despite the perverse moral societal implications.

In the combined performance of the knaves, Jonson imputes dazzling deceptions and a fascinating use of verbiage and sheer bravery. Their intrigues are carried out

in an atmosphere of a play in which the reader supports their strategies in a context from which the joys and victories of the knaves are equally transferred to the reader who enjoys the successes chalked so far in the dealings of the knaves with the gulls. There is a level of satisfaction in the reader for “having prevailed momentarily in a situation of pure knavery”, for as Beaurline (1969) suggests, Jonson’s play must be viewed as expressing “a more relaxed, playful air, tempting spectators to enjoy and perhaps give tacit assent to decadent but delightful release of inhibitions” (p. 58). The reader appreciates Jonson’s skill which has a therapeutic effect releasing deviant impulses through self-projection into the trickeries of comic theatre.

Trickster stories generally recount the experiences of the hero both deceiving and being deceived (in the end) in keeping with his nature. Both aspects of the tales equally manifest the comic elements in which the trickster undertakes series of escapades and adventures to express himself and amuse society. These things the trickster cannot do unless he has a society to gull with, with the sole purpose of effecting a change either for the good of society or for worse.

Jonson’s art recognises that the best trickster story is not that which places the moral burden on the hero to manifest the artist’s moral stance but that the best story is one in which the trickster struggles to exact his worst roguery, and in those acts an unforeseen good is produced. Jonson’s dramatic skill in the play enables the reader to associate themselves with the rogues until the moral censors of society convict us. We are captivated by the dizzying force of the trickery, the enterprising ventures and near-escapes; and even sometimes we want the intrigues to continue as we “prod” the heroes – Volpone and Mosca, in this context – to deadlier moves,

expecting at least, as does Volpone, one last “rare meal of laughter”. At the same time, we are caught up in the moral obscurities of their behaviour. Jonson’s introduction of a moral code and legal values into the artistic world of Volpone’s criminal schemes delimits our full participation in his rogueries and the reader is compelled to disconnect himself from the hero through sober reflection, not necessarily about the hero’s fate but the observance of what Brockbank refers to as the “rigour of comic law”. This ensures that a kind of justice is imitated not by the vigilance of the criminal law, but by the process through which the knaves finally betray each other.

Jonsonian “justice system” captures notions of both divinity (as expressed by Bonario) wherein “Heaven could not long, let such gross crimes be hid” (V. xii. 98) and his superior intellectual and imaginative dynamics which devise a trickster’s downfall. Jonson is well aware of the Horatian injunction which prescribes a condition under which divine intervention is permissible in the creative craft (“let no god intervene, unless a knot come worthy of such a deliverer”); so he muffles Bonario and Celia’s belief in the divine as a resolution to the unnerving serious issues in the play.

The Renaissance overwhelming thought had discarded considerations of using the divine and dependence on morality to resolve conflict, and Jonson is also aware that the vigilance of the law in dealing with the “crimes” of Volpone and Mosca is very weak. Consequently, his poetic genius devises a scheme in which he is not so much interested in punishing the vice of the knaves but in energising them to consume each other (through common place phrases such as “set a thief to catch a

thief”, “trickster out-tricked”, “double-cross plotters or invectives”) with the very energies and fantasies that animated them. Jonson’s technique recaptures the already discussed dual nature of the trickster – his impostering and buffoonery – and a further development of the bond between a master and a servant in which the servant obviously acting the role of a parasite uses his familiarity and position to swindle his patron and in the end he reverses the fortunes of the protagonists.

Beecher (1985) argues that “the master-servant relationship in drama is at least as old as Aristophanes and no doubt was the substance of comic scenes in the mimes before that” (p. 49). He cites Plautus’ Palaestrio in *Miles Gloriosus* as an outstanding example of a slave who used his wit to exploit his master ruthlessly even while he was busy cozening him out of his mistress. Palaestrio’s flattery is so effective that he succeeds in absconding with money, the girl (who is restored to her former lover), and also gaining his freedom.

Jonson, however, develops a new stratagem in the plot in which both master and servant fiercely compete for supremacy in outdoing each other. The fierceness of the combat involves self-confidence, betrayal, usurping the patron’s wealth and over reaching one’s limit. At the end of Act four when Volpone and Mosca succeed in outwitting the legacy hunters and securing a judgement in their favour after “rigging” a trial in which innocent Bonario and Celia are declared guilty, the breathless succession of the intrigue and counter stroke continues at a dizzying speed in Act five. Volpone, in a soliloquy, declares that, “I shall conquer./ Any device, now, of rare, ingenious knavery” (V. i. 14-15).

This self-confidence drives his passion for histrionics which lures him into a fatal blunder of not only spreading false rumours of his death (apparently to attract the legatees) but also disguising himself as a Commandadori (an officer of the court) to spy upon, and tease the legatees. Mosca takes advantage of Volpone's disguise and also declares, "... My Fox / Is out of his hole, and, ere he shall re-enter, / I'll make him languish in his borrowed case, ... / I'll bury him, or gain by him. ... / To cozen him of all ... / ... this is called the Fox-trap" (V. v. 7-17). The battle of wit, buffoonery and the thrill of courting unnecessary risks that culminate in the final courtroom scene precipitate the final catastrophe in which Volpone prefers to unmask himself rather than accept humiliation at the hands of his servant.

The dramatist pursues the logic of the action to its just conclusion wherein there is no sense of virtue triumphant, but vice is manifested as its own executioner. Volpone retains his pride but receives a fitting punishment, and the irony of his final speech, "This is called mortifying of a fox" (V. xii. 125), brings to the fore the recompense justice system Jonson devises for his new trickster hero who has been liberated from the conventional roles and made to institute a different model through which the artist can criticise the follies of greed and inordinate ambition.

Jonsonian justice system initiates a public punishment of vice in which the knaves are not only purged of their human follies but of the inhuman crimes they inflict upon societal moral codes. The Avocatore's delivery of Volpone's ill-gotten wealth and property to the *Incurabili* justly serves the false valuation society places on the acquisitive tendencies of humans to the "earth's teeming sought-after", gold. Volpone's imprisonment is specifically designed by the artist to provide him the

opportunity not only to experience in reality the diseases – lame, gout, palsy, deaf, dumb etc. – he had feigned to possess and stratagems employed to gull society, but also to experience what he describes as the “mortifying of a fox” in which he will be “cramped with irons” until he truly becomes “lame indeed” (V. xii. 122-124). For Mosca, the dramatist devises a physical torture and a life sentence in prison; while Voltore and Corbaccio are to be secluded from human habitation like the unnatural species they have proved to be, and learn “to die well”. For Corvino, his animalism will be purged by being made the object of public ridicule after restoring the dignity of his wife’s fidelity. Jonsonian justice system exposes the monstrosity of vice which ultimately suffers purgation.

Barish’s study, “The Double Plot in *Volpone*”, (1953) has opened a window of viewing the subplot of Jonson’s *Volpone* as providing a unifying thread in terms of the intrigue with the main action. He argues that Sir Politic Would-Be and Lady Would-Be, as characters, “function to a large extent precisely as mimics. They imitate their environment, and without knowing it they travesty the actions of the main characters” (p. 83). Jonson contrives that the Sir Pol episodes are intricately linked with the main action involving the knave-gull pattern through wit. In the main action Venice is chosen as the setting of the plot, noted for its mercantile prosperity, luxurious living and extravagance, and in the subplot the same setting is created to portray the Englishman’s imitation of the delusions and general lifestyle in Venice. Sir Pol is created as a comic distortion of *Volpone*, imitating the hero’s wily ways as an imposter; a would-be politician who never really

actualises his enterprising stratagems of outsmarting his listeners, unlike Volpone who executes his knavish tricks and succeeds in gulling the legatees.

Jonson's choice and presence of Sir Pol and his wife as characters in the play, Brockbank suggests, alludes to "an English traveller to Venice, Sir Anthony Shirley, and a would-be countess of Bedford whose exploits and accounts bring to the fore a range of self-deluding fantasies that foolish Englishmen abroad may entertain about foreigners" (p. xvii). Sir Pol's chattering obsession with the fantasies and secrets of the state of Venice as reportedly scripted in his diary, and his assumed knowingness of the "goings and deeds" in England as he interacts with Peregrine make him a naive imposter who by circumstance seeks to gull his listener. His knavish plots to sell the state of Venice to the Turks and his priggish-headedness to be a fine politician and a diplomat extraordinaire generate the excitements associated with the prankster in the trickster tale of the main plot and also provide a version of the gull-knave relationship. For Lady Would-Be, her seductive tendencies coupled with her aping of the Venetian styles in dressing and application of cosmetics to appear fashionable, and her active involvement in the struggle of the legacy-hunters for Volpone's wealth put her in the category of a sophisticated knave and imposter.

Within the construct of the trickster tales inherent in the comedic genre of the subplot and the dramatist's involved posture to exorcise the characters of their humours, Jonson reverses the gull-knave structure and introduces an order that conforms to his "imitation of justice" according to "the strict rigour of comic law" in the beast fable. Peregrine, who in his initial appearance (II. i.) is portrayed not as

a knave, however, courts knavery from his interaction with Sir Politic Would-Be as the play progresses and he masters the art. He declares to Sir Pol, “Well, wise Sir Pol: since you have practised, thus, / Upon my freshmanship, I’ll try your salt-head, / What proof it is against a counter-plot” (IV. iii. 22-25). The dramatist designs that Peregrine (it is worth noting that his name means a pilgrim hawk or falcon, and since it is in the nature of hawks to hunt other birds) should hunt Sir Politic Would-Be (a parrot). Herford and Simpson’s reference to Jonson’s Epigram LXXXV (viii. 55) in which the hawk is described as a bird sacred to Apollo, pursuing truth, striking at ignorance and making the dupe its quarry to be run down becomes relevant in explaining the judgements Jonson designs for the Would-Be’s in the subplot of the play.

Peregrine’s “counter-plot” (as it were, contrived on behalf of Jonson) to expose the folly of Sir Pol demonstrates the artist’s overriding interest in shaking the English audience off its archetypal figure as all wise and all knowing, and its priggish-headedness; a disease most essentially self-inflicted and self-destructive, all within the context of the “strict rigour of the comic law”. The follies of Sir Pol (as exposed by Peregrine) and his wife (as exposed by Mosca) are “punished” both within the private confines of Sir Pol and Volpone’s residencies respectively, to establish a distinction between the legal crimes of the three legatees – Voltore, Corvino and Corbaccio) in the main plot (Volpone’s) and the misdemeanour of the Would-Be’s in the sub-plot (Peregrine’s).

Unlike the vice of the three legatees appropriately and publicly punished by a constituted authority in court, Peregrine arranges with some merchants to mortify

Sir Pol in a grotesquely monstrous way. The buffoonery involved in making Sir Pol climb into the tortoise shell, stamping and poking the shell as the merchants goad him out of his exoskeleton serves the dual purpose of pronouncing the dramatist's muted punishment on tomfoolery and linking the events of the main plot to the subplot where both vice and folly are punished on their own scores. Sir Pol and Lady Pol, awakened to their own sense of folly, agree to leave Venice, take to sea and go back home "for physick", medical treatment and recuperation; for as Sir Pol admits, they "shall be the fable of all feasts; / The freight of the *gazetti*; ship-boys' tale; / And which is worst, even talk for ordinaries" (V. iv. 82-84).

Jonsonian artistic vision outlines that in the Volpone-Mosca plot, the gulls are severely punished for their failures to exhibit corrective reasoning in interacting with their fellow-humans, hence the dramatist designs for them to be gobbled by the red fox (Volpone) as in the fable. However, Jonson's skill permits the fox itself to be mortified for over-reaching itself and defrauding by false pretences. In the Peregrine plot, the knavery and folly of the Would-Be's are counted as the opposite sides of the same coin of the gull-knave structure since the exhibitors "shall be the fable of all beasts"; for humanity changes shape as a new being (of the Would-Be's) emerges from the stuttering exoskeleton of shame and disgrace purged of their hackneyed folly through the strong medication of ridicule. Throughout the actions of both the main plot and the sub plot, one observes that one of the principal aims of Jonson is to initiate a model of a trickster tale in which beasts ape men and men imitate beasts and birds of prey with varying shades of differing modes on both the moral and psychological levels.

Thus, Jonson's vision in *Volpone* is to portray not only the essence of the unchanging character of the hero trickster in tales, but most importantly, establish that individual tricksters are products of national thoughts and psyche in order to reflect a particular ideology of the times and cultures of every society. For as Adams (1979), quoting Barish, observes that "the most obvious trait of Jonson's style, its realism, thus, brings to a climax a process toward which comedy had been moving for generations, perhaps since its origins" (p. 456). Jonson, in *Volpone*, has domesticated the trickster tale from the classical world into the streets and halls of London from which unique persons plot their own mischiefs and create a new order through the comic justice system to deal with them.

Jonson's Artistic Skills in *The Alchemist*

In *The Alchemist* (1610) Jonson's choice of the trickster hero draws inspiration from the portrayal of the *delosus servus* of the Roman New Comedy. His skill domesticates the portrayal to reflect the late Renaissance sensibilities of an avowed distrust of the economic realities by which society was organized in England. In the Roman New Comedy, the *delosus servus*, a crafty servant, uses his intelligence, guile and marginal position to facilitate both romantic accomplishments and marital favours for his master. Such a trickster hero demonstrates a capacity of wit and roguery to out-think most of the other characters, who invariably are personages reflecting the upper class. This theme of the clever slave motif is one that goes beyond time and place, because even though slaves are considered the nethermost on the class system, they are still very intelligent and successful tricksters.

Most of Plautus' works demonstrate this sensibility of the *delosus servus*, apparently from whom Jonson might have imbibed this idea. His slaves display that wisdom, ability and wit are blind to the upper class and that through series of roguery and intelligence the upper class is easily gulled. In *Mostellaria* for example, Plautus in a simple plot portrays a young slave, Tranio, who aids his master's son, Philolaches, to deceive both his master, Theopropides (a rich magnate), and a money lender, Misargyrides, with intent of securing Philolaches' profligate lifestyle and romantic feelings towards a lady. The wit, roguery and villainy exhibited by Tranio (which dominates the play) help to conceal the truth of Philolaches' life-style for a while. Finally, the truth is revealed and Tranio jumps onto the top of an altar to escape punishment. He is later forgiven by Theopropides when one of Philolaches' friends volunteers to pay off all the debts. The play ends happily.

In another play, *Epidicus*, Plautus' plot takes many twists and turns as the hero, Epidicus, tries to please his master's son, Stratippocles. Epidicus is a slave who seeks to please all those he serves. He tricks his master, Periphanes, out of a huge sum of money to buy a slave girl, Acropolistis, who the master's son, Stratippocles, has fallen in love with. Epidicus' trickery, roguery and his unbending will of serving both his master and his son's interests succeed in outwitting Periphanes and a captain's intelligence by extorting money from them to pay off Stratippocles' debts, buy another slave singing-girl and complicates events in the plot. His double trickery and fraud is later discovered and slated for punishment. However, when events turn out that his scheme exposes his master's illicit affair with a Theban

woman, Philippa, who had borne an illegitimate daughter, Telestis, meant to be married to Stratippocles, the step brother, Epidicus is quickly forgiven his knavery and is set free because of his role in helping to re-unite a father and a daughter and averting a possible incest.

Jonson's dramatic skill in *The Alchemist*, while following in the romantic tradition of Plautus' choice of the clever slave motif, *dolosus servus*, formulates a new conception of a trickster hero whose idealism professionalises criminality not in the real legal framework, but within the imaginative extravagance and the moral logic of the socio-economic structure of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England. During the century, new economic opportunities opened up to boost the national economy for the state and the upper classes, weakening the medieval religious and social institutions.

Hill (1958) in *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* observes that the closure of the monasteries and the Civil War made financial wealth a critical standard in perceiving social status among the English people. He cites the example of King Henry VIII who after annexing the lands and treasures of the church as part of his break with imperial Rome, injects about one hundred and thirty six thousand pounds (£136,000) and one million pounds (£1,000 000) of physical property into the public economy. Most of this wealth was retained by the crown or distributed among the bourgeoisie opening up new avenues toward wealth and authority. Both domestic and foreign trade boomed raking in impressive profits for the English economy.

Sharpe (1982) also records that the English merchant fleet grew massively from “around 100,000 tons in 1610 to 2,000,000 tons in 1600” (p.137). Hill also suggests that a Russian company in 1581 paid dividends of 106 percent into the English economy more than what was paid in 1580 (p.48). These economic success stories had dire consequences and repercussions on the social institutions in England, especially the vast majority of the underprivileged population who had been exposed to what Appleby (1978) describes as “the vagaries of the harvest, the fluctuations of foreign markets, and the investment preferences of the propertied men who alone could offer employment” (p.40).

The vast underprivileged majority who mostly were tradesmen and husbandmen came to appreciate a rather sad moral logic that working the land and doing other menial jobs made them “master-less men” and hence aspired for a new dream of self-advancement. These group of people identified the increasingly sharp division in the socio-economic living conditions between their rich prosperous masters and their impoverished down-trodden status. The obvious option available for them to both bridge the gap and ascend to the capitalist status is through roguery and criminality. The English elite society on the other hand considered such roguery a serious crime worthy of punishment as detailed in Harman’s *A Caveat for Common Cursitors* (1566) and Awdeley’s *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561).

Jonson’s formulation of the conception of the trickster hero as a kind of a “criminal” arising from the socio-cultural realities in England finds a comparison in Soyinka and Sutherland’s conceptions of their heroes – Jero and Ananse – as portrayed in different geo-political spaces. The twentieth century dramatists recreate the socio-

economic realities of their societies in which dire economic conditions propel individuals into the roguery trade. As we shall discuss later, we will observe that Jero's roguery activities are a natural consequence (though not the sole motivation) of the socio-economic malaise. Additionally, we will notice that Ananse's roguery is justified within the artistic world the dramatist crafts for the hero to operate in.

Curtis and Hale (1981) in an article, "English Thinking about Crime, 1530- 1620", provides a detailed account of the economic dislocations in England between the rich and the poor and its disastrous consequences of producing an ideological formulation that identified and ostracised the economically bankrupt lower classes who sought through wit, villainy and criminal activities to resist their socio-economic marginalisation. Curtis and Hale establish the fact that this scenario resulted in the creation of several cony-catching pamphlets including Awdeley and Haman's cited above, Chandler's *The Literature of Roguery* (1907) and Aydelotte's *Elizabethan Rogues and Vagabonds* (1913) though the latter may be seen as later classic collection of the cony-catching literature.

These roguery and cony-catching pamphlets, Haynes (1989) suggests, specifically created a lawless milieu and introduced an element of social disaffection which described an "alien and exotic population" (p. 20). This population was meant to tell the inside story about the impoverished trappings of the English countryside and how these individuals grow in greater numbers in the mid-16th century than in any other period of history. Haynes further argues that this alien and exotic population devised its own elaborate social structure and behavioural patterns

which blended in the imagination with gypsy lore as utilized by Jonson in his masque, *The Gipsies Metamorphosed*.

Beier (1985) in *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560-1640* also opines that about the beginning of the seventeenth century these cony-catching pamphlets provided a new literary material for writers to use in relation to the tradition of rogues and tricksters in literary works. The roguery scene was developed from the morality plays where “crimes” such as drinking, brawling, whoring, debauchery etc. mature into sophisticated and secularised crimes such as the use of wit and intelligence for real crimes and vagabondage. The Tudor government of James I considered the status of the poor as vagabondage and made it a crime punishable by judicial social ostracism. McMullan in *The Canting Crew: London’s Criminal Underworld 1550-1700* (1984) suggests that the English society’s bid to deal with crime and criminals made:

The honourable [to] abhor them, the worshipped will reject them, the yeomen will sharply taunt them, the husbandmen utterly defy them, the labouring men bluntly chide them, the women with a loud exclamation wonder at them, and all children with clapping hands cry out at them (p.41).

However, an interesting twist to these socio-cultural happenings in England was the indulgence of the theatre-goers to these rogues, who the writers of the Renaissance handled with some fascination and ambiguity. The ease with which the rogues engaged in vagabondage appealed to the imaginative sensibilities of the

audience, who invariably were the middle class; and the conscious effort of the writers of that period to criticize the socio-political and religious hypocrisy of England's post-feudal society culminated in the intense interest in vagabond literature because the rogues were considered "outside" the social order; a kind of ideological otherness [Walker's *A Manifest Detection of Dice Play*, Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Fletcher and Massinger's *Beggar's Bush* are good examples to illustrate]. This ideological otherness legitimises crime and urges society in the view of Haynes to "prefer deception to truth and idleness to work" (wherein idleness is applied to the busy professionals in *The Alchemist* as they engage in their easeful venture of roguery in the alchemy trade) (p. 21).

This notion of otherness in the portrayal of the rogues provides solid grounding for these illegalities and stabilizes the socio-economic ideological formulation, for as Agnew (1986) observes:

... the rogue literature served as a figurative act of settlement: exposing, dissecting, and classifying all that threatened to confuse the social relations of Elizabethan England, tying the loose ends of commerce and crime back to the frayed fabric of society... . The effect [being] to assimilate an otherwise erratic pattern of itineracy and trespass into a more familiar notion of deliberate, if dubious, guild activity: a free masonry of crime whose arts and mysteries the pamphlets purported to lay bare

(p. 65).

The argument emerging from the discussion so far is that the lower class of society has sought a kind of equalisation with the upper class to establish a claim that the entire English society is based on deceit, lies, thievery and roguery for as Walker (1552) observes, “no man is able to live an honest man unless he have (sic) some privy way to help himself withal” (p. 38). Walker, as quoted by Judges (1930) in *The Elizabethan underworld* succinctly makes the point in a series of rhetorical questions that explain the moral logic of the dialectics in the ideological formulation. A young hanger-on arrives in London and confides in a much more experienced rogue. The experienced rogue quizzes the new recruit thus:

Think you the noblemen could do as they do, if in this hard world they should maintain so great a port only upon their rent? Think you the lawyers could be such purchasers if their pleas were short, and all their judgements, justice and conscience? Suppose ye that offices would be so dearly bought, and the buyers so soon enriched, if they counted not pillage an honest point of purchase? Could merchants, without lies, false making their wares, and selling them by a crooked light, to deceive the chapman in the thread or colour, grow so soon rich and to a baron’s possessions, and make all their posterity gentlemen? What will ye more? Whoso hath not some awkward way to help himself, but followeth his nose, as they say, always straight-forward, may well hold up the head for a year or two, but the [third]

he must needs sink and gather the wind into beggars' haven. (p.38).

The obvious logic arising from the rhetorical questions is an unrelenting distrust of the economic imperatives by which the English society was organised. For the poor to survive in such an environment, they needed to be prepared to take on several disguises, adopt new roles or strategies and voices with intent of wittingly taking advantage of what they perceive as society's "respectable norm" in which gulling, deception, avarice, greed are the modus operandi. Perhaps, the socio-economic realities of the West African situation as reflected in the artistic worlds of Soyinka in *The Trials of Brother Jero* and Sutherland in *The Marriage of Anansewa* explain the linkages a critic can draw to establish the view that Jonsonian skill echoes in the twentieth century dramatists' works. The decision of both Ananse and Jero to engage in deception, avarice and roguery is attributable to the socio-economic imperatives of the times. These ideas will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

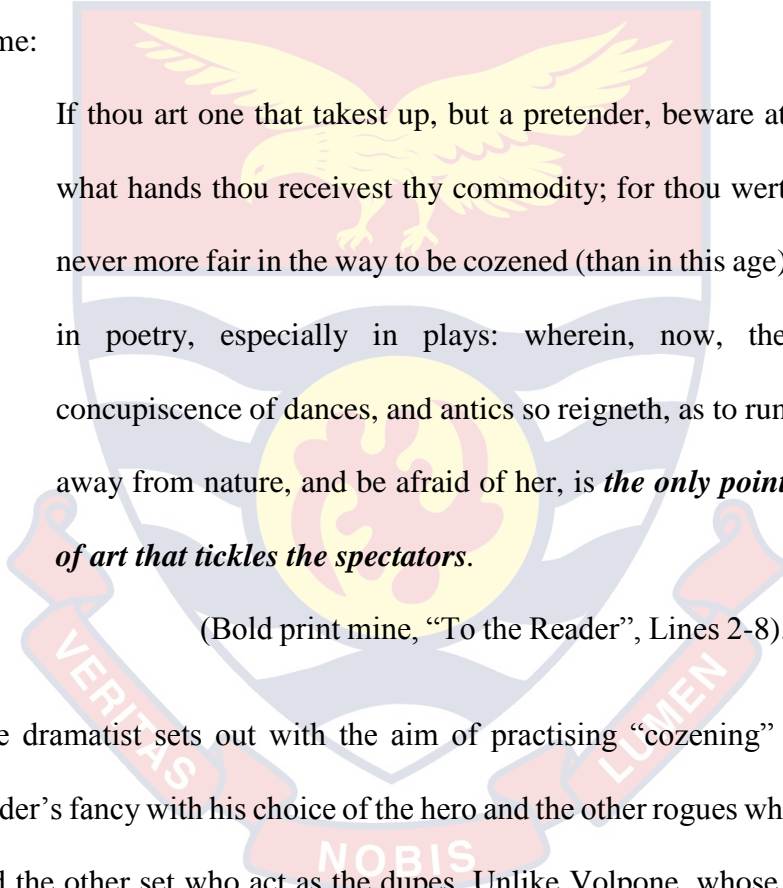
Jonson's *The Alchemist* portrays a society whose cherished ideals are a gewgaw made manifest to all categories of humans: the rich, the poor, the professionals and the craftiest rogues whose willingness to partake in a dance of cozening and intrigue with the sole intent of transforming their marginalized positions in life. In the play, Subtle, Face, and Dol are not the only characters greedy for wealth and a high status in life; all the characters seek after the *Philosopher's Stone*, the grand symbol of limitless desires, something that promises infinite wealth and a dramatic change in one's status in life.

The dramatist uses the alchemy trade therefore to provide a mysterious economic exploration and a metaphor to portray the ills of the nascent capitalism in England. The lawyer's clerk, Dapper, for example is prepared to leave the noble profession of law and aspire for a "successful life" in gambling where he will "blow up gamester, after gamester, /As they do crackers" and "win ten thousand pound" (I. ii. 79-79). For Abel Drugger, he seeks the "stone" for a fashionable business by necromancy to be called a grand mayor next spring when "he'll be wise, preserve his youth, and fine for't:/ His fortune looks for him, another way", as he hopes to be a merchant who will "trade with balance" (I. iii. 40-41).

Sir Epicure Mammon sees the "stone" not only as changing his fortunes in life but also as his means to transform the world. He declares, "This night, I'll change/ All, that is metal to ... gold. / And, early in the morning, will I send/ To all the plumbers, and the pewterers, / And buy their tin, and lead up: and to Lothbury, / For all the copper". In addition, he proposes to "purchase Devonshire, and Cornwall, / And make them perfect Indies! ... on a hundred/ Of Mercury, or Venus, or the moon,/ Shall turn it, to as many of the sun; / Nay, to a thousand, so *ad infinitum*:" (II. i. 29-33, 35-36).

To Ananias and Tribulation, (who are a metaphor of radical Puritans) aspire for the "stone" to become "temporal lords" on earth and they believe the charm of the stone can help purchase influence and fame for them, in addition to bribing their way through life. For Kastril, he seeks the "stone" to teach him how to gamble and live by wit and help his sister Dame Plaint get a wealthy husband.

The indexes of these yearnings, arising from the socio-cultural realities in England, for the *Philosopher's Stone* naturally create a society where gulling and roguery will be the order of the day; for gulls always create opportunity for rogues and tricksters to exist. Jonson's artistic vision therefore in *The Alchemist* is not to justify the legitimacy of crime as an acceptable norm in society but as he declares in his preface of the play; playwrights, like himself, are practitioners of the trickster's game:

The logo of the University of Cape Coast is a watermark in the background. It features a shield with a yellow eagle with wings spread, perched on a globe. Below the globe is a red banner with the Latin motto 'VERITAS NOBIS LUMEN'.

If thou art one that takest up, but a pretender, beware at what hands thou receivest thy commodity; for thou wert never more fair in the way to be cozened (than in this age) in poetry, especially in plays: wherein, now, the concupiscence of dances, and antics so reigneth, as to run away from nature, and be afraid of her, is ***the only point of art that tickles the spectators.***

(Bold print mine, "To the Reader", Lines 2-8).

The dramatist sets out with the aim of practising "cozening" and "ticking" the reader's fancy with his choice of the hero and the other rogues who act as the knaves and the other set who act as the dupes. Unlike Volpone, whose magnificence and "cunning purchase of gold" elevates him to the position of the hero in the 1605 eponymous play, Jonson selects a triumvirate professional cozeners whose underhand dealings battle amongst themselves to determine who has the superior ability to victoriously emerge as the trickster hero of *The Alchemist* since Lovewit has abandoned his home for a holiday. The dramatist "tickles the spectators" fancy

with a fierce competition and outburst among the tripartite cozeners to portray the fragile and destructive English society.

As Dynes (1993) suggests, the plague that drove Lovewit from his magnificent home and emptied London symbolises “the breakdown in the official systems of order and regulation that provides Subtle, Face, and Dol their license to act freely”.

In the opening scene, the principal cozeners display an aggression which threatens their very survival. Jonson uses this aggression to isolate who really is the leader of the “trickster trinity”. Face tells Subtle:

I ga’ you countenance, credit for your coals,
Your stills, your glasses, your materials,
Built you a furnace, drew you customers,
Advanced all your black arts; lent you, besides,
A house to practise in - (I. i. 43-47).

Subtle indignantly retorts that he made Face “fit / For more than ordinary fellowships”. In addition, he gave Face the “oaths” and “quarrelling dimensions”, taught him:

Your rules to cheat at horse race, cock-pit, cards,
Dice, or whatever gallant tincture else?
Made thee a second, in my own great art?
And have I this for thank! Do you rebel?
Do you fly out, i’ the projection?
Would you be gone, now?

(I. i. 74-80)

Jonson heightens the battle of wits between the two rogues who throw verbal salvos at each other. These rather ironically project Face as the presiding hero in the venture tripartite because he is in charge of the master's house, now infested with "dog-leech," "cow-herd," "vomit of all prisons," "cut-purse" "cobwebs," "scarab," "vermin" and he has kept "company but with a spider or worse". These strong images of poverty and dung-fly creatures as used in the scene suggest the abyss from which these "heroes" have emerged to effect society with their alchemical manipulations meant to "prove a true philosopher; stone" that the world will seek after. In addition, the images suggest how Face will have to honestly keep "the master's worship's house" such that by the end of Act five all the "plague" associated with the mistress' death will be blown out for Lovewit, the master to reap the fruits of his labour.

For Dol, she is worried about intruders discovering their hide-out and terminating their "venture tripartite". She advises that both Face and Subtle "leave off your barking, and grow one again" as they do "kindly, in the common work" with the expectation that they "fall to [their] couples again, and cozen kindly, / And heartily, and lovingly, as you should, / And lose not the beginning of a term" (I. i. 118, 155-156). Indeed, Dol's counsel eases the tension and immediately unites the three rogues with Captain Face emerging as the *founding father* and *face* of the trickster trinity, while Subtle and Dol are portrayed as witty parasitic accomplices in the "tripartite indenture". Jonathan Haynes observes that this tripartite indenture portrays a business imagery of the roguery trade in which all the three contribute, as it were, shares in a joint stock company with credit to be maintained. However,

it is imperative to establish that for such a venture to succeed, each investor must act his/her role with precision and distinction.

Jonson's dramatic skill valorizes Face's superior wit in making him act as a stage manager, a cozenor and both a plotter and executor of each of the plots involving the gulls. Similarly, (as we will discuss later in the fourth chapter of this work) we find out that Sutherland's dramatic skill projects Ananse's superior wit to act as the stage manager, cozenor, plotter and executor of each of the plots involving Ananse's dealings with the four chiefs in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Additionally, we will examine how Soyinka demonstrates his skill in the third chapter of this work to portray Jero's superior wit in his interactions with the gulls in *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

Each of the gulls in Jonson's *The Alchemist* interacts with the triumvirate rogues via the ingenuity of Face's wit. As a stage manager, Face tells Subtle, "Get you / Your robes on" (as a noble Doctor) (I. i. 195-6) while he too changes his appearance into a Captain in readiness to dupe their first client, Dapper, who we learn later "knows the law, and writes you six fair hands, / Is a fine clerk, and has his cyphering perfect, / Will take his oath, o' the Greek Xenophon" (I. ii. 54-56). Face employs his superior wit to exploit Dapper's weaknesses, manipulate his dream expectations of winning "some five thousand pound" and "ten thousand pound" at gambling, and cozening him into yet the costly plot "allied to the Queen of Fairy loves" (I. ii. 106).

Jonson's skill exploits the wit of Face, in stage whispers with Subtle, to transform the "Queen of Fairy" into Face's aunt. Face double-deals with Subtle (his partner

in business) and Dapper (the dupe) guiding the plot lines in the scene. In the end, Face increases his investments with the profits he rakes in as he ludicrously subdues both Dapper (who is made to pledge half of his expected gains to the company) and his shareholders (Subtle and Dol) who are unaware of the “kick-back” he rakes into his personal pockets, in addition to collecting the usual “consultation fee” for the Doctor’s services. Unlike Volpone who depends on his witty parasite, Mosca, to effect the gulling of the dupes, Face takes absolute responsibility as the “Captain” of the triumvirate venture: he solicits for clients, arranges the stage and consultants to welcome the clients, and negotiates the terms and conditions of the new business transaction before it is carried through.

It is Face’s ingenuity and wit directed towards his personal benefit as the owner and chief executive officer of the business to ensure that clients get their best services. He tells Subtle in the presence of Abel Drugger, their next client, to do all in his power, as the chief consultant of the alchemy trade (the Doctor), to meet the expectations of Drugger because the latter is a “friend and an honest fellow” (I. iii. 22). Face’s cozening of both Drugger and Subtle yields maximum dividends for the company as he succeeds in extorting Drugger’s six month’s savings. He gloats over his accomplishments to Subtle at the end of the scene thus:

Why, now, you smoky persecutor of nature!

Now, do you see, that something’s to be done,

Beside your beech-coal, and your corsive waters,

...

You must have stuff, brought home to you, to work on?

And yet, you think, I am at no expense,

In searching out these veins, then following 'em

....

'fore God, my intelligence

Costs me more money, than my share oft comes to,

In these rare works. (I. iii. 100-109)

Subtle's acknowledgement of Face's superior wit: "You are pleasant," confirms the latter's extraordinary alchemical art in the cozening business venture.

The dramatist provides further insight into Face's extraordinary skill as a master cozener in the rogues' dealings with Sir Epicure Mammon who is portrayed as one of the gulls hoping to get rich from the venture capital because of Subtle's magical spell. At the beginning of the business transaction, Face is presented as *Zephyrus* setting up the alchemical apparatuses and distilling the processes to effect the final projection. According to March (1999), "Zephyrus is the Greek god of the West Wind". It is the mildest of the winds and it is known as the "fructifying wind" heralding the onset of spring.

Jonson's choice of the mythological figure to portray the hero's role in gulling Mammon and leading him to his destruction at the end of the play suggests the ease with which these knaves exact their business. Face fires Mammon's prospect of becoming a rich man and tempting him deeper into folly of believing that within "eight, and twenty days / I'll make an old man, of fourscore, a child" to enjoy the elixir of life; and in the end Mammon could

... have a list of wives, and concubines,
Equal with Solomon, who had the stone
Alike, with me: and I will make me, a back
With the elixir, that shall be as tough
As Hercules, to encounter fifty a night...

...

and in addition, feast on

The beards of barbels, served, instead of salads;
Oiled mushrooms; and the swelling unctuous paps
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
Dressed with an exquisite, and poignant sauce;

(II. ii. 35-39, 82-85)

The dramatist's detailed portrayal of Mammon's greed suggests not only the degenerate luxury and monstrous excesses of the capitalist upper classes in England but also their gullibility in business transactions presided over by rogues such as Face now dressed as "Lungs" and Subtle who now plays the role of a pious alchemical sage, *a home frugi*. The speed and fast changing movements of the rogues in the Mammon plots characteristically recalls the *carpe diem* motif employed by Jonson in the Mosca-Corvino scenes of *Volpone*. However, the difference in the skills employed by the dramatist in *The Alchemist* is seen in the diverse roles of Face appearing as "Zephyrus", blowing gentle and fructifying wind across the mind of Mammon; and later appearing as "Lungs" inhaling and exhaling the fructifying deceptive wind over the several different furnaces operating in the

adjourning rooms (in the company); and finally emerging as “Eulenspiegel” with the triumph of making Mammon completely trust the rogues in order to secure his stocks and all his wealth.

March (1999) further explains that “Eulenspiegel” is a protagonist of German chapbook published in 1515 with a possible background in earlier Middle Low German folklore. He is a character whose picaresque career takes him to many places, and he “plays practical jokes on his contemporaries, especially scatological in nature exposing vices at every turn”. March suggests that Eulenspiegel translates to mean “owl mirror”; a name, in fact, which in a veiled German phrase suggests “wipe- the-arse”. It is very probable that Jonson’s reference to this German protagonist suggests the role of Face in this scene, as he truly “wipes- the-arse” of Mammon. The dramatist designs the scene in such a way that Face enters six times and exits again five times, while Subtle who technically is the consultant makes minor appearances as Dol makes a brief appearance.

These appearances and disguises are the skills Jonson uses to facilitate the tricksters’ schemes in the play. In addition, it is the tricksters’ “ability to manipulate language that makes those disguises successful”, what Surly describes as “a brave language, next to canting”. However, Mammon sees the use of this “brave language” in the pious sense of helping him found “colleges, and grammar schools, / Marrying young virgins, building hospitals, / And now, and then, a church”. (II. iii. 50-53). To him, the alchemy trade must bestow both social and material benefits for his personal gratification. Primarily for this reason does the dramatist assign long speeches to Subtle, whose knowledge of the pseudo-science of alchemy turns

the verbiage and lies into beautiful lyrical poetry intended to gull the dupes. The alchemy then becomes like a metaphor the rogues promise Mammon to turn base metal into gold but they are aware themselves that alchemy is merely an involved hoax.

Flachmann (1977), in his essay “Ben Jonson and the Alchemy of Satire”, suggests that Jonson saw the alchemy trade as both a legitimate pursuit and therefore as a source of “positive” metaphor and as a vehicle for charlatans, and therefore as a source of “negative” metaphor and as an object of ridicule. Jonson therefore exploits the language of the alchemy in speeches he assigns all the rogues to exact their mastery over the dupes in the cozening triumvirate ventures. The alchemical verbiage arising from the colouration of the varying degrees of fermentation of the compounds involved in the processes itself, assigned with different letters, has a charming and beguiling effect of “braying”, “pounding”, and mesmerising the gulls who easily fall prey to the tricksters’ art. These elements of language, as exhibited by the rogues, become the objectified emblems the dramatist uses to expose the gullibility of the supposed capitalist elites who in reality are the owners of language in society.

Thus, the dramatist employs the alchemical language to expose the cold logic of the apparently rigid social structure in the English society which saw itself as a pious group of people endowed with the riches of language. In fostering his aim of exposing this folly in the play, Jonson invests the rogues with a kind of “higher language” to mesmerise (and also criticise) the gulls who the rogues treat with scorn and disdain, and in the end render them as fools. Later in the third chapter of this

work, we will discuss the use of this skill by Soyinka who also invests his hero, Brother Jero, with a kind of a 'higher language' to effect the deceit of his congregants and especially the Member of the Federal House. For as Flachmann (1977) argues "the fools [in Jonson's *Alchemist*] are all distilled through the language and action of the play to the level of their most base desires" (p. 279). Since most elite human societies are regulated and ordered by both the intelligence and the logic of language, the rogues in Jonson's world exhibit their ability to mould and shape the elite society's perception of how the rhetoric of that language can mystify and mesmerise their sensibilities.

The dramatist constructs a new image of society which is easily gulled in their quest for the "Philosopher's Stone". Face and Subtle (as philosophers of the alchemy trade) promise to teach their new clients, Wholesome Tribulation and Ananias, the new language employed in the "world trade" since the latter pair do not "understand heathen language". The rogues devise a new "Grammar, and logick" which involves "Putrefaction,/ Solution, Ablution, Sublimation,/ Cohobation, Calcination, Ceration, and/ Fixation" (II. v. 21-23) which have the ultimate aim of gulling society "Dry into cold, cold into moist, moist into / Hot, hot into dry" (II. v. 37-38). The intimidating gerunds fused into a prosaic rhetoric conforms remarkably to the description that Jonas Barish gives of the excesses of the language of roguery which leads to "a narcotic dose... a trancelike rhythm that conceals the vagrancy of meaning beneath" (p. 198).

The series of gerund metaphors and imagery associated with the "Grammar and Logick" of alchemy employed by the dramatist in the plot involving Ananias and

Tribulation in *The Alchemist* serve the artistic aim of satirizing two social evils of his time, Puritanism and the alchemy profession. Schuler (1985), quoting Herford and Simpson (1925), points out that “when Ananias introduces himself as ‘a faithful brother’, and Subtle affects to understand by this a devotee of alchemy, the two professions at once assume the air of parallel fraternities” (p. 173). This “parallel fraternities” must be seen as manifestations of the same moral and religious hypocrisy and decadence in the English society; a kind of smugness which seems to confer some prideful impulse in the ‘puritanical faithfuls’ who considered themselves better than the rest of society, what Fisch (1964) describes as the “false and narrow application of the Hebraic Covenant-doctrine” (p.205).

Schuler (1985) has argued that in England, Puritanism manifested in the sixteenth century idea that there was a naturalist body of an exclusively elect few, who had been given the exclusive divine priesthood, elected to bring light to a heathenish society. Fisch has also suggested that alchemy flourished in England due to the pioneering work of the highly influential Paracelsus who saw himself as the divinely elected “priesthood of Nature” to bring to light the great *arcana* of Nature through meditation and other sciences. It is important to establish that certain of Paracelsus’s social and theological ideas of exclusivity and special abilities were in consonance with the beliefs of the Puritans whom Jonson derided.

In *The Alchemist*, therefore, one of Jonson’s satirical purposes is to vilify the Calvinist doctrines of grace and election, and the tenets and processes of alchemy as being superior above all others. The dramatist is also interested in exposing the arrogance and pride of the Puritan movement which sees itself as chosen for a

special grace or knowledge it possesses as dramatised in the Ananias and Tribulation *scenes*. Jonson's choice of these individuals as representatives of the Puritans and the "exiled brethren" (associated with the "Saints" or the "Separation") who zealously call themselves "by names of Tribulation, Persecution,/ Restraint, Long-Patience, and such like,/ ... Only for glory, and to catch the ear/ Of the Discipline" (III. ii .93-96) links the Puritans to the rogues who have set up an alchemical shop in Lovewit's house, itself located in "Blackfriars", a suburb outside the jurisdiction of the London municipal authorities.

Schuler (1985) points out that the Puritans in London and the "exiled brethren" who have fled the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of England to practise their cozening religion actually live there in the "Blackfriars". It is not surprising that the rogues promise to help Tribulation and Ananias become "temporal lords" in an earthly kingdom. The hypocrisy, greed, and self-interest of these Puritans are no different from the motives of these rogues who now momentarily team up in an unholy covenant "to lend their willing hands, to any project" of cozening. For as Tribulation acknowledges, they "have to hasten on the work, / For the restoring of the silenced Saints,/ Which ne'er will be, but by the philosopher's stone" (III. iii. 36-38).

The dramatist's interest, however, in this unholy alliance is not only to expose the hypocrisy of the Puritanical movement in London but also to express a view commonly held among the Elizabethans and Jacobean about these "exiled brethren". They were considered, as Holden (1954) describes them, "a synonym for riot and rebellion"; anti-social, anti-government and their communistic attitudes

made them a threat not only to the theological but to the political as well (p. 92). Capp (1972) provides a reasoned argument why this “exiled brethren” (known also as the *Anabaptists*) were a real threat to society. He tells the experience of a German vagrant priest, Thomas Müntzer who

as early as 1520, established himself at Zwickan near the Bohemian border, and declared that the elect must rise up and annihilate the godless to prepare for Christ’s coming and the millennium. He won a considerable following among the local weavers, mine-workers and the peasants. The most important movement was in 1534-5 when the Anabaptists won control of the city of Münster and proclaimed it as the New Jerusalem. Its programme included polygamy, a ferocious legal code based on the statutes laid down in the Old Testament, and the abolition of the private ownership of money and many other goods; the social order was inverted completely. In June 1535 the New Jerusalem was captured by an army of mercenaries raised by the bishop of Münster and the saints were put to the sword (p.27).

Jonson associated the Anabaptist, Thomas Müntzer, with the ‘exiled brethren’ in England and he chose to treat Tribulation and Ananias as deep-seated Separatists, with a virulent disgust and hostility than he did with the tricksters who he accorded superior wit to gull the two characters at the end of the play.

The dramatist expresses his disgust for these Puritan characters primarily because of their posture in real life London, at the time the play was written and published in 1610 when Puritanism was at its height. The Puritans threatened to close down the theatres. They also exhibited a hypocritical self-righteousness that renders all other humans as second-class citizens unworthy of the mercies of the divine. Tribulation refers to Ananias (a fellow Puritan) as “Good Brother” fighting to “give furtherance, to the holy cause” (III. i. 11-12) but refers to all humans including the rogues as “children of perdition”, “profane persons” who “... bear/ The visible mark of the Beast in [their] forehead[s]” (III. i. 6-8, 15).

The Puritans invoke damning judgements of “brimstone, and arsenic” hell, couched in high-flown Hebraic-language, on the children of perdition. Meanwhile they are unable to see through their own roguery and self-deluding religious hypocrisy in diverting donations meant for the widows, the poor and orphans for their personal comforts. In addition, Ananias’ self-righteous declaration of not understanding both the “Heathen language” and “Heathen Greek” except “the Hebrew language” poses a situational irony in the sense that the “orphans and widows” to whom the goods are designated do not understand “the Hebrew”. However, the Puritans’ bid to proselytizing the “heathen” seems to be fraught with contradictions and self-seeking interests. That these Puritans are just voraciously greedy as the other characters is without doubt. The dramatist therefore unashamedly satirises the hypocrisy and vices of the Puritans whose swift gulling at the end of the play satisfies his ethical and moral codes.

In *The Alchemist*, Jonson's sting is directed not so much at the tricksters as at the society, which by its unbridled appetite and folly is open to manipulation. He showcases a society in which we view a cross-section of both the nobility and the countryman: a lawyer's clerk, an epicurean self-egoistic man, a young newly rich aristocrat and his sister, a small shop keeper, and the clergy. All these characters have been invested with a common purpose and motive, that of an obsessive desire for riches and wealth. This not only portrays them as easy prey for gulling but depicts what Steane (1967) describes as "an entire society ruthlessly individualistic and acquisitive, and ultimately deluded and impoverished by its own false values". We will see later, in the next chapter, a similar skill exhibited in Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, in which the dramatist showcases a cross-section of society where we observe both the nobility and the lowly-bred countrymen and women insatiably craving for a change in their status: a legislature, a prospective prime minister, a penitent, a chief messenger, a petty trader. All these are invested with a common motif of obsessively desiring to change their statuses in life.

Perhaps, this driving force in humans serves Jonson's artistic interest of criticising greed in his society. Greed for wealth becomes a unifying force in *The Alchemist* that it almost seems an end in itself. However, Jonson exploits this greed, lust, and inordinate acquisitiveness to portray significant developments in the English society gearing itself towards the growth of capitalism and projecting into an industrial enterprise which provides the real opportunity for both tricksters and the gulls to thrive in the modern market economy. This is the milieu, most probably,

which the dramatist exploits to create the Kastril and Dame Pliant vis-a-vis the triumvirate rogues' interactions in the play.

Kastril is a “gentleman” worth “three thousand a year” in stocks and estates and a “Governor of a Province”, who is come up into both the alchemical and mercantile industry “to learn to quarrel, and to live by his wits/ And will go down again, and die i' the country.” (II vi. 60-62). The ethos of a gambling life among the capitalist masters is traded as a commodity in the market in the form of a set of lessons to be learnt from the “Doctor” and the “Captain” in the business transaction. Dame Pliant also has come up into the business “of purpose/ To learn the fashion” of the times; but Kastril's real motive in bringing his sister up into the business is to sell her off in the marriage market to the highest bidder. Kastril's motive here is similar to Corvino selling (or trading) his wife Celia to Volpone in his bid to inherit the rich magnate. Women therefore become like commodities sold in the market “to be delivered, be it pepper, soap, / Hops, or tobacco, oatmeal, wood, or cheeses./ All which you may so handle, to enjoy, / To your own use, and never stand obliged”. (III. iv. 96-99).

Williams (1973) in *The Country and the City* has suggested that there was a London marriage market in which both the nobility and con men traded. He explains that the market was a spectacle of luxury and fraud, in which “parasites collect around the real services, as in the legal and social underworlds of seventeenth-century London”. What was frightening, in the view of Williams, was the fact that “as a result of changes in the laws of inheritance, it became a necessary marriage-market (what was later called ‘the season’) for the relatively scattered country land-owners.

Around this, again, collected the pimps and procurers as well as the professional escorts, the keepers of salons, the intermediary rakes and the whores” (p.51). It is not surprising therefore that Face and his accomplices are very ready to trade the “Philosopher’s Stone” in this market so he tells Kastril that the Doctor is

... then for making matches, for widows,

Young gentlemen, heirs, the fortunat’st man!

He’s sent to, far, and near, all over England,

To have his counsel, and to know their fortunes.

(III. iv. 101- 4).

The tripartite rakes enter the business deal with Kastril not to exhibit their skill in the *magisterium* of selling their knowledge into tangible commodities but of fraudulent trading scheme to take advantage of Kastril’s greed in selling off Dame Pliant. The dramatist therefore makes Dame Pliant to replace the “inordinate object of desire” (the Philosopher’s Stone) among the characters in the play. She is capable of transforming the fortunes of Face, Subtle (and Surly) from con men into honest (respectable) men. As Haynes (1989) observes, Dame Pliant is fatal to the tripartite venture, for as soon as she appears Face and Subtle begin to conspire against Dol, and then against one another. She brings with the marriage-plot formulas of a kind of new comedy, which will have her married respectably to Lovewit at the end of the play. In effect, permitting the rehabilitation and triumph of Face, who has performed a genuine service in the market for marriages. Face declares to Subtle that Dame Pliant will be “a wife, a wife, for one on’s” as they “draw lots, and he that fails, shall have/ The more in goods, the other has in tail”. (II. vi. 85-87). The

assertions of Face do not only predict the coup de grace in the plot involving the tricksters' fate but also pre-empt the coup d'arret the tricksters enact to further gull the dupes.

Dame Pliant is enchanted by the prospect of becoming a fashionable lady goaded on by her brother, and this fantasy leads her on to be "used bravely" by Subtle, Face, and the disguised Surly (as a Spaniard count). The scenes involving Pliant and her brother's interaction with the rogues find a comparison in the scenes in *Volpone* where Corvino forces his wife, Celia, into bed with Volpone. In addition, Mosca's pornographic and voyeuristic fantasy of "using" Lady Would-Be, similar to Face and Subtle's voracious greed to win Pliant, demonstrate not only the gullibility of women in the face of patriarchal pressures, but also portrays the general malaise associated with the new rich capitalist masters like Kastril whose overwhelming egocentricity and solipsistic tendency become the trade mark for them to be duped by the rogues.

Rebhorn (1980) argues that the dupes in Jonson's *The Alchemist* exhibit egocentric desires in which "they dream of mountains of money, rarified sexual pleasures, assured health and endless banquets" which manifestly become an expression of an underlying restlessness wherein there can never be enough of everything they crave for. Thus, the dupes spin out fantasy after fantasy disregarding the sense of reality and falling victims to the trickster's game. For example, Mammon dreams of a brave new world centre in a bedroom where he will be surrounded by mirrors to "multiply the figures as I walk/ Naked between my succubae. My mists/ I'll have of perfume, vapoured 'bout the room/ To lose ourselves in; and my baths, like pits/

To fall into: from whence, we will come forth, / And roll us dry in gossamer, and roses.” (II. ii .47-52). For Dapper, the naïve and easily gullible of all the dupes, is made to believe that he will be given a seat of honour in all the taverns after winning all the gambling bouts in London, in addition to him being ministered to by the “Queen of Faery” after the supposed initiation rites. Drugger is made to believe that he will be so wealthy after he erects a signpost that has a magical power to drag customers to his shop and after he places a special magnet under his shop to “draw in gallants that wear spurs” (I. iii.70). In addition, Drugger’s dream to be voted into a high office as the government official responsible for law enforcement in his country could become a reality only if he trusts the alchemical manipulations of the Doctor and the Captain in the business deals.

Jonson manipulates events in the plot of *The Alchemist* to suit his gull-knave pattern. For as the dupes glory in their fantasies of acquiring riches, wealth, sex, fame and power, their very energies consume them making them descend into a state of shame and morbidity (before the reader). Similarly, Soyinka’s skill in *The Trials of Brother Jero* manipulates events in the plot to serve artistic purposes in the gull-knave pattern which allows the gulls to also spin out irrational fantasy for materialism that defies common sense of reality. Invariably, these fantasies create room for their effective gulling by the rogues.

The rogues become instruments for both dramatists to exact a kind of judgement on the dupes. In Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, Dapper, the lawyer’s clerk, is subjected to embarrassing rituals: dressed in a petticoat, blinded, gagged and pushed into a crouching posture and instructed to go “Down o’ your knees and wriggle” This

scene finds a comparison in Soyinka's portrayal of Chume during the scenes when Jero pushes him down to kneel and pray for forgiveness for nothing evil done. In Jonson's play, Dapper is made to kiss the skirt of the departing "Queen of Faery" after he is convinced to "bring's a thousand pound/ Before tomorrow night" (V. iv. 21, 48-49). Dapper's gulling shares some similarities with the lawyer, Voltore, in *Volpone*. Voltore's intelligence as a lawyer is ridiculed since the rogues –Volpone and Mosca - make him to lie under oath in court, speak a gibberish language in fits of epileptic swoons; teased out of his professional melancholia, and finally humiliated in open court by the Avacatore after he had donated a golden plate to Volpone.

Perhaps, Jonson's disgust for the law profession and lawyers in general could be attributed to the role of William Cecil, the first Baron Right Honourable Lord Burghley in England during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and James I. William Cecil's role as the State Attorney in persecuting and prosecuting the Catholics than Puritans and influencing the Queen made him a recurring character in what Stefania Tutino refers to as the "evil counsellor polemics" (p. 61). Cecil was believed to have been a sympathiser of the Puritan Movement. The reader therefore understands Jonson's portrayal of both the religious leaders and the lawyer's clerk in *The Alchemist* and the lawyer in *Volpone*.

These characters are treated with some amount of disdain and virulent disgust, making such "respectable citizens" fools and despicable humans. For the Puritans –Tribulation and Ananias – whose images of themselves as confident and self-righteous men endowed with the fantasy of seeing themselves not merely as

“temporal lords” to rule society but as the very gods of this world indeed are manipulated and swindled by the rogues who in real terms become the lords of this world. The rogues, by virtue of their superior wit, adopt a superior air of power and authority to effect a reductive and humble posturing in Ananias and Tribulation who cast the purse of “the whole company of the Separation” at the feet of the rogues in a metaphorical gesture of worship. The two figures of Puritanism in the play enact a shocking parody of religion and a denial of the real source of their own authority as Tribulation Wholesome declares to Subtle, “let me find grace, sir, in your eyes” (III. ii. 65). This needless show of humility exhibits the irony through which all the other dupes (who in real life are the wielders of power) are forced into a worshipping posture before the rogues who clearly have all the real power.

Jonson’s artistic vision of portraying the dupes in a pathetically disdainful state serves the interest of not only throwing a satirical jibe at the self-righteous Puritans but also to deflate the ego of the self-confident capitalist masters who exhibit their pride enacted through Mammon’s quest for position, power and unrestrained cravings for food, sex and materialism. Most tellingly, the dramatist manipulates these cravings to build up a kind of tension in the first four acts in the plot to a point, which Rebhorn describes as “an inevitable, farcical explosion”, which metaphorically manifests in the loudest noise heard at the end of act four. It suggests the same gesture of contempt Jonson expresses at Sir Epicure Mammon whose lechery and epicurean sensibilities hit the snag during the alchemical experiments. The dramatist designs a justice system for Mammon who rightly declares, “I am

justly punished ... cast from all my hopes -/ By mine own base affections” (IV. v. 73-77). These base affections emit a continual stench until the end of the play.

Rebhorn observes that Mammon, like all the dupes, is deflated at the end of the play. This deflation is similar to the alchemical experiment that has been going on continuously behind the stage for four acts and symbolises all the characters inflating and bubbling their illusions which finally explode in their faces. When Mammon asks Face whether anything was left of the experiment, the latter replies, “All flown, or stinks” (IV. v. 89). Face’s comment summarises Jonson’s vision of both the tricksters and gulls alike. They are all born of earth suggesting dung. Though they strive to transform themselves beyond their natures, deceiving themselves with dreams of power, wealth and purity, but they bubble and burst, emitting the foul-smelling air of illusion which escapes in a rush, until they are vaporised and returned to the stench of their origins.

Jonson’s epistemology in the fifth act of *The Alchemist* provides a series of verdicts on the main actions in the plot, which invariably has generated several critical responses in examining the dramatist’s artistic vision in the dénouement of the play. Is the artist still pursuing the Levitical justice system we have known him for in most of his works as sketched out, for example, in *Volpone* where unequivocally Jonson establishes the fact that whatever evil humans sow, it is the same evil they will reap? Or is the dramatist consciously negating his own orthodox morality for a new one in which the rogues and tricksters are pardoned for the wit and infinite resourcefulness displayed? Are the rogues: Subtle, Dol and Face to be pardoned because they are self-confessed cheats while the dupes who are pretentious and

hypocrites should be punished? What about the role assigned to Surly in the play as a kind of ethical arbiter who “technically” is not gulled but exposes the trickery of the rogues; yet when he is about to outsmart all the schemers and reap his reward, he is foiled by Lovewit and dispatched into discomfiture with the other dupes and rogues? Even Lovewit’s final triumph, where he uses his mental and shrewd agility to gain advantage over both the dupes and the rogues to claim the spoils of their labours, poses a serious problem to moral purists who claim Jonson presents him in such a way that the audience must condemn him as an immoral rogue [Partridge, (1954); Brown, (1966); Mares, (1967); Dessen, (1971); Dutton, (1974)].

Blissett (1968) in “The Venter Tripartite in *The Alchemist*” supports the view of the moral Purists. He argues that Lovewit is “a figure of greed and appetite who does not bring order and justice into the chaotic world of the play, as a true *deus ex machina* would, but simply confirms that world’s perversion” (p.332). On the other hand, other critics [such as Levin (1963), Goodman (1963), Steane (1967), Arnold, (1969)] argue that Lovewit is a representative of the comic justice in the play, what Rebhorn describes as “a figure of vitality, intelligence, urbanity, and skill who wins all the prizes at the end because he deserves to win them”? (pp. 355-356). Does Lovewit really “deserve to win the prizes”? Indeed, Jonson had already declared his intent in the preface that the “Reader” is “never more fair in the way to be cozened than in this age” (Line, 4).

The moral imperatives which featured in most writers’ works during the late sixteenth century gave way to a sense of pessimism at the turn of the seventeenth century. Haynes (1989) observes that the pessimism that engulfed society

accommodated the practices of a new social economy. Such an economy permitted wit and intelligence on the part of England's ruling class to mediate the conversion in the form of their property from primitive to capitalist ventures. Lovewit's absolute legal possession of the house (which served as the company for all the business transactions) gives him the right to claim all the "dividends" that have accrued on his "investments" (that includes Face's wit in duping his own partners). Though Jonson's anti-capitalist agenda is undeniable in the play his formulation of criminality is dictated by the great sensitivity with which the social action of the play registers historical change.

As Haynes suggests, the formulation of the dramatist is "subversive of the new therapeutic bourgeois category of criminal otherness", and his dramatic practice "investigates and reveals, rather than marginalizing crime and then investing this marginal terrain with extraneous concerns" (p. 40). The judgements therefore in the play form a contorted kind of justice system in which Jonson relaxes the harsh moralism of earlier plays, invites our admiration for the vigour of the rogues' trickery and endorses their activities with intent of exalting wit and intelligence over virtue. Perhaps, this is one of the skills wherein Soyinka and Sutherland's comic plays echo Jonson's skill; a point in comedy where moral imperatives are subverted to the excitements of exalting wit and intelligence over puritanism and virtue. Both Soyinka and Sutherland subvert the moral imperatives in their works and valorize wit and intelligence as the new therapeutic devices to initiate a new order in society.

At the beginning of the fifth act in Jonson's play, Lovewit enters as the protagonist with an air of authority of a capitalist master quizzing the Neighbours whether "there has been such a resort" as his house in the neighbourhood. His curiosity drives him to acknowledge the intelligence of Face, who, according to the reports, has drawn in a large company "hung[ing] out no banners/ Of a strange calf, with five legs, to be seen? / Or a huge lobster, with six claws?" (V. i. 7-9).

Jonson ensures that Lovewit first condescends from a capitalist master to an investigator, then to a bargainer, to a trickster and to an exploiter as he interacts with the Neighbours, the dupes, Face over the terms of the bargain, and with Surly over the fate of Dame Pliant, who then becomes the ultimate prize. Lovewit's condescendingly transformative processes are meant to bring him on even terms with Face, his servant, who now negotiates both his pardon and his elevation from the status of a servant to a "partner" in the new bipartite capitalist venture in which Lovewit "were wont to affect mirth, and wit". In addition, Face "...ll help [him] to a widow,/ In recompense, that you [Lovewit] shall gi'me thanks for, / Will make you seven years younger, and a rich one". (V. iii. 80-86). Lovewit's recognition of the opportunity to gain material and sexual benefits invokes the comic licence and the re-establishment of order in the chaotic plot, in which Face (the prime manipulator and greatest rogue) is vindicated by his wit; by implication, paving way for the trickster-servant to enter into the joy of his Lord.

Brown (1966) observes that "the verdict in which the play comes to rest is an exaltation of intelligence above virtue". Intelligence is valorized and creative ingenuity assumes the stature of a virtue. These judgements suggest the idea that

“unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance”. Though this ending of the human condition in the play may appear both harsh and superficial but it provides the opportunity for the dramatist to execute a savage judgement upon a viciously acquisitive society where avarice is the dominant evil which both the alchemists and Puritans serve as gods. In such a society, this judgement is acceptable because Jonson’s judge himself is not an official representative of law and order (as dramatized in the role of the Avocatore in *Volpone*) but Lovewit (in *The Alchemist*) is the “jovv boy”, (as Kastril describes him) who “love[s] a teeming wit” (V. v. 144) and loves his nourishment. Jonson has provided a summing up which does not rest on a solid ground of moral certainties but his judgement echoes the very fabric of society. His verdict as Brown avers, portrays the acquisitive society which in reality is “a vortex of greed, competition, self-seeking, out-manoeuving, corner-cutting, swindling and cozening; its justice is unpredictable and arbitrary, and cleverness is its virtue” (p. xx).

In *The Alchemist*, the artist focuses on what happens when humans lose their humanness and seek to take advantage over the other. The venture tripartite – Face, Subtle and Dol – who are portrayed as self-confident but self-deluding tricksters are eventually undone by the same human weaknesses which they exploit in their victims. The denouement of the trio is foreshadowed in the opening scene of the play where the three gather in Lovewit’s house to exhibit a battle for supremacy in wit, intelligence and showmanship in roguery. These qualities are concretised in the imagery of the alchemical elements that run through the play in the series of dialogues of the tricksters not only to dupe the gulls but to demonstrate that they

live and transact business in an uneasy and imbalanced house (society). In such a society, a very unstable and unpredictable reaction is the utmost outcome.

As the play draws to a close, Jonson animates the tricksters with a fantasy of power and winner takes it all attitudes. They strive to outdo one another in wit and subtlety to determine who enjoys the spoils and dividends from their venture capital. In the view of the dramatist, Face deserves to win not only because he is able to recover all the “stolen goods” (profits or dividends) through superior wit from both the dupes and the two other rogues – Subtle and Dol – but also because of the dramatist’s intent of partly fulfilling a social logic working through the comic tradition, and partly portraying a logic related to contemporary thinking about the nature of criminality in seventeenth century London. Face ultimately wins primarily because he is rightfully attached to the house as the servant, Jeremy the butler, who is expected to perform the ancient role of a tricky servant who helps his master to get a good marriage. Even Lovewit’s Neighbours think that “...Jeremy/ Is a very honest fellow” (V. ii. 37-38) and that they trust his judgement.

Consequently, the artist emboldens Face to participate in a comic settlement, making him to successfully “bribe” Lovewit; offering his master exactly what he previously offered the dupes: sex, the elixir of youthful rejuvenation, and wealth. He tells Lovewit, “I’ll help you to a widow, / In recompense, that you shall gi’ me thanks for, / Will make you seven years younger, and a rich one” (V. iii. 84-86). Thus, Lovewit gleefully accepts the offer as he takes possession of all the “goods” precisely because the house is his legal property and he employs the strength of the law to subsume the wit which has provided such handsome dividends on his

investment. For as Haynes suggests, Lovewit's application of the law for his personal advantage echoes England's ruling class managing to negotiate the transformation of a new social economy; an economy which accommodates to it the strength and durability of the status quo in which landlords exact absolute control over their properties. So Lovewit can depend on the law to bully Mammon, Tribulation and Ananias, Drugger, and Dapper to show proof that indeed the goods in his legitimate house are theirs.

Such a harsh conclusion may suggest Jonson's endorsement of the criminality involved in Lovewit's triumph. However, the dramatist subverts the moral judgement in the plot and introduces a liberal code in which humans are always on the lookout for new opportunities to get ahead in life despite the ethical boundaries. This liberal code manifests in the judgement of the audience to whom Jonson expects better "understanding ... in the way to be cozened" (Preface, Lines 1-4) and to become "judging spectators" of "fortune, that favours fools" (Prologue, Lines 1, 3). These audiences of the seventeenth century delight to see the machinations and successes of confident men as they triumph over dupes and simpletons, and also they love wit, enjoy the exhibition of cleverness for its own sake while implicitly, setting aside all moral considerations. It is this ability in spectators to love wit and identify with clever tricksters as well as comic rogues other than unsophisticated and unintelligent dupes that clown the seventeenth century theatre. The audience will applaud the former over the latter.

A similar skill is exhibited by both Soyinka and Sutherland in their portrayal of Jero and Ananse's victory over the dupes. The reader is inclined to applaud Ananse's

wit and intelligence in his interaction with the four chiefs at the end of the play. Does Sutherland by implication exonerate Ananse's wit above the criminality involved in his 'misdeeds'? Also in Soyinka's play, the reader is courted to applaud Jero's exhibition of superior wit in triumphing over all the gulls. The question of whether Soyinka and Sutherland also valorize wit and intelligence over criminality will be part of the subject of discussion in the third and fourth chapters. In Jonson's play, Lovewit's appeal to the "kind spectators" in the epilogue of the play to "think/ What a young wife, and a good brain may do" (V.v.154-155) invites the audience to applaud him in having an aspiring mind to change his status in life. Similarly, Face's humility in submitting himself to the judgement of the audience invokes an applause from the audience who by virtue of the appeal are courted to ignore the moral complicities in preference for a show down of more feasts in the art of trickery that establishes a balance in society. Jonson's epistemology therefore implicates the audience to share in the spoils of the roguish trade which has put to rest the obnoxious characters and practices of the gulls but has provided mirth and enjoyment for them. By such logic the reader is conscripted to himself partake in the swindles dramatized in the play.

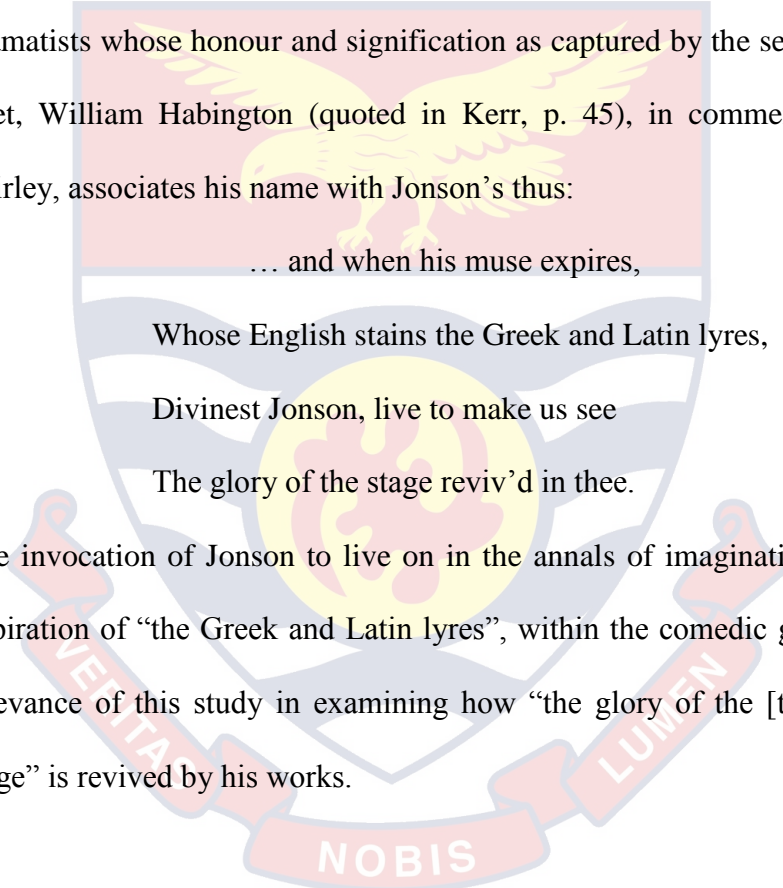
Jonson's skill in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* has not only provided a pattern in domesticating the comedic structural design in the portrayal of the gull-knave pattern as imbibed from the Classical forebears to reflect contemporary society, but has provided a moral satire in which the reader is made complicit in the knaves' use of tricks and schemings for effective gulling of the dupes. The reader appreciates the dramatist's anti-capitalist posturing which apparently dictates how

the dupes are treated with virulent disdain and disgust in the afore-mentioned plays. In addition, the reader applauds the dramatist's ideals of positive brilliance in the management of detail with constant reference to the entire plot and the invention of new tricks (at each point in the plot) and skillful conduct of intrigue on the part of the rogues who are made to legislate both Jonson's moral burden and to execute it as well. There seems to be a kind of sympathetic bond between the dramatist and his rogues who also enjoy the commendation of the reader.

Most tellingly in the pattern is the portrayal of the witty parasites who assist the heroes not only to generate the excitements in the satiric elements (in the plays) but also to exact the dramatist's judgements on the dupes. The parasites exhibit wit, intelligence and sheer devilry as they interact with the heroes and the gulls decidedly in portraying contemporary life and also reflecting the dramatist's conception of the characterisation of the dupes who obviously manifest the illogicality and dunce nature in humanity. To clearly achieve this artistic aim, Jonson's skill selects both professionals and highly socio-culturally placed individuals who act the grotesque roles of the dupes in the plays. These individuals are animated by an insatiable greed and unnerving quest for something far beyond the natural aspirations of humans; and it is in that unnatural quest that they exhibit the unnatural cravings and deeds which attract the dramatist's censure most obviously to the glorification of the rogues' exhibition of wit, cunning and candour in spite of Jonson's moral edicts on his characters in his plays.

The rogues in Jonson's plays are treated with a derisive admiration which is short-lived. They are more attractively realistic than those we get from Aristophanes and

Plautus' works. Jonson's rogues demonstrate a deeper insight into the nature of humans and provide a broad signification to human actions in life. They manifest a more thoughtful and understanding grasp of underlying meanings that underlie human relationships and conducts. Ultimately, the reader is wholly unable to criticise them without first re-examining his/her motives and purposes in life. In this lies Jonson's success as one of the "acknowledged masters" of Renaissance dramatists whose honour and signification as captured by the seventeenth century poet, William Habington (quoted in Kerr, p. 45), in commendatory verses to Shirley, associates his name with Jonson's thus:

The watermark is a large, semi-transparent crest of the University of Cape Coast. It features a shield with a yellow eagle with outstretched wings at the top. Below the eagle is a banner with the Latin motto 'VERITAS LIBERABIT VOS A OMNI AESTIVATIONE'. At the bottom of the shield is a yellow sun with rays. Below the shield is another banner with the Latin motto 'NOBIS'.

... and when his muse expires,
Whose English stains the Greek and Latin lyres,
Divinest Jonson, live to make us see
The glory of the stage reviv'd in thee.

The invocation of Jonson to live on in the annals of imaginative craft, after the expiration of "the Greek and Latin lyres", within the comedic genre explains the relevance of this study in examining how "the glory of the [twentieth century] stage" is revived by his works.

Conclusion

In concluding this segment of Jonsonian skills as exemplified in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, it will be worthwhile to isolate the essential features of Jonson's art which have been taken over by the West African writers, specifically Soyinka and

Sutherland, as a basis to guide the discussion in subsequent chapters. Among the features include:

- i. Jonson uses the trickster archetype- the fox- as one of the key elements in the mythological sub-structure of the play. He refashions the archetype to reflect the socio-cultural realities of contemporary England. Soyinka also employs the fox archetype in his portrayal of Baroka and Jero to reflect the socio-cultural realities in West Africa. So does Sutherland in employing the craftiness of the hero, Ananse, as the key element in the sub-structure of the play to reflect the socio-cultural realities of West African trickster archetypes.
- ii. Jonson employs the gull-knave pattern in the plot construction of his plays. Soyinka and Sutherland also employ this skill in their plays.
- iii. In developing the gull-knave pattern, Jonson switches the roles of the characters to exhibit oppositional disguises where the roles change between the gulls and the knaves. Soyinka and Sutherland's skills in the portrayal of the characters in the gull-knave structure also exhibit the oppositional disguises.
- iv. Jonson assigns to the knaves (tricksters) a superior moral insight and know-how to prevail always in their interactions with the gulls. Soyinka and Sutherland also assign the same superior moral insights to the knaves who prevail over the gulls.
- v. Jonsonian plays institute a justice system to deal with both the knaves and the gulls. Though Soyinka and Sutherland also initiate this same skill the West African dramatists mute the overt Jonsonian punitive justice system to reflect a comic distortion of a Shakespearean comedy in which life goes on as normal and events

are allowed go on naturally without a conscious effort to punish wrong. The West African dramatists initiate a system which self-corrects the ills in society.

The succeeding two chapters will examine to what extent both Soyinka and Sutherland's artistic choices and skills reflect the Jonsonian model.



CHAPTER THREE

MANIFESTATION OF THE UNIVERSAL ARCHETYPAL TRADITION IN THE CRAFT OF SOYINKA

Soyinka's Poetics

Soyinka's poetics, coupled with his thoroughness in pursuing what he describes as "the aesthetic matrix" being the fountain of his creative inspiration and his genius, as manifested in his dramatic works, make him not only a towering figure in African literature but they combine to carve a niche for him as a trail blazer in world literature generally. These characteristic features not only isolate him as a special breed in the iconoclastic class (of the Achebes, Wa'Thiongos, Awoonors, etc.) and define him as a productive artist actively engaged in redefining the models of literary classicism, but also they become emblematic symbols in explaining what Irele (1975) has described as "the growth and the consequent deepening of his [Soyinka's] consciousness" as an African writer (p.2). It will be unproductive here to reproduce Soyinka's poetics which dictate his writings since many scholars [such as Moore, (1971); Richard, (1972); Jones, (1973); Lindfors, (1975); Irele, (1975); Davis, (1976)] have provided same. However, our interest in this segment of the chapter is to explore how Soyinka also incorporates certain universal archetypes into his dramas to portray the realities of contemporary patterned social behaviour as both a product of his socio-cultural environment and a manifestation of semblances a critic can glean from his works.

His creative works draw upon mythic and archetypal elements which reflect the universality of the human experience in the world and how the dramatist

manipulates these archetypal elements to reflect life relevant to the West African situation, especially his Yoruba background. In an earlier chapter of this work, we pointed out how Soyinka utilized Greek myth in his play, *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite* both as an adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* and a re-interpretation of the Dionysus myths. Soyinka has also exploited Greek myths and ritual in the construction of the novel, *Season of Anomy* and some poems. In the former, Soyinka incorporates the *Orpheus myth* and in the latter works, he employs a complex imagery fashioned out from allusions to Greek matricidal myths and dramas. As he admits in an interview with Valerie Wilmer of *Flamingo*, Soyinka opines that “when I use myth it is necessary for me to bend it to my own requirements. I don't believe in carbon-copies in any art form. You have to select what you want from traditional sources and distort it if necessary” (p.16). His admission points to the fact that, as an artist, in selecting images, ideas and tropes from sources - either classical or elsewhere- for the literary enterprise, one must be guided by the principle of avoiding direct imitation (what he refers to as “carbon copies”), and consciously (or unconsciously) distorting the borrowed ‘*image*’ to reflect what Harold Bloom describes as “the larger phenomenon of intellectual revisionism” (p.28) for purposes of helping the artist to achieve specific ends in the work.

One of the recurring dominant archetypes which has continued for centuries to appeal to writers of all ages, including Soyinka, is the fox figure utilized in beast fables, epics and analogies to reflect both the wily, clever and predatory nature of humans on the one hand and the witty, humourous rogue on the other. Both

characteristics of the fox figure have been exploited by Soyinka and other literary artists to express the universal theme of voracious greed with intent of examining to what extent humans exhibit the fox's cunning and traits, and also to find out how such a character either positively or negatively reflects the ethos of a particular given society. However, what is so clear in the mind of Soyinka and apparently most other artists is the fact that the fox represents what Abrahams (1968) describes as "the most paradoxical of all characters", for the fox combines the attributes of many other types of tricksters (p. 170).

Abrahams is of the view that the fox manifests several traits: such as a clown, a fool, a cheat, a jokester, an initiate, an ogre and other times he is a culture hero. He is the central character in many types of folk narratives. The fox figure, therefore, must be seen as a trickster figure which exhibits transcendental or archetypal characteristic of the human psyche. He is so ubiquitous that Radin (1972) describes him as "an inchoate being of undetermined proportions, a figure foreshadowing the shape of man" (p.xxiv).

In fact, Carroll (1984) suggests that the ubiquitous nature of the trickster image in folktales as Jung (1970) has posited, reflects the fox as an "archetype buried in the mind of all human beings" (p. 105). Jung's view, as suggested by Carroll, confirms the universality of the fox image which most artists exploit as an archetypal figure and a clever being; one who is rich in imagination and exhibits cunning, one who gulls larger and stronger creatures (and even weaker beings) and one who knows a clever way out of delicate and often risky situations. In most narratives, the role assigned the fox is stereotypical: one who induces its "victims" or "partners" with

deceit and cunning in order to gain personal comforts or selfish ends while the victims are always portrayed as dupes and dunce.

The German scholar, Uther (2006), in an essay entitled: *The Fox in World Literature, Reflections on a “Fictional Animal”*, discusses the varied qualities and roles of the fox in international folktales, both written and oral to suggest the human embodiment of cunning, shrewdness, treachery and even wickedness. He opines that the “content and motifs in European or European-influenced fox narratives are most often predicated by descriptions that go back to antiquity” (p. 134). He argues, however, that there are some positive qualities and faculties associated with the fox and they include a creative mind, a readiness to care for and help others, quickness, and circumspection. These positive attributes are signs to suggest the ambivalence and paradoxical nature of the archetypal trickster fox whose universal characteristics are available to most societies and communities and, as expected, literary artists exploit these in their craft to reflect a particular artistic end.

Among the Dogon in the West African savanna of Southern Mali and Northern Burkina Faso, for example, the fox figure is expressed in the myth of Ogo-Yurugu (“pale fox”) as the chief figure of a trickstering fox to showcase the innermost patterns of the ambivalence of humans. The fox image among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria is seen as an elusive, slippery creature since its operations are mostly in the night. Afejuku (2018) opines that the fox in Yoruba mythology is portrayed as having a deep subtle mind which attracts numerous praises from sorcerers because of its ability to catch its prey unawares. Its ways are unknown to

skillful hunters and this explains why warriors are warned never to depend on, or trust those who wear fox hides.

It is without doubt that Soyinka, a Yoruba, is influenced to a large extent by the mythology of the fox in his socio-cultural environment to craft his heroes Baroka and Brother Jero in the plays, *The Lion and The Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* respectively, since as already hinted, his writings are deeply rooted in the rich and complex culture of his people. However, he easily adapts and adopts the Western theatrical modes available to him in the knowledge that they can be meaningfully domesticated to reflect the African heritage and African experience. For as Jeyifo (1987) observes, Soyinka's deep immersion in mythology is "a vehicle through which he simultaneously gives imaginative depth to his writings and also anchors his creative imagination in the collective tradition of literary craft" (p.143).

The central argument emerging so far is that Soyinka's dramaturgy employs tropes and ideas within the Yoruba tradition but the figures he employs (for example, the fox image) are also found in other traditions because they are archetypes, which apparently are universal. In studying Soyinka's portrayal of the archetype, it will be necessary to place it in the wider context of world tradition. Gibbs (1996) commenting on Soyinka's comic works observes that:

when you look at [the commedia dell'arte] you will find that it's popular theatre It uses stereotypes, it uses masks, and I think Soyinka found that there were parallels. And he liked cultural coincidences; he liked to find links between things... . He looked at

classical, Elizabethan, and contemporary drama; ..., so we should find him reacting to those traditions (p.).

Gibbs' view provides the watershed to disprove the claim that Soyinka's conception of the fox image in the portrayal of Baroka in the play, *The Lion and The Jewel* is solely dependent on his African conception of the fox image.

The overwhelming thought the introductory segment of this chapter seeks to raise is the fact that Soyinka's choice and use of the fox image in the afore-mentioned plays conform to, but deviates from, the universal portrayal of the archetypal trickster hero who is seen always cunningly wandering and leeringly trotting in the literary work either playing tricks on other characters he views as gulls or having them play tricks on him. However, Soyinka's portrayal is different in the sense that his hero creates good out of a chaotic situation in society. The hero is presented as a concept Radin describes as a "picaresque mythology" (p. xxv). Such a hero is not guided by the moral codes of society or the normal conceptions of good or evil, but he is obviously highly sexed and unpredictable to make possible what I will describe as "order" in a "disordered" society with intent of ultimately bringing culture and civilization to humankind.

Soyinka's artistic aim in the play, *The Lion and the Jewel*, reflects a comic spirit of conviviality. He treats several themes of varying aspects of the African tradition vis-à-vis the influence of European modern views on the African psyche, and examines to what extent that interaction provokes serious consequences which in the view of the dramatist are subjects suitable for a serious satire. Though the dramatist succeeds in creating a good comedy, he also raises serious issues of

concern to the African mind. The issues include the ludicrous portrayal of Lakunle foolishly imitating the ways of the European culture he is ignorant about; the feminist “agitation” arising from the alliance between Sadiku and Sidi in the scenes which portray them as chanting their “supposed” victory songs over Baroka; the concept of masculinity as dramatised in the lop-sided gender role-playing between Lakunle and Sidi in the earlier scenes; the deification and preservation of the African beliefs and cultural practices regardless of Africa’s contact with western culture; and the seduction (and background “rape scene”) of Sidi by the wily fox, the ‘Bale’ of Ilujinle culminating in Sidi’s preference to marrying the old chief rather than the young suitor.

The dramatist’s overriding artistic aim subordinates all the above issues to the portrayal of the fox image in the character of Baroka who is portrayed as a trickster hero after the fashion of Jonson’s Volpone. Though Soyinka’s Baroka and Jonson’s Volpone may superficially have nothing in common this study argues that both dramatists discuss ‘similar’ issues by exploiting the archetypal trickster image of the fox as the focal point of their works to discuss the theme of greed. In addition, Soyinka’s technique employed in discussing the fox figure also echoes his sixteenth century predecessor’s skill with some surprising affinities which raise the question of whether the twentieth century West African dramatist’s work has “borrowed” anything from Jonson’s.

Both dramatists, in discussing the theme of greed as expressed in the trickster hero, portray the compelling acquisitive human tendencies wantonly craving for the satisfaction of either a biological, physiological, psychological or a kind of self-

actualisation drive in the form of gaining wealth, fame, and materialism or satisfying a psycho-somatic or emotional need. The characters the dramatists portray demonstrate certain patterns of behaviour in their cravings, and in the process (either consciously or unconsciously) disregard the moral codes that regulate society.

In developing the behavioural patterns of the characters, both dramatists devise that the foxy characters (the tricksters) take advantage of this evil propensity in humans to cozen their fellow humans who then become the symbolic character-types mostly described as the gulls, and by such portrayal they become emblematic images of the ridiculous within the overriding artistic interest in the comic plays. In addition to both dramatists exploiting the fox figure to discuss the theme of greed within the structural design of the gull-knave pattern, Soyinka demonstrates some artistic skills (in his comic works) which essentially echo the Jonsonian features as earlier discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter discusses how Soyinka's handling of his themes in both *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and his stylistic mode of incorporating some archetypes in his plays draw a semblance from the universal tradition to reflect his African experience.

Soyinka's Artistic Vision in *The Lion and the Jewel*

The inspiration behind Soyinka's creation of his hero, Baroka, demonstrates his rich artistic skill in selecting images and motifs from the folk material of his Yoruba descent to express his version of the fox archetype. In an interview, as recorded by Gibbs (2001), Soyinka provides an account of the origins of his conception of

Baroka from the story of Charlie Chaplin, a man of nearly sixty who takes to wife, a seventeen year old, Oona O'Neil. He admits that, "... from Charlie Chaplin, and again thinking of the Old man I knew in my society who at 70 plus, 80, would still take some new young wives - and always seemed perfectly capable of coping with the onerous tasks which such activity demanded on them! I just sat down and that's how Baroka came into existence" (p.82). Baroka then becomes an archetypal creation of the concept of greed and the ridiculous yearnings in humans who seek for limitless opportunities to satisfy their personal egoistic desires. It also suggests how the aged rich and affluent devise ways of taking advantage of the weak and innocent for their benefit.

Within the socio-cultural orientation of his Yoruba background (or African) coupled with his artistic vision, Soyinka portrays Baroka as a manifestation of an accepted form of practice in which a category of humans take advantage of (or prey on) a lesser breed of humans with the intent of boosting their self-confidence, ego and pride. Baroka in this context could be seen as a metaphor of greed and self-conceit, whose continual existence depends largely on the availability of gulls and supposed daft individuals. Perhaps, this view of humanity ties in with the universal conception of the gull-knave motif.

Soyinka's conception and portrayal of the hero, Baroka, as the "Fox of the Undergrowth" and "The Lion of Ilujinle" spring from his deep knowledge of the Yoruba folklore, rituals and traditional ceremonies. Yoruba society, like most communities, utilises animals in their folklore to present a convenient simplification or an amusing representation of the human world and its complex

happenings. These animals were endowed with particular characteristics that metaphorically represented various types of humans, their strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices, etc.

In a collection of stories titled, “Stories of an African Prince: Yoruba Tales”, Lomax (1913) recounts a series of tales he got from Lattevi Ajayi, a Yoruba Prince. The collection describes series of stories that relate the activities of both the *lion* and the *fox* and other creatures. The *lion* is always portrayed as the king of the jungle and a winner in all contests. The *fox* is portrayed as a cunning, wily and a deceptive creature who always thrives by pulling a prank or trick on his fellow creatures. In one particular story, “The Rabbit and the Fox”, the image of the fox’s wily and crafty nature is described. The Fox after having lost an athletic competition to the Rabbit feigns sickness and falls down “dead”. Rabbit really thought Fox dead and started to walk over him when Fox takes a swift leap at Rabbit and tears her to pieces. The story ends with this clause: “That’s where we got the idea of deceiving people” (p. 9). The fox in this context represents the trickster who sustains himself by cunning and deceit. Hence, Soyinka’s artistic aim in selecting Baroka to exhibit both the traits of a *fox* and a *lion* is structured to reflect the traits of a wily, cunning human who exerts a conquering victory over all other humans. To an extent, Baroka becomes a deification of the human psyche as Soyinka describes him, “the living god among men...” (*The Lion and the Jewel*, Morning, p.11).

Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* dramatizes the fox fable to represent Baroka as a powerful magnifico whose portrayal within the artistic construct of the play echoes Jonson’s hero, Volpone. Volpone’s cunning, which is instinctual and even

amoral, drives him the more to seek the greater satisfaction of attaining his fundamental egoistic desires. In the same vein, Baroka's cunning knows no bounds in seeking to satisfy his instinctual and sexual desires. Soyinka presents Baroka as the chief of the village, "the Lion of Ilujinle" and the "Fox of the undergrowth." These metaphors confer absolute power in the personality of Baroka who both exercises and utilises the power within the jurisprudence of Ilujinle.

According to scholars such as Johnson (1921), Idowu (1962), Balogun (1976), Adewoye (1977), in traditional Yoruba and even in Africa, the chief wielded the legislative, executive and judicial powers over his subjects and he was expected to exercise these functions in consonance with the laws, customs and traditions of his people. He invariably "owned" everything; he was revered and accorded all the due respect, but he was ultimately accountable to his people to whom he was expected to dispense justice and due benevolence. However, in Baroka's Ilujinle, he decides that the village does not need the benefits of the railway project and so he bars the gates of other developmental projects. All he cares for is to secure his "... dogs, and his horses, his wives and all his/ Concubines ... ah, yes ... all these concubines" (*The Lion and the Jewel*, Noon, p.25) to the detriment of pursuing "trade,/ Progress, adventure, success, civilization,/ Fame, international conspicuity" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.24) that will benefit his people.

Soyinka's Baroka always seeks to satisfy his cravings for excessive pleasure, fame and sex instead of serving the interests of the people, similar to Jonson's Volpone who glories "more in the cunning purchase of [his] wealth,/ Than in the possession" and also he detests "the widow's or the orphan's tears... or their piteous cries"

(*Volpone*, 1.i. 31-32, 44- 47). Baroka's portrayal captures the idea of a self-centered and pleasure-seeking virile chief whose subjects, wives and concubines, even "the strongest of them all/ Still wearies long before the lion does!" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.28).

One of the dramatist's vision in *The Lion and the Jewel* therefore is to portray various manifestations of the socio-cultural imbalance in Ilujinle (Africa) regulated by despotic and uncaring leaders whose self-seeking and pleasure loving avarice create a new order of greed in society. Baroka then becomes a metaphor of the African leader who after "defeat[ing] all the men in the log-tossing match/, ... Hunt the leopard and the boa at night/... Climb to the top of the silk-cotton tree,/ Break the first pod, and scatter tasseled seeds/ To the four winds" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.28) resolves to bribe the agents of development and change society's progress (in the personality of "The Surveyor") with a "wad of pound notes and kola nuts; ... a coop of hens, a goat and a gourd of palm wine" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.25). His sole purpose as he confesses later to Sidi is to protect the "Virgin Plots of lives, rich decay/ And the tang of vapour rising from/ Forgotten heaps of compost, lying/ Undisturbed." (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.52). The character of Baroka represents some greedy aristocrat chiefs in Africa, who like the lion and the fox, scheme ways of both preserving their hold on their victims and devising new ways of amassing more wealth, fame and satisfying their libido.

Baroka's cunning and determined will to keep the "virgin plots of lives ... undisturbed" for his selfish gains compel him to take a new wife with such a rapacious speed of "five months' intervals" (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.18) as he

dispenses them into his harem. He is like Jonson's Volpone, who greedily devours the wealth of the gulls in such rapid succession that the reader, is amazed at the dexterity and wit displayed by the heroes. Soyinka also clothes "the lion" with the fox's cunning. Baroka's deep desire to maintain his grip over his village as the continued head demands the deployment of his full foxy predatory skills from his trickster armoury to wittingly rule his world unchallenged.

The dramatist's skill in clothing Baroka with the fox image artistically provides the appropriate analogy to link him to the universal trickster archetype in the play. Baroka's description as "The **F**ox of the **U**ndergrowth" and the deliberate stylistic choice of the graphological feature of capitalisation portray an age-long trickster whose reincarnation in the Ilujinle society primarily serves "to add disorder to order and so make a whole, to render possible, within the fixed bounds of what is permitted" (Kerenyi, p.185).

Baroka, then, as a metaphor of an African chief seeks cunning ways of administering his citizenry. He abuses power either overtly or subtly to satisfy his egocentric desires in marrying virgins every five months without due processes. When he first appears during the miming of "the dance of the Lost Traveller", all the villagers prostrate to show respect to their overlord but Lakunle sneaks off to avoid any interaction with the Bale. Baroka surreptitiously and manipulatively compel him to act the role of what Lakunle describes as the "Childish nonsense" of the "Stranger". The Bale's reaction to Lakunle's question as to whether the overlord even has time to dabble in these trivialities is quite surprising, since in the view of Lakunle, such frivolities are meant for commoners. Baroka's response that:

“Without these things you call/ Nonsense, a Bale’s life would be pretty dull” (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.17) unequivocally prepares the reader’s interaction with a hero who exhibits a life-style craft of pulling a prank on all the people he deals with. One will have expected that dutiful leaders should be concerned about the politico-socio-economic development of their societies.

Baroka’s life is devoted to devising ways of dealing with the boredom in his narrow world in which knavery and crookedness are exhibited as the dominate image in the play. His portrayal echoes Jonson’s Volpone who spends his entire life seeking pleasure in foods, songs, dances and deriving satisfaction by following sensational subjects. Both Baroka and Volpone’s lives are dominated by pleasure-hunting activities. Volpone, for example, has “... filled his vaults/ With Romagna, and rich Canadian wines, / ... and feeds on sumptuous hangings, and soft beds. / [He] know[s] the use of riches” (*Volpone*, I. i. 57-62). Baroka also enjoys music, dance, “staring at the flock of women in flight” and gazing admiringly at beauty queen(s) on the front cover of magazine(s) with a declarative statement: “... Yes, yes ... it is five full months since last/ I took a wife... five full months” (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.18).

Soyinka introduces the hero as a voyeuristic being devoted to pleasure and the affirmative statement of Baroka seeking a new wife develops the theme of greed in the play. It presents a picture of contemporary Africa where chiefs cunningly engage in corrupt activities for their personal comfort. Igborin (2016) in an article titled, “Traditional Leadership and Corruption in Pre-Colonial Africa: How the Past Affects the Present” discusses certain pertinent activities of corruption among

traditional Pre-Colonial chiefs in some communities in Nigeria. He concludes that chiefs, from pre-historic times to contemporary days, have cunningly exploited their citizenry through the infamous slave trade, human sacrifice, and bribery through justice administration, embezzlement of public funds and abuse of power.

One of the central issues he raises is the question of chiefs marrying subjects' wives and daughters without following due processes according to societal mores. A chief's thirst for sex and pleasure must be satisfied regardless of whomsoever he desires. This phenomenon, though accepted and practised in pre-colonial Africa, has become a consequence of greed in post-colonial societies where humans wantonly seek prestige and carnal pleasure in marrying new wives after "five full months". Perhaps, the ease and frequency, and the cunning with which Baroka desires a new wife are not only an indication of his virility but also Soyinka's criticism of the excesses of African leaders. They also suggest the metaphorical portrayal of the theme of voracious greed in contemporary African society.

Soyinka's artistic development of the theme of greed in the play prefigures a hero who is a master trickster. He is in love with power, prestige, fame and sheer devilry of satisfying his carnal pleasure by annexing "loveliness beyond the jewels of a throne" as Sidi captures it (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.20). Baroka's greed knows no bounds and since his credo is to preserve all the "virgin plots of lives" for his use, the dramatist valorizes the character of Sidi as a metaphor of the gleam, fame, prestige and the lovely jewel that must be hunted; similar to how Jonson portrays Renaissance England's legacy-hunting motif depicted in the incessant quest for gold, fame and wealth by the legates. Sidi's unparalleled beauty in the socio-

cultural environment of Ilujinle and how that beauty makes her famous in the capital, bestowing honour and fame “beyond the dreams of a goddess” (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.10) is made real with the publication of her portraits in the pages of the magazine symbolizes the image of somatic passions in humans that invite a hungry pack of fox (es) and wolves to go hunting after her. One of the village girls captures this thought succinctly thus:

Yes, yes, he did. But the Bale is still feasting his eyes on the images. Oh, Sidi, he was right. You are beautiful. On the cover of the book is an image of you from here [touches the top of her head] to here [her stomach]. And in the middle leaves, from the beginning of one leaf right across to the end of another, is one of you from head to toe. Do you remember it? It was the one for which he made you stretch your arms towards the sun. Oh, Sidi, you looked as if, at that moment the sun himself had been your lover. (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.11).

The imagery of the Bale feasting his eyes on Sidi and the sun portrayed as her lover denotatively suggest not only the worth, pride and charming beauty of Sidi as a valuable asset or prize to be annexed, but, connotatively, she is presented as a gleam that both humanity and divinity have concluded as a highly sought-after commodity, or a species that satiates humans’ (in this this context, the masculine gender) hunger and thirst. Sidi herself acknowledges that her “fame has spread to Lagos/ And beyond the seas”. The publication has made her “worth increased and

multiplied” to such an extent that everyone has already heard: “the ballad-makers and their songs/ In praise of Sidi the incomparable” (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p. 20). This portrayal of Sidi as a semblance of the gleam finds a comparison in Jonson’s portrayal of ‘gold’ in Renaissance England. Volpone’s celebration of his gold, which he refers to as his “saint” and the “world’s soul” coupled with his adoration of the “sacred treasure” which the “wise poets” described as “the best of things; and far transcending” (*Volpone*, I.i.14-15) mirrors Sidi’s incomparable beauty. Just as legacy-hunters go hunting after Volpone’s gold so do hunters hunt for Sidi’s beauty.

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the dramatist creates a competitive spirit among the men in their pursuit and conquest of the gleam metaphorically portrayed in the feminine beauty of Sidi’s personality. This portrayal is similar to Jonson’s skill in the dramatization of the competitive spirit the gold creates among the four legatees whose undercutting activities excite the reader. Though the competition is fierce and intense in Soyinka’s play, the dramatist regulates and mediates it within the artistic construct of the comedic genre. This is aimed at initiating the ridiculous posturing of humans who are unable to restrain their cravings (of incessant greed) within corrective reasoning. In the play, Lakunle, Baroka and “The Stranger” are presented as the men who hunt after Sidi. Each of the three displays a sneering disgust for their opponents (or rivals) with a cunningly devised strategy that excites mischief and the ridiculous. One finds a comparison in Jonson’s *Volpone* in which the four legatees devise cunning ways and offer expensive gifts to attract Volpone’s benevolence to name one of them as his successor.

The unnamed “Stranger” in Soyinka’s play, who is described as “the man from the outside world” [himself a symbol of European masculine modernism] (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.10), employs some articles of European civilization – the motor-bike, the camera, and the wonders of print technology – to woo Sidi. He tells Sidi that those articles “would bestow upon her/ Beauty beyond the dreams of a goddess” and “would announce/ This beauty to the world” (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.10-11). The Stranger’s wooing strategy is, perhaps, one of the most prolific schemes in which men use materialism and other articles of worldly acquisitions to entice women. In the Stranger’s bid to win Sidi’s love and to denigrate his other competitor (the Bale), he places the image of Baroka in an obscure corner of the magazine and confines him to nothingness and verminous putrefaction. One of Soyinka’s minor characters, Second Girl, conveys the Stranger’s contempt better. She declares that:

... it would have
been much better for the Bale if the Stranger
had omitted him altogether. His image is in a
little corner somewhere in the book, and even
that corner he shares with one of the village latrines.

(*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.11).

Soyinka’s portrayal of the Stranger’s hunt for Sidi also metaphorically suggests Europe’s rape and plunder of Africa during the 16th and 17th centuries and later colonial conquests in their bid to cunningly “civilize” the “dark continent”. These images of the Stranger’s strategy recalls Joseph Conrad’s hero, Kurtz, in the novel,

The Heart of Darkness, who sets out on a civilizing mission to Africa but ends up decorating his walls and gates with the skulls of the blacks he had killed putatively to demonstrate his strength and victory.

The Stranger's strategy, however, works perfectly to make Sidi disdainfully look down on Baroka and Lakunle. She becomes infatuated with her beauty and succinctly declares her importance and worth over the latter two admirers (or hunters) who in the heroine's opinion are far below her present status. She confesses thus: "Sidi is more important even than the Bale./ More famous than that panther of the trees". To Lakunle, she tells him, "In fact, I am not so sure I'll want to wed you now.../ I would demean my worth to wed/ A mere village school teacher." (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.12). Despite the 'success' of the Stranger's strategy to denigrate Baroka and Lakunle, the dramatist's skill as demonstrated in the elaborate stage direction in the miming scene ensures that the Stranger does not win the love of Sidi. He is denied access to win Sidi's love like the gulls in Jonson's *Volpone* who do not satiate their greed. The Stranger is dismissed as a miserable clown and a drunk into the abyss of the village river.

The dramatist's portrayal of the second 'hunter', Lakunle, manifests his criticism of the semi-literate supposed middle class personalities whose pretence and bigotry in love affairs emphasize their stupidity and quaint daftness in the Western culture they believe they are experts in. The elaborate stage directions devoted to Lakunle's physical appearance suggests the dramatist's intent of making him a contradiction of what he espouses as his strength to woo Sidi. He prides himself in the knowledge that he is an educated modern man but "he is dressed in an old-style English suit,

threadbare but not ragged, clean but not ironed, obviously a size or two too small” and wearing a white tennis shoe (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.1).

This portrait of Lakunle makes him more of a clown and a court jester rather than a respectable school teacher. In addition, his views and mannerism in wooing Sidi as expressed in his supposed cultured and chivalrous ways of the Europeans only expose him as a buffoon as he heaps empty words upon words, empty phrases upon phrases and useless ideas upon ideas. For example, in his bid to sound academic and prove what he considers as the superiority of men over women, he tells Sidi that:

The scientists have proved it. It’s in my books

Women have a smaller brain than men

That’s why they are called the weaker sex.

(*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.4).

Lakunle’s claim sounds ridiculous especially within the context of Science that he opined proves his theory. It betrays him as an eccentric and old-fashioned man whose misogynistic tendencies make him rather backward. Sidi’s response, drawing attention to women who pound the yams and plant the millet all day with a child strapped at their backs, appears commonsensical and the dramatist designs it to deflate his ego and supposed scientific claims.

Lakunle’s fanciful ideas about wooing a young woman in high sounding melodramatic language make him rather a joke and a crazy buffoon who selects meaningless phrases from books he does not understand himself. In one of the exchanges between Sidi and himself, Lakunle pleads with ecstatic emotion thus:

Lakunle: Sidi, my love will open your mind
Like the chaste leaf in the morning, when
The sun first touches it.

Sidi: If you start that I will run away.
I had enough of that nonsense yesterday.

Lakunle: Nonsense? Nonsense? Do you hear?
Does anybody listen? Can the stones
Bear to listen to this? Do you call it
Nonsense that I poured the waters of my soul
To wash your feet?

Sidi: You did what!

Lakunle: Wasted! Wasted! Sidi, my heart
Bursts into flowers with my love.
But you, you and the dead of this village
Trample it with feet of ignorance.

(*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.6)

The dramatist's portrayal of Lakunle's use of language is similar to Jonson's portrayal of Ananias and Tribulation's use of the Hebrew and Greek languages in *The Alchemist*. Both dramatists invest their dupes with high sounding language that makes them ridiculous. Lakunle's language is infested with bombastic nonsense and meaningless verbiage which make him a stranger in his own socio-cultural environment. An African man such as Lakunle who launches a scathing attack on one of the revered institutions of marriage, disregarding the payment of the bride-

price in preference for his Westernised romanticised ideas of love and marriage will surely be presented, by Soyinka, with an outrageous ridiculous portrayal. When Sidi insists that Lakunle should pay her bride-price as the only condition to she marrying him, his outbursts amuses the reader.

A savage custom, barbaric, outdated,

Rejected, denounced, accursed

Excommunicated, archaic, degrading,

Humiliating, unspeakable, redundant.

Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable.

(*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.7).

Lakunle's series of negative participial phrases fused with intimidating gerunds and compounded into a prosaic-poetic rhetoric (as presented above) echo Jonson's portrayal of Ananias and Tribulation's use of the "Grammar and Logick" of the Alchemy trade in *The Alchemist*. Jonson's characters love the use of words and phrases for their own sake whether they are appropriate or not. Their supposed mastery over the Greek language which they believe demonstrate their sophistication and ultimate desire to become "temporal lords" portrays them rather in a ridiculous negative light, a kind of smugness which betrays their religious hypocrisy and prideful impulse. For Lakunle's use of these redundant phrases, Soyinka aims at satirising the so-called scholars in Africa who boast of their acquisitions and mastery of Westernised culture but their use of the language manifests their lexical limitations and dwarfish mental processes in appreciating the mores of their own society.

Lakunle therefore becomes an externalisation of the ridiculous posturing of the semi-educated middle class whose jumble of oddity in the use of language to communicate their socio-cultural experiences reveals their absurdity. The dramatist's wit as manifested in Sidi's rhetorical question, "Is the bag empty? Why did you stop?" captures this absurdity made more concrete in Lakunle's response: "I own only the Shorter Companion/ Dictionary, but I have ordered/ The longer One- you wait!" (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.7). The grotesque reversal of roles the dramatist assigns to Lakunle and Sidi in their use of language and the semantics portrays Soyinka's disgust at the likes of Lakunle.

The dramatist provides series of Lakunle's buffoonery as a befitting portrayal of a gull whose mannerisms evoke disgust. At the beginning of Act 1 (Morning), for example, Soyinka presents Lakunle's gesture of forcibly offering to carry Sidi's bucket of water because he thinks a modern gentleman should not allow a beautiful young girl to carry a load while he watches her unconcerned. This misdirected act of chivalry, of a man carrying a bucket of water while the woman looks on, which results in the water spilling over his Westernised suiting outfit with a crudity of mess, only portrays him rather as a misguided gentleman. A school teacher, who is expected to be in class imparting knowledge for the transformation of society, is here presented as a clown providing mirth. The inverse clownish portrayal finds credence in the later roles Sidi and the other young women assign him during the miming scenes of *The Traveller*. These scenes have a demeaning tendency in emphasising the shallowness of Lakunle's mind accompanied by pretenses to decorous breeding and foolish bravado. In fact, every action of him merely serves

to highlight his crudity, daftness and stupidity similar to Jonson's portraiture of Ananias and Tribulation in *The Alchemist*.

One of the technical designs that Soyinka's comedy bears a semblance to the Jonsonian comedy is the reductive and corrective judgements imposed on the gull characters whose demeaning and deflationary portrayal manifests the dramatists' ethical aims in their plays. We have seen how in *Volpone*, Jonson reduces the legatees (Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio, Lady Would-Be) and in *The Alchemist*, the gulls (Dapper, Sir Epicure, Mammon, Abel Drugger, Ananias and Tribulation and Kastril) are denied the opportunity of enjoying the benefits of their craze in their search of the Philosopher's Stone.

Soyinka also effects the demeaning posturing of the gull. However, he inverts the socio-cultural dynamics of the foundations of African culture in which gender roles grotesquely reverse to effect the reduction. At the opening of Act II (Noon) we encounter Lakunle from behind "carrying a bundle of firewood which Sidi has set out to obtain" while Sidi elegantly walks ahead "happily engrossed in the pictures of herself in the magazine" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p. 18). Lakunle believes he is being a modern European lover (or wooer) but he forgets that within the values of the African society he is carrying himself as a man without dignity. He acts as a slave consigned to perform the role of a paid hireling. In fact, Sidi does not respect him as a man, nor appreciates his kind gesture of carrying her load of firewood. He is reduced to a little noisy child who must be quietened at several points in their interactions in the scene. Indeed, Sidi's reference to him as a kind of a non-living thing; not worthy of being considered a man, but a eunuch, deepens the reductive

process made concrete by Sidi's reproaches and rebuff of him which further plunge Lakunle to exhibit more of his ridiculous posturing.

The dramatist ensures that Sadiku informs Sidi (in the presence of Lakunle) of Baroka's intent to marry her. This suggests the demeaning posturing in Lakunle's dignity as a man. He kneels in front of Sidi, covering her hands with kisses and muttering useless and meaninglessly clumsy Biblical names to express his idea of Westernised romance which he hopes will win the heart of Sidi. He declares: "My Ruth, my Rachel, Esther, Bathseba/ Thou sum of fabled perfections/ From Genesis to the Revelations" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.20).

Soyinka's demeaning and ridiculous portrayal of Lakunle serves two artistic aims in the plot of the play. First, it projects clearly the metaphorical idealism and gleam which all humans (especially, the men) seek after within the geo-political space in Africa. Most men hunt for beautiful girls, especially virgins. Sidi is conscious of who and what she has become in the scheme of things involving the men in Ilujinle. She is now aware that she has become "more esteemed" than others and has brought great fame to Ilujinle. She then resolves to effect "a deceitful message in [her] eyes/ Beckoning insatiate men to certain doom" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.22).

The dramatist invests Sidi's personality with a disconcerting temper which certainly triumphs over Lakunle (by implication all men); for she is "more important even than the Bale/ More famous than that panther of the trees. He is beneath me now -/ Your fearless rake, the scourge of womanhood!" (*The Lion ...*, Morning, p.12). This portrayal of Sidi with a disconcerting temper metaphorically echoes Jonson's dramatisation of the eccentricities of the 16th century's clamour for

gold and wealth. As Volpone declares in his pious glorification of gold: "... Thou art virtue, fame, / Honour and all things else! Who can get thee, / He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise" (*Volpone*, I.i.25-27). Just as the craze for gold in Jonson's play is exploited to effect the demeaning posturing in all the characters who seek after it, so does Soyinka's skill also exploit the hunting of Sidi's personality to effect a dunce posturing in the gull characters.

Secondly, Soyinka's skill introduces a complication into the plot as the gulls fiercely compete for "the jewel of Ilujinle". The reader has witnessed the failed attempts of both The Stranger (the outsider) and Lakunle (the buffoon) in their hunt for the jewel. The crafty Bale (Fox of the Undergrowth and overlord of Ilujinle) also desires the jewel for his personal glorification just like the earlier competitors. The dramatist introduces a battle of wits between the two main contenders (Baroka and Lakunle) whose rivalry connects the events in the plot to a crescendo of comic bliss from where the trickster rogue triumphs over his rival. Similarly in the Jonsonian model, the dramatist creates a competition among the gulls – Voltore, Corvino and Corbaccio – who battle amongst themselves as they present gifts and other "services" to attract Volpone's consideration. In the end Volpone, the fox, triumphs.

In dramatising the fierce competition between the two, Soyinka presents Baroka and Lakunle as contending hunters for the "Jewel of Ilujinle". Both rivals are fully aware of their potentials and the weakness of their opponent. Baroka is fully aware of his potential as the "Fox of the undergrowth" and his position as the "Lion of Ilujinle", so is Lakunle conscious of his "strength" in the ways of Western culture

and his cunning in using “his clipping tongue” (as Sidi describes him). Both ‘hunters’ exploit their potentials and strengths for their benefits while they also exploit the weaknesses of their rivals in their quest to annex the gleam. When the reader first encounters them in the miming scene, Lakunle sneaks off to avoid any interaction with Baroka who calls him back employing the full force of his power as the overlord. Baroka subjects Lakunle to some Machiavellian tactics making him do his bidding of entertaining the crowd most apparently to announce his power and authority in the ‘contest’.

Later in the play when Baroka sends Sadiku on the mission to convince Sidi to marry him, Lakunle also discredits Baroka as “... The greedy dog! / Insatiate camel of a foolish, dotting race” (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.19). He even cautions Sidi to be wary of Baroka’s guile and foxy nature which apparently is “known even in the larger towns” (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.24). Lakunle calculatingly convinces Sidi, in the story told in mime to suggest that Baroka is an enemy of progress, to disregard the authority and dignity of Baroka but to see him rather as a “voluptuous beast” who flatters his manhood by amassing more concubines. Despite the fact that Lakunle is aware of Baroka’s successes with women (and he even betrays his envy of him), he is determined to expose Baroka’s knavery in dealing with women since “... few men/ know of this trick – oh, he’s a die-hard rogue” (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p. 24).

Soyinka develops the plot, in the play, to reflect the gull-knave structure by unclothing Baroka from the “lion” cloak. The hero ‘exits’ his role as the lion to fully manifest the roguery and cunning of the prankster fox, who devises a wily

strategy to entrap and hunt Sidi. The dramatist captures ideas from the beast fable of the clever fox, as a humourous clever character, outwitting the birds of prey and entrapping them by feigning death.

Soyinka's fox in *The Lion and the Jewel* is presented as an over-pampered 'lover-boy' lying in bed and undergoing a sensual operation of the hairs of his armpit being pulled out. The metaphor of Baroka's half-nakedness in bed and the elaborate description of the bedroom's architectural designs coupled with Favourite's adept skill of pulling out the hair from Baroka's armpit suggest the hero's excessive love of pleasure and a satirical portrayal of African leaders whose over-indulgence conceive new strategies of perpetually exacting pleasure. Baroka's endurance of the 'hair pulling' operation from his latest wife, Ailatu, with "an aspirated 'A-ah' [with] a complete look of beautitude spread[ing] all over his face" (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.26) is designed by the dramatist to symbolise not only the hero's toughness in *servicing* his wives and numerous concubines but also his wily way of courting more pleasure. The imagery coupled with the paradoxical "vicious wasp" of the "scorpion's sudden sting" and the resultant pleasure of the "cooling aftermath" associated with the painful operation portrays a hero who is invested with a double nature that is ready to overturn the moral codes of society upside down. It also presents the trickster hero whose actions and inactions induce both pain and pleasure to him and the society at large. Baroka therefore becomes like the architect of pain and pleasure, a contriver and the contrived, a hunter and the hunted, a plunderer and the plundered, a marauder and the mocker who ultimately rejoices in making his victims conform to his dictates.

The dramatist invests Baroka with a quality of wit and intelligence to take advantage of the privileged position of Sidi as the metaphor of the gleam and the sought-after pleasure in Ilujinle. Similar to how Jonson's hero Volpone uses his wealth to entrap the legatees and Celia's affection in the eponymous play (and the rogues – Face, Subtle, and Dol – who devise the “Philosopher's Stone” to entrap the gulls in *The Alchemist*) Soyinka's Baroka employs his prowess in wrestling and innovative ideas on development to entrap Sidi during the ‘question and answer session’ in Act III (Night). The dramatist's skill in this Act deliberately creates a holiday atmosphere in the palace suitable for sensuality and love-making where “the house ... seemed ... empty” with “no one/ To bar unwanted strangers” from interfering in their conversation (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.38). This skill shares a similarity in Jonson's *The Alchemist* where the play begins in Mr. Lovewit's empty house, with a pervading atmosphere of freedom, which the rogues exploited for their roguery venture.

Baroka's potency as a virile man, metaphorically conveyed in the wrestling match, his dexterity portrayed in his full attention given to the contest he is engaged in, as though Sidi's presence in the room is of less interest to him whatsoever), and his wit in providing the cunning responses to Sidi's questions suggest an imposter wily fox who is ready to exhibit his foxy skills. When Sidi declares her intent of visiting Baroka in the palace as “a repentant child” and that the answer sent through Sadiku “was given in a thoughtless moment”, Baroka feigns ignorance of what Sidi is talking about. The reader is amused and surprised at Baroka's response which pointedly indicates that “... up till now/ Sadiku has brought no reply” to him (Night,

p.40) though in truth Sadiku has delivered the reply. Baroka's wit is further exhibited in this scene when we consider the fact that the reader is fully aware of Sidi's intent of taunting him.

Baroka's device of entrapping Sidi with the strange equipment meant to print the latter's beauty and glories to the outside world is similar to how Volpone uses his wealth to entrap the gulls and the cosmetic powder to entrap Celia. Soyinka's hero also exhibits wit and dexterous language to exploit Sidi's infatuation with her new status as the village beauty. The hero, like the old fox, is fully aware of Sidi's weakness (and most apparently that of women in general) of being infatuated when her beauty and intelligence are rehearsed and chorused before her. This naturally gnaws the reasoning capacity of Sidi to her own hurt. Baroka's wit prods Sidi on to assume that she is very intelligent and beautiful:

To think that I once thought,
Sidi is the eyes of delight, but
She is vain, and her head
Is feather-light and always giddy
With a trivial thought. And now
I find her deep and wise beyond her years

*[Reaches under his pillow, brings out the now
Familiar magazine, and also an addressed
Envelope. Retains the former and gives her
The envelope.]*

Do you know what this means?

The trim red piece of paper

In the corner?

(*The Lion ...*, [italicised, mine] Noon, pp.49-50).

He surreptitiously guides Sidi's infatuation and makes her completely overawed by the idea of embossing her images on thousands of tax stamps.

When Sidi admits that she had not seen the device ever before, Baroka cunningly plays on Sidi's ignorance. He convinces her that he is not against progress after all as Lakunle (his rival) had accused him; for he believes in modernity, a kind fashioned out from the traditional foundations of his community, not the imported one foisted on Ilujinle as Lakunle sheepishly imitates. The dramatist exploits Baroka's views to express the dignity and worth of the African in fashioning out his own sense of change and development.

Baroka: The work dear child, of the palace blacksmiths
Built in full secrecy. ***All is not well with it*** –
But I will find the cause and then Ilujinle
Will boast its own tax on paper, made with
Stamps like this. For long I dreamt it
And here it stands, child of my thoughts

Sidi: [*wonder-struck.*] You mean ... this will work some day?

(*The Lion ...*, [Bold italicised, mine] Noon, p.50).

What is of interest, however, to the reader is Sidi's inability to see through the tricks of Baroka whose stamp machine is not likely to work. The dramatist makes this

obvious fact real with the deliberate inclusion of the caesura, the stage direction and the ellipsis embedded in Sidi's question. This dramatic skill culminates to dull Sidi's intelligence and reduce her to the position of a gull. Baroka coaxes her thus: "... can you see it, Sidi?/ Tens of thousands of these dainty prints/ And each one with this legend of Sidi./ [*Flourishes the magazine, open in the middle*]/ The village goddess, reaching out/ Towards the sun, her lover./ Can you see it, my daughter! [*Sidi drowns herself totally in the contemplation, takes the magazine but does not even look at it. Sits on the bed.*] (*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.51). This portrayal ostensibly demonstrates the supposition that women are easy prey to the ravenous intrigues of cunning men, like Baroka who calculatingly had "dreamt it long ago" to preserve and later annex the virgin plots of lives, for their comforts.

In developing the structure of the intrigues connected to the trickster in the play, Soyinka switches the roles of the main characters to exhibit oppositional disguises which seem to be the dominating element in the pattern. Baroka in Act III (Night) manifests the role of a wily and crafty rogue, perhaps similar to Jonson's Volpone to deceive the jewel of Ilujinle. Earlier in the plot, he condescends into a state of buffoonery, what Lakunle describes as "childish nonsense" to exhibit the role of a buffoon. In Act I (Morning), Soyinka presents the hero acting the role of a clown jester, observing and directing the miming in the songs and dances of the village folk. He is portrayed as an illiterate old chief whose language is infested with a debased verbiage of a village clown, compounded with some localisms that ironically present him as a drunk. Perhaps, Jonson's portrayal of Volpone as a buffoon in the mountebank scene where he acts his disguise to woo Celia finds a

comparison with Soyinka's Baroka. Jonson makes his hero speak in a prosaic language full of verbiage and compounded with sheer nonsense. In Soyinka's portrayal, when we first encounter the hero, he emerges from behind appearing "wiry and goateed".

Baroka: Akowe. Teacher wa. Misita Lakunle.

Lakunle: A good morning to you sir.

Baroka: Guru morin guru morin, ngh-hn! That is
All we get from 'alakowe'. You call at his house
Hoping he sends for beer, but all you get is
Guru morin. Will guru morin wet my throat?

(The Lion ..., Morning, p.16).

Later in Act II (Noon) Baroka acts the role of an over-lord and a "lover boy" who has sent an emissary to woo a new wife for him. Interestingly, when news reaches him about Sidi's refusal to marry him he pulls the prank of his impotence to act the role of a decrepit old buffoon as he cunningly declares to Sadiku:

Baroka: The time has come when I can fool myself
No more. I am no man, Sadiku. My manhood
Ended near a week ago.

Sadiku: The gods forbid.

Baroka: I wanted Sidi because I still hoped –
A foolish thought I know, but still – I hoped
That, with a virgin young and hot within,

My failing strength would rise and save my pride.

A waste of hope. I knew it even then.

But it's a human failing never to accept

The worst; and so I pondered to my vanity.

When manhood must, it ends.

The well of living, tapped beyond its depth,

Dries up, and mocks the wastrel in the end.

I am withered and unsapped, the joy

Of ballad-mongers, the aged butt

Of youth's ribaldry.

(*The Lion ...*, Noon, p.29).

Baroka's buffoonery is particularly manifested when "his voice goes drowsy" during the interaction with Sadiku while he acts the disguise of a helpless sixty-two year old chief whose feigned impotence makes him a weakling in apposition to his predecessors. In this scene, Sadiku is presented as acting both the role of a faithful emissary and a trusted comforter. She keeps the 'secret' to herself but later in the play she acts the role of a buffoon prankster by betraying the trust reposed in her as she divulges the supposed impotence secret to Sidi (and Lakunle) during her victory dance.

For Sidi, whose naivety and intelligence later mature to present her as an egoistic self-confident woman as portrayed in Act I and II (Morning and Noon), the dramatist manipulates her role as the precious jewel hunted by predators to act the new role of a predator. In Act III (Night) when she goes into Baroka's palace she

“wears” the disguise of a predator in search of a “clown” jester to feed her new found prestige and ego, and also “to mock the devil” of the fox whose “twitching hands... cannot/ Rush to loosen his trouser cords”. (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.35). The dramatist later swaps these roles, of Sidi as an imposter and Baroka as the gull, through fake pretences connected with the hunting motif and associated with the trickster plot in the play. The intent is to project the lies, buffoonery, deception and flattery which disfigure human interactions and confuse relationships paving way for the triumph of the trickster to sport with society. Ultimately, Soyinka ensures that there is wit in deception and there is glory in the changing roles as all the characters are subsumed under the pranks of the cunning fox.

Soyinka is conscious of his role as the plotter of the entire structural design in which both the knaves and the gulls interact to execute the wit and mischief inherent in the gull-knave pattern. He exploits the knavery and resourcefulness exhibited by Baroka (assisted by Sadiku) in contriving cunning ways of hunting for the jewel and clamping down on the other gulls who exhibit various manifestations of the disfigured human relations to portray the oppositional disguises between the gulls and the knaves.

Sadiku’s role, as both a knave and a gull, has been crafted to perform specific roles in the plot similar to Jonson’s role assigned to Mosca, who aids Volpone in executing the roguery in *Volpone*. In the scenes where Sadiku assists Baroka to ‘collect’ more brides for him and acts as a go-between to entice Sidi, she is portrayed as a knave. However, when she acts the victory dance with Sidi celebrating the triumph of women over men, she is portrayed as a buffoon. The

dramatist uses Sadiku's role as the eldest and most senior wife of Baroka coupled with her accolade as "the queen" of Baroka's harem, the "most faithful" and "All-knowing" wife to be trusted with secrets of the husband, to portray frightening insights about human interactions.

As the eldest and most senior wife, Sadiku had earlier in life (as the "youngest and freshest of the wives", *The Lion ...*, Night, p.32) "scotched" the great Okiki (Baroka's father) and rendered him redundant as a weak man because of his "rusted key". This naturally paved way for her new position as the first wife (of Baroka) whose duty is to nurture new breeds of her kind to smother and "encase a sweet sensuality in men which age [supposedly] will not destroy", but ultimately her aim is to "eat" men up completely. The dramatist uses the new roles of Sadiku to portray the new found idealism of feminism that gained grounds in the late nineteen sixties and its influence on the psyche of the African woman who seeks to contest the traditional patriarchy of men in society and enunciate a new kind of freedom and power for women. In the opening scene of Act III (Night) Sadiku enunciates her victory song over Baroka (and by implication all men).

So we did for you too did we? We did for
you in the end. Oh high and mighty lion, have
we really scotched you? A – ya – ya – ya ... we
women undid you in the end. I was there
when it happened to your father, the great Okiki.
I did for him, I, the youngest and freshest of the
wives. I killed him with my strength. I called him

and he came at me, but no, for him, this was
not like other times. I, Sadiku, *was I not flame
itself and he the flax on old women's spindles?*

I ate him up! Race of mighty lions, we always
consume you, at our pleasure we spin you, at
our whim we make you dance; like the

foolish top you think the world revolves
around you... fools! fools! ...

(*The Lion ...*, Bold italics mine, Night, p.32).

The imagery of Sadiku as “the flame itself” ignited to set ablaze “the flax” of Okiki denotatively portrays the destructive force of women from time immemorial in their dealings with men. Connotatively, it suggests the assumable posture of a simple flame (woman) lying while the man is on top of her during sexual intercourse between the female and male. Ironically, the wriggling movement of the “Race of mighty lions” during intercourse “like a snake” seems to suggest they are in control but little do they realise that “Sadiku’s unopened treasure-house demanded sacrifice”, so “like a limp rag, smeared in shame”, the men are overthrown in the end.

The sexual imagery coupled with the destructive force of the “flame” suggests the dual function of Sadiku in the plot as both the enchanter and the enchanted, the cozener and the cozened. In her dealings with Sidi at the beginning of Act II (Noon) she acts the role of a faithful and dutiful emissary under the guise of friendship and love for both Baroka and her ultimate aim of collecting more brides for her victory

dance later, similar to how Mosca relates to Bonario in Jonson's *Volpone*. Sadiku employs her "honey tongue" to convince Sidi to be the Bale's last wife since there are enormous privileges associated with that position. In addition, she derides Lakunle's attempts at convincing the village girls against the payment of bride-price. She also defends the allegations levelled by Lakunle against the Bale as an anti-progress chief in a bid to assure Sidi that Baroka is a better husband than Lakunle.

The reader appreciates the degree of Sadiku's intelligence, wit and comic villainy which simulates Mosca's role as dramatised in his dealings with the gulls in Jonson's play. Just as Jonson designs Mosca's role as a self-conceited poisonous being, so Sadiku's role has been designed by her creative mentor to reflect the cunning and deceptiveness of women who backstab their fellow humans through careless gossips by divulging secrets. Soyinka's Sadiku possesses a poison (inherently a trait in most women who have a propensity to chatter about and in those verbal acts they utter both the despicable and unmentionables) which destroys. Lakunle hints at this fact when he chides Sadiku's irreverence in divulging the 'secret' of Baroka to Sidi:

Could you not keep a secret?

Must every word leak out of you

As surely as the final drops

Of mother's milk

Oozed from your flattened breast

Generations ago? (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.35).

The imagery of women's irascibility and cantankerous attitude, conveyed through the rhetorical question that has been associated with their hormonal set up, dates back to "generations ago". Apparently it has the potency to be transmitted to succeeding generations. Later in the play, during the interaction between Sidi and Baroka when Sidi's unguarded and ribald comments about a hypothetical suitor give her away, Baroka admits that Sidi has been a "most diligent pupil of Sadiku". He confirms that "among all shameless women,/ The sharpest tongues grow from that one/ Peeling bark –" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.47).

The reference to Sadiku's sharp tongue which peels the bark (of trees) suggests her crafty and poisonous nature which could lead events to a climatic point unleashing in its wake a tragic denouement in the plot. The dramatist's skill mutes the destructiveness of Sadiku's tongue and introduces a liberal adequate explanation to suit his satiric purposes of transposing unpleasant and unpardonable deeds in humans to the ridiculous. Baroka, in a sharp mild contrast refers to Sadiku's proper designation as "my faithful lizard!" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.47) to reflect the mythological sub-structure of the play which permits the human mind to avoid the discernment of some unpleasant dilemma associated with women in general. In the realm of Science the metabolic processes of reptiles, the lizard inclusive, universally shedding off its outer skin in exhibiting their uniqueness and existential dilemmas captures Baroka's imagery of Sadiku as a lizard. The lizard's ability to change its colour and separately rotate its eyes as well as its slow quavering and fast walks are distinctive traits of the genotype Baroka is attributing to his wife, Sadiku.

Soyinka exploits the imagery of the lizard and assigns Sadiku a role to reflect the cosmology of some African people as expressed in some legends, myths, art works and folktales. Fagg (1963, 2014) in a study of a typical Nigerian archaeological work that has a portrait of a lizard points out that the tail of the lizard (and chameleon) among the Edo people of the Benin Kingdom refers to concepts of time and ancestors. Its self-generative tail symbolizes the transformative power of the diviner, and its ability to change to meet any situation makes it a symbol of wisdom. In addition, the lizard (and the chameleon) is also regarded as the spy in the magical night and its capability to adapt to quick situations provides a clue to refer to tricky and unscrupulous persons. Fagg makes reference to the lizard's ability to transform its appearance similar to the Ijebu-Yoruba peoples' history of surviving attacks and defeating powerful enemies during the late nineteenth century to common motifs in trickster myths among the people.

The Lizard in Yoruba metaphysics is known as *Alangba*. Ogunjobi (2015) recounts a folktale titled, "The Tortoise, The Lizard, and The Cave of Yams" among the Yoruba people to suggest the tricky nature of the lizard. The story elaborates on the cunning of Lizard who accidentally learns of the secret of a yam farmer in dealing with a dearth that had hit the community. The Lizard feeds and sustains itself on the secret for a long time until one day when he decides to reveal the secret to Tortoise whose innocence and naivety in cunning and also stealing from the farmer results in him being caught by the farmer. Fagg's study and Ogunjobi's tale of the Lizard put into perspective Soyinka's portrayal of Sadiku who "faithfully" acts her roles (as Baroka identifies them, the "All-knowing", the "match-maker without

prompting” and the “role of a go-between”). Each of the roles has been designated with a fusion of varied grammatical word classes ranging through adverbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions, participles, verb phrases etc. to suggest Sadiku’s hypocrisy, cunning, witticism, pranks and deviousness in her new found feminism.

The dramatist is well aware of the limitations of the Lizard (*Alangba*) when pitched against the cunning of the Fox (*Ko’lo’ko’lo’*) in Yoruba metaphysics, so his skill subsumes the role of Sadiku to the Bale’s wily ways. Baroka declares to Sidi during the discussions on the hypothetical suitor (that precede the seduction scene) that he “knows the ways of women, and I know/ Their ruinous tongues” (*The Lion ... , Night*, p.44-5) to suggest the immodesty and frailty of the “new and strange disease” (*The Lion ... , Night*, p.49) of feminism which ironically portrays women as easily susceptible to flattery and sinister witticism. Sadiku herself is aware of this truth and after celebrating her supposed victory dance with her new found disciple, she warns Sidi thus: “You will have to match the Fox’s cunning. Use your bashful looks and be truly repentant” (*The Lion ... , Night*, p.35).

Soyinka’s skill exploits the fox imagery to empower Baroka in the wrestling scenes which obviously demonstrate the hero’s physical strength. Baroka’s cunning intellect perfectly understands the vanity of youthful bashfulness and the coquetties of women. Hence, he like the fox, therefore devises cunning ways to entrap his prey, Sidi, with the very energies that animated her as the village belle, trapped to carry the honorific responsibility of showcasing her new status to the outside world on the stamps. Baroka gradually draws the prey into his trap, by exploiting Sidi’s naivety and infatuation with the new ideas (imbibed from Lakunle) of progress.

The dramatist tweaks Baroka's skillful rhetoric on the magnificent strategy to bring progress to Ilujinle and his artful manipulation of Sidi's emotions to effect the transformation in the strong-headed beauty queen who now agrees "to carry the country's mail/ All on [her] comeliness" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.51). Baroka's seductive rhetoric reveals his adept skill in dealing with the kinds of Sidi who must be goaded and prodded to "... inherit/ Miracles which age alone reveals./ Is this not so?". Sidi's last comment before the "rape scene" demonstrates the success of Baroka's cunning: "Everything you say, Bale,/ Seems wise to me" made more concrete with the dramatist's skill in the stage direction pointing to the truth that Sidi is completely submerged under Baroka's cunning as "*Sidi's head falls slowly on the Bale's shoulder*" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.54).

Soyinka ensures that the fox, aided by his parasite, takes on several disguises and shapes (as a Machiavellian frightful Bale, a pleasure lover-boy, a contemptible impotent old chief, a virile over-powering wrestler, and an artful manipulator and seducer) with the sole aim of gulling society (and also guiding society to progress) reechoes the familiar figure of the trickster who always devises fleeing ways to satisfy his fundamental appetites to the detriment of societal good. Why should the trickster always outsmart society with all its sophistication in greed, avarice and inordinate sensibilities? The reader finds the trickster's antics amusing and laughs not just at the deviousness of his tricks but precisely at the gulls' daftness and what Good (1988) describes as the trickster's "unpretentious straight-forwardness" (p. 117).

The trickster is deceitful but overtly skillful about his trickery in employing a blend of survival skills in hunting. Soyinka's Baroka simulates the archetypal fox trickster who in its varied manifestations becomes a metaphor of humans' capacity to see the world and aspects of ourselves as ambiguous, chaotic and unbound because Baroka's characteristics exhibit the fluidity of identity as they shape-shift to reflect the cultural, environmental, gender and religious considerations of African communities. The portrayal of Baroka as a fox trickster exhibits a certain level of complexity which illuminates, in a refracted way, the complexity of its readers.

In the Jonsonian pattern of the gull-knave structure the dramatist assigns to the knaves the superior moral insights to prevail over the dupes. The knaves are presented as the moral scourge with a metaphorical whip to ensure that society divests itself from the follies and inadequacies exhibited by the gulls. Quite similarly in the Soyinka model, the knaves – portrayed in the characters of Baroka and his (wife) assistant, Sadiku – exhibit a superior moral know-how in dealing with Lakunle and The Stranger as gulls hunting for the gleam, Sidi. The socio-cultural demands of marriage in the payment of the bride-price become the moral high ground for the knaves to execute judgement on the dupes.

In the play, the dramatist introduces this payment of the bride-price into the plot to generate a discourse on what the African society considers acceptable as far as marriage is concerned. Sidi is presented as the symbol of the author's moral burden and expression of the belief in this practice. This explains her insistence for its payment as a condition for the hunters to annex her as a trophy, especially if we see her as the metaphor of the unspoilt African society. In the earlier scenes we have

witnessed how The Stranger takes innumerable photo shots of Sidi with relish and Lakunle's mock obsequiousness and indulgent indignation at the payment of the bride-price as an uncivilized and barbaric custom.

The dramatist uses these scenes to portray his criticism of the depraved moral perversion and the current distortions in the socio-cultural lives of the deracinated African who espouses foreign religious dogmas or beliefs in preference for his societal mores. Sadiku's role in scourging and deriding Lakunle's uncompromising stance in the payment of Sidi's bride-price even after it turns out that Sidi had been deflowered, coupled with her commitment in ensuring that due processes are followed in 'properly' marrying Sidi to the Bale serves the artistic interest of projecting her as a woman with a superior moral insight despite the fact that she may be uneducated in the ways of what Sidi refers to as "book-nourished Shrimp" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.63).

The dramatist's skill in investing Sadiku with this higher moral insight over Lakunle is to unequivocally criticize the ineptitude and silly mentality of some educated Africans who equate their acquisition of book knowledge to commonsensical approaches in solving problems of life. Sadiku may be an illiterate "savage and a brabarbarian" but her role (similar to Mosca's in *Volpone* and Subtle and Dol in *The Alchemist*) in contributing to the satiric exposure of the gull, Lakunle, serves the artistic interest of revealing Soyinka's moral posturing in the play.

The dramatist is well aware of his role as an African writer whose relevance to his community is to correctly interpret the beliefs and practices of his larger society to

the outside world and also to correct the distortions and perversions that denigrate the African personality. His portrayal of Baroka's ideas of progress in Ilujinle may seem slow and shrouded in secrecy as compared to Lakunle's which superficially appears modern and radical. However, Soyinka prefers the maintenance of tradition to the sudden unreasonable changes Lakunle proffers which obviously have the propensity to transform completely the real identity of peoples of the African descent. Lakunle sets out to eradicate the core values of the African by abolishing the bride-price, banishing the use of clay pots and other artefacts because he thinks they are "unhygienic". In addition, he intends to "burn the forest, cut the trees; print newspapers every day/ With pictures of seductive girls" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.36-37).

These emblems of progress rather seem bizarre and detrimental to the survival and sustenance of the African psyche and community as a whole. They manifest a complete dissolution of the core social values that define the society. Conversely, Baroka's ideas of progress are gradual, realistic and commonsensical. He advocates a change rooted in the observance of core traditional African values not detached from the past but blended with modern technological trends to produce a better integrated personality who appreciates the saying: "The old must flow into the new, Sidi,/ Not blind itself or stand foolishly/ Apart. ... the truth of this, Old wine thrives best/ Within a new bottle" (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.54).

Soyinka's vision of progress cautions the African society of wholesale adoption of Western values which jettisons our traditions in preference for "murderous roads" and other icons of civilization like modern houses, cars, clothes etc. The dramatist

demonstrates his vision of progress in the creation of Sidi's personality who, though imbibes the progressive ideas from Lakunle, she does not forget her foundations in the observance of core traditional African values. Soyinka's deliberate choice in making Sidi to marry Baroka in spite of the hero's cunning and supposed backwardness rather than Lakunle is a testament of the dramatist's artistic vision and his moral commitment to his society.

Soyinka's structuring of events in the play and the artistic choice he makes in allowing both Baroka and Sadiku to triumph over Lakunle in their hunt of the jewel reveals his investiture of the knaves with a superior knowledge of the moral penal code in society, which thrives on the excitements of the trickstering fox tale. The success of this scheme depends to a large extent on the wit and understanding displayed by both Baroka and Sadiku on the one hand and the maturity and traditional wisdom of Sidi on the other hand.

The resourcefulness of Soyinka in crafting a trickster tale to exhibit a semblance of Jonson's skill in which the knaves contrive ways out of seemingly difficult circumstances to exploit the weaknesses of the gull as a means to prosper demonstrates an artist who understands the workings of the comic law (as inherited from the Ancients) in which knavery and outmanoeuvring are the key elements of comedy. His heroine, Sidi, admits that Baroka's superior wit in outsmarting both Sadiku and her had been at play when Baroka had earlier intimated his impotence as a bait to entrap new maidens.

When Sadiku confronts Sidi about her maidenhood being deflowered by Baroka, the latter chides the former thus:

Fool! You little fools! It was a lie.

The frog. The cunning frog!

He lied to you Sadiku.

He told me ... afterwards, crowing.

It was a trick.

He knew Sadiku would not keep it to herself,

That I, or maybe other maids would hear of it

And go to mock his plight.

And how he laughed!

How his frog-face croaked and croaked

And called me little fool! (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.59).

Baroka is fully aware of the innuendoes and sarcastic jibes which the African society hurls at men with this impotence problem. Most men desperately fear situations which will expose their sexual limitations since they know their wives may use this knowledge to either punish them for some suspected extramarital affairs or report the impotence to both the nuclear and extended families to initiate divorce. Impotence in the African society is an extremely sensitive topic of conversation and most men will keep it a secret rather than make it a public gossip.

Harrell-Bond (1975, 2019) cites a psychiatric study conducted by Leighton, et al. (1963) in Western Yorubaland. The findings suggest that a large proportion of the men suffer from impotence and they seek medical practitioners for cures. The epidemiological survey used for the study confirms that impotence among the Yoruba men is a distinctly serious concern which they will keep away from the

larger community. Baroka's willful disclosure of this "secret" and his weakling demeanour exhibited during the narration to Sadiku are key elements of his roguery.

The dramatist exploits another reptile imagery of the frog (known in Yoruba as *akěřě kónkó*) to portray Baroka's cunning. Olaniyi (2004) in a study of the metamorphosis and integration process of the Yoruba commercial settlement, their identity and integration in pre-colonial Kano observes some indexes of the Yoruba. One of the key indexes of identification of the Yoruba people in Kano is their cunning and industry in textile, kola nut, foodstuff and livestock trades in the early 19th century. During their settlement patterns they cunningly outsmarted the Nupe people in the process of granting lands to them and this generated the name "Ayagi" for the Yorubas. It is a deceptive word to refer to the cunning man who eats 'frog' and 'snake'. Olaniyi intimates that the descriptive word ("Ayagi") had characterised the Yoruba man in business from the early 14th century.

Soyinka might be acquainted with these historical facts and his creation of Baroka's "frog-face" croaking portrays the roguery associated with the trickster's disposition, whose pursuit of pleasure and joys of artful intrigue excites the reader in spite of the lingering moral reservations. His heroine, Sidi, taunts Lakunle in the final scenes thus:

Sidi: You may come too if you wish,

You are invited.

Lakunle: [*Lost in the miracle of transformation.*]

Well I should hope so indeed

Since I am to marry you.

Sidi: [*turns round in surprise.*]

Marry who...? You thought ...

Did you really think that you, and I ...

Why, did you think after him,

I could endure the touch of another man?

I who have felt the strength,

The perpetual youthful zest

Of the panther of the tress?

And would I choose a watered-down,

A beardless version of unripened man?

(*The Lion ...*, Night, p.63).

Sidi's invitation to Lakunle to witness her nuptial celebrations is metaphorically extended to the reader who is made complicit in the roguery of Baroka whose use of tricks and intrigues effectively gull both Lakunle and Sadiku's "All-knowing" posturing. The reader appreciates the dramatist's satiric posturing (as expressed in Lakunle's fanciful ideas and Sadiku's feminism dance) which apparently dictates how the dupes are treated in the afore-mentioned imagery of the frog croaking laughter scene and Sidi's choice of "the panther of the trees" over the "watered-down beardless version of unripened man". In addition, the reader applauds Soyinka's apt use of verbiage imagery to capture the brilliant deceptions and sheer audacity of the trickster in manipulating events in the plot. The reader even supports the strategies and the victories of the knave whose successes are equally transferred to us as we honour Sidi's invitation to the wedding ceremony. There is a level of

satiation and fulfilment in the reader for having also prevailed in the exercise of wit and roguery to participate in the nuptial celebrations.

Pelton's view of the trickster in *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight* (1980) as representing the "human race individually and communally seizing the fragments of his experience and discovering in them an order sacred by its wholeness" captures a truth in conceptualising Soyinka's hero whose intrigues tempt spectators to enjoy and release delightful inhibitions buried in the psyche of humans (p. 255). For a trickster's status in tales manifests certain hidden aberrant impulses which define our humanity and brings into the social institution new possibilities for action and self-understanding generating a deliberate balance between creativity and destructiveness.

Baroka's sexual triumph over Sidi may pose a moral problem to destabilise the liminal state of society; however, that same act ensures the preservation of the admirable core values in the African society creating a "meaningful" model out of a "meaningless" and amorphous situation his inaction would have caused. His roguery arising from the foxy nature predisposes him to be seen as an embodiment of complementary opposites of destruction of society's values while at the same time preserving them. Baroka therefore is like a fountain of regenerative energy producing good values out of a distorted underworld of existence. Consequently, we need to see Baroka as a signification of the character of a trickster clothed with a potency to initiate change in society. This explains why a trickster like him is carefree and certain that his every action and movement creates life out of death in consonance with the dramatist's artistic credo.

Soyinka's philosophical idealism of the concepts of destruction and recreation in his artistic works has been credited to his close affinities to his patron god, Ogun which manifests a seemingly enigmatic contradiction as both a destroyer and a creator. In his famous essay, "The Fourth Stage", Soyinka explains the contradiction and affirms that it is also a natural complement.

Ogun is embodiment of Will and the Will is the paradoxical truth of destructiveness and creativeness in acting man. Only one who has himself undergone the experience of disintegration, whose spirit has been tested and psychic resources laid under stress by the most inimical forces to individual assertion, only he can understand and be the force of fusion between the two contradictions. The resulting sensitivity is also the sensitivity of the artist and he is a profound artist only to the degree to which he comprehends and expresses the principle of destruction and recreation (p.126).

Part of Soyinka's artistic vision in *The Lion and The Jewel* is not to satirise the social evils of greed and perverse buffoonery which may appear destructive, but his commitment to recreating a new social order grounded on the solid maintenance of the traditions of society generates a process of recreation. This is Soyinka's moral responsibility as an artist who shares in the moral burdens of his sixteenth century dramatist, Jonson, in fashioning out comedies that "mix profit with ... pleasure" (Prologue, *Volpone*, Line 8). His deep commitment to his role as an African artist

compels him to take into account all the clumsiness and anarchic social behaviour of Baroka's trickery of Sadiku and his seduction of Sidi to contribute significantly to the birth and evolution of culture despite the hero's sheer exhibitions of selfishness, cleverness and buffoonery especially considering the fact that Lakunle is still unprepared to pay the bride-price of Sidi. The dramatist's skill in recreating culture and regenerating society in the final scene of the play where we witness Sidi fully adorned in her bride's attire and kneeling at Sadiku's feet asking for her blessing for the expected child in a fully pervasive festive atmosphere inaugurates the spirited society which will have to be ready to embrace the change.

The dramatist's deliberate choice of Sadiku to perform the rituals associated with the wedding of Sidi and Baroka coupled with the celebratory atmosphere of songs, music and dance portrays the regenerative process of society which must continue through successive generations. Her metaphorical role as the "faithful lizard" of Baroka's harem confers on her the position of a kind of a chief priest officiating the destruction of the social evils of society (as manifested in Sidi's pride and coquettishness, Baroka's cunningness and deviousness and her own garrulous and unbridled tongue) and ushering in a new dispensation of hope for future generations. Thus, it is in her metaphorical performativity role of the ecdysiast in society that she declares to Sidi:

I invoke the fertile gods.

They will stay with you. May the time come soon

When you shall be a round-bellied as a full

Moon in a low sky. (*The Lion ...*, Night, p.64).

The regenerative process of society through pregnancy and birth is the metaphorical underpinnings of the Ogun philosophy wherein life disintegrates and recreates itself. Soyinka's art recognizes the moral sensibilities of his immediate society. However, he does not create his characters deliberately to carry his moral burden or to reflect his psychological outlook but his skill in manipulating the trickster story of the fox as critiques of the social evils in society as well as initiate a regenerative process of dealing with the social disorder becomes a metaphor in reaffirming the belief systems of society, that good can come out from evil. Perhaps, it is this resultant affirmation of a kind of positivism that the contradiction in Soyinka's Ogun philosophical idealism as dramatised in the play mediates the balance in society. As Street (1999) suggests, the role of a trickster in a story is to mediate a balance between creativity and destructiveness, for "to question everything in society would lead to stagnation, the conflict is presented, and the balance achieved ... a universal feature of the trickster is his role as both revolutionary and saviour" (p. 97). Soyinka's Baroka struggles to do his "worst" and in those acts the unforeseen good emerges.

Unlike the Jonsonian skill which initiates a justice system based on the legal code through the public punishment of vice in the formal court system where the knaves suffer for the chaos and ills they have committed against societal mores, the Soyinkan model seeks to reform society by implicating both the knaves and the gulls in follies of greed and over-arching ambitions of pride that offend the moral sensibilities of society and liberating them through the regenerative process of the

patron god, Ogun. Both dramatists, however, are committed moralists whose artistic aims in the comedic genre seek to entertain and to make society a better one.

Soyinka's Artistic Skills in *The Trials of Brother Jero*

Soyinka's success in exploiting the fox imagery for the portrayal of the trickster figure in *The Lion and the Jewel* coupled with his artistic vision of refashioning his version of the archetypal trickster hero to reflect his uniqueness as an African writer defines his creation of yet another trickster character in his short comic play, *The Trials of Brother Jero* which also exhibits some echoes from the Jonsonian model. The fox image of the trickster in *The Trials*, however, is conveyed through certain commonalities expressed among West African people in the creation of the popular culture hero of a trickster. Such a trickster triumphs due to his cunningness, shrewd behaviour and an avowed predisposition to succeed despite the chaos his actions create. Some common examples of such tricksters include Ananse (among the Akan in Ghana), Legba (among the Fon people in Benin), Ogo-Yurugu (among the people of central plateau region of Mali and the people in Burkina Faso), Eshu-Elegbara (among the Yoruba of Nigeria) and in Central Africa, Ture (among the Azandes of Sudan). These tricksters are always portrayed, as Hynes (1997) describes them, "as an out person" because their activities are often "outlawish, outlandish, outrageous, out of bounds and out-of-order" (p.34). These trickster figures characteristically move swiftly and thoughtlessly back and forth across all boundaries in society with virtual latitude, with the sole aim of satisfying their ego.

In *The Trials*, Soyinka creates his hero, Bro Jeroboam, (Jero, for short) to reflect the trickstering “out-of-order” fox who shares affinities with the metaphysical content of one of the revered gods among both the Fon people in Benin and the Yoruba people of Nigeria. The dramatist, in crafting the play, focuses on the idiosyncratic personality of Eshu-Elegbara, (or Legba) whom most West African people, according to Davis (1999), ascribe cultic rites through “spiritual communication, divination and the peculiar chaotic” sensibilities of the trickster (p. 45).

Davis (1999) intimates that Eshu-Elegbara (shortened as Eshu) is “a divine mediator of fate and information, a linguist, and a crafty metaphysician”. He is a trickster “not just because he fools people and creates chaos”, but more profoundly because he is always escaping the very codes of society he is expected to enforce (p. 47). Ironically, though Eshu gives the world the divination system of Ifa, he does not rule over its poetic prophecies because he is always “flowing through the cracks of fate” (p.47). In addition, Eshu expresses a spiritual principle of connection, between chaos and complexity of exchange making him a god with varied stories, moods and lusts. Within the West African tradition, especially among the Yoruba, Eshu therefore becomes an embodiment of principles that are real when they are brought into the fabric of daily life, of the noticeably human patterns of the craze for money, family, sex, power and language as emblematic features of a people’s culture.

Eshu consequently possesses what Carroll (1984) describes as “enormous sexual appetites” which apparently explains the insatiable greed and inordinate evil

concupiscence in humans. (p. 110). This is made concrete in the metaphysics of the Yoruba people who, according to Davis, “hold Eshu responsible for acts of adultery and illicit sexual relations generally. The long pigtails which are typical of the hairstyle associated with Eshu are often carved in the shape of a penis on statuettes of Eshu” (p. 49). The obvious association between Soyinka’s trickster figure, Jero, and the Eshu personality in the oral tradition of the Yoruba is evident in the dramatist’s vision of portraying varied manifestations of the human condition through the popular mode of the comedic genre, to reflect a society in which roguery, deception, gulling are an “acceptable norm”, and one motivating force in human action is insatiable greed.

The dramatist valorizes this greed in humans (in the play) to reflect the manifestations of the socio-economic imbalance in his immediate society which apparently became increasingly individualistic and self-centered. The emergence of capitalism coupled with the economic revolution in Nigeria during the mid-forties created a growing feeling of pride and nationalism among the citizenry especially in the lives of the emergent middle class to the neglect of the marginalised and impoverished masses. There was a marked improvement dramatically in all aspects of life among the elite – education, health, and social infrastructure.

Ekundare (1973) in his *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860 – 1960* provides a detailed account of the socio-economic activities in Nigeria, and traces how the society had transitioned from a purely agrarian to a market economy which tended to idealize individual ambition. Educational facilities had improved greatly and

increasing numbers of Nigerians were educated outside the country resulting in the emergence of an educated elite class of lawyers, doctors, administrators, politicians, and other professionals. who advocated and participated in both the political and economic reforms of the country.

Prior to independence, Ekundare's report suggests that the total expenditure of the elites under the Colonial Development and Welfare schemes increased from about £2,995,000 in 1948 to £9,408,000 in 1950. This figure even rose to £36,380,000 in 1955. In addition, the value of domestic exports increased from £23.7 million in 1946, to £129.8 million and £165.6 million in 1955 and 1960 respectively. The value of total imports also increased from £19.8 million in 1946 to £136.1 million and £215.9 million in 1955 and 1960 respectively. All this cumulatively generated an increasing number of private businesses to be set up and the booming of an economic prosperous climate which engendered a "profound anxiety over ostentatious displays of wealth and an unprecedented social mobility" among the elite by the time of independence in 1960. Ironically, the Nigerian Federal Government which was expected to expand the resources to bring improvement in the provision of infrastructure, training programmes and general services that will benefit the masses became excessively greedy and looted the country's resources for their personal gains.

These naturally created an imbalance in society since everyone was interested in actualising the popular cliché at the time of independence, to "get a piece of the national cake". The spirit of competition, scrambling for resources and avariciousness manifested in all aspects of society. Obviously, these developments

served as a rich source of materials for literary artists. Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana*, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* are good examples of the artistic portrayal of the socio-economic malaise which had plagued the Nigerian society.

In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka manipulates the effect of the socio-economic malaise on both the middle class elites and the majority poor to create a kind of a tension between the individual and society. For the middle class, their desire to maintain the status quo leads them into further destructive exhibition of greed which ironically plunges them into the condition of buffoonery, daftness and outright stupidity. On the part of the masses, the tension generated an unnerving anxiety for them to change their socio-economic statuses by annexing society's cherished values and instituting a new life-style of roguery, lies, deceit as a means of actualising their fundamental desires.

Soyinka exploits the boundless energies exhibited by both groups to create a titillating and exciting but also extremely disturbing society of mischief, mistrust, and fraud to produce a new order of greed in contemporary Nigeria. This socio-economic background against which Soyinka crafts his play finds a comparison in Jonson's *The Alchemist* in which Jonson's skill justifies the roguery trade of Face and his companions in the English society. In Jonson's artistic world, the rogues take advantage of the imbalance in society to perpetuate their nefarious activities because of the gullible middle classes' search for the "Philosopher's Stone" which ironically became the expression of the incessant greed among the upper class. In Soyinka's artistic world, the dire economic conditions of the marginalised poor

compel them to find solace in religion, which obviously as the Marxian theology instructs became the opium to soothe their egregiousness and also to initiate the roguery trade.

The dramatist provides a cynicism of contemporary society in the activities of the new religious groupings and Christian missionaries whose rampant sectarianism by the 1960s at the Lagos Bar Beaches created not only avenues for the roguery trade among the churches but also became a subject of ridicule. The hero in his play is described as the “Articulate Hero of Christ’s Crusade” (*The Trials...*, Scene Three, p.19). Jero exhibits a life-style craft of pulling a prank on both the emergent middle class people and the ordinary masses. He is a self-serving rogue (similar to both Jonson’s Volpone and Face) who is driven by greed and an insatiable sexual appetite for “the daughters of Eve”. From the beginning of the play in the first scene till the end, Jero is presented as a self-acclaimed master prankster whose skills in deception and sheer roguery excites the reader rather than repels him. He is also a self-styled knave who knows how to manipulate his clientele to achieve his sole aim of keeping them always “dissatisfied people” who keep coming to him (*The Trials...*, Scene Three, p.20). For as his philosophy of the trade suggests, “once they are full, they won’t come again” (p. 20).

In fact, his capacity to deceive both the highly placed middle-class and the commoners, keeping them always in an expectant “better tomorrow” mood, and his irrelevant fleecing of their resources for his personal comfort take on a significance in the play as the dominant imagery the dramatist uses to develop his trickster hero. Soyinka invests his hero with a moral laxity, like the Eshu figure in Yoruba

cosmology that makes him the anti-thesis of a true religious leader; a kind of a free agent liberated from all the restraints that regulate the “prophetic trade”. In addition, Jero is endowed with an intelligence and cunningness to out-think most of the characters who rather pathetically exhibit the gullibility in humans at the hands of tricksters. It is in the exercise of this intelligence and craft that the trickster exhibits his ability to move the action of the play.

Soyinka’s *The Trials* ... portrays a society that seems to be sinking under a yoke of insatiable yearnings and greed for materialism arising from the socio-economic realities in Lagos during the early 1960s. The rich, the poor, the professionals, even charlatans, and all categories of humans seek after both the tangible and intangible articles of human existence through the medium of religion with the sole intent of transforming not only their marginalised positions in life, but also to crave for limitless desires. Society’s cherished values as exhibited in intelligence, common sense, hard work and perseverance as the best qualities that guarantee success and socio-economic change in one’s status (in life) have been buried under the cold logic of seeking the divine. This cold logic is portrayed in the play through the fake churches spluttered along the beaches in Lagos. In the play, Jero tells us that “You have probably seen many of us on the streets, many with their own churches, many inland, many on the coast, many leading processions, many looking for processions to lead”, (*The Trials*..., Scene One, p.9).

The dramatist uses the proliferation of the prophetic trade and the internal wrangling for customers (similar to Jonson’s use of the ‘Philosopher’s Stone’ in *The Alchemist* as the grand symbol of unlimited desires among the English society)

to provide an exploration of the socio-economic imbalance and as a metaphor to portray the ills in the Nigerian society. Chume, for example, after several years in the Civil Service as the Chief Messenger (rising from the position of a labourer) does not go to work. He seeks respite in prayers as a means of actualising his potential first as an assistant prophet, second as an economically decrepit man, and then as a husband who so desires to beat his wife.

In the invocatory prayers he offers on behalf of the congregants, Chume reveals the incessant yearnings of the plight of the ordinary masses and their limitless desires for materialism instead of their quest for the spiritual. He intones thus:

... Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. May you no forget those of us who dey struggle daily. Those who be clerk today, make them Chief Clerk tomorrow. Those who are Messenger today, make them Senior Service tomorrow ... Those who are pretty trader, make them big contractor tomorrow. Those who dey sweep street today, give them their own big office tomorrow. If we de walka today, give us our own bicycle tomorrow ... Those who have bicycle today, they will ride their own car tomorrow. I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow. (*The Trials...*, Scene Three p.29).

The rhetorics as presented in the prayers between the now of “today” and the prospects for a better “tomorrow” do not only express the indexes of the yearnings of society but reflects a craze in society’s indulgence of stupidity and lazy attitudes which naturally create a situation where gulling and the roguery trade will be the order of the day.

The dramatist’s vision therefore is to justify the legitimacy of the existence of rogues and tricksters in society like the ubiquitous presence of Eshu-Elegbara in society. These rogues and tricksters always win the moral battle against society and mesmerise it with their antics and cunning. In addition, society’s inability to restrain its inordinate cravings for materialism within the corrective reasoning of work ethics predisposes it to gullibility and the subsequent duping by the rogues.

Soyinka sustains the reader’s interest in this vision by implicating the reader (audience) to become active participants in Jero’s roguery. He makes Jero to address the reader directly to believe in the idea that he is “a prophet by birth and by inclination”. In addition, his insignia of the Biblical Nazarite vocation of a “rather thick and long hair” flowing down to his eyes and neck proves that he is ordained a natural prophet. Jero confides his secrets of the trade with the reader and prepares to con us into conspiring with him to dupe the gulls in the play. This skill aids the dramatist to devise a structural pattern similar to Jonson’s gull-knave pattern of comic episode. In ensuring the artistic success of this scheme, Soyinka designs the roles of the knave, Jero, (who plots the mischiefs and roguery) and the dupes (who exhibit the stupidity and buffoonery) to reflect the social realities of the

West African society where crime and indecent behaviour have become the modus operandi of modern day churches.

Soyinka's craftsmanship in portraying the gull-knave pattern is evident in the hero's self-confession (to the reader) at the beginning of the play of his roguery intent and his avowed position of not only duping his old master but also duping society. The reader is subconsciously invited to witness how Jero will execute his tricks on his victims. Jero appears to be time-bound. He has to execute this assignment very quickly because there is an audience ready to gulp down his antics. Unlike the Jonsonian model (as dramatised in both *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*) which creates and nurtures a holiday atmosphere of gaiety and laxity within which the rogues operate, the Soyinkan model does not create this holiday atmosphere. Face, Subtle and Dol in *The Alchemist* and Volpone and Mosca in *Volpone* seem to have time to demonstrate their knavery and this explains Jonson's choice of creating the five-act plays full of roguery. However, the Soyinkan model does not create a five-act play. He adopts a modern approach of creating a short five-scene play (instead of the five-act play) which cuts out details of the roguery activities, and also bridges the gap between the hero and the reader. This skill makes the reader complicit in the hero's knavery, and also psychologically prod the hero on to exact more roguery on the dupes since the reader is ever ready to believe whatever Jero tells them rather than the reader witnessing it.

The dramatist, therefore, does not provide detailed accounts of Jero's interactions with the gulls but makes him to recount his roguery escapades and false prophecies about his clients to the reader. The first gull is a man whose status in society is not

indicated. He is predicted to be “a chief in his hometown” only when he “lives to be eighty”. Perhaps, this character shares some similarities with Jonson’s Corbaccio in *Volpone*, an octogenarian who still has hopes of surviving a younger legator to inherit Volpone’s wealth. Soyinka’s interest in this “safe prophecy” is to portray the gullibility of society at the hands of these rakes and false prophets.

In the African society there are clear rules and practices in every community to be followed before someone is declared a chief and for such an unnamed character to believe Jero’s prophecy without assessing his legibility or otherwise but blindly accepting it as truth betrays his daftness and stupidity. No wonder, Jero tells us that he “always comes earliest” to church (*The Trials...*, Scene Three, p.24). Soyinka uses this event to portray his criticism not only of the religious charlatans in society but also modern day nascent capitalism that has invaded our chieftaincy institutions and robbed them off their former glories. Rather sadly, in West Africa, most people use money to buy their way into the revered and sacred chieftaincy institution.

Soyinka’s dupe is not different from the dupes in Jonson’s *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. The easily identifiable trait among the dupes is their inability to think and act reasonably commensurate with their social standing in society. They exhibit the dunce and bizarre posturing in humans striving to rid themselves of stupidity but in reality they manifest themselves as fools and buffoons. Soyinka provides a good example of such a dupe character, the Second Faithful, whose idiotic behaviour bears a semblance to Jonson’s dupe characters, Mammon and Ananias. Soyinka’s character is also most probably someone of high repute, but he manifests the traits of a fool. Here is a man who firmly believes that he is going to be the first

“Prime Minister of the new Mid-North-East State - when it is created” (*The Trials...*, Scene Three, p.25) because a prophet has predicted it. Common sense should dictate that a “Prime Minister” is normally the leader of the majority in Parliament to form a ruling government but it is not a position that one can get out of the ordinary, not even from prophecy. Hence to *firmly believe* such a prophecy manifests the idiocy and stupidity of the so-called leaders of society.

Such a prospective “Prime Minister” in Soyinka’s play shares a semblance with the stupidity of Ananias and Tribulation in Jonson’s *The Alchemist*, who desire to become “temporal lords” in the affairs of life and to determine the future of society. Jonson uses the satirical presentation of the religious leaders to criticize the decadence in the English society, especially as espoused by the hypocrisy in Christianity. Though Christianity is meant to relieve the poor and oppressed, it rather assumes the force of an oppressor. Soyinka also exploits the weaknesses in modern day Christianity, especially politicians’ over-dependence on so-called prophecies to criticize the mental opacity of leaders whose self-abasing and self-deluding characteristics define their degraded worth and buffoonery status.

In the late fifties and sixties, most African states produced emerging political leaders who transformed themselves as “messiahs” supposedly sent by God to redeem the suffering masses from the socio-economic and political strangulation the colonial masters had inflicted on the African. But these leaders failed their societies because they exhibited pathological reductiveness in their mental capabilities as leaders and that incapacitated their performance in the governance of their societies after independence. Soyinka ensures that these leaders (similar to

Jonson's portrayal of Ananias and Tribulation) are cozened by rogues who rather exhibit superior wit and intelligence to rule society. In Scene Five, the dramatist provides a graphic portrayal of the "Honourable Member of the Federal House, a back-bencher" who apparently is aiming at a ministerial position in government. The Member's daftness and greater gullibility amazes the reader who had been made complicit with Jero to execute the knavery. This man we learn carries "a sheaf of notes in his hand" delivering "a fire-breathing speech" but the reader cannot hear it.

The portrayal of the Member's vulnerability and gullibility is manifest in his inability to make the speech despite the fact that he rehearses it every day. It suggests the dunce posturing of leaders who are too scared to act and most probably why they fall victims to rakes like Jero. The Member's inability to exercise prudent judgement in discerning the bait of the "Minister for War" thrown at him, in a country which is not plunged into strife (even if it were so, one will rather expect a portfolio of a 'Minister for Peace'), and his indiscretion in assessing his own leadership qualities make him a victim of Jero's roguery. Jero quizzes him thus: "But are you of the Lord? Are you in fact worthy? Must I... pray to the Lord to remove this mantle from your shoulders and place it on a more God-fearing man? ... Brother, are you of God or are you ranged among his enemies ...? (*The Trials...*, Scene Five, pp. 40-41). Jero had earlier informed the reader that the "revered" legislature is already a victim of his roguery trade and he invites us to watch him exact his antics on him.

The series of rhetorical questions flung at the Member, his crouching posture before Jero, coupled with the dramatist's skill of blending Chume's pursuit of Jero (brandishing a cutlass to kill him) and Jero's constant 'appearance' and 'disappearance' in his dealings with the Member of the Federal House serve the artistic aim of satirising one of the key institutions of governance (the elected representatives of the country) whose blindness and daftness manifest in the kind of atrophied religious solutions they proffer in solving the myriad of problems confronting Africa. The Member interprets Jero's sudden "miraculous disappearance", occasioned by Chume's murderous pursuit, as a visitation of the divine. He believes that he "must await his [the prophet's] return", for if he truly "show[s] faith, he will show himself again. ... Perhaps he has gone to learn more about this ministerial post" (*The Trials...*, Scene five, p. 43). The gullibility of this "nincompoop" (as Jero describes him) testified to by his actions of removing his shoes (with the belief that the place was a holy ground) awaiting the return of the prophet suggests not only Soyinka's outright criticism of political leadership in Africa but their absolute dependence on the providential supply of the divine instead of exercising discretion and intelligence to governance issues.

In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka's satirical jibes are not so much directed at the trickster as at the society, which by its folly and stupidity is obviously open to exploitation. He portrays a society (similar to Jonson's portrayal in *The Alchemist*) in which we observe a cross-section of both the supposed upper classes and the lower classes shamelessly gulled by the roguery of the trickster Jero. All the dupe characters in Soyinka's play: The Member of Parliament, The Prospective Chief,

The Penitent, The Prospective Prime Minister and even Chume - are invested with a common motive and a purpose of changing their socio-economic status in life (which in itself is not a bad motive), but their resort to the lazy-easy-way- approach portrays them as easy prey for gulling. Since Jero has been aligned with Eshu (as the oral narratives of the Yoruba cosmology suggest) he persistently resolves to set the affairs of society in order by offering to be what Pemberton (1975) describes as “the road maker” and the “messenger” for many, through its spiritual characteristics of communication (p. 25).

As “the road maker”, Jero’s greatest asset is his power of communicating his truest intents to the reader. He creates a path for humans to interact with their self-actualising bid. He employs his tongue and wit to manipulate all the dupes to his advantage. His capriciousness, good appearance and agility of body and mind are all characteristics he shares with Eshu. In the oral traditions of the Yoruba, Davis (1999) suggests that Eshu is acknowledged as the messenger in Orisha rituals. No human can interact with the divine except through him. Consequently, one must “feed or call him first before any other gods are invoked” (p. 50). The primacy of Eshu is therefore manifest “through his linguistic ability”, his proficiency at communicating both the aspirations, hopes and the peril of humans: hope because humans come to him in full expectation of being aided; and peril because he plays tricks with the information he has about humans to keep them perpetually gulled and to establish the fact that he oversees the network of exchange. Pelton (1980) intimates that Eshu’s nickname is *Aflakete*, which means, “I have tricked you” (p.72).

Soyinka exploits this piece of Yoruba metaphysics in developing a pattern similar to the Jonsonian pattern of the gull-knave structure. The dramatist invests the knave, Jero, with an outstanding quality of wit and intelligence. This is best displayed in the hero's linguistic ability to take advantage of the depraved mental conditions of his dupes whose buffoonery and daftness attract the dramatist's censure. In developing this structural pattern of the intrigues of the trickster, Soyinka switches the roles of the knave(s) and the gulls to exhibit a kind of oppositional disguise.

Jero at several points in the play is presented as the master crafty communicator rogue who fleeces his clients (or "customers" as he describes them) as a means of enriching himself but as some points he exhibits the lawlessness and buffoonery manifested in his unrestrained sexual appetites which he considers "a very cheap curse" invoked on him by his Master. In the main action of the play, Jero is aided by Chume, his assistant (though also a gull), to defraud society. In these scenes, he appears as a master schemer over-running his dupes with ecstatic amusement through the religious services and prophetic utterances he gibbers. However, the scenes: where he jumps through the window to escape paying his debt to Amope, his inability to control his libido as he daily visualises the near-nakedness of the Young Girl, and "the exposed thighs" of the Woman pursuing the Drummer Boy during the climax of the service, and the resultant beatings he received at the hands of the Woman, portray him as a glorified buffoon. In addition, in the final scene when Chume chases Jero with murderous intent while brandishing a cutlass after him, Jero plays the role of a buffoon. He condescends into a moribund and ghoulish

state that evokes the reader's anxiety and fear. However, Jero recovers from the momentary fright as he transposes his buffoonery to the Member of the Federal House who really exhibits the posturing of a dunce.

The dramatist wedges these oppositional disguises into the personality of Jero to ensure that there is wit in deception and there is glory in changing roles to simulate the prankstering figure of Eshu-Elegba. Despite Amope's watchfulness and vigilance to expose Jero as a debtor and a fake prophet coupled with the Penitent's eagle eye on Jero (regardless of her 'self-abasing convulsions' and paroxysms) and Chume's near-sanity revenge on his master, Soyinka deliberately subsumes all these efforts and manipulates all the characters and situations to change with exhilarating rapidity, confusing all relations and initiating a disfigured portrayal of humans in consonance with the Yoruba ontology of Eshu. The trickster then acts as the main cause of disturbances and disorders, disasters and improprieties. All resemblances of what is considered truth and false are subject to his rapid alteration. His lies, deceit, cunning and crookery derive from the trickster being simply a malicious spoiler.

Davis (1999) recounts a famous Yoruba story about Eshu's escapades in relation to two intimate friends who pledged undying devotion to each other but disregard the power of Eshu. These two friends work on opposite fields. The account of the story has it that one day Eshu walks on the dividing lines between their fields wearing a cap that is black on one side and red (or white) on the other. He leisurely walks between the fields, exchanging brief conversations with the two friends. After the day's work both friends discussed the visitor wearing the cap. They ended their

conversation with a vicious quarrel about the colour of the man's hat, calling each other crazy, dumb and blind. It took the timely interventions of neighbors and the arrival of Eshu himself to stop the fight. After the two friends had explained their disagreement, Eshu shows them the two-sided hat with intent of chiding them for not acknowledging him first in their interactions. The moral of the tale suggests that Eshu moves along the ridge of two different world views, obscures communication, exposes ambiguity of knowledge and plays with varying perspectives to initiate disorder in society but ultimately he re-appears to institute a semblance of an order. Soyinka's conception of his hero captures notions of similar affinities with the Eshu personality in his portrayal of the scenes where Jero interacts with the couple, Chume and Amope. The series of innuendoes, disagreements, verbal abuses and battering that erupt in their marital relation may be attributable to both their deprived socio-economic condition and their irreverence to the power of the Jero figure in their lives. Amope's persist in retrieving her debt from Jero, and Chume's insistence on getting permission from the same Jero to beat his wife initiate a system of disorder in the prophet who later learns of the relation between them. Soyinka skill exploits the Eshu concept of wearing a cap in two colour sides metaphorically to translate that fright into mental energies to create disorder in the Chume-Amope relationship.

Jero's decision to allow Chume beat his wife serves two artistic purposes. First, it provides him the best option to deal with a garrulous creditor and second to initiate a similitude of 'order' in the marital relation between the couple. Ironically, the couple is unaware that Jero is the self-same cause of their disordered life. When

Chume gets to know of the truth at the point of executing the semblance of ‘order’ in his marriage, Amope calls upon the same Jero to salvage her from the distraught husband. By the end of the play, Jero arranges with the police force, supported by the buffoon Legislature to commit Chume to a lunatic asylum for a year. What really happens to Amope is unclear to the reader. But we can guess that Amope will surely find respite and ‘order’ to be the prophet’s lover, as Chume suggests.

The imagery of ‘order’ and ‘disorder’ in the gull-knave pattern as Soyinka contrives it enables the knave, Jero, to prevail over the gulls not because of his superior moral insights but because of the excitements of creating a trickster tale in which human gullibility is exposed and criticized. Jero is presented as the scourge of the follies of the gulls and he seems to be chiding the inadequacies of society, its indulgence and the anatomy of the time’s deformity wherein humans place value on the acquisition of wealth, power and materialism. These gulls employ the easy-lazy-path-approach to the neglect of pursuing traditional acceptable values like honesty, hard work, intelligence and truthfulness. For example, Chume goes to work only to report sick and leaves for church with the intention of gaining permission from the prophet to beat his wife as a means assuaging his demented and disordered life instead of focusing on improving his socio-economic status. The Penitent Woman, though portrayed as an intelligent woman, does not apply corrective reasoning in her quest to having children badly. Rather, she chooses to engage in her glossolalia freak of “Echa, echa, echa, echa, echa...ei, eei, eei”. The dramatist’s attribution of the adjective “faithful” to her absurdity and meaninglessness in her mannerisms and glossolalia further portray the criticism. The Member of the Federal House also

does not know the basic rudiments of speech making and communication. Instead of seeking scientific methods of dealing with the disorder in his life he resorts to the easy-lazy-path and falls a victim to the rogue. The images of all these gulls echo Jonson's portrayal of his dupes in *The Alchemist*.

The resourcefulness of Soyinka in crafting a trickster tale (similar to what Jonson does in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*) in which Jero contrives ways out of difficult situations and acts mischievously to exploit human weaknesses as a means to prosper exhibits the skill of a good dramatist, who in following after the comic tradition creates a work to reflect universal forms. He understands that knavery and gulling are the ingredients for the workings of the comic law that regulates the construction of a good comedy, and also a dramatist's skill of consciously creating doubtful lingering moral issues and perverting them to make the trickster prosper in the work generate the joys of artful intrigue that the reader admires in the hero.

Soyinka's stylistic mode in the play which enables the reader to identify with the rogue whose brilliant deceptions and compelling use of a superior wit and sheer audacity in manipulating events and situations transposes the reader into an ecstatic joyful comic mood. His skill shares a semblance with Jonson's skill in *The Alchemist*. The reader of Soyinka's play enjoys the successes chalked by Jero in his interactions with the gulls and there is a level of momentarily satiation in pure knavery as we align ourselves with the daring ventures and near-escapes. We are compelled to desire more of Jero's intrigues and psychologically we "prod" him even to greater heights of dangerous moves as we witness the concluding scene in which the revered Legislature wakes from his slumberous nincompoopery "with a

start, stares open-mouth, and falls flat on his face, whispering in rapt awe, - ‘Master’” (*The Trials...*, Scene Five, p.44).

There seems to be an implicit request from the Federal Member for more roguery to be exacted on him as he awaits, barefooted, further instructions from Jero on the supposed “holy ground”. Soyinka’s art, however, recognizes the moral ambiguities involved in the artistic world especially considering the criminal schemes of the trickster hero. Soyinka’s skill compels the reader to soberly reflect on what kind of “justice system” the artist is portraying, especially when we consider the pathetic plight of Chume and his moralizing cry at the end of the play: “O God, wetin a do for you wey you go spoil my life so? Wetin make you vex for me so? I offend you? Chume, foolish man, your life don spoil. Yeah, ye...ah ah, ye-e-ah, they done ruin Chume for life... ye-e-ah, ye-e-ah ...” (*The Trials...*, Scene Five, p.42).

The dramatist’s scheme implicates the reader who is made to both share in the blame game where divinity and society combine forces to “spoil” the life of Chume. At the same time, Soyinka’s skill ensures that the reader detaches him/herself through sober reflection of the weaknesses of state institutions mandated to deal with crime. Jero’s confession to the reader that he will exploit the influence of the nincompoop Member of the Federal House to secure a one-year judgement from the judiciary to commit Chume to a lunatic asylum manifests a criticism.

The import of the artist’s skill implicates the three main governmental institutions of State (the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary) which have the responsibility of maintaining law and order in society, and throws into relief the moral question of the role of legal codes or values in contributing either positively

or negatively to the well-being of humans; since on the one hand Chume feels duped and on the other hand Jero feels secured and protected. Albeit, the dramatist seems to suggest that these institutions are there to provide support for those who know how to manipulate men and institutions for their advantage. Since society itself is gulled as demonstrated in the metaphor of Jero's NEIGHBOURS affirming that Brother Jero is a 'good prophet' who solves all manner of ailments afflicting humanity, including Chume's foolishness, Amope's garrulous loud mouth, and the Legislature's stupidity there is a sustained reasonableness in Soyinka's quest to institute a kind of a "justice system" in the play.

The Soyinkan "justice system" exhibits a semblance to the Jonsonian model as portrayed in *The Alchemist* in which the rogues become instruments in the hand of the dramatist to exact a kind of judgement on the gulls. Jonson's portrayal (of Dapper's humiliating rituals: being gagged and forced into a crouching posture and made to "kneel and wriggle", Ananias and Tribulation's metaphorical gesture of worship at the feet of the rogues, Sir Epicure Mammon's pathetic self-deflating, egoistic and voyeuristic posturing before the rogues, and Kastril and Dame Plaint's debased worshipping posture before the rogues) effects a reductive posturing and exhibits the depraved sense of humanity.

Similar to Jonson's portrayal, Soyinka also initiates this reductive posturing of humans in the scenes where Chume is emasculated, insulted and reduced to the vermin gypsy of a worst sinner and "harbourer of Astoreth" who must demonstrate his beastly nature in the glossolalia choruses. In addition, Soyinka's rogue, Jero, by virtue of his superior wit adopts a superior verbal agility and higher intelligence to

effect a reductive and dunce posturing in the Member of the Federal House and the prospective Prime Minister of the Mid-North-East State.

The dramatist of *The Trials of Brother Jero* provides a similitude of a kind of justice system as expressed in Jonson's *The Alchemist* in which the harsh moralism in *Volpone* is subverted and the reader is urged to rather admire the vigour of the rogue's trickery. Soyinka makes the reader endorse the roguery activities of the knave with the aim of glorifying wit and intelligence over moral virtues. This view is made concrete in the play because the adjudicators of moral virtue themselves (as symbolized in the three main governmental institutions of state) are clothed in a perverse formulation of criminality as dictated by the pessimism and sensitivity that has engulfed the social economy of most African countries, specifically the Nigerian case in the late fifties and early sixties.

Ogbeidi (2012) in his essay, "Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960: A Socio-economic Analysis" examines the correlation between the phenomenon of corruption among the political leadership class since the 1960s and its implication for socio-economic development in Nigeria. He argues that bad political leadership coupled with the pernicious effect of corruption on public institutions as a whole since independence is the resultant consequence of the institutionalisation and glorification of roguery and corruption in Nigeria. In addition, it has also led to a new kind of a social economy which celebrates wit and intelligence on the part of the ruling class.

Soyinka's portraiture of Jero's wit and intelligence over moral virtue as the verdict in the play reflects the socio-cultural realities of a society he knows so well; a

society which glorifies creative ingenuity and “smartness”. The portraiture also provides the opportunity for the dramatist to execute a savage judgement upon a lazy, self-seeking and corner-cutting society whose imitation of a kind of justice rests only in the bosom of the very intelligent and clever hero who decides what is best for society. Jero’s determination of what is ‘good’ for society is perhaps similar to the sensibilities of the Yoruba god, Eshu.

According to Davis, Eshu is the god who has access to *ashe*’, which literally means, “so be it” (p. 54). He recounts the story of how Eshu gets *ashe*’ when all the gods trek to the supreme god, Orunmila, to ascertain who the next is most powerful. Each god carries a giant sacrifice on its head, but Eshu consults the oracle before he goes, and finds that all he needs to bring is a bright red feather set upright on his forehead. When Orunmila sees this, he grants Eshu the power of *ashe*’ because Eshu had shown his aversion to carrying burdens, as well as his thoughtfulness to the handling of information. The story explains why to this day, Eshu statuettes often have a large phallic plume or nail on the head. It confirms the proposition that one of Eshu’s characteristics shows humanity, in the view of Thompson (1983), to “cultivate the art of recognizing significant communications” of wit and intelligence, the point where doors open or close for individuals who will have to make decisions that will affect them perpetually or forever lose the opportunities (p. 19).

Jero has truly recognized the power of effectively communicating to both his audience and his gulls. He has demonstrated significant wit and cunningness to perform whatever promise (prophecy) he issues out, and by implication assumes a

midway posture of a god-human being to function as a cultural transformer. Soyinka's skill therefore places the "right red feather" of Eshu on Jero to institute the *ashe'* theology in the final episode of Jero's career as a trickster with minor divinity status to create 'order' out of a disordered society. As Jero dismisses the nincompoop of the Legislature, he is crowned with *a ring of red or some equally startling colour [which] plays on his head, forming a sort of halo* to establish the norm of "so be it" in society (*The Trials...*, Scene Five, p.44).

In the sequel to the Jero plays, *Jero's Metamorphosis* (1973), Soyinka dramatises the same *ashe'* principle in portraying the same Jero figure who exhibits a higher level of wit, intelligence, roguery and charlatanism. Jero's mastery of the communication skill coupled with his manipulative abilities of both humans and institutions succeeds in galvanising support from other beach fake prophets in the formation of a supposed united church (CASA) to "twist" the hands of governmental institutions to sign off a document that confers all state lands along the beach for Jero's personal use. The play satirises leadership struggle (among both religious and political divides), deception and corruption among the elite and shows how state institutions are gullibly hoodwinked by charlatans who always demonstrate their resourcefulness in displaying a higher dexterity of wit and intelligence.

Soyinka, like Jonson in *The Alchemist*, celebrates the use of wit and intelligence for effective gulling of society's dupes and the illogicality among humans. Both dramatists strive to fulfill partly a social logic working through the comic tradition (inherited from their Classical forebears) and partly portraying a certain logic

related to contemporary thinking about the nature of criminality in both the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. Face, Jonson's hero, triumphs primarily because of his demonstration of a superior wit and showmanship in intelligence over the other rogues and dupes whose exhibition of greed and self-seeking avarice translates their actions into a "crime" that must be harshly "punished".

In the same logic, Soyinka's Jero wins because he possesses a superior wit and understanding of how society operates. The entire society is embedded in stupidity and an irrational quest for corner-cutting activities to actualize human greed which automatically invite the execution of judgement from someone with a superior wit. Both dramatists' summing of the human condition may appear harsh and may not rest on solid moral groundings but their conclusions echo the reality of society; a reality which valorizes intelligence and innovative ways, and by implication establishing those realities as admirable virtues.

Conclusion

Soyinka, writing in the twentieth century, may not necessarily have imitated Jonson's skill in the construction of both *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* but his handling of themes, motifs and dramatic skills in both plays bears a semblance with the craft of the sixteenth century dramatist despite the differences in time and space of four centuries. It indicates therefore that both dramatists belong to the timeless tradition Eliot's poetics suggests. Soyinka's art in the afore-mentioned texts has been discussed with a focus of providing the parameters for determining the convergence of their aesthetic skills rather than pure imitation. In applying the taxonomy of Bloom's poetics as expressed in *The Anxiety*

of Influence to examine the relation between the sixteenth century dramatist and the twentieth century dramatist, it is evident that Soyinka's art does not bury Jonson's. Rather, Soyinka's art implicates a matrix of relationships within the comic literary tradition with Jonson's. Soyinka shares some semblances in his dramatic skills with Jonson's in portraying the absurd and ridiculous posturing of humans. He, creates his originality, however, by crafting his version of the archetypal lovable rogue to reflect the socio-cultural realities of his time and culture.

Soyinka has demonstrated his commitment to the comic tradition as handed down from the Ancients and the Renaissance writers. However, he has also exhibited his authenticity as a twentieth century African writer who "deviates" from the tradition in his artistic choices and dramatic skills which obviously reflect the spirit of his West African heritage. With regards to the technical details of Soyinka's artistic choices such as plot structure, the use of common archetypes in the story lines of his plays and other elements of style will be the focus of discussion in the fifth chapter. In that chapter, we will be highlighting the echoes and parallels by imposing the metaphor of Bloom's "Laius and Oedipus at the crossroads" relationship between Jonson and Soyinka. In addition, we will explore to what extent Soyinka has followed the comic tradition and his points of deviation which confirm his originality as a master craftsman.

In the next chapter, we will be examining Sutherland's craft as exhibited in her play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, to find out how the dramatist utilises some ideas from her socio-cultural environment to portray her version of the archetypal

trickster hero and to explore what semblances, echoes and parallels exist in her work to suggest a remembrance of Jonson's craft.



CHAPTER FOUR

RE-MEMBERING THE ECHOES OF THE UNIVERSAL ARCHETYPAL TRADITION IN THE CRAFT OF SUTHERLAND

The Ananse Legacy as a Trickster

Sutherland's greatest success as an artist within the geo-political space of the West African sub-region is manifest in her innovative dramatic form which incorporates several artistic schemes taken from the oral African tradition as exhibited in dance, music, costumes, rituals and some elements from the Ananse storytelling tradition in the hybrid form of narrative theatre. These elements and schemes are blended with Western theatrical models to reflect what she describes as *Anansegoro* (or "spider play"). In one of her renowned essays titled, "Venture into Theatre" published in the very first edition of *Okyeame* in 1960, she explains that the term "was coined from *Anansem* (Spider Stories) whiis the traditional name for a popular class of Folk-Tales of the Akan" from which she sees a connection between the Western art of theatre (as exemplified in writing, acting and producing) and the traditions of her people (p.48).

The various simulations in the craft of Sutherland [as dramatised in *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), *Edufa* (1967), *Foriwa* (1971)] and those of the Western models have been a subject of defining her uniqueness as an artist whose poetics and thoroughness in the comedic genre have attracted the attention of scholars and critics alike. Since many scholars [such as Angmor (1978), Sutherland-Addy (2002), Gibbs (2004, 2009), Anyidoho (2007), Biodun (2007), Rotimi (2007), Adams (2007), Adams and Sutherland-Addy (2007)] have explored these concerns

it would be counter-productive to do same. However, the interest of this chapter is to focus on Sutherland's portrayal of the universal archetypal trickster hero, its cunning intelligence and wily traits which are definitive elements creative artists exploit to portray varied manifestations of the human condition. In addition, the chapter examines the relationship between her art and that of Jonson's in respect of treatment of themes and stylistic choices to find out what parallels and semblances the former receives from the latter.

In Sutherland's play, *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), the dramatist presents a trickster figure, Ananse, whose origin (though commonly associated with the Akan group) is not exclusive to the Akan oral tradition in Ghana. He is an archetype that reflects several groups from West Africa and even the Caribbean. Basically, these groups view the Ananse figure as exhibiting two basic features of creating mirth and instructing society on the acceptable mores by both defying and challenging the status quo and at the same time drawing attention to the preservation of the moral codes.

Sutherland opines in "Venture into Theatre" that in most Akan tales, the Ananse figure is venerated in the society "because of the role of cunning and ingenuity he plays. Obviously created as a vehicle for satire, the Ananse folk-tales are a marvelous source of material for dramatic use" (p. 48). The folktale hero, Ananse, has been exploited by many contemporary Ghanaian writers in their works for varied reasons of manifesting the many facets of the trickster hero. Danquah's *The Third Woman* (1943), for example, portrays the duplicity of a hero who is both divine and earthly, manipulating the Divine Being, Kokuroko, and Ananse, himself,

as human to establish his disruptive creativity among the Asante people. Other playwrights such as De-Graft in *Ananse and the Gum* (unpublished play), Owusu in *The Story Ananse Told* (1970), and Asare in *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* (2006) have similarly exploited the duplicity in the personality of Ananse to portray varying aspects of the trickster figure as a cheat, bully, selfish, greedy and a prankster. In all these portrayals the Ananse figure serves as a re-creation of the universal lovable rogue whose stories in literary works, according to Deandrea (2004), “are meant to work as a safety valve for the social tension and attrition created by communal restrictions” and to help the reader “get rid of our latent desire to behave like Ananse” (p. 2). Ultimately, the trickster Ananse figure questions the given order and allows social change to occur.

Sutherland’s choice of the Ananse icon and its recreation as a reflection of the lovable rogue within the geo-political space of the Akan community manifests a character whose exhibition of a grand scheme in his dealings with other characters reflect the ridiculous, the absurd, and the farcical posturing of humans. Her dramatic skill in the portrayal of the Ananse figure reflects the Aristophanes figures of the *alazon* and *bomolochos* which manifests the character traits of an *Imposter* and a *Buffoon* respectively. In developing this figure in *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the dramatist’s artistic choices share some semblances with the Jonsonian images of the trickster as reflected in the gull-knave pattern in which the characters exhibit varying degrees of impostering, buffoonery, churlish, absurdity, sonority and downright stupidity.

The Ananse trickster hero as Sutherland conceives him in the play reflects a culture hero who exhibits contradictory traits. His cunning and antics blend together elegance and buffoonery so that what appears improbable and unthinkable in human society becomes a dazzling display of wit and intelligence in social intercourse. Perhaps, this is a manifestation of the Akan personality and cosmology which believes in the duality of beings, for as Pelton has suggested: the Ananse figure is the “agent of Ashanti doubleness” (p. 136). The Ananse figure reflects the interplay between male and female, heaven and earth, King and Queen Mother, Nyame and Asase Yaa. All this is the manifestation of the Akan people, their cosmology and derived meaningful tropes spun across spider tales as exploited by literary artists.

Sutherland’s creation of a version of the universal lovable rogue in the character of Ananse to reflect the socio-cultural realities of her immediate environment coupled with her artistic skills displayed in the play shares a semblance to a similar skill demonstrated by Jonson’s craft in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. Both dramatists exploit the universal trickster hero to portray basic human instincts, impulses, weaknesses and the duplicity associated with human existence. Their exploration of similar themes and artistic skills in making the trickster hero (Volpone in *Volpone*, Face in *The Alchemist* and Ananse in *The Marriage of Anansewa*) a master schemer in roguery, wit and intelligence to outsmart fellow humans (as he interacts with the other characters in the plays aforementioned) suggest a kind of a “filial” relationship between the sixteenth century dramatist and his twentieth century counterpart. Though four centuries elapse between the two dramatists the

latter's craft echo the former's with some surprising parallel affinities in their handling of the trickster hero, themes and dramatic skills that reflect the humour paradigm in the comedic genre they both use as their artistic medium.

Manifestation of Jonson's Skill in Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*

It is an undisputable fact that both Jonson and Sutherland exploit the universal archetypal trickster hero recreated from mythology as a ubiquitous being in their respective plays, *Volpone* and *The Marriage of Anansewa*, to make distinct statements about the human condition. While Jonson selects the image of a fox to reflect the trickster Sutherland chooses a spider. Though the choices of the image of the trickster (as reflected in the varied animals selected) differ, they both exhibit clearly a common observable characteristic which by association unifies the artistic skills of both dramatists (but at the same time distinguishes them). The two animals – the fox and the spider – are characterised by extremely solitary habits. Unlike most carnivores, foxes are not always pack animals; they are known to be solitary of all canines.

Burrows (1968) intimates that he has observed foxes in the wild for several years but he has never seen two adults together. Burrow's suggestion provides that in assessing the characteristic of the fox as an image of the trickster, its solitary habitat confers the traits of cunning, selfishness, deceptiveness and exploring all possible means to satisfy its appetites despite societal inhibitions. Jonson's portrayal of the fox image in the personality and character of *Volpone*, in the play, captures notions

of the solitary habitat with its manifestation of the traits of cunning, deceptiveness and selfishness. Spiders are also associated with solitary habitats. Several Ananse tales capture the trickster hero full of greed and lechery with the inescapable result that he ends up in a humiliating position seeking refuge in far away solitary confinements outside the habitat of humans.

Carroll (1984) observes that “spiders generally associate with members of their own species on only two occasions – when they are born and when they mate”. Aside these two occasions, adult spiders generally spend their entire lives in seclusion. However, he notes that there are few species of spider who live in groups, but these are rare. He cites an example from Burgess (1978: 69) to establish a claim that “out of about 33,000 different species of spider, only 30 of them live in groups” (p. 116). By associating the trickster with these lonely animals, both dramatists seek to establish the fact that though the trickster heroes – Volpone and Ananse – seem to act “outside the culture” of humans they live within the confines of human society to manifest the unsightly inside culture of human life as exhibited in greed, lust, lies, deceit, jealousy, etc. Both trickster figures must be seen as Deandra describes them as “taboo-violators” because they act consciously against social rules by being selfish, deviant, vulgar, mean, hypocritical and excessively full of wit and intelligence primarily with the intent that their only goal in life is the immediate gratification of their biological and psychological needs (p. 2). They destabilise social order and create havoc in society. Though both dramatists utilise the trickster to perform this role in their plays Sutherland designs a new role for the trickster, as

a revolutionary and a saviour, to initiate a change in human affairs by its mediation of a delicate balance between destruction of culture and preservation of it.

To examine the manifestation of Jonsonian skills in Sutherland's play, it will be worthwhile to impose The New Historicism Theory which prescribes the examination of "sub-literary texts" and the socio-cultural realities of society as a basis of studying a literary work. The manifestation of these sub-literary texts and the socio-cultural realities in the latter's work will provide the background against which Sutherland's craft will be studied.

The Context

Sutherland's recreation of the trickster hero in *The Marriage of Anansewa* reflects the realities of the socio-cultural and economic imperatives in the Ghanaian (or West African) society which by the middle of the twentieth century obviously has become extremely materialistic and greedy. Apparently, the greed and nascent materialism exhibited in the play should be seen as a manifestation of the latent effects of colonialism as exhibited in the characters of Ananse, Anansewaa, the artisans and others. The dramatist's portrayal of these social contradictions, greed, moral depravity and economic exploitation in the play reflects what obtains in most post-independent African societies in which the demands of urban living compel individuals to devise varied means of survival.

The socio-economic background against which Sutherland crafts the play is important in analysing her treatment of the themes and dramatic skill exhibited in the work. Obviously, the social vision of Sutherland captures similar ones

expressed for example by Achebe in *A Man of the People* (1966), Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Awoonor's *This Earth My Brother ...* (1971), Djoleto's *Money Galore* (1975) and Wa'Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1977). In all these works, we observe the harsh effect of nascent capitalism and greed arising from the pressures of post colonialism on the African society with its debilitating and devastating consequences on the African psyche. The realities in the African societies provide the materials that the artists' works mirror. Sutherland's portrayal in *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) also recreates some of the socio-cultural realities in the Ghanaian society.

Fosu and Aryeetey (2010) conducted a study in 2006 on the immediate past of the country's socio-economic history and its impact on society. They suggest that Ghana's economic growth at the time of independence was positive and there was much hope that Ghana would lead the way toward rapid growth and progress for Africa as a continent, as evidenced in the high per capita growth and general economic boom that followed in the early 60s and early 70s. However, by the mid-1970s the economy suffered a significant deterioration and there was unevenness in the economic growth. Though Ghana experienced negative growth during the 1966 coup d'état with the forceful eviction of Kwame Nkrumah the lowest economic growth was experienced in 1975 with a growth dip as low as -12%. The per capita income at the time of independence was about 300 dollars but by the mid-70s it dipped to as low as 185 dollars.

Fosu and Aryeetey argue that the structure of the Ghanaian economy declined despite the slight shift from Agriculture to industry and to non-manufacturing

activities such as mining, quarrying, construction, and electricity and water (which invariably were expected to grow the economy). The reason for such a dip in the economic growth of Ghana was attributable to the “relative contributions of physical and human capital, as well as total factor productivity” output per worker was extremely low declining to about -0.62% (p.53). They conclude that the diminishing productivity in the Ghanaian society played an important role in retarding the growth of the Ghanaian economy during the post-independence era.

In another related study, Azindow (2008) also confirms that the economic performance of the mid-70s was the poorest in Ghana’s recent history. The instabilities in world commodity prices of primary agricultural products strained the country’s foreign exchange base. He provides available statistics to suggest that between 1970 and 1983 the economic variables fell by more than 2% per annum while agrarian production dropped by 0.2%. Within the same period the ratio of exports to GDP fell from 21% to 4%. Similarly the ratio of investment to GDP dropped by 14% to 2%; wages also reduced by 80%. Per capita income equally dropped by 30%. These bleak socio-economic conditions provided a sustained background material for literary artists to express the yearnings, desires and social imbalances among Ghanaians. Amu Djoletto’s *Money Galore* and Efu Sutherland’s *The Marriage of Anansewa* are examples of works that reflect the malaise sketched above.

Sutherland’s Artistic vision in the Play

In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the dramatist’s portrayal of Ananse’s poverty, deprived socio-economic conditions as evident in his poor leaking roof, straw

mattress, his inability to pay the daughter's school fees and the typewriter, and even enjoy the benefits of an average life-style are images that reflect the reality of the harsh effect of post-Colonial African situation on the ordinary individual. Indeed as the Players, in the play, intone, "...life is a struggle, / Oh life is a pain. (*The Marriage ...*, p.1). The dramatist suggests that the poor economic conditions, as dramatised in the play, are traceable to the "wrong at the beginning of things" (p.1) where failed political leadership and bad economic policies of the past have resulted in what Ananse describes as "going-and-coming"(p.2) syndrome as a necessary attitude to deal with the grim conditions of life.

The dramatist superficially seems to be justifying Ananse's roguery and cunning ways of exploiting society as the best option to respond to the negative economic down turn. She makes the hero appeal to the reader (at the beginning of the play) to suggest any other option, if there was, after much "thinking, thinking and thinking... . Won't somebody who thinks he has discovered the simple solution for living this life kindly step forward and help out the rest of us? [*To the audience:*] Brother, could it be you? Mother, how about you? Nobody? (*The Marriage ...*, p.2).

The series of rhetorical questions implicate the reader and make them complicit in Ananse's decision to change his socio-economic status to an appreciable middle class status where he also could attend social events such as memorial services, naming ceremonies, and church services and live averagely a good life. For after all, Ananse is only desiring "... a few things can come [his] way I'm not saying I'll eat chicken everyday, but what about a little fish today, and tomorrow, a little meat on which I can count? I'm not saying my only daughter Anansewa must

become a Judge of the Supreme Court ... but what about her finishing her secretarial course? (*The Marriage ...*, p.5). Perhaps, the artist's intent here is to provide a broad framework within which roguery, deceit, lies cunning and knavery become acceptable ways as the latent effects of colonialism by which West Africans respond to the socio-economic pressures in society especially if we view the Ananse figure as "a kind of Every man, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination" (Sutherland's *The Marriage ...*, Foreword, p.v).

Sutherland provides further manifestation of the "going-and-coming" attitude of humans as necessary responses to the socio-economic malaise that had afflicted society with the portrayal of the artisans' crooked ways of conducting their businesses. Their decision to exploit Ananse's largesse and "changed social status" by deliberately delaying a three-week contract to last for ten weeks suggests the pervasive and widespread nature of the socio-economic malaise in the Ghanaian society. The Mason, Carpenter and Painter in the play must be seen as emblematic portrayals of the down-trodden proletariats who desire through crook means to also change their status in life, perhaps similar to the crook ways the capitalist masters used to amass their wealth. The entire society therefore thrives on cunning and wit.

All these socio-economic pressures and its consequent behaviours therefore become manifestations of the human insatiable yearnings redeployed in the context of a series of scheming drawn from the conditions of contemporary West Africa. Sutherland's portrayal of these images of greed shares some semblances with Jonson's portrayal of the socio-economic conditions that gave birth to the roguery

trade in *The Alchemist*. The same socio-economic conditions and extravagance in sixteenth century England apparently served as the background against which Jonson portrays the greed and avarice in society as expressed in *Volpone*. In Sutherland's portrayal of the socio-economic conditions in the play, she, like Jonson, obviously challenges society through the artistic medium of the comedic genre to re-examine its cunning ways and falsehoods by which humans organise their lives.

Sutherland's creation of Ananse's exaggerated materialistic predilections as a father who has given his daughter the best of education (by all standards in the mid-sixties through the seventies) and now desires to marry her off to the highest paying suitor as a bid to live a comfortable life and overcome the pressures of life introduces the theme of greed, avarice and selfishness in the play. This nascent greed is amplified in Ananse's understanding of "this world's ways" (*The Marriage ...*, p.12) which explores all avenues whether right or wrong to take advantage of opportunities that come one's way.

The dramatist's presentation of Ananse suggests humans' propensity to desire always the best and even crave for more. Ananse, as a father, is not satisfied with interacting with one chief as a prospective husband for the daughter, he "travelled the country, by bus, by train, by ferry boat. [He] lobbied for introductions into palace after palace... listened with ears alert [and]... observed with keen eyes" until he settles on the four chiefs around whom he organises the contest for the daughter's hand in marriage (*The Marriage ...*, p.11). The metaphor of the four chiefs (as Ananse explains himself) "covers North, South, East and West" to

suggest the four cardinal poles (*The Marriage ...*, p.11). This reflects the pervasive nature of greed in humans, its capacity to permeate all aspects of human life including the very choices and decisions that humans make. The dramatist expresses the theme of greed in the four respected chiefs' varied reasons for marrying Anansewa, apparently to boost their ego.

The dramatist's portrayal of the theme of greed captures notions of the negative mad rush among West Africans for the gleam and an inordinate evil concupiscence for materialistic gains; what Armah expresses in his novel, *Fragments*, as suggesting that the entire "Ghanaian society is dominated by an 'Anansean' rush for material acquisition" (Deandrea, 2004:4). Ananse's cunning and greed, therefore, in seeking several suitors for his daughter as a condition to enrich himself and also provide the opportunity for him to enjoy the latent effects of colonialism in articles such as a fridge, fan, car, money, fame must be seen as Sutherland's critique of the social evil in society. Ananse's greed, therefore, in "selling off" the daughter should be interpreted as the artist's vision of educating society to get rid of our suppressed desire to imitate the ways of Ananse.

Ananse, as the hero of the play, attains full dramatic potential as a culture hero, a self-serving rogue who is driven by greed and appetite to reflect the hybridity of the interaction between Africa and Europe. His full name as the artist presents in the play is *George Kweku Ananse*. This name evokes mirth and brings to mind Africa's split personality and obsession with English names which obviously manifests the buffoonery and churlish behaviour associated with neo-imperialistic tendencies among West Africans. The name *George* has been a subject of

Sutherland's contemporary, Ama Ata Aidoo's satirical portrayal of these eccentricities which apparently make Africans look down on their names to the glorification of English (foreign) ones. In "Male-ing Names in the Sun" one of the short stories from the collections in *The Girl Who Can* (1997), Aidoo satirises Africans' mindless adoption of English names primarily because they think the names reflect their new found belief in Christianity and also as an expression of English royalty.

In Sutherland's play, she depicts the buffoonery associated with the name *George* in the various scenes where Christie Yamoah expresses her insipid greed and sentimental affection towards Ananse's newly attained middle class status. She romanticizes the name and calls him "Georgie! Georgie!" "Pa Georgie!" perhaps to suggest the overall grand scheme of a clever self-styled accomplished performer like the English Monarch, King George I, whose inventiveness and scheming yielded some dividends not only for himself but eventually trickled down to the English people.

According to Thackeray (1880), King George I ascended the British monarchy through cunning, wit, intelligence and skillful manipulation of events, situations and humans. Though born a German, he employed guile and political trickery to annex the Dutch, Spanish, French and English allies to create a strong government of the Whig Party in the United Kingdom. During his reign as the monarch of Great Britain and Ireland and the "ruler of the Duchy and Electorate of Brunswick-Lunelourg, (Hanover) in the Holy Roman Empire from 1698 until his death in 1727", his masterful knowledge and adept language skills in German, French, Latin

and Dutch became his greatest assets in manipulating parliamentary bills, economic and social treaties with neighbouring European countries for both his personal advantage and that of Great Britain and Ireland.

Gibbs (2004), the Historian, also suggests that despite King George's cunning, he was reticent, moderate and financially judicious. The king disliked to be in the public light at social events; he "avoided the royal box at the opera and often travelled incognito to the house of a friend to play cards". Despite his anti-social nature Gibbs avers, the English people admired him for his prudent management of the economy and expressed optimism in his reign as a better alternative to the Roman Catholic Pretender James. The eminent nineteenth century Historian and Novelist William Makepeace Thackeray indicates such ambivalent sensibilities of the English people to him thus:

His heart was in Hanover.... He was more than fifty years of age when he came amongst us: we took him because we wanted him, because he served our turn; we laughed at his uncouth German ways, and sneered at him. He took our loyalty for what it was worth; laid hands on what money he could; kept us assuredly from Popery... I, for one, would have been on his side in those days. Cynical and selfish, as he was, he was better than a king out of St. Germain's [James, the Stuart Pretender] with the French King's orders in his

Pocket, and a swarm of Jesuits in his train

(pp.52-53).

The portrayal of George Kweku Ananse in *The Marriage of Anansewa* draws a parallel with the historical accounts of King George I. Ananse, as a character in the play, is presented as always retreating behind the “spider web screen” (similar to the solitary habitat of foxes) away from public social events. He employs guile, subtlety, trickery and schemes his way out of difficult situations for his benefit. His mastery over language predisposes him to exploit the praise names of the Chiefs with dexterity. He mesmerises both the Chiefs (who are here presented as a prototype of gulls) and the reader to an ecstatic point of comic bliss that we rejoice at the hero’s grand successes rather than condemn him. The savouring eloquence with which he dictates the letters to the four chiefs at the beginning of the play and his wit in cunningly making Anansewa complicit in the roguery business he is about to initiate take on a significance which dominates the plot of the play; that is, the trickster hero’s capacity to deceive and outsmart society out of its inadequacies and dunce manifestations. He seems to “know much about this world’s ways” (*The Marriage ...*, p.12) and that makes him irreverent of his victims’ ignorance and pathetic plight at the end of the play. He assesses his present condition of hopelessness and grim poverty and projects the kind of future he intends to carve for the daughter and himself as an index of “a hope gleaming in the future” for which he directs his energies, will and mental strength.

The dramatist valorizes this imagery of “a hope gleaming in the future” among all the characters (in the play) to achieve a dizzying speed effect of clamouring for the

niceties in life. We have seen Ananse's attempts in securing a better future for his daughter and most importantly for himself because conditions at *home* are bad. We also have seen the dubious ways by which the artisans improve their lot in life primarily because conditions were that bad for them. Chrisite Yamoah also is hurried in from Tarkwa because 'conditions' in the *home* of Ananse have started going bad. Aya and Ekuwa are rushed back to the village, Nanka, because 'conditions' had gone bad for Ananse at *home*. These images of "home" in the plot have been designed by the dramatist to heighten the exigencies of a kind of clamour for something that inevitably might change one's status at home and life in general. The Players capture this in their song:

Hurry, hurry,

Hurry down there;

Hurry, hurry,

Hurry down there.

Time is nobody's friend,

Time will not wait for you...

So hurry, hurry (*The Marriage* . . . , pp. 9/10)

This dizzying speed finds a comparison in Jonson's *Volpone* where all the characters are "energised" with an inordinate desire clamouring for the gold and wealth of the hero (who himself is presented as a metaphor of greed). Jonson's characters are ready to shed off their humanness and intelligence and descend into the state of bestiality. For example, Corvino prostitutes his legal wife for wealth, Corbaccio disinherits his son, and Lady Would-Be defiles her marital vows. In

Sutherland's play, Ananse is ready to "sell off" his daughter to the highest bidder after terminating Anansewa's education and delaying the "outdooing ceremony" for five years. Anansewa herself is prepared to be complicit in Ananse's trickery by switching her "life off and on like electricity" to aid the father execute the knavery on the four chiefs. Christie Yamoah also assists Ananse and Anansewa in their knavery to secure her vision of becoming a wife to Ananse, most apparently to enjoy Ananse's new found wealth.

The dramatist foregrounds this theme of greed in the personality of Anansewa who is presented as a "sought-after commodity" like the gold in Jonson's *Volpone* and The Philosopher's Stone in *The Alchemist* and Sidi in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. In all these works, the valorized item is set as a kind of gleam the entire society is craving for. Anansewa is presented as a pretty young woman of twenty radiating the dazzling aroma of hope for the father's dream. She is the focal point of "slaying the four chiefs flat" just at the sight of her photographs, and she is the reason for the four chiefs being "willing and eager to oil the wheels of custom... for the maintenance of the object of [their] interest" (*The Marriage ...*, p. 13).

Sutherland manipulates events in the plot to make Anansewa conscious of herself as a metaphor of the gleam in the scheme of things. Anansewa is also conscious of society's mad rush for her person as a bid for humans (especially men) to change their socio-economic statuses. Anansewa is not willing to stop attending school and to "do without a certificate" because these are metaphors to define her rising status in the plot. These circumstances are manipulated by the dramatist to make Anansewa complicit in the father's cunning of organising a "lively competition"

around her. Anansewa is willing to trust her father to handle the competition. This skill transposes the focus of the play from Anansewa's gleam to Ananse's wit, cunning, and dazzling intelligence which know "the ways of the world" "human nature" and "the customs of society more than well" (*The Marriage ...*, p.16).

The Ananse figure as a trickster in Akan mythology, according to Vecsey (1988), evokes significant concepts to the society because in the tales which portray his heroic deeds, the trickster destabilises the very foundations of society, the Supreme Being and the people themselves. In his portrayal, he seems to know all about the world, human nature and he even attempts to undermine the bases of Akan life. In the telling of these tales Ananse often acts the role of a greedy and lecherous buffoon.

Rattray (1930) recounts several Ashanti myths in which Ananse "marries a whole village of women, describes his penis as being longer than 77 long poles fastened together, and uses trickery to seduce another man's wife on nine different occasions during the course of a single night" (p. 107). Ananse's drives are also selfishly related to his passion for food and other physiological needs. Rattray recounts myths that suggest that Ananse learns of a mystic procedure which allows him to get all the food he needs. Not satisfied with this, Ananse's inordinate desires lead him to manipulate the procedure such that he can get more food than he really needs, with the inescapable result of him ending in some embarrassing position.

Sutherland is well aware of these patterns in Akan thought and in creating Ananse as the hero of the play, she makes him free from all the restraints of both the legal and moral psyche that regulates society's conduct. Ananse is invested with a double

nature and liberty which make him the schemer and the schemed, the hunter and the hunted, the plunderer and the plundered; all these reflect the fully realised state of a prankster. He is portrayed as operating outside the codes of society but his actions and inactions shame his victims into conformity to society's codes. He exhibits a posture that bears a semblance to that of a prophet and an apostate because he knows both the "ways of the world" and "human nature". When he quizzes Anansewa thus: "You think I'm walking round this world playing ludo?" (*The Marriage ...*, p.13) as a precursor to both winning the support of her into the roguery business and also assuring the daughter of his mastery skills in knavery in respect of the "lively competition", the dramatist seems to be paying compliments to her art. This inter-relationship of opposites is what the dramatist manipulates in the hero to achieve the play's artistic success.

Sutherland devises a structural pattern which manifests in the recreation of the gull-knave model of comic episode. Though this pattern is not a new creation of Sutherland (for it dates back to antiquity wherein trickster tales present a society in which the dunce and foolish hearted are out-smattered by an innocuous rogue or a nocuous knave), her artistic choices and structural design resemble a pattern developed by Jonson in his humour paradigm in which both professionals and the highly placed in society are made a subject of ridicule and gullibility. In the Jonsonian model as dramatised in both *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, the dramatist exploits the prevailing socio-economic realities in Renaissance Europe to express the theme of greed as the necessary condition that invites the exhibition of wit, intelligence, cunning and the roguery acts on the gulls. In the Sutherland model, the

dramatist also exploits the realities of the socio-cultural imperatives of the Ghanaian society that is striving to attain the glories and exoticism of the rising middle class status. The attainment of this middle class status insidiously invites the exhibition of crookery, cunning and witticism on society with a debilitating effect of gullibility.

The quest to attain this middle status or its analogous rankings is not a bad idea in itself but it is the profligacy and wanton display of avarice that attracts the dramatist's censure. Perhaps, Ananse's early quest to change his socio-economic status at the beginning of the play may be understandable. However, his persist in the cunning ways to exploit money from the four chiefs as a bid to equate himself with the middle classes' wanton display of affluence "on a buying spree ... / ... to be seen with the best of the spenders./ ... To deposit with the best of the spenders" in church and other social occasions such as memorial services must be seen as the dramatist's critique of the social evils in the Ghanaian society (*The Marriage ...*, p.24). It is this profligacy and frivolous lifestyle of the middle class, as displayed by Ananse's current status, which invite the execution of roguery by the proletariat class on them, as manifested in the artisans' trickery and sheer devilry in exploiting Ananse. Sutherland therefore transposes the social evils of the Ghanaian society to reflect a society diametrically divided between the upper middle class (the possessors of wealth) whose ostentatious display of riches makes them susceptible to gullibility, and the ordinary class who feign friendship, hard work and generosity as a bid to win the legator's trust.

The artist's skill in portraying the gull-knave pattern is particularly evident in her choice of the characters whose assigned roles in the action of the play provide a multi-levelled perspective in the plot of the hero to gull his dupes. In the play, Ananse and the daughter Anansewa (aided by Christie Yamoah) act the role of the knaves while the four chiefs (Sapaase, Akate, Mines and Chief-Who-Is-Chief) or their Messengers act the roles of the dupes, though society expects them to be wise-hearted. The choice of the character names for the gulls evokes the flowering glamour associated with the upper middle class personalities in the Ghanaian society, whose excessive love of praise-names and appellations set in motion an inducement to be deceived and manipulated.

The selection of the four chiefs is carefully crafted to reflect the entire chieftaincy institution in Ghana. Chiefs are revered, honoured and permitted to marry as many wives as they wish since in the performance of this act (in addition to other political, economic, religious and social functions) their ego is manifested. The dramatist does not censure this desire in the chiefs to marry a new wife, but it is the motive and the purposes for which the marriage is contracted and the perverse symbolism invested in the praise-names which obviously reflect both the knavery and gulling mode of society.

The dramatist invests the knaves with a quality of wit, intelligence and cunning to take advantage of the privileged position of the gulls who are portrayed as “adore[rs] of their appellations” (p. 6). Ananse is clearly aware of this “nature of humans” and he exploits it to his benefit. In the four letters he writes to the chiefs, Ananse infuses the salutations with periphrastic language, studded with metaphors

of benevolence which ironically betray the recipients' selfish and perverse natures.

For example Chief of Sapaase is described as:

O Mighty-Tree-Of-Ancient-Origin!

Mighty-Tree-Of-Ancient-Origin,

Rooted in the shrine of deity!

Countless branches in which

Benighted wandering birds

Are welcome to shelter. (*The Marriage ...*, p. 6).

Chief of Akate, Togbe Klu IV, is also addressed as:

Prickly-Pear!

Cactus keeping guard

...

Thanks to your capacious leaves,

Those whom you love

Will always find within them

Water to refresh them (*The Marriage ...*, p.7).

Chief of Sapaase is supposed to possess "countless branches" that provide shelter for "wandering birds". Togbe Klu IV is also expected to possess "capacious leaves" showering refreshing water persistently to humanity. But the question to ponder on: how many "wandering birds" and thirsty humans have truly benefitted from the largesse of chiefs in real life? Chiefs use the wealth of their communities for their personal benefits. The Chief of the Mines is given the accolade of "coming again", sprinkling his riches and exercising command through his possession "of priceless

lands”. This suggests his wealth but the metaphor of the “driver ants” covering the ground and making it impossible for humans to “sit” reflects the irony and perversity of the chief’s portrayal obviously justifying his presentation as a gull. Sutherland’s dramatic skill in creating the favourite trickster hero, Ananse, whose lips are sugared to effect the gulling, serves the overall interest of the comedy. This point is made concrete in the artistic choices of the sub-plots (as dramatised in the Akwasi and Akosua episodes), the role of the Property Man and the devices of the *mboguo* to make the knaves execute the mischief and wit inherent in the gull-knave pattern.

The resourcefulness and knavery displayed by Ananse in contriving ways of exploiting the gulls, weaving intricate webs in and out of difficult situations in the plot, scheming appearances and acts and his fulsome praise involved in the gloating exchanges between the Messengers (of the Chiefs) and himself on the one hand and the buffoonery exhibited by the Postman and him on the other hand serve as useful insights in the dramatist’s artistic design. The artist seems enamoured with her own creation, Ananse, who reports to the reader on one of the numerous occasions when he receives money thus:

You see? They are beginning to salute me. They are calling me Sir. If only time would stand still for me. Well, what have we got this time? [*He opens the letter.*] Good Lord! Again? [*He is thrilled.*] Oh, they say, they say, but I am seeing the truth for myself. Another cheque! Oh, you whose name is whispered in the ear, you

are scoring goals. This is your thirteenth cheque to arrive. And the largest amount you've ever sent.

(*The Marriage ...*, p. 30).

Ananse's successes and excellent exhibition of wit at this point in the plot finds a comparison in Jonson's play, *Volpone*, in which the hero, Volpone, gloats over his successes in exploiting the legatees of their gold, diamond plates and other valuables. Unlike Volpone who is portrayed as an impostering rogue fleecing his clients off their wealth Ananse is here presented as a lovable rogue whose exhibition of wit is applauded by the dramatist.

In developing the structural pattern of the intrigues associated with her trickster tale, Sutherland switches the roles of the main characters to exhibit oppositional disguises. Jonson also demonstrated a similar skill in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* wherein the heroes at some points in the exhibition of their wit and cunning manifest the roles of both imposters and at other points exhibit the buffoonery. In Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Ananse (during the course of the main action in the play) exhibits his intelligence, guile and wit to outsmart the four chiefs through deception to receive gifts from them. These acts make him the principal imposter and rogue aided by Anansewa and Christie. However, later in the play when he also starts displaying his wealth "to deposit with the best of spenders", he condescends into a state of morbidity and buffoonery as the artisans act the roles of lesser imposters and petty devils to exploit Ananse.

Ananse's buffoonery is further manifested in the various scenes when he receives news (and letters) announcing the Chiefs' intent of coming to perform the customary head drink for Anansewa's hand in marriage. In the earlier scenes when he fleeces the chiefs off their wealth, he plays the role of a confident trickster and an artful manipulator of humans, but now he feigns a sudden headache; he hides behind the web screens to spontaneously contrive the lies about enemies destroying the family cocoa farm at Nanka. In the final Act of the play, Ananse's buffoonery is particularly manifested when he disguises the daughter as 'dead' and organises the funeral for the "Dead-and Alive Anansewa". In all these scenes the dramatist swaps the roles by fake pretences connected with the trickster plot to ensure that there is wit in deception and a kind of glory in changing appearances and roles as Ananse disfigures human identities and confuses human interactions.

The artist's skill in developing the knavery and resourcefulness displayed by Ananse to deceive the chiefs provides a further insight into the development of the gull-knave pattern which accommodates the special role of a parasite who assists the hero to execute the roguery. The Jonsonian model exploits the special roles of Mosca in *Volpone* and Subtle and Dol in *The Alchemist* to develop this pattern. In the Soyinkan model, Sadiku and Chume are selected in *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* respectively to perform the roles of the parasite in the gull-knave pattern in both plays.

In the Sutherland model, the artist selects Anansewa and Christina Yamoah to perform such a parasitic role. We have already commented on Anansewa's complicit role in agreeing to Ananse's proposal for the "lively competition" to be

schemed as she switches her “life off and on like electricity” at the end of the plot to determine the appropriate suitor who is worthy to be her husband. The artist uses Christina’s self-confessed role as “toiling for Georgie!/ That he may smile on me” (*The Marriage ...*, p.56) coupled with her dexterity as a fashion expert for “prospective brides” to portray interesting insights about humans, captured in Ananse’s favourite expression, “Going-and-coming is necessary. Otherwise nothing succeeds” (*The Marriage ...*, p. 2). This phenomenon captures an over-reaching imposter full of buffoonery, subtlety and an ultimate purpose of maximizing her chances of success regardless of the moral implications.

Christie Yamoah is a fashionable woman engaged by Ananse to help train Anansewa for marriage. Though her wages are assured, she looks beyond the temporary benefits to focus on aligning herself to both Ananse’s wealth and establishing her position as a wife to him. Such effrontery makes her both an enchanter and a cozener. In her dealings with the hero, her cunning and subtlety in “leaning her ladder” on Anansewa in order to climb up to Ananse and her boldness in addressing Aya (Ananse’s mother) as “Mother” portrays her as a sneering imposter with a sinister motive. After the outdoor ceremony she elegantly walks ahead of everyone beside the brass bowl and declares:

I will be the first to place my gift in this brass bowl.

Anansewa, my darling, I never thought I would part with this sovereign in my hand. And yet, you see what love’s power can do? When Georgie told me you were to be outdoored, I nearly went mad with joy. I asked myself,

‘What on earth shall I give Anansewa, my Sweetie?’ I
said, I’ll give her something I value. ... Things go where
they belong. It is not as though I were throwing it away
on some stranger (The Marriage ..., p.40).

Christie’s pretence and smart moves of love and friendship are part of her dissimulation to serve her selfish interest. The reader applauds the degree of her intelligence, wit and comic villainy as she “forces” her way into the family affairs of her prospective in-laws.

The dramatist supports Christie’s moves as she manipulates events in the plot. Sutherland employs the *carpe diem* motif with the portrayal of the four chiefs, one after the other, hastily announcing their intent of performing the head drink ceremony for Anansewa’s hand in marriage on the same day, paving way for Aya and Ekuwa to hurriedly leave the home of Ananse for the village. Christie’s role as a cunning and amusingly ingenious parasite is best illustrated in her dealings with the Messengers of the four chiefs who come mourning the death of Anansewa during the mock death scene. She is portrayed as a chief linguist mourner carrying a staff of the Asona clan. Her dexterity in ushering in the Messengers around the “corpse” and chaperoning Ananse during the “mock death scenes” manifest a touch of comic villainy simulating the way professional mourners in Akan societies cry to move sympathisers to give out more money.

The dramatist’s skill in the portrayal of the gulling of the Messengers of the four revered chiefs through the parasitic role assigned Christie shares a semblance to Jonson’s skill in the scenes where Mosca itemizes the properties in his notebook as

Volpone “lies in state dead” while the four legatees throng Volpone’s home to claim their prize as the named inheritor of the hero’s wealth. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Christie produces *a sheet of paper and a pencil from her clothes... reads it and speaks like one suppressing tears*: “I have called Akate and informed Togbe Klu, and they are on their way./ I have called Sapaase Palace and informed them. They say they are on their way./ I have called the Mines and informed them. They may even have arrived already. [*Her voice is now quivering as much as possible*]. I have called Chief-Who-Is-Chief and informed him” (*The Marriage ...*, p. 66). Unlike the Jonsonian model where Mosca itemizes the physical holdings of the “dead man” (Volpone) as evidences of the inherited properties in the presence of the legatees, the Sutherland model of the “mock death scenes” translates the physical tangible properties to revered chiefs reduced to objects of mockery as they come one after another to “claim” their “prize”.

Sutherland’s skill in manipulating these scenes to make all the Messengers of the four chiefs believe Ananse and Christie’s antics (as exhibited in the feigned quivering voices, Ananse’s buffoonery and repeated groans, coupled with the conspiratorial whispers between them) reveals the gullible state of the dupes who though suspected that Anansewa was feigning death still believed and obliged Ananse. Christie’s song, “Oh really clueless one/ Wailing though I lack skill/ Oh really clueless one” (*The Marriage ...*, p. 69) repeated all through the visitations of the Messengers of the four chiefs in the scenes further suggests the gullible state of the Chiefs’ councillors who tradition expects of them to be wise, discerning and

intelligent. However, they all seem to be in a hurry to attend to other issues in life rather than focusing on the funeral of their supposed beloved, Anansewa.

The dizzying speed with which the dramatist introduces and dismisses each of the emissaries of the first three Chiefs (Mines, Sapaase and Akate) serves as a pointer in establishing her criticism of the dupes. These dupes are “willing and eager to oil the wheels of customs... for the maintenance of the object of [their] interest (*The Marriage ...*, p.13) so long as they stand the opportunity to gain by way of actualising their selfish ends (as revealed in their intents for initiating the marriage to Anansewa) but they are not fully committed in following the tenets of true tradition since, as one of them declares: “this is a case of no-sale-no-payment” (*The Marriage ...*, p.71).

The dramatist highlights this metaphor of “no-sale-no-payment” mentality to portray not only the selfish and greedy nature of humans but to reveal the pitiable and pathetic state of humanity that thrives on dissimulation and devious intents. Superficially, the metaphor suggests a fair playing ground upon which human interactions are anchored, but the dramatist goes beyond the physical appearances to explore the inner motives that drive actions and behavioural patterns. The four chiefs have an objective interest in “oiling the wheels of custom” by sending gifts to Ananse for specific self-centred egoistic desires, perhaps not for charitable purposes of helping the poor and needy in society. Since the object of their interest does not survive (as dramatised in the mock-death scenes), the question inadvertently posed by the artist is whether they will continue sending those gifts to Ananse. Obviously not, since no human marries a corpse. Sutherland’s skill

therefore justifies Ananse's knavery in exploiting money from the chiefs and organising the "lively competition" since "there isn't any law to oblige Ananse to return to them any of the gifts he has received from their hands so far" (*The Marriage ...*, p. 65).

Thus, the logic emerging from the play suggests that the rich and the affluent in society can become objects of gulling if they are motivated by selfish desires and do not seek the general good of humanity, thereby justifying any means whatsoever the poor devise to improve their lot in society. Perhaps, this may sound a harsh suggestion to be delineated from Sutherland's play but the Storyteller intimates that:

As for some people! They do not pause to enquire
how true a thing is before they believe it, and so
it's easy to deceive them (*The Marriage ...*, p. 60).

This is the essence of Sutherland's Anansegoro.

Vecsey (1988) opines that Ananse is an enigmatic figure whose pranks make mockery of the serious form of rules, the sacredness of "beliefs and the establishment of rituals. He is a vagabond, an intruder to proper society and an unpredictable liar who throws doubt on the concept of truth itself" (p. 106). His manifestations in society are both oxymoronic and paradoxical. By violating the accepted patterns of culture using lies, deceit and trickery to exploit money from the chiefs, Ananse helps to spell out those patterns of life. By acting recklessly in "selling" the daughter, he helps define accountability. He threatens the very

foundations of society, yet he teaches too. In addition, Ananse expresses misgivings about what constitutes realities but helps focus attention on the realities of life.

Sutherland's portrayal of Ananse as crossing supposedly unbreakable boundaries between what is admirable and less admirable in culture and nature, life and death and thereby drawing attention to these boundaries manifests her skill as a master craftsman whose art becomes the embodiment of the Akan people. Her art confirms the view that Akan societies embrace trickster stories of Ananse because as Hynes and Doty (1997) observe about tricksters in general, "they serve the vital purpose of questioning and affirming, casting doubt and building faith upon the most important societal concepts" (p.107). The Storyteller in Sutherland's play confirms that the nature of Anansegoro is such that "as soon as you release your mind to it, it takes you, penetrating where it might not have been possible for you to go" (*The Marriage ...*, p. 66). Thus Sutherland's vision in the play is a penetrating exploration of the socio-cultural realities which help humans to make the best of decisions in the face of life threatening situations.

Ananse's posturing at the beginning of the "mock death scenes" is one of the highlights to be examined in seeking to understand Sutherland's vision. He confides in the reader thus:

I know that not all my ways can be considered
straight. But, before God, I'm not motivated by
bad thoughts at this moment. I have a deep
fatherly concern for this only child of mine.
If the world were not what it is, I would not

gamble with such a priceless possession.

(Italicised, mine: *The Marriage ...*, p. 67).

Ananse's admission of his untoward ways perhaps suggests the frailty associated with our common humanity which pre-disposes all humans to errors and mistakes, but his reason for engaging in the roguery with the four chiefs is, however, credited to the *ways of the world* which invariably have become fraught with contradictions and inexplicable behavioural patterns. How can such revered Chiefs possess wealth in abundance while the citizenry suffer in abject poverty; and again why do the supposed wise councillors not see through the roguery of Ananse in duping the chiefs? The answers lie in Sutherland's understanding of the grand scheme involved in the gull-knave pattern which allows the knaves to prevail over the gulls because of their superior know-how. Sutherland's stylistic mode in *The Marriage of Anansewa* resembles Jonson's (in both *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*) in which the knaves prevail because of their superior moral insights and understanding of the workings of human society. The knaves are portrayed as the scourge of the inadequacies and follies of the gulls, and even their inexplicable ways and deeds that society tolerates or overlooks.

Sutherland's grand scheme in the play focuses on establishing the philosophical foundations of Akan society mediated to explore the inner motives of humans as they strive to observe the acceptable values of honesty, truthfulness, love and sincerity which are the hallmarks of a just society. The dramatist provides a preview of this superior-know-how in the scene which dramatises the Akwasi and Akosua encounter. Akosua insists that she is not a legal wife of Akwasi because the

customary head drink has not been paid. This scene finds a comparison in the encounters between Lakunle and Sidi as dramatised in *The Lion and the Jewel* in which Sidi insists on the payment of her bride price before Lakunle can claim she is his wife. Akwasi's benevolence and acts of charity have no basis in Ghanaian law to confer the rights of a husband to Akosua.

His ignorance of the tradition governing marriage and his deliberate attempt to subvert customary law and practice in pursuit of his selfish motives attract a censure from the dramatist who portrays him as "senseless" and a gull. Akosua reprimands Akwasi thus:

So this is your *character*. You keep coming to me:

'Akosua, this is something small I bought for you', you say. I'm reluctant to accept it, but you press it on me.

'You'll embarrass me if you refuse it', so you say.

Therefore, I accept it. And here you stand today in a public street screaming out (*The Marriage ...*, p.18).

Akwasi's character as revealed by his motives and understanding of how marriage should be contracted is the basis for his gulling and the subsequent ridicule from the PLAYERS in the scene.

Similarly, the Chiefs' numerous gifts to Ananse do not automatically confer the right of husbands on them. However, the Chiefs are conversant with the customary laws and practices and are willing to pay the head drink accordingly as their emissaries indicate. But the critical questions Ananse poses to the reader in a soliloquy are, "What about [their] character? What kind of life will [they] lead my

daughter?" (*The Marriage ...*, p. 30). Perhaps, these are the thought provoking issues the dramatist engages the reader to explain the prescriptive role she assigns Ananse in the plot to act as the moral legislator in the affairs of marriage. The Chiefs' mad rush for Anansewa's hand in marriage is understandable but their self-confidence and overweening hope in their wealth and selfish motives invariably lead them toward error. Ananse's "lively competition" therefore contributes to the satiric exposure of the gulls and the artist uses these scenes to establish the moral posturing in the play.

The dramatist is well aware of her role as an African writer committed to interpreting the mores of her society to readers. This privileged position endears her to structure her art to both delight and teach admirable traits that enhance society's progress. Her portraiture of the Chiefs' display of wealth by "merely doing what it is beautiful to do" in oiling "the wheels of custom" and their willingness to follow the revered customs and practices of society in paying the customary head drink is commendable but the artist focuses on how cherished traditional values in human relationships are trampled upon in pursuit of personal egoistic desires. In the mock death scenes, the dramatist provides sustainable reasons for which the first three Chiefs (Mines, Sapaase and Akate), do not deserve a win in the competitive bidding for the hand of Anansewa in marriage.

The vicious but derisive judgements that Ananse (and Christie) executes on the three Chiefs share a semblance to Mosca's judgements on the gulling of the legacy hunters in Jonson's *Volpone*. Jonson's skill, however, focuses on both the heartless and malicious manner in which Mosca executes the treachery and judgement on the

one hand and the daftness and stupidity of the gulls on the other. Sutherland's skill focuses on the potential social imbalance that the three Chiefs' actions and inactions are likely to cause society because of their failure to completely uphold the expectations of Akan mores as far as marriage is concerned. In the play, the Chief of Mines insists on contracting the marriage to Anansewa against his councillors' advice. His First Messenger to the 'funeral service' reports that "our royal one, the wealthy paramount Chief of the Mines... has had many discussions with his councillors about this marriage he was going to contract. He insisted – *against their advice* – that if a lady of this quality came into his hands she would give enlightened training to the many children to whom his wives have given birth". (Italicised, mine: *The Marriage ...*, p. 68). This decision by the chief contravenes Akan customary practices.

As Gyekye (1998) suggests, in Akan cosmology, a Chief has the sole prerogative to decide whom he intends to marry and how the union ought to be contracted. But the Chief's powers are subject to the Queen Mother's assent and his councillors' views. Their expressed objection to the Chief's decision spells doom for the prospective bride and even has tragic consequences to the peace and harmony inherent in the chieftaincy institution. Consequently Ananse's verdict on the Chief's intent of marrying his daughter conveys the moral imperatives in the play. He declares: "Ah! So had my daughter gone into this marriage, this chief's councillors would not have liked it; and she would have gone there to get hated". (*The Marriage ...*, p.69). The verdict evokes a comic cathartic effect in the reader who obviously agrees with Ananse that the Chief of Mines deserves to be gulled

and derided. He does not deserve Anansewa in marriage because the basis of the marriage only serves his personal interests.

Ananse's judgement on the Chief of Sapaase equally portrays the perverse intents of humans in initiating and contracting marriages. The Messengers of the Chief report that they had been "campaigning" for Anansewa's marriage primarily to "display [their] pride for the purpose of putting to shame a certain bitchy, ugly somebody" who they "would have sent packing downstairs – straight! – that shrew of a woman at large there, who is only waiting to claw out [their] eyes and scare [them] away" (*The Marriage ...*, p.70). These intents of the Sapaase councillors (invariably those of the Chief himself) are conceived to cause pain and bitterness to Anansewa who in this portraiture is meant to deal with their own internal wrangling and rivalry which they are unable to handle. Apparently, these intents and wrong motives are part of the dramatist's criticisms of the social institutions and behavioural patterns of humans that come under intense scrutiny in the play.

Sutherland's skill of introducing this self-confession mode enables the Chief (who is here presented as a dupe fit for gulling) to reveal his own inner motives and thoughts which become the basis for the hero to pass his derisive judgment on him. The gulling of the Chief of Sapaase is manifest in his Messengers' verbiage and "trouble-ridden talk" rendered in prosaic language full of repetitions and muffled hate. According to Kwasi Wiredu, Chiefs are expected by custom and practice to maintain law and order and settle all differences among the citizenry to ensure peace in society. Since the Chief of Sapaase, in Sutherland's play, is unable to do this, he does not have the moral right to marry Anansewa. The dramatist courts the

reader's support to justify Ananse's virulent disgust for the Chief of Sapaase (and his people), and also provides a sustained basis for Ananse's roguery executed on the Chief. For Ananse declares:

Had you people got hold of my child, you
would have involved her, blameless as she is,
in your contention in Sapaase Palace and
driven that wild woman of whom you speak
to kill her and bereave me for nothing

(The Marriage ..., p. 72).

Ananse's judgement also manifests a criticism on society in the complicit role of its institutional structures that create tensions for innocent and blameless individuals like Anansewa who are dragged into conflicts they bear no hand in its beginnings.

The portrayal of Togbe Klu's "good intentions" in making Anansewa a "helper" to run his substantial business appears positive and suggests an economic empowerment the prospective husband intends to bestow on Anansewa. However, the dramatist's skill of revealing the inner motives of the Chief (through the testimonies of his emissaries) manifests the deceit, lies and hypocritical tendencies of the revered character portrayed here as a dupe. Togbe Klu's emissaries reveal that he "... has become a most zealous adherent of a Spiritualist Church" (*The Marriage ...*, p.73), and so he resolves to abandon time-tested Ghanaian customary practices relating to funeral observances. His decision to prevent the emissaries from attending the "funeral" to pay their last respect to his prospective wife and the

fact that the messengers do not present any gift whatsoever as tradition requires of him render all his “good intentions” to live so well with Anansewa a display of mockery and sheer lip service.

Since Ananse is a known master schemer in disguise and has the ability to use agility and camouflage to deceive his victims, the dramatist manipulates the hero to engage in “ifs” and “supposition” analysis, full of rhetorical questions which examine the various chances and options left for him to succeed or fail in the mock-death enterprise.

Have I allowed your messengers to depart? What *if* Chief-Who-Is-Chief doesn't come? And *if* he does, *supposing* he comes in the manner in which the Mines people and Sapaase people came? What would I do then? *If* in desperation and torment, I push my child into his hands in that event, I would be pushing her into catastrophe. Oh, has trouble so turned into a fallen tree across my road?

(Italicised, mine: *The Marriage* ..., p.74).

The portrayal of Ananse here suggests his engagement in rules of sheer survival skills. These invariably prevent him from being restricted to a mono-dimensional heroic role; he manifests the fluid nature of tricksters. He gambles his fortunes (and that of the daughter's) but there is a level of optimism in his indecision that defies logic similar to Jonson's portrayal of Volpone in the scenes where he is uncertain whether his disguise as a Clarrissimo would foster his dream of further gulling the dupes or forever dashing his fortunes as a wily trickstering fox. (*Volpone*, IV.v, vi).

Sutherland's vision in this scene of the play explores the intricate relationship in the concepts of chance, religion and divinity, and how these shape an individual's destiny, since Togbe Klu we learn has become a "zealous adherent of a Spiritualist Church" which predisposes him to monasticism and asceticism. Do these concepts of the supernatural predispose humans to leave everything they cannot understand (or make headway of) in the hands of God? The dramatist seems to suggest that these are part of the deep penetrating probing into Ananse's psychology which facilitates his adept ability in wisdom (most apparently greater than the entire world's put together) to enhance his trickery.

Sutherland's structuring of the play is similar to Jonson's in respect of the moral sensibilities of both dramatists. Jonson's skill, we had established earlier, allows the knaves to prevail over the gulls primarily because of the knaves' superior knowledge of the moral code which makes them exploit the weaknesses of the gulls, whose inability to regulate their desires and cravings according to the acceptable mores of society make them buffoons. This structuring enables Jonson to achieve what Beecher (1985) describes as "the joys of artful intrigue" in which the reader admires the knaves despite the lingering moral reservations (p. 50). Unlike the Jonsonian model which allows the knaves to completely dupe all the gulls for varying reasons of greed, irreverence of societal mores as expressed in marital unfaithfulness between husband and wife (as exhibited by Corvino towards his wife Celia, and Lady Would-Be towards her husband, Sir Politic), and distorted father and son relationship (as exhibited by Corbaccio towards his son, Bonario), the Sutherland model permits the knaves to vindicate one of the gulls and spare him

further gulling possibly for his tenacity in ensuring that the mores of society are upheld.

Ananse's brilliant deceit of the three Chiefs and subsequent dismissal of them as failed prospective husbands is conveyed in an atmosphere in which the reader enjoys the successes chalked so far in the hero's dealings with the gulls. The reader is made complicit to Ananse's knavery which schemes to select Chief-Who-Is-Chief as the right suitor for Anansewa. At the beginning of the play when Anansewa rejects the father's proposal of giving her in marriage to "some old chief with fifty wives" (*The Marriage ...*, p. 12), Ananse's brilliance in dispelling this notion of a bigamous and polygamous marital relation amazes both Anansewa and the reader. He cunningly quizzes the daughter thus:

Supposing it isn't some old chief as you ignorantly describe, but the finely built, glowing black, large-eyed, handsome as anything, courageous and famous Chief-Who-Is-Chief? (*The Marriage ...*, p.12)

The narrative about Chief-Who-Is-Chief excites the reader who is given a portraiture of the African conception of an ideal husband. These physical endearments momentarily tempt the reader to give tacit assent to this "unnamed Chief" as against the other three (Mines, Sapaase, and Togbe Klu) whose physical descriptions are subsumed to their "charity works" and flawed motives invested with contradictions and selfish inclinations. As the play progresses, the dramatist provides sustained and compelling reasons for which the reader should agree with Ananse in selecting him over and above the others despite the fact that they also

have demonstrated their willingness in “oiling the wheels of custom” for the “maintenance of the object of their interests”. Chief-Who-Is-Chief is the first among the four to send money for the maintenance of his object of interest and the first to send his emissaries to formally announce the formalisation of the marriage. These two feats are admirable in the Akan conception of marriage.

According to Danquah (1990), Africans place value on individuals who first initiate processes that are admirable to the mores of society. As such, a person like Chief-Who-Is-Who who exhibits forthrightness is preferable. In the same vein, Gyekye (1998) also explores some admiring qualities of the Akan personality suggests that the principles of good conduct, honesty and sincerity are most cherished by society and worthwhile. Sutherland’s portrayal therefore of Chief-Who-Is-Chief as exhibiting these cherished attributes prepares the reader to assess “his character” in the mock-death scene. As Ananse posits, the best criteria to determine the most suitable suitor is by assessing the *character* of each suitor as expressed in their motives and intents. The dramatist provides six reasons to suggest that Chief-Who-Is-Chief deserves Anansewa’s hand in marriage in consonance with Akan norms and customs: i. “He makes no error in calling Ananse his father-in-law”; ii. He is “eager to blend his blood” with Ananse’s to “become a member of the family; iii. He accepts total responsibility for everything concerning” Anansewa’s death; iv. He provides the traditional ring to be placed on the wife’s finger; v. He provides the farewell libation drink; and vi. He provides a coffin. These compelling reasons fulfill the demands of a real husband (or wife) performing the funeral of a spouse.

Rattray (1927) in a study of Akan funerals provides a detailed account of the donations each party of the mourners (widow, widower, children, in-laws, friends, etc.) is expected to bring as a contribution to the funeral. He indicates that all contributions come under the category of *nsa*, the “drink” which obligatorily must be provided by the spouse of the deceased. This *ayi nsa* (farewell funeral drink) is used in pouring libation to announce to the ancestors the final journey of the deceased “home” and to bid farewell to all on earth. Later, this drink is shared among the mourners.

Sutherland’s deliberate choice in making Chief-Who-Is-Chief to provide all the most important needed items for the funeral of a wife makes him the obvious person selected from among the other chiefs to marry Anansewa. Ananse’s cunning rhetoric and antics in performing the libation ceremony and Anansewa’s “resurrection” from the dead are part of the dramatist’s skill in creating a relaxed and playful atmosphere which courts the reader to participate in the comic resolution that the hitherto tragic mock-death scene has invoked in the play. The seemingly cathartic disposition that the dramatist spins on the reader manifests the comic elements in trickster stories in which the trickster engages in series of adventures and near escapades to express himself and in the end, he both amuses society and instructs in ways acceptable to society’s mores.

Sutherland’s art, similar to Jonson’s, recognises the fact that in trickster stories, the best approach is one in which the hero is made to do his *worst* but in these acts of perversity in the hero a kind of *good* is created for society’s instruction and benefit. Jonson’s portrayal and handling of the rogues in the gull-knave pattern in both

Volpone and *The Alchemist* enable the reader to identify with them in their knaveries primarily because of the fascination with the overwhelming force of their intrigues, the buffoonery and the near-escapes experienced by them on the one hand, and the sheer stupidity and mental opacity displayed by the gulls who society expects them to behave uprightly on the other hand. This approach provides the fertile ground to initiate the “justice system” in the Jonsonian model in which both the knaves and the gulls are punished.

Similarly, Sutherland recognises the need for the trickster to prosper in his roguery deeds which apparently excite the reader who endorses his wily ways in extorting money from the chiefs and organising the “lively competition”. His scheme in the mock death scene obviously produces a *good* of what really constitutes the best acceptable practices among the Akans. In addition, Sutherland recognises that Ananse’s successes are predicated on the fact that there is a gullible society to spot with by executing rogueries which ultimately create the expected good. In the play, we observe that the hero while sporting with society, he also destabilises the socio-cultural foundations of Akan society. Though Ananse’s acts in the mock-death scene profanes Akan cultural norms pertaining to marriage, death and burial but he regenerates the norms creatively. The dramatist’s vision in *The Marriage of Anansewa* is to portray the unchanging character of the trickster hero, Ananse, whose tales recount the heroic deeds of the trickster prospering, but at the same time his actions and behavioural patterns challenge societal beliefs and aspirations despite the fact that his actions arouse laughter.

Ultimately, Ananse's successes validate society's values and also focus on the strict observances of these cultural beliefs; for as Pelton (1980) suggests, the Ananse figure must be seen as a metaphor to "unveil the ethical and religious principles of Akan society" (p.125). The portrayal of the hero therefore in the play manifests Akan thoughts on marriage, death and burial lore drawing attention to acceptable customary practices. Though the reader applauds Ananse's successes at the end of the play, society is not expected to emulate his anti-social stratagems. Society is expected to focus on avoiding the possibility of being gulled like the three chiefs who lost their bidding in the contest for Anansewa's hand.

Conclusion

Sutherland's success in reconstructing the image of the archetypal Akan trickster hero, Ananse, to reflect her uniqueness as an African artist contributes substantially to the universal discourse on the comedy genre. Her skill in the construction of the structure of the play, coupled with her handling of the theme, motif, characters and general moral sensibilities "remembers" a similar skill exhibited by Jonson in his play, *Volpone*.

Situating both Sutherland and Jonson's art within the framework of Bloom's poetics, one observes that the twentieth century writer's work, similar to Soyinka's, manifests a matrix of relationships with the sixteenth century writer's work within the timeless universal tradition advocated by Eliot. The framework provides the basis to suggest the convergence of their aesthetic skills. Sutherland's portrayal of the absurd and ridiculous posturing of humans to exhibit the gull-knave pattern, her artistic choice of the lovable rogue and the handling of the trickster hero in *The*

Marriage of Anansewa bears a semblance to her sixteenth century “elder’s” skill. The reader of Sutherland’s play ‘remembers’ some similar scenes and patterns in the selection of the hero, his antics and wily ways, the characters who are portrayed as the gulls, the dizzying speed with which the gulls announce their intents to annex the trophy, and the dramatist’s moral sensibilities of valorizing wit and intelligence in the trickster hero to triumph over the gulls as echoes of Jonson’s skill.

In addition, the reader also appreciates the fact that Sutherland’s skill ‘deviates’ in several ways from the Jonsonian pattern. For example, Sutherland’s unique theatrical innovations in her choice of the Akan storytelling tradition which inculcates the use of the *mboguo*, the roles of the Property Man, the PLAYERS, and Storyteller (acting in concert as a kind of Chorus in Greek Comedy), her condensed plot structure and her use of language to reflect her socio-cultural background are all innovative ways that Sutherland has initiated in the play to establish her art as distinct. These stylistic features not only demonstrate her uniqueness as an African writer but suggest her commitment in carving out her originality in the recreation of her version of the archetypal lovable rogue to reflect the socio-cultural realities of her time.

Sutherland’s choice of the archetypal trickster hero and the dramatic skills exhibited, as well as Soyinka’s choice and stylistic modes in his works, which share semblances with Jonson’s skills will be the focus of discussion in the next chapter where we will impose the metaphor of Bloom’s taxonomy in examining the relationship between the two West African dramatists, on the one hand, and Jonson, on the other hand, with intent of exploring to what extent the former’s approach

and technical skills in relation to the comic tradition remembers the latter's and also establish how the former's skills portray their originality.



CHAPTER FIVE

EQUALISATION OF AESTHETIC ENERGIES: JONSON, SOYINKA AND SUTHERLAND IN PERSPECTIVE

The earlier chapters examine the essential elements in Jonson, Soyinka, and Sutherland's comic works and how each dramatist utilizes those elements, and their stylistic modes to present their craft as self-determining users of universal artistic patterns in their socio-cultural environments. The examination points to the idea that there are some echoes and semblances in the works of the three dramatists to suggest a kind of relationship among them. One singularly dominating element in the three dramatists' skills is their choice of the archetypal trickster hero as the convergence point to reconstruct the image of the absurd and ridiculous posturing of humans.

Though the individual choices and artistic skills exhibited in their works suggest that all three are committed to utilizing the universal artistic paradigms, in respect of the portrayal of the universal lovable rogue, the artistic choices of each dramatist demonstrate that varied revisionisms are possible to reflect the socio-cultural realities of every community. The relation among the three, therefore, will be looked at with a focus on Harold Bloom's poetics to explore the elements and skills utilised by the three within the universal tradition. The exploration will position the Renaissance dramatist, Jonson, as a reference point and examine his dramatic choices in the light of those exhibited by Soyinka and Sutherland. These issues will be the concern of this chapter which seeks to equalise their aesthetic energies,

putting in perspective the similarities and differences among the three dramatists as manifested in their works.

The discussion in this chapter focuses on a juxtaposition of what is common to the dramatists; drawing in issues such as the choice of a common trickster hero, treatment of “similar” themes and character types who are deployed within a similar structural pattern, and other stylistic choices exhibited by the dramatists. In addition, the examination will focus on highlighting the echoes, semblances and parallels among the three dramatists. While admitting the suggestion of the “presence” of Jonson in the works of the two West African dramatists, the discussion will concede that Soyinka and Sutherland have demonstrated their capacity to craft their own identities as original writers. Their voices come alive through the various artistic choices and skills exhibited in selecting tropes and images from their socio-cultural environments to express distinct views in their works. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to point out the similarities in the skills of the three dramatists to suggest the continuum in the comic tradition, and discuss the ways in which each dramatist is distinct in their artistic choices to establish the distinct poetic style of each of the dramatists selected for study.

The Metaphor of Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland at the Crossroads

Ben Jonson, Wole Soyinka and Efuwa Sutherland, as comic literary artists, concentrate their aesthetic energies in portraying the follies and *humours* (to borrow Jonson’s favourite term) of humans in their everyday setting. In their portrayal and handling of the theme of greed, the dramatists focus on criticising those follies,

conducts and behavioural patterns which offend proper, decorous and normal functioning of society. The three dramatists employ the religious imagery of worship to arouse the greatest scorn and disgust for those humans whom society accords respect and dignity by virtue of their social standing. The portrayal presents an ironic portrait of these individuals whose attributes do not commensurate with their positions. Their sense of what constitutes admirable seems to be lost on societal values as they grope in the darkness of their upside-down world. The dramatists manipulate the imagery of worship through the use of irony to metaphorically transfer the emotions of sacred devotion to a deity unto the worship of greed and maintenance of materialism and false values such as we find in the characters presented in their plays.

In *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, for example, Jonson presents a world in which all the characters express an insatiable devotion towards the worship of gold, wealth and the metaphor of the “Philosopher Stone” which suggests the conferment of certain privileges on their middle class statuses. Jonson’s ironic portrayal of the imagery of worship among the characters in both plays manifests the dunce posturing of humans whom the dramatist invests with animal imagery reduced to vermin and putrefaction.

Similarly, in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, Soyinka presents humans’ ironic devotion to false values and pursuit of materialism as against the aspiration of a true worship of the Christian deity, which obviously is made an object of ridicule. The dramatist launches a bitterly critical attack on the spiritually bankrupt society which exploits religion for selfish ends. He also aims at exposing the lies, deceit, roguery and

corruption of the religious practitioners. Ultimately, Soyinka's satiric attack is not only directed at the materialistic acquisitive tendencies of humans in their craze for wealth and power, but the exhibition of human weaknesses which brings to the fore the bestial tendencies that the craze manifests in humans. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Soyinka manipulates the object of worship from a spiritual being to a satisfaction of a craze or a triumph in annexing the metaphor of a gleam and the satisfaction of a psycho-social craze or passions, as depicted in the episodes which present Lakunle and Baroka chasing after Sidi. These episodes reflect the voracious and dunce posturing of humans.

In Sutherland's play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, the dramatist explores human greed and pursuit of values that gratify the human ego in consonance with the socio-cultural realities in the play. Most of the principal characters yearn for recognition, adore fame, clamour for wealth and they exhibit a certain mentality which the hero refers to as the "spending spree". This craze to be counted among the "spenders" creates a debilitating image of humans making them neglect admirable values like truthfulness, honesty and sincerity which all the characters lack. Sutherland's portrayal of the hero (with his cunning to exploit and prosper), the artisans deliberate extortion of Ananse, and Christie Yamoah's parasitic roles are all images that manifest the craze for the worship of false values.

One of the recurring images in the three dramatists' craft is their use of the trickster archetype as a motif (or a core element) in the sub-structure of their plays to portray various manifestations of human greed and voracious behaviour. Jonson selects the image of the trickery fox from medieval bestiary and refashions it to reflect the

socio-cultural realities of Renaissance Europe in developing the plot structure of his play *Volpone*. Similarly, Soyinka selects the image of the fox from his Yoruba metaphysics to express the cunning, wit and selfish nature of the hero in *The Lion and the Jewel*, who both deceives Sidi and Sadiku and also outsmarts Lakunle. The dramatist refashions the image of the fox to reflect the voracious propensities in African chiefs who wantonly desire to marry more virgins into their harem.

In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the image of the fox is portrayed in the Yoruba trickster, Eshu-Elegbara, whose eccentricities amuse the reader. Soyinka's heroes, as presented in the plays, live by wit and cunning to deceive the birds of prey for their personal advantage. Both heroes reflect the Jonsonian image of the fox. Sutherland also exploits the recurring image of the trickster in Akan folktales, Ananse, as the archetype to portray various manifestations of human greed and avaricious life. The dramatist's choice of the spider image shares some close characteristics with the fox image, in terms of their solitary habitats, feeding on carrions and cunning lifestyle. The three dramatists exploit the archetypal trickster hero to portray various manifestations of human greed and the evil concupiscence in humans which ultimately invite the execution of some kind of exposure or judgement on them.

In handling the trickster in each play, Jonson's skill exploits the universal pattern in storytelling (which presents the trickster as always outsmarting its victim) to fashion out the structural pattern of the gull-knave model in which the trickster hero takes advantage of the gullibility of the dupes to prosper. Jonson's plots in both plays, *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, provide a progression in which the knaves

prosper in all their dealings with the gulls who are portrayed as daft and unthinking. These qualities of the gulls obviously make them objects of ridicule and scorn. A particularly important feature in the Jonsonian model of the gull-knave pattern is the portrayal of a set of rogues and cheats who manifest the roguery of the knaves on the one hand and a set of highly placed individuals who exhibit the dunce posturing of the gulls on the other hand as presented in both *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. This feature provides the technical design which the artist manipulates to achieve his artistic aim of satirising the ills of nascent capitalism, greed and selfish living among both the aristocrats and the newly-rich upstarts in his society.

Soyinka's dramatic skills also follow the Jonsonian model of the gull-knave pattern. Soyinka's plots in both plays may not be as expansive (as Jonson's five-act plays) but he succeeds in instituting a structure which accommodates the tricksters on the one hand and the gulls on the other hand. His handling of Baroka (in *The Lion and the Jewel*) and Brother Jero (in *The Trials of Brother Jero*) in making them masters of manipulation, full of wit and cunning and their natural endowment of a "slimy tongue of fire" to deceive not only the ordinary folks but even the supposed intellectuals and highly placed individuals such as the Member of Parliament and Lakunle serves the artistic interest of portraying the trickster figure at its best.

Since tricksters always sport with society's folly and affectations, Soyinka's structuring creates gulls who display the qualities associated with the dunce, which obviously predispose them to be easily duped. Such characters are portrayed to manifest the dunce posturing of humans. In *The Trials of Brother Jero*, for example, the dramatist demonstrates a revolutionary posture in making the Member of

Parliament and the octogenarian man who is predicted to be a chief objects of ridicule and stupidity. Soyinka purposely manipulates the reader's emotions against the dupes to make definite statements about the social and political malaise in the West African society. To establish his overall aim of severely criticising the entire society, the dramatist selects a range of characters from the social strata (both high and low) in both plays to portray the ridiculous nature of the dunce in society. These characters include prospective chiefs, politicians, teachers, market women, beauty queens, house wives and the ordinary citizenry. Soyinka's structuring of his plays and characterisation bear a semblance to Jonson's gull-knave pattern. While Jonson's gulls are selected from among the upper class and the middle class, Soyinka's gulls are expanded to include both the highly-placed individuals and the ordinary people. Soyinka's choice and skill appear more realistic because tricksters in real life do not only target the upper and middle classes but the society at large. Sutherland's structuring of her play shares a semblance to the Jonsonian model of the gull-knave pattern. The plot of *The Marriage of Anansewa* is structured into four acts without a deliberate sub-division of scenes, but the dramatist creates a pattern which identifies the tricksters on the one hand as knaves and the dupes on the other hand. The dramatist's skill in making the hero, Ananse, a master craftsman in roguery, deception and manipulation as a bid to clearly portray the trickster's personality who is invested with a "sweet tongue" full of cunning and wit shares a semblance with Jonson and Soyinka's creation of Volpone, Face, Baroka and Jero respectively. Ananse's success in manipulating Anansewa to make her complicit in his knavery to gull the four revered chiefs – Sapaase, Mines, Togbe Klu and Chief-

Who-Is-Who – depicts the usual patterns of a trickster which Jonson exhibited. Sutherland’s careful selection of the gulls to reflect the upper strata of society manifests another semblance she shares with the Jonsonian model. These dignitaries radiate the glorious posturing of humans within the socio-cultural environs of the play, made substantial with their praise-names and lavish display of wealth. The chiefs (and their emissaries) are expected (within the socio-cultural environment of the play) to reflect the admirable qualities of intelligence, wisdom and prudence in both their individual lives and that of society. But their lack of these traits and exhibition of the dunce posturing makes them share similar traits with Jonson’s gulls.

Sutherland’s deliberate portrayal of them as easy dupes for Ananse’s knavery puts them within the same class as Jonson’s dupes in his plays. The choice of this class of characters, as dupes, enables both dramatists to portray the assertive and over-confident nature of tricksters who by their wit and cunning are expected to prosper in their roguery deeds as they interact with society. Perhaps this skill is a universal reproduction of the usual patterns in storytelling in which the trickster will have to sport and prosper by society’s gulling mode.

Jonson, however, achieves artistic distinction in this universal portrayal by switching the roles of the characters in his plays to exhibit oppositional disguises between the gulls and the knaves. In developing this pattern in his plots, the dramatist deliberately manipulates the tricksters to exhibit the buffoonery and stupidity of the gulls while at some points in the plot the gulls exhibit traits as imposters and predators which are the defining qualities of the knaves. For example

in *Volpone*, the scenes where the hero disguises himself as a mountebank selling the special powder to the public and wearing the attire of a court official to tease Voltore and Corvino at the precincts of the court are acts to demonstrate his buffoonery and stupidity. In the same play we later observe Voltore and his colleague gulls trooping into the home of Volpone to claim his wealth and also outsmart one another in court with a self-deluding confidence of imposters. These roles of knavery and gulling are frequently switched in the play. In the end the dramatist reverses these roles for the tricksters to prosper momentarily while the gulls are purged off their false devious disguises through the medicinal therapy of ridicule.

Soyinka's skill in both plays also presents this oppositional disguise where the roguery characters who exhibit the trickery are made to perform certain roles which portray them as buffoons, while the dunce characters act roles which make them both imposters and temporary witty personages. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the scenes which present Baroka getting involved in the village dances and miming the Stranger's appearance, coupled with the narration of his lost manhood are portraiture of the hero exhibiting the traits of a buffoon. Lakunle's efforts to win Sidi's hand in marriage and his deliberate distortion of facts regarding his rival, Baroka, elicit examples of his exhibition of the role of an imposter, even though he is primarily portrayed as a buffoon in the play. The scenes in which Lakunle deceives Sidi about Baroka's true nature: as a "collector of brides", one who prevents development from coming to Ilujinle, one who bribes his way to maintain the virgins in the village are portrayal of his assumed posture as an imposter playing the role of a trickster.

Similarly, in *The Trials of Brother Jero*, the various scenes where we observe the dramatist's skill which makes Jero and Chume exchange roles as master and servant during the Church service is a good example. While Chume, the gull, assumes the role of the prophet deceiving the congregation during the prayer session; Jero, the rogue, descends into the posture of a buffoon as he chases the woman with the exposed thighs. In addition, Jero's dealings with the MP at the end of the play as Chume pursues him in fright with a brandished cutlass manifests the oppositional disguise of a trickster prophet in flight for his life as the buffoon while Chume initiates the act of an imposter. Ultimately, Soyinka makes the knaves – Baroka and Jero – to triumph over the dupes. Both Jonson and Soyinka exhibit this skill to demonstrate the excitements involved in trickster tales and to express the overriding interest of making the tricksters finally to triumph over the gulls.

Sutherland's skill in *The Marriage of Anansewa* also exhibits this oppositional disguise in the portrayal of the characters who are manipulated to switch roles as imposters and as buffoons. In the main action of the play, Ananse exacts the roguery on the gulls but at some points in the plot he acts as a buffoon. The scenes which portray Ananse on a "spending spree", being duped by the artisans, hiding behind the screens to weave his web, and the infamous "mock-death scene" are emblematic representations of the dunce posturing of the trickster. Conversely, the scenes which present the revered chiefs (or their emissaries) announcing their intents of performing the customary marriage for the hand of Anansewa with a dizzying speed and the rapidity with which each chief responds to the "funeral service" of Anansewa provide a portraiture of them as imposters, subjecting Ananse to intense

pressure. Sutherland's skill, similar to Jonson's, ultimately allows the knaves to prosper over the gulls.

In the portrayal of this oppositional disguises, the three dramatists' skills in character portrayal manifest the confused state of human relationships as reflected in knavery and gulling and the blurred human interactions between the sane and the stupid, the wise-hearted and the foolish, the selfish and the selfless, the witty and the dunce, etc. However, in this confused state and blurred human interactions the dramatists manipulate events in favour of the tricksters who are made the satirical whip of society's stupidity and moral decadence. This skill contributes to the general interests of establishing the plays within the comedy genre which obviously portrays the folly of humans that must be purged through the therapeutic medium of ridicule.

Another skill exhibited by Jonson which finds a comparison in Sutherland and Soyinka's works is the Jonsonian skill of creating a parasite who assists the trickster hero. Such a character performs a special role of aiding the trickster to succeed in his roguery deeds and also contributes to the exposure of both the gulls and the trickster himself at the end of the play. The roles assigned to Mosca (in *Volpone*) and Subtle and Dol (in *The Alchemist*) contribute substantially to the development of Jonson's plots in both plays. Their roles provide the series of intrigues, daring roguery, complicated knavery, near escapes, and sheer devilry of both the parasites and the trickster heroes themselves. These parasitic characters also are used as agents of the dramatist to effect the gulling of the dupes and executing the due judgements on the knaves themselves who are denied the opportunity of enjoying

the benefits of their roguery acts by the end of the plays, as dramatised in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*.

In Sutherland's play, the dramatist also assigns Christie Yamoah and Anansewa the roles of the parasite to aid Ananse in his roguery. Anansewa initially is portrayed as a naive and unsophisticated knave but when the benefits of the roguery trade are dangled before her, she consents to the father's cunning and complements the efforts of Christie Yamoah to defraud the chiefs. Her willingness to "switch off and on" her life like electricity and Christie's role as a linguist extraordinaire during the "mock-death scene" to effect the gulling of the chiefs are manifestations of the dramatist's success in making them accomplices in Ananse's roguery and also to execute the judgements on the gulls. However, Sutherland's skill permits both the trickster, Ananse, and the parasites to enjoy the fruits of their knavery while Jonson's *Volpone* and *Mosca* are denied the opportunity of enjoying the benefits of their roguery deeds.

Similarly, Soyinka assigns special roles to parasites who assist the tricksters in their knavish acts to both prosper and exact judgements on the gulls in the end. The dramatist assigns Sadiku (in *The Lion and the Jewel*) and Chume (in *The Trials of Brother Jero*) the roles of the parasites in the plays. Baroka depends greatly on his "faithful lizard", Sadiku, (perhaps similar to *Mosca*'s self-confessed role of a snake) to effect the roguery on both Sidi and Lakunle. Her role as the eldest wife of Baroka's harem and the dramatist's portraiture of her personal idiosyncrasy as an African feminist portrays the double-dealings and intentional deceptive nature of

Sadiku in both serving the interest of Baroka and her personal agenda of defeating the men-folk in the battle for supremacy among the sexes.

The dramatist assigns her a special role of a priest who endorses the roguery of Baroka in the blessing of the new bride and instituting the acts of Ogun in the death and rebirth of the trickster to prosper ultimately despite the lingering moral imperatives. Perhaps, this is the point of departure between the Jonsonian art (which insists on punishing both the trickster and the parasite) and the Soyinkan art (which rewards the acts of the trickster and the parasite) when we compare Jonson's *Volpone* and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*.

Jonson's skill, however, in *The Alchemist* provides a new model of complexity in which the parasites (Subtle and Dol) perform roles which aid the trickster to institute various punishments on the gulls but they are themselves (at the same time) denied the opportunity to enjoy the booty regardless of the fact that their acts also contributed to the series of events that exonerate the hero, Face, to prosper. The hero also assists his master, Lovewit, to triumph finally over the dupes despite the crookery of Face's deeds. This skill of assigning the parasite a complex role in fostering the fortunes of the trickster to prosper despite the restraining moral imperatives is also presented in Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*. Chume's roles: as an apprentice who helps his master to deceive the congregants; as a gull manipulated by Jero to both create havoc in his marriage and prosper by his stupidity; and finally his "liberated" posture where he brandishes a cutlass chasing the hero with murderous intents are all designed by the dramatist to make the trickster triumph despite the compelling moral imperatives. He, unlike Sadiku and

Face, descends into a state of morbidity where he gains nothing. He is committed into a lunatic asylum while Jero triumphs.

The overall artistic design of the Jonsonian art which assigns to the knaves a superior moral insight in their interactions with the gulls such that the former prevails over the latter has a semblance in both Sutherland and Soyinka's artistic designs as demonstrated in their plays. Jonsonian skill celebrates the knaves' exhibition of wit, intelligence and the strength of the law to institute a kind of a "justice system" in dealing with both the folly of the dupes and the roguery of the tricksters in consonance with the socio-cultural realities in Renaissance Europe. The seizure of Volpone's assets to be given to an orphanage and his commitment to serve a lifetime imprisonment, the flogging of Mosca, the court order for Corvino to pay the emoluments due Celia (his wife) back to her parents, the seizure of Corbaccio's assets for his son, Bonario, and the public disgrace of Voltore as a lawyer are all judgements effected through the strength of the law. However, in *The Alchemist* the dramatist blends Face and Lovewit's exhibition of wit and intelligence, and the strength of the law to execute the judgements on the dupes.

Similarly, Sutherland's skill also enunciates the celebration and exhibition of wit and intelligence as distinctive qualities of the knaves who have been invested with a superior moral insight to prosper in their interaction with the gulls. The dramatist's commitment to her artistic ideals of the Anansegoro allows her to manipulate the gulls who fail to demonstrate true respect toward the mores of society in accordance with the correct observances of Akan funeral celebrations. Therefore, the dramatist devises that wit and intelligence will have to be exhibited

by the superior knowledge of the knaves to educate society. This manifests the teaching aspect of her art which does not depend on the force of the law to express it. Soyinka's skill also extols the exhibition of wit and intelligence over the stupidity and folly of the dupes but he mutes the element of dependence on the law to effect the "justice" at the end of his plays. He, like Sutherland, institutes a system which accommodates the comic distortion of a Shakespearean comedy that permits the rogues to go unpublished. Life seems to go on normally but the West African dramatists' skills draw the reader's attention to the regenerative processes inherent in West African societies which ultimately permit culture and morality to triumph over stupidity and buffoonery.

Baroka's success and triumph in annexing the trophy of the jewel, as designed by Soyinka, demonstrate the preservation of West Africa's belief in the pristine institution of marriage and its observance in the payment of bride-price, which Lakunle refuses to acknowledge. It also reveals the dramatist's belief in the integrative process of tradition and modernity blending to carve a new path for the African society as against Lakunle's wholesale adoption of European values and identity.

Similarly, Ananse's successes at the end of the play and his gloating exchanges with the Storyteller direct the reader's attention to the observance of acceptable societal mores (which the three chiefs failed to observe) rather than his roguery. Sutherland suggests that in Anansesem the listener (reader) is encouraged not to emulate the tricks of the hero but draw vital lessons from the tales, which are enacted to promote sincerity, truth and honesty. Humans therefore must know what

to do at each point to prosper in life. Similarly, Soyinka's hero, Jero, triumphs over Chume and the dupes. The triumph is credited not only to his exhibition of wit and intelligence but his ability to know what to do in the face of life-threatening situations as Eshu-Elegbara did to obtain the *ashe*. Soyinka and Sutherland's skills applaud the belief systems and practices which have socio-cultural relevance to their African descent; for after all one of their roles as African literary artists in the light of Awoonor's advocacy is to serve as "the vanguard of the armies that will liberate the masses from ignorance and cultural strangulation and restore for them their earlier attachment to life" (p.355).

The Geniuses of Soyinka and Sutherland

Soyinka and Sutherland, in their selected plays, demonstrate their commitment to the comic tradition of written literature in following after both the Ancients and the Renaissance dramatist, Jonson. At the same time, they have exhibited their geniuses as modern African writers whose originality is credited to their artistic choices and skills domesticated to reflect the spirit of their age and the culture of their periods. Both dramatists select images and tropes from their socio-cultural environments to contribute to the universal discourse on the imaginative craft of literary production as far as the portrayal of the trickster archetype is concerned. Though their portrayal suggests some close affinities to Jonson's it is not proof to assume that they copied from his skill; for Bloom's poetics intimates that a modern writer's work sharing a common tradition or adopting the poetic mannerisms of an earlier poet, consciously or unconsciously, is not concrete evidence of imitation. Rather, it should be seen as

a metaphor implicating “a matrix of relationships” (p.xxii) and the modern writer’s ability to escape the influence of a major predecessor by making better a new craft out of the old is the distinct mark of originality.

Soyinka and Sutherland have created original pieces which metaphorically “bury the ancients and recreate a new path” in their artistic choices and skills which build on the Jonsonian tradition of comedy. Soyinka selects the trickster archetype - in the image of the fox and the lion - as the central element in structuring the play, *The Lion and the Jewel*. His selection is largely influenced by his Yoruba metaphysics which view the *Fox* (*Ko’lo’ko’lo’*) as a cunning, wily and deceptive creature who sustains himself by exacting tricks on his fellow creatures, and the *Lion* (*kininun*) as the king of the jungle and one who wins all competitions. Yoruba society utilizes these animals in their folklore to express amusing thoughts of the human world and its complex happenings, and these stories serve both purposes of didactic and amusement.

Soyinka exploits these ideas in the portrayal of the hero who takes on several disguises and shapes in play. He is presented as a Machiavellian frightful overlord, an excessively indulgent pleasure loving man, a contemptible impotent and redundant chief, a virile over-powering wrestler, a skillful manipulator and seducer, and finally a victorious king. These shapes and disguises have been invested in the hero to make him a complex character larger than life with a sole purpose of guiding society toward progress (as demonstrated at the end of the play) unlike Jonson’s hero –Volpone - who is presented as a familiar figure of the trickster devising

fleeing ways to satisfy his fundamental appetites to the disadvantage of society's welfare but finally exposed for his misdeeds.

Jonson's justice system which provides the framework of the moral underpinnings to deal with Volpone's excesses as a trickster sporting with society's folly must be seen as the norm in artists' handling of tricksters. The norm is that the trickster engages in series of roguery deeds (that is the "causality") but in the end he is exposed or punished (the "resolution"). In this model, both the *causality* and the *resolution* are presented as discrete but consequential elements in the plot. However, the Soyinka model initiates an *integrative* approach in which the hero becomes an embodiment of both roguery and good. Though his actions destabilise the social structure of society (the causality) and deserve punishment (the resolution), the same hero's actions institute a good for society's benefit. Baroka's knavery, cunning, exhibition of wit, intelligence, and final triumph are necessary complements of the images of a *fox* and a *lion* to provide a new perspective of looking at the trickster hero who necessarily needs not to be exposed or punished at the end of his portrayal as Jonson presented the trickster. Soyinka presents the trickster not just as an archetypal idea of initiating roguery to be exposed later as a buffoon but the trickster is portrayed as a symbolic pattern embracing a variety of ideas (in the observance of the payment of bride-price) which reflect societal progress.

The hero is celebrated not as a disruptive force in society but (now in his glorified position) as an initiator of the good society requires in its regenerative process. This demands evaluating the benefits his actions and inactions bring to society as the

reader is guided to laugh at the inadequacies of humans. Baroka therefore becomes an embodiment of the human imagination recapturing its pristine value in laughter by providing a safety valve for society to delight in the absurdities of humans while profiting therein to simulate what Pelton describes as the “epiphanies of a holy order” (p.123). Soyinka, by implication enunciates a new psychosocial value of the trickster in shaping culture through the observances of the lived realities embedded in daily life of humans.

The psychosocial value of the trickster is further demonstrated by Soyinka in the portrayal of Jero in the play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The hero’s portrait as a trickster (as already indicated) is drawn from the Yoruba foxy trickster figure, Eshu Elegbara, whose interactions with society initiate a new order for society to deal with its inadequacies and folly. Jero is invested with a limitless amount of liberty to sport with society’s stupidity and profit thereby but in the end he goes unpunished himself since Orunmila, the supreme god of Yoruba cosmic universe, grants him the power of *ashe* (“so be it”). The play ends on a celebrative note of the hero’s prowess which is endorsed by the Divine Being Himself; a being who regulates the conduct of daily life of the people.

The trickster image in Jero’s personality presented as an assertive prophet, a swindler, a cheat, a jester and a celebrated rogue must be seen as a creation of the Divine Being and an externalisation of a multi-dimensional figure (esoteric, divine, and human) assigned a sole purpose of effecting a change in society’s outlook. The dramatist’s deliberate manipulation of events at the end of the play to ensure that Jero is crowned with “a ring of red” (the metaphor of the god’s signature and

endorsement in consonance with the *Eshu* and *ashe* theology in Yoruba metaphysics) and escapes unpunished, in spite of his roguery and dubious acts against humanity, enunciates the new role of the trickster. He is portrayed as someone who has the mandate to regulate the irreprehensible conduct of humans and supervise the realm where the illogical and irrational behaviour of society is mediated.

The mediation is designed to effect a release in the psyche of humans as the reader reflects on the misdeeds of the gulls, which obviously invite the execution of a higher order to make society a better one. In effect, the trickster metaphorically becomes a permanent figure of change; one who aids society in the path of regeneration. Instead of viewing the trickster as a disruptive and destabilising figure designed to be punished as Jonson conceived him, the trickster in Soyinka has been given a new role to effect a change in society's outlook and guide it on the acceptable mores with intent of regenerating it.

Sutherland's portrayal of the trickster hero, Ananse, in the play, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, captures similar notions of assigning a new role for the archetypal lovable rogue to shape society's consciousness towards the right path of living in consonance with the Akan cosmology. The dramatist's reconstruction of the Ananse figure in the play to express her version of the fox archetype manifests the duality of roles assigned the hero as both a trickster and a moral legislator who has the endorsement of the "Dependable God", "Earth Efuwa" and the Ancestors". These foundational elements of the Akan society rule over the chthonian Akan universe and they become emblems of the Divine metaphorically conferring a

spiritual role on Ananse as a “priest” to instruct society on the preferred way of life. The dramatist’s deliberate portrayal of the hero in the ‘scene’ where he invokes the divine and the ancestors during the final prayer (as a bid to gull the emissaries of Chief-Who-Is-Who and prosper therein) enunciates the new role of the trickster who will forever triumph over the follies of humanity and go unpunished despite his knavery against society.

This is the point of divergence that Sutherland’s conception and skill in the portrayal of the trickster hero demonstrates over the Jonsonian model which of necessity demands that the trickster must be exposed through the “rigour of the law” to effect the teaching in comic plays. Sutherland’s hero, similar to Soyinka’s heroes -Baroka and Jero-, is invested with an enormous liberty most apparently endorsed by the Divine to sport with society’s stupidity and he is made a free moral agent to institute the regenerative process of change in humans. For as the reader laughs at the hero’s buffoonery and applauds his exhibition of wit and intelligence over the dupes, the reader gains wisdom to conduct his affairs rightly.

The absence of a clear legislative or judicial injunction against Ananse, Baroka and Jero at the end of the plays does not suggest Soyinka and Sutherland’s endorsement of the heroes’ roguery. Rather, it should be seen as an implicit artistic manipulation of the reader’s attention to avoid the acts of the gulls and of the rogues themselves and pursue actions which promote the mores of society. By implication, Sutherland and Soyinka’s lovable rogues possess a transformative power of the human imagination in playing with mischief, delighting in its follies, shattering norms that

exist until finally establishing what constitutes reality through the observances of acceptable mores in society.

To the West African dramatists - Soyinka and Sutherland - the archetypal trickster hero exists as a figure of a known life in the imagination of humans because the trickster himself is more than human. He exists in a complex relationship with divinity, the human society, the cosmos and lives in what Eliade (1963) describes as a “universe impregnated by sacredness” (p. 157). Both dramatists conceive of the trickster as a reflection of the sacred implants that society is expected to govern its life. They also conceive him as a guide and a key figure in society’s regeneration. The trickster, therefore, must be seen as a reflection of an *image* embedded in the human mind and its portrayal recaptures varied experiences of the lived human existence (both the evil and good) to reflect the reality of society, manifested in the paradox of human life. The portrayal of Soyinka and Sutherland’s version of the archetypal trickster reflects this irony of doubleness which Lynch (1973) describes as a “patterning of facts [evil forces], a recomposing in which the fact is seen within the creative presence [in the good] of a contrary” (p.14).

To both Soyinka and Sutherland, the archetypal trickster hero manifests a single figure in which real opposites, of evil and good, are yoked together in an amazing way such that the hero’s roguery which seemingly destabilise society co-exist with his potency to regenerate it without losing their contrariness with one intent of transforming humans and the way we perceive things. It is in the paradox of the trickster’s portrayal that he provokes humour which provides delight by its exposure of the inadequacies of society while at the same time regenerating it. The

heroes - Baroka, Jero and Ananse - therefore assume a posture larger than their sixteenth century counterpart's heroes - Volpone and Face - whose multi-dimensional portraiture will have to depend on an external force of the law to effect the comic change Jonson has designed for them to perform in the literary works. However, the integrative portraiture of the West African trickster heroes seems to suggest a self-sustaining and self-correcting system clearly established in the human imagination of society's daily life. To an extent, Soyinka and Sutherland have redefined the role of the trickster making him acquiescent to their societies. Though their artistic choices of the trickster hero share a semblance, in part, with Jonson's choice and skills; their handling and artistic vision for the trickster point to the recreation of a new role and path within the comic tradition.

Soyinka and Sutherland's artistic choices and skills (exhibited in their works) initiate a new role for the trickster hero different from the conventional pattern of a hero who exacts cunning and roguery on society and ultimately exposed. The two dramatists liberate him from that role and provide a pattern which simulates a comic distortion of a Shakespearean comedy in which the rogues are unpunished. To them, daily living must be allowed to go on normally for society to regenerate itself in conformity to the socio-cultural realities in West African communities.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Putting the Parts Together

This chapter provides a summary of the major ideas in the study and proposes a viewpoint in examining the relations among Jonson, Soyinka and Sutherland. The three dramatists have demonstrated their commitment to the written comic tradition in the portraiture of the ridiculous posturing of humans to express the realities of their socio-cultural environments as dramatised in their selected works for study. Their works have been studied drawing interpretive insights from Harold Bloom's Poetics in his *Anxiety of Influence* which examines the relation between modern writers and their predecessors and The New Historicist Theory, which examines literature with an eye on historical events using the text and non-literary texts as a basis to reconstruct an idea of each dramatist's distinctiveness. Both views have been blended in the analyses of the selected texts. In examining the relations among the dramatists, Eliot's ideas have been utilized, also, in the study to determine whether the two modern writers' art and skills demonstrate their individual talents as distinct writers or their works show a total continuation in the tradition of literary production.

The three dramatists were selected for study for two basic reasons. First, Jonson's popularity arising from his innovative theories on humour and the technical structure of his plays gained popularity among Renaissance dramatists of his time. His dramatic skills have been studied alongside other European dramatists and American writers of later centuries. In all these studies, his influence had been

variously demonstrated with the presence of some key elements that characterise his dramatic works, as manifested in other European writers' works. However, such a comparative study had not been conducted between Jonson and other dramatists from the West African sub-region. This was the prime motivation for the current study: to examine the relationship between Soyinka and Sutherland, as twentieth century West African dramatists, on the one hand, and Jonson, a sixteenth century dramatist, on the other hand.

The need for the research was borne out of the absence of such a comparative study between Jonson and Soyinka, and Sutherland, and the trajectory of directions in the literature available on Soyinka and Sutherland points to the fact that there is a gap in scholarship relating to the relation between Jonson and the two West African writers. The examination focused on the three dramatists' artistic choices, their treatment of themes and dramatic skills, and also how the echoes, parallels and semblances from Jonson's plays manifest in the plays of Soyinka and Sutherland.

Secondly, Soyinka and Sutherland have been selected because of their geniuses in manifesting not only their distinct qualities as African writers in their portrayal of life relevant to the African, but their artistic choices and skills studied in their plays suggest some close affinity with Jonson's as demonstrated in his works. The two dramatists' works have been studied in relation to Jonson's to examine the extent to which the former's skills and choices manifest some echoes, semblances and parallels from the latter's plays in the portraiture of human folly and eccentricities, and also how the West African dramatists' skills exhibit a new pattern.

In conducting the study, Jonson is set up as a kind of a standard bearer in Renaissance comic English dramatic history. His knowledge in the Classics and the craft of the Ancients which he domesticates to reflect his society enables him to develop some theories as reflected in his dramatic works. These theories serve as signal posts and emblems, referred to as the elements of Jonsonian comedy, which both isolate Jonson's originality within the comic tradition and at the same time establish a link with the historical timelessness of those theories as applicable to previous and later centuries. Jonson's theories foreground how important the older writers in the comic tradition were to the Renaissance dramatists and also they serve as a pointer in defending the role of tradition to aid contemporary writers express their originality while demonstrating their commitment to the tradition and the skills of previous writers.

The implication of Jonsonian theories, in this study therefore, suggests that modern writers should create their works to simulate the timeless tradition, with all the literature of previous centuries as a guide, while simultaneously expressing their contemporary environment. By this process, a kind of dialogue is established among writers of different centuries and periods to create a convergence of ideas and talents. The quest, therefore, for loyalty towards the existing tradition while at the same time expressing the individual talents of modern writers has been the basis to examine the relationship between Jonson and the two West African dramatists, Soyinka and Sutherland.

Summary and Findings

The findings as discussed in this study include the fact that Jonson and the two West African dramatists utilize a common archetype in the form of the trickster image as the sub-structure of their plays. The three dramatists employ the gull-knave pattern as the structure of their plots. They initiate a hunting motif in their plots and also assign a special role to a witty parasite. In addition, the three dramatists satirically portray a gulling mode on professional personalities (or the aristocrats in society), and finally institute a kind of justice system which deals with the inadequacies and folly of the principal characters.

These elements were studied in Jonson's *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. The major highlights of the discussion reveal that Jonson exploits the trickster archetype hero, in the image of a fox, as the key element in the mythological substructure of the plays, whose plot constructions are patterned to reflect the gull-knave structure. In this structure, a set of characters acts as imposters and knaves while the other set acts as dupes. In developing this pattern, the dramatist switches the roles of the characters who exhibit oppositional disguises to perform dual roles as imposters and buffoons with intent of portraying the paradox inherent in trickster tales and reflecting the human condition. In addition, the dramatist assigns a special role to a parasitic character whose antics aid the knaves to both gull the dupes and execute a kind of judgement on them. The justice system initiated by Jonson is a necessary requirement in the artistic design in which the knaves exhibit a superior moral insight to dupe the gulls. Ultimately, both the knaves and gulls are subjected to the rigours of the comic law.

The obvious conclusion we can draw from the overall artistic design is that Jonson domesticates the trickster tale from the classical world into the English society from which both the knaves and the gulls plot their own mischiefs and initiate a new order working through the comic justice system to deal with their follies.

Soyinka's artistic choices in *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero* are examined in relation to the Jonsonian elements. The study unravels some semblances and parallel echoes from Jonson's stylistic choices and modes. Both dramatists utilize the archetypal trickster hero, in the image of a fox, as one of the key mythological features in the substructure of their plays. In Soyinka's plays, the heroes act as the knaves while the dupes are selected from among both the highly placed individuals and the down-trodden to reflect the varied social strata in society.

In developing the gull-knave pattern, Soyinka switches the roles of the knaves to exhibit buffoonery while the gulls exhibit imposterism. Later the dramatist swaps these roles with surprisingly amazing affinities to express the paradox associated with trickster tales and the oppositional disguises which the characters demonstrate. This skill allows the knaves to exhibit a superior moral insight which enables them to dupe the gulls. Soyinka's art assigns special roles to parasites who perform specific functions in the development of the plot as evident in the characters and roles of Sadiku and Chume in both plays.

In addition to the above stylistic modes, Soyinka's art reflects the realities of his socio-cultural environment. He creates his version of the archetypal lovable rogue utilizing some ideas from his Yoruba metaphysics in society's conception of the *fox* (ko'lo'ko'lo') and *lion* (kinium), and Eshu-Elegbara as reflected in their

folktales. These ideas underlie the creation of the trickster, Baroka, who exhibits the cunning and wily ways of the fox, on the one hand, and the imposter and domineering posture of the lion, on the other hand, and Brother Jero to effect the gulling of humanity who must be guided in the acceptable mores of society.

Soyinka's portrayal of the trickster initiates a new role for the archetypal figure in making him both a self-serving knave, whose roguery deeds momentarily destabilise the social order, and a self-correcting saviour, whose acts (and intents) guide and provide benefits for the society. Baroka's deception of Sadiku and Sidi in the matter of his infamous impotence, and his domineering posture in dealing with Lakunle suggest the usual presentation of a rogue as a self-serving knave. However, Baroka's willingness to pay the bride price of Sidi in accordance with societal norms and practices, and the priestly role assigned Sadiku in enacting the acts of Ogun, as both a destructive force and a repairer of breaches, manifests the regenerating role of the trickster in West African societies. Similarly, Soyinka's portraiture of Jero (in the fox image of Eshu Elegbara), also exploits and destabilises society through his roguery deeds. However, his final exhibition of wit and intelligence which rewards him with the crown of *ashe* in the form of a *ring of red halo* metaphorically suggests the endorsement of the Divine for the regeneration role he is assigned to perform.

The West African dramatists' portrayal of the archetypal trickster hero points to the religious observances and belief systems of society, which believe in the rebirth of society unlike Jonson who exploits the legal system (itself, fraught with contradictions and complexities) to perform the reformation in society.

Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* is also studied alongside Jonson's plays with a view of examining the relationship that exists in terms of their artistic choices, thematology and dramatic skills. It is evident from the discussion that Sutherland also utilizes the archetypal trickster hero as the major motif in the sub-structure of her play. Her choice of the hero, drawn from the Akan cosmology, and the successful experiment of the dramatist's stylistic modes in manipulating the Ananse figure as a trickster share a semblance with Jonson's art in *Volpone*. Sutherland's plot and characters (though, not as expansive as Jonson's), are structured to accommodate the gull-knave pattern in which Ananse dupes the four revered chiefs, whose exhibition of indiscretion and folly makes them gulls like Jonson's dupes.

In developing the gull-knave pattern, Sutherland manipulates the principal characters to exhibit oppositional disguises in which the roles of Ananse and Christie, as imposters, are swapped with the gulls' exhibition of impostering and buffoonery at some points in the development of the plot. This skill of the dramatist achieves the excitements involved in trickster tales and ultimately executes the due judgements on the gulls. The special roles assigned Christie Yamoah and Anansewa in the play, as both parasites and accomplices in Ananse's roguery, coupled with Ananse's superior moral insight echo Jonson's skill in the creation of Mosca, Subtle and Dol, whose roles also aid the tricksters, Volpone and Face, to exact the expected judgements on the dupes.

The mode for the execution of the justice system in both dramatists' works is one of the stylistic choices that distinguishes their skills, though in principle they both

endorse the punishment (or exposure) of vice as one of their artistic aims in their plays. While Jonson's skill depends on the strength of the legal system, which is fraught with inconsistencies and unfair practices, Sutherland's skill, similar to Soyinka's, leans heavily on the observances of some socio-cultural and religious practices of West African people. Sutherland's art prescribes that society can be regenerated by unlearning the cunning ways of the trickster and upholding the societal mores which the trickster's actions and inactions distort. By implication, Sutherland assigns a new religious role to the trickster who sports with society's errant ways to prosper, with intent of instructing society on the preferred and acceptable mores of life while enjoying the tacit approval of society.

Implication of the Findings

The study has established the fact that each writer's artistic creation does not take place in a vacuum for there is an existing literary tradition seen first in the works of the Classical writers, through the Renaissance writers to modern writers. Each writer contributes substantially to the literary tradition in consonance to the differing needs of their societies to create a kind of convergence of ideas and talents among the three dramatists. There is an indication of a synergy in the three dramatists' artistic choices and skills, exhibited in their plays studied, which unite them rather than isolate them on the basis of one being classified as an elder and the other a progeny.

Eliot's view on the timelessness of literary tradition in terms of artistic creation, wherein the works of previous century writers are linked with modern writers, serves as the parameter to make a determination between pure imitation and

convergence of aesthetic skills. The three dramatists exploit the comic genre as the medium of their artistic creation, and their commitment in utilizing a common archetype, in the form of the fox trickster image, to reflect their distinct socio-cultural realities contribute substantially to the maintenance of the tradition, as well as their originality. Jonson selects the trickster to reflect the realities of the socio-economic conditions in Renaissance England as dramatised earlier in the Classical comic writers' works. In following the same literary tradition, Soyinka and Sutherland also select their tricksters to portray the realities in their socio-cultural environments.

The quest to maintain the tradition while at the same time exhibiting one's originality has been one of the issues discussed in this study to provide the basis in making a determination that Soyinka and Sutherland did not imitate Jonson's skills, either consciously or unconsciously. Critics need to be conscious of the fact that within the perspective of Bloom's taxonomy, predecessors are always present in the works of modern writers. This explains the various semblances and parallels discussed in the study. However, it takes a strong artistic voice, on the part of modern writers, for their individuality to spring forth as Soyinka and Sutherland have demonstrated. The obvious implication of Bloom's view, as utilized in this study, points to a case of convergence of aesthetic skills.

In addition to Bloom's view as utilized in the study, Frye's view on archetypes provides that a corpus of literary works, such as those discussed in this study, constitutes a self-contained literary universe which has been fashioned over a period of time by the human imagination with a purpose of uniting all literatures

based on certain identified categories. The choice of the common trickster archetype by the three dramatists unite their aesthetic energies within the literary universe. Also the three dramatists utilize a similar plot structure, which accommodates the gull-knave pattern, oppositional disguises, and similar characterization. The various echoes and semblances, as indicated earlier, in the plays of Soyinka and Sutherland should not be seen as evidences of Jonson influencing the two West African dramatists. Rather they should be seen as concerted artistic skills deployed to reflect a continuum in the ridiculous portraiture of humans in general, and therefore indicate a merger in the aesthetic energies of the three dramatists.

One of the concluding parameters used in the determination of the convergence of aesthetic skills among the three dramatists takes a cue from Eliot's ideas as expressed in his essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Eliot espouses a view that tradition should help new writers to be simultaneously modern and part of the existing tradition so long as their craft reflect semblances from the past writers. He explains that knowledge of writers of the past and a conscious effort on the part of contemporary writers to remain committed to the tradition with intent of expressing their contemporary environment ultimately makes them part of the universal existing tradition. He further argues that the relation between the older writers and the modern writers converges in a timelessness of association which makes them part of a wider poetic tradition. Consequently, Eliot's advocacy explains the relationship between the sixteenth century dramatist, Jonson, and the twentieth century dramatists, Soyinka and Sutherland as being part of the wider poetic

tradition, and their exhibition of similar skills and artistic choices suggests their commitment to the comic tradition. None of them sacrifices their originality in a willful act of mere repetition of the craft of their elders or a mindless imitation of their predecessors' skills. Rather they exhibit novelty by creating a re-adjustment in the existing comic tradition through their artistic choices and skills exhibited, as a proposition for their works to be accommodated into the tradition. Each dramatist's skill therefore must be seen as distinct, not as a reflection or a manifestation of mere echoes from their predecessors.

Since Jonson's choices and artistic skills, as expressed in his plays, are considered original but not an imitation of the Ancients' skill in the portraiture of human eccentricities during Renaissance Europe, so critics need to view Soyinka and Sutherland's skills and artistic choices, demonstrated in their plays, as an exhibition of a continuum in the literary tradition to which the two West African dramatists contribute substantially in redefining a new role for the trickster who sports with society's folly and eccentricities. Overall, what lends originality and greatness to Soyinka and Sutherland's works of art is the nature by which their artistic choices and skills are synthesised with the Classical model to create a kind of convergence of ideas, styles and talents within the existing comic tradition.

Similarly, what accounts for the greatness of Jonson in the Renaissance literary tradition is the innovative ways by which his art shares some semblances with the craft of the Ancients in the comedy genre as portrayed in the works of Plautus and Aristophanes. Jonson's talent is not regarded as mere imitation of the Ancients but as a manifestation of the constant revisions that literary artists exhibit after careful

study of the works of their predecessors. Consequently, to assume that Soyinka and Sutherland's talents (as twentieth century writers) are mere echoes of Jonson's skills because of the semblances and traces pointed out in the study constitutes a misunderstanding of the whole concept of literary creativity. Such an assumption points to the fact that all modern writers (such as Beckett, Pound, Joyce, Eliot, Dickens, Soyinka and Sutherland inclusive, etc.) are mere echoes of their predecessors, lacking any identity of their own as original creators of art.

The assumption, or possible conclusion, that modern writers are imitators of their predecessors is an error in literary judgement considering the geniuses of writers like Eliot, Dickens and the stature of Soyinka as the first African recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature and Sutherland's enormous contribution to the development of modern Ghanaian theatre and principles in Pan-Africanism. Particularly, Soyinka's concerns as a writer coupled with his integrity and commitment to creating a space for African writers within the existing literary tradition cannot be overlooked. He is, indeed, in the view of Bernth Lindfors one of the productive African writers whose creative works are original and refreshing; for his "imagination, vision, and craft distinguish him as a creative artist of the very first rank, as a writer of world stature" (p.64). Sutherland's artistic theory and practice have been very instrumental to the emergence of modern dramatic arts in Africa and they have also provided validation to African values, thoughts and a redefinition of the literary craft. To consign therefore both dramatists' aesthetic choices and skills to the condition of mere echoes of a predecessor will be a great disservice to the world comic literary tradition.

Both Soyinka and Sutherland have demonstrated their originality by remaining committed to the literary comic tradition in the portraiture of the ridiculous posturing of humans and carving a new path or role for the trickster hero. They share a common poetic sensibility with Jonson and are equals in the metaphor of the Jonson versus Soyinka and Sutherland at the crossroads. Each writer is uniquely original. Though they all write from different socio-cultural contexts, their aesthetic energies converge to establish the continuum in the tradition.

Further Research

The study has focused on examining the relation between Jonson and two West African dramatists, Soyinka and Sutherland, in response to a gap in scholarship which has prominently featured several comparative studies between Jonson and other European writers to the neglect of focusing on West African writers. The conclusion reached, so far in this study, points to the convergence of aesthetic skills among the three writers. It will be beneficial, therefore, to explore other areas of research between Jonson and other West African writers, or other writers from the main geo-political divide in Africa – East, South and North – to provide a fuller understanding of the relation between Jonson and African writers.

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