Ananse/Èṣù Rising: Trickster Figures and Shakespeare in Davlin Thomas's *Lear Ananci*, a Caribbean *King Lear*

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Abstract
Many contemporary rewritings of the Shakespeare canon capture the enduring and unending global relationship with the English Bard. The radical transformation of the canon from the beginning of the twentieth century in particular dramatizes the conflicting situations in the adapters' countries in what often amounts to the use of the alien potentialities of the canon to address the failings of the present. One fine example of such rewritings is Davlin Thomas's Lear Ananci, a Caribbean version of King Lear[1]*. This paper examines how Thomas appropriates both Shakespeare's King Lear and Ananci (that he merges his features with the Yoruba hero-god, Èṣù) in order to provide forceful and penetrating insights about the failure of postcolonial realities in the English-speaking Caribbean country of the author. While the play clearly comes across as a concrete affirmation of the continuing relevance of Shakespeare to global politics, it also affirms the continuing place of African tradition and ritual aesthetics in the New World through the playwright's use of narrative resources that he draws from the Yoruba/African diasporic performance tradition, which comes in the guise of the Akan mythic-figure, Ananse (written Ananci in the Caribbean).*

Keywords: *adaptation/appropriation; Ananci, Davlin Thomas; Postcolony; Shakespeare.*

[1] Written and first performed at the University of West Indies in 2000, *Lear Ananci* was the winner from the National Drama Association of Trinidad and Tobago the same year of the Cacique Award for "the Most Original Script".

Introduction

Inspired by the sheer number of rewritings of Shakespeare and the multiple ways in which the Shakespeare canon has been continually transformed, Eric Bentley once remarked that "All roads lead to Shakespeare, or perhaps it might be more correct to say that Shakespeare leads to all roads" (107). Indeed, the diverse global response to Shakespeare, despite being a relic of colonial legacy most especially in the post-colonial world, oscillates between those which challenge Shakespeare's canonical authority and those that resist such homogenous reading of textual or cultural evidence. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins,

> … given the legacy of a colonialist education which perpetuates, through literature, very specific socio-cultural values in the guise of universal truth, it is not surprising that a prominent endeavour among colonised writers/artists has been to rework the European 'classics' *in order to invest them with more local relevance and to divest them of their assumed authority/authenticity*. (16; emphasis added)

Gilbert and Tompkins argue here that, whereas there are numerous rewritings of Shakespeare which fall into the categorisation of "canonical counter-discourse" and are thus useful for oppositional reading that challenges the political and cultural capital that Shakespeare privileges as the most significant of the "European classics," the notion of "local relevance" works best to describe the "Shakespeare of alternative strategies" that is more concerned with the "here and now" of the adapters in terms of critiquing their own societies (Fischlin and Fortier 10). Indeed, Davlin Thomas's *Lear Ananci* comes across as one fine example of how the act of adapting and appropriating the Shakespeare canon is sometimes driven by political imperatives, whether local and/or transnational; it is an excellent example of how "post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture […] that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities" (Ashcroft et al, 19).

Moreover, *Lear Ananci* also underscores both the transnationalism of Shakespeare and the intent of postcolonial adapters

in shifting such a gaze that promotes the Bard as the pinnacle of knowledge. As Kwok-kan Tam writes, the "transnational aspects of Shakespeare, particularly in the age of globalization" (Tam 4) often raise the issues around the relations between the centre and the periphery, and bring to light the idea of hybridity or the place of the colonized world and their identity in the "third space" (bhabha 2004; Kalua 2009), as well as the continuing value of syncretism as a performative strategy. Christopher Balme argues that syncretic theatre "result[s] from the interplay between the Western theatrico-dramatic tradition and the indigenous performance forms of a postcolonial culture" (Balme 147). Use of indigenous performance forms allows Thomas to draw on more of the cultural politics that postcolonial Shakespeare scholars have advanced, for example, in pushing back against the idea of Shakespeare's exceptionalism and supposed 'universality' and treating his widespread foothold across the postcolonial world as a matter of history – that is to say, colonial history, because of its position in the canon of English Literature, the dissemination of which was part of a colonial strategy. He demonstrates in *Lear Ananci* such an insight by Balme and through the appropriation, he also shows what happens when Shakespeare's texts are taken up in new contexts and invoked to tell new stories of political struggle.

Through his aesthetic approach, Thomas shows that he has inherited the folkloric tradition from his Yoruba ancestors. By morphing Ananci's features into that of Èşù, Thomas demonstrates how ancient deities from the Yoruba pantheon often manifest in New World drama. Surviving the horror of forceful transportation to the New World countries of Brazil, Cuba, Spain, the USA, Canada, the North America and other places which form the Yoruba diaspora, the Orisas often manifest in worship such as the Cuban *Lucumi* (and through *Patakin*), *Candomblé*, the Spanish-speaking Yoruba people's *Santeria* etc., as a strategy to overcome religious strictures such as the Catholics'. On the one hand, the persistent presence of the Orisas in diaspora drama shows how Yoruba traditions have survived in time and space since one of the ways in which "relocation and adaptation of a particular culture in a diaspora is established is through artistic productions" (Jones 321) and, on the other hand, *Lear Ananci* provides a context in which to view how diasporic theatre presents the interplay between Yoruba cosmology and socio-political and aesthetic realities.

As such, the play underlines the fact that "the blend of ritual, aesthetics, and agency is the soil from which contemporary Yoruba diasporic performance is cultivated" (Jones 323). Based on the folkloric tradition about the activities of Anansi, the trickster figure, *Lear Ananci* shows the role often played by ritual aesthetics in creativity and social mobilisation in the Caribbean in particular and the Yoruba diaspora and the New World in general, as well as how imagination and creativity extend the afterlife of Shakespeare in the global context. In the rest of this essay, I will examine the intersection of Yoruba mythology and Shakespeare in the play, stress how *Lear Ananci* dramatizes, and then suggest some specific examples of the socio-political dystopia in the Caribbean as a broader cultural and political context of the play.

Folktale, Shakespeare and (Postcolonial) Imagination

Although *Lear Ananci* uses the storytelling device as a demonstration of the author's own sense of inherited Yoruba tradition, the aesthetic device also recalls Shakespeare's approach and use of the narrative pattern of fairy tales in his plays such as *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale*, and *King Lear*. Laurie Maguire mentions that, in this invariable fairy tale pattern, there is always a good character that is undervalued; ignored or banished; passes a test or tests, marries the hero(ine) and they live happily ever after. However, Shakespeare often shatters the expectation of a reconciliation and a happy ending by going beyond the verbal confines of his plays, to providing an acute observation about the human conditions, and forces his audience to reflect about the infirmities of age and the meaning of life, so that "art [can truly hold] the mirror up to nature in the most realistic and painful way possible" (Maguire 184—5). Similar to Shakespeare, Thomas shows that the human society is the domain of the fictional world that Ananse/Ananci rules. While the ambivalence of this mythic-figure reflects the dual or even multiple nature of adaptation, it also draws attention to the content, context and cultural impact of mythology as stories and particular forms of expression that show human intelligence.

Kwesi Yankah writes that fictional narratives among the Akan people are referred to as *Anansesem* (stories of Ananse) whether or not the mythic-figure is in them. According to Yankah, Ananse possesses dual or even multiple images that flounder among the human, animal

and the supernatural worlds, and he needs such a multiple physical characterization to enable him cope effectively with his manifold responsibilities. These are often best conceptualized through artistic means. As Donna Rosenberg also writes, Ananci shows "the creative aspect of human intelligence even as he reveals the fact that deception, greed, suffering and death are inherent part of the human condition [as much as it is] part of human nature to harm others" (Rosenberg 7—8). As a trickster figure by his very nature, Ananse expresses the people's keen sense of human nature in a cultural environment where morality and justice are important values.

Like Shakespeare, trickster figures occupy an important place in the global imaginary, often appearing in different forms: as humans, such as Hermes, Èşù (sometimes spelt Eshu), Saint Peter, Till Eulenspiegel, or the Taz in Uyghur/Central Asian tradition, and as animals that are though endowed with human qualities such as the raven, coyote, a spider. These figures from Greek mythology, the Tsimshian cycle, Navajo tales, and African/Yoruba myth often transgress the spatial and temporal boundaries in order to unite the divine and human, perfection and imperfection and, in short, stand for the human condition and the ambiguities of life generally (See: Pelton 1992; Hyde 1998; Bellér-Hann and Sharshenova 2011). For instance, Raven brought daylight to the dark world through theft, Hermes invented the lyre, Coyote stole fire, and Èşù invented divination and sacrifice (Levi-Strauss 1963; Pelton 1987; Owomoyela 1997; Hyde 1989). The trickster achieves the goal through what the Greeks termed "mêtis" or "cunning intelligence" that derives from "craft, skill, eloquence, and resourceful cleverness" (Detienne and Vernant 1978; Ben-Amos 1976).

Endowed with special capabilities such as shape-shifting, intelligence and mental agility, tricksters come across as "culture heroes" who oscillate between two poles in order to perform their essentially mediating functions. According to Claude Levi-Strauss, the trickster "must retain something of that duality—namely an ambiguous and equivocal character" (226), and for Owomoyela, the tricksters' innate endowment enable them "to ease their passage through a treacherous and dangerous world, usually in spite of and at the expense of more powerful adversaries" (x). While he draws from this elaborate conception of the trickster figure, Thomas only uses the duality aspect by blending Ananci's personality into that of Èşù along

with the crossroads symbol with which he is identified, and focuses on the character's boundary crossing ability, as both a human and divine figure.

Hence, the crossroads is an important feature of *Lear Ananci* for it is useful as a metaphor for conflict, confusion, and disillusionment. Giselle Rampaul argues that the play uses the crossroads symbol to reflect the multiple interpretations of politics in the Caribbean region. Rampaul also notes that the crossroads is often identified with the trickster god, Èṣù who appears as Ananci, in place of Shakespeare's Fool in *King Lear*, and that such complexity is a reflection of Caribbean subjectivities and the challenges of political independence following the end of colonialism (Rampaul 313, 21). While Èṣù is known in the Yoruba diaspora as a trickster, s/he reflects the intersecting multiple cultural strands in the New World.[2]

Moreover, Thomas also mildly draws inspiration from Greek mythology especially the story of the ill-fated Laius' family which Sophocles dramatizes in *Oedipus Rex* (King Oedipus), and adapted by the Nigerian playwright, Ola Rotimi, as *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. But here, Thomas combines his skill with Shakespeare's in order to use the stories of Lear and Gloucester's family to interrogate the assumptions surrounding the legitimacy of power and public office, and the problem of self-perpetuation that are rampant in Caribbean politics. While dramatizing the effect of "mental slavery caused by blind, corrupt, impotent governments and political systems" as well as the problems posed by "the Caribbean multiple and intersecting cultural influences" (Rampaul 319) which the trickster figures, Ananci and Èṣù represent, Thomas also suggests through the Shakespeare's characters, the continued role being played by colonial authorities and the Western world on Trinidadian politics, and reveals that "the issues of legitimacy, right, corruption, power and responsibility" (Rampaul 317), that are prevalent in Shakespeare's time are still relevant today.

Plotting a Trinity of Complex Situations

Generally speaking, *Lear Ananci* presents two storylines which merge towards the end. The first and central story involves King Lear, the desperate ruler of Malick (a fictitious landscape that alludes to the playwright's country, Trinidad and Tobago) who perverts the process

[2] The gender of Èṣù is always suspect since the god shape-shifts.

of political power by literally devouring his friend and predecessor, King Henry. Consequently, King Lear becomes insane, bites off his butcher's fingers, flouts the law which says monarchs should remain childless by having three daughters from three different women whom he names his children after; he divides his kingdom arbitrarily among his daughters and banishes the youngest, Cordelia, who is also affected by her father's insanity and acts irrationally as he does. The second story runs parallel to King Lear's. It dramatizes the conflict over filial rights between Gloucester's two sons, Edgar and Edmund, each of whom lays claim to their father's estate. While Edgar insists that the land is his own because he is Gloucester's legitimate son, Edmund lays claim to the land as the first son, while Gloucester fears that Edgar might kill him if he reads *Oedipus Rex.* Specifically, *Lear Ananci* dramatizes the morbid socio-political situation in Trinidad and Tobago, and shows how the same symptoms are evidence of politics in the Caribbean.

However, through his own dramaturgy of appropriation, Thomas demonstrates the continuing relevance of ritual imagination to aesthetic constructs in Caribbean theatre and performance by further expanding the two storylines into three plotlines that recall the crossroads over which Èşù presides. The three plots are related: a televised news item; a play-within-a-play; and Ananci's performance as the Shakespearean Fool, while actions in the three plots take place in Malick, an imaginary society that stands for Trinidad and Tobago (and the Caribbean as a whole). In his first appearance in the play, Ananci assumes the role of a storyteller, "Come children, Ananci have a story; the story of a man called Lear…the story began quite simply. Lear was at Henry's bedside constantly, and I, on his wall listening attentively" (6-8). Ananci uses the introduction to draw attention to himself. By drawing attention to the activities of this particular character as Èşù-figure, *Lear Ananci* dramatizes the psychological trauma being experienced by the people as well as the uncertainty that the postcolonial present portends for the future.

The first plot, which is a televised broadcast, describes the strange bomb that exploded in the Parliament in Trinidad's capital, Port of Spain, while a debate on the Equal Opportunities Bill was in progress. The after-effect of the bomb explosion is complete amnesia suffered by the Parliamentarians. A character in the play, Professor Reinhart, tells us, "The key to any possibility of explanation for this

phenomenon lies with the fact that no members of parliament seems to be able to recognize or acknowledge any components of reality" (3). This situation forces everyone to turn to Ananci "who we think is the embodiment of the Caribbean people" (4), and who claims to be equal to the task of both narrating and interpreting the unfolding situation as he tells everyone, "From my place on the castle wall I studied the positions and for what it's worth I'll share my observations with you" (8). But it soon becomes clear that he, like others, has no clue of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Caribbean as a whole.

Although the bombing in the capital city sets off the conflict(s) in the play in this first part, it also shows how the fictional story connects to specific historical events in Trinidad and Tobago. The play uses the reference to "the Capital city of the Port of Spain" and "The Red House which has been bombed" (2), to show this connection between fiction and history. The Red House is the historical House of Parliament building located in the Port of Spain, the capital city. The bombing of the Red House in the play recalls the Water Riots of 1903 when the Red House, painted earlier in 1897 to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria, was burnt down during a debate of the Legislative Council, due to reactions over increase in water rates, and the protests which accompanied the arrest of a woman in the aftermath of the bombing. The government's intervention led to the death of at least sixteen (16) people (See: Mavrogordato 1979, 2008). *Lear Ananci* alludes to that historical incident through the bombing in the play. Professor Reinhart tells us, "I'm afraid the situation here today is very much as before…Parliament was in session when bombing occurred" (2). The incident also shows how the play links the colonial past with contemporary events, "the bomb itself caused a fusion of time, physical space and consciousness that has endured the persons and the event itself" (4); and by recalling this particular incident, *Lear Ananci* leaves no one in doubt as to its concern with history.

The second plot, also called the Ghostly play, is presented in the form of a play-within-a-play. It is the central point of reference and the most developed plotline in the play. All the principal characters are also introduced here, and the thematic concern of the play is extended beyond Trinidad to the West Indies. The stage direction reads, "The entire spectacle takes a total of about two hours, then all players disappear to reappear elsewhere in the Caribbean" (5). It is here also that Lear takes the crown as the King of Malick after devouring his

friend and incumbent, King Henry. The conflict between Cordelia and her sisters, Regan and Goneril over Lear's estate; and the war between Gloucester's sons, Edgar and Edmund, over their father's title and property are also presented here. At the end of the scenes, Ananci who boasts of being capable of handling the situation is rendered helpless and is overwhelmed by what he terms "the baggage of passing" (16), that is, the burden of guilt shared by all the characters.

In the third plotline, Ananci steps into the role of the Shakespearean Fool and relates the situation specifically to Trinidad, and to the Caribbean in general. He reminds elected officials of their primary duty: that they are meant to serve the people whom they represent, "the experience of the many are determined by the will of the great few" (52). Ananci laments that the reverse is the case; all he could see are "bleed[ing] hopes, and perspire[ing] dreams [which] become grey as black life is drained from the hair" (51); all these are metaphors for leadership failure at every level.

But Ananci fails to deliver as the Shakespearean Fool. Marjorie Garber explains that the Fool in *King Lear* represents the body and self-preservation voice of common sense and practical wisdom, a figure of infinite value in the court where he reminds Lear of his folly through wit and gesture (674). In the "season of madness" (26) when irrationality is preferred than reasoning, Ananci becomes overwhelmed and no longer able to understand the situation. Professor Reinhart tells us that, "Ananci is not yet in control of his destiny and he recognizes that" (43), although Ananci consoles himself by saying, "All of mankind are slaves beaten by the whips of time" (51).Consequently, Announcer in the televised section of the play asks, "Professor, do you think that the members of Parliament will ever be in touch with our reality?"(67), to which the stage directions read, "*She waits, but he does not respond." Instead, the television set switches off to signify the end of the play in the midst of "more thunder than ever*" (67), which suggests that there is no end in sight or is there solution to the social crisis that the play dramatizes.

From the foregoing, it seems that Ananci's thoughts are a reflection of the crossroads by which the play suggests that there is confusion in terms of how to make sense of the socio-political failings in the society. Ananci cannot make sense of the complexity of the people's struggle against slavery, colonialism and the continuation of despair, as such, we are reminded of the so-called "Èşù-moments," or

what Soyinka describes as the "Esu-harassed day" (Soyinka 9), in terms of when Èşù performs her/his "divine task of putting humanity to [the] test" (Aiyejina15).There are at least three of such "Èşù-moments": at the scene where Lear devours Henry (8-12); Cordelia's discovery of how her father, Lear, became king of Malick (17-35); and when Edmund sets Gloucester against Edgar(35-54) respectively.

In the first "Èşù-moment" which occurs at King Henry's bedside, Lear is put to the test by Èşù. Here, Ananci represents Èşù (let us keep in mind Ananci's ability to transform which I mentioned earlier on) and looks on unconcerned as Lear sits impatiently waiting for Henry to die so that he can take the crown. In this case, we are looking at Èşù, the deity who manipulates emotion and test human mental capability to assess a situation and make the right decision. Yoruba understanding is that at such moment, Èşù presents the individual with choice but remains impartial and unperturbed by whatever the individual decides to do, although Èşù will not hesitate to punish afterwards. Ananci watches as Lear struggles to control both his hatred for Henry and eagerness to seize the crown. When a servant brings water for Henry to drink, Lear whispers, "I pray he trips and dies while getting the water. Heaven knows I'll eat his rotting body along with Henry's". But after waiting for a while he exclaims, "Lord! Why doesn't Henry die?" Getting increasingly impatient that Henry "refuses" to die, Lear suddenly pounce on and devours him. As the stage direction reads, *"Lear bites off a finger…bites Henry's face, and dives for the throat. Blood is sprayed upon Lear's white clothing. Lear stands bloody and alone, chewing the last of Henry, he stares at the audience madly"* (8-11). Unable to control his desires, Lear obviously fails the test by Èşù. After seizing the crown in such a brutal fashion, however, Lear also tries to perpetuate himself in office. The politics of bitterness demonstrated by the two characters shows the negative effect of "sit-tightism" (tendency for self-perpetuation), which also literally nurtures patrimonialism by the sides.

According to Max Weber, patrimonialism refers to an office that lacks all the bureaucratic separation of the "private" and "official" sphere. In this system,

> … political administration is treated as a purely personal affair of the ruler, and political power is considered part

> of his personal property…the office and the exercise of public authority serve the ruler and the official on which office was bestowed; they do not serve impersonal purposes. (Weber 128-9).

The system of political power acquisition and its deployment that *Lear Ananci* dramatizes through the activities of both King Lear and his friend, King Henry, is similar to what Weber describes and submits that it does not serve the people. As Ananci informs the audience, "the court is full of pretenses, the lies…here men can lie and tell the truth both at the same time like telling a beggar that you'll end his hunger and then you shoot him dead" (12). Patrimonialism is similar to autocracy, which the system of power acquisition in Malick also clearly subscribes to; "the country is the ruler's estate and the state apparatus is ultimately his to use at his own discretion" (Hyden99). The end-product of this system is tyranny which grows out of an impulsive and oppressive rule that considers political office as a private property. The way Lear acquires public properties which he shares arbitrarily among his children underscores this point.

Moreover, in what they term "Hidden Economy", Alain Maurin et al uncover how public office holders and influential citizens (politicians) engage in economic activities where a large percentage of workers who earn low incomes are forced to use rudimentary equipment, and work outside the framework of the laws and regulations thereby making it possible to evade tax. These are some examples of the socio-political activities that undermine the growth of Trinidad and Tobago (and the Caribbean). Such that some people who pay taxes regularly are discouraged by the inferior quality of social services that the government provides for them in return for both the taxes and service charges that they are made to pay. As a result, and because the government is unable to address such an economic malfeasance, they feel cheated and seek satisfaction from private establishments, which also take advantage of government's failure in order to further cheat their clients (Maurin et al, 6-12). These illegal, anti-social and anti-establishment activities that constitute a vicious cycle of treachery, encourage corruption and engender renewed ethnic fragmentation due to mistrust among the people. Such negative impacts occur in spite of the oil boom in the country and the thriving petroleum economy which should ordinarily have translated into positive economic changes for the region and its people. In *Lear*

Ananci, Thomas addresses these kinds of postcolonial political failure and despair through the lens of the Yoruba epistemology and aesthetic principles as represented by the *Orisa*, and in particular Ananci and his alter-ego, Èṣù.

In that particular scene which I describe above, although Ananci pretends to be neutral and detached, he silently instigates Lear's action psychologically. Ananci's seeming detachment and silence illustrate the indifference and reluctance of Èṣù to destroy the bad and the malevolent so that the good remain because s/he is aware of the positive aspects of both sides of human action and emotion, or what the Yoruba call "*Tibi tire*" (Good and bad are inseparable companion). Instead of intervening, Èṣù allows people to make their choice but also reminds them of the consequences (Falola6).In this particular scene, Lear fails to apply self-restraint which Èṣù preaches, hence unable to reflect on the saying, "*Èṣùmá se 'mí, omo èlómìran ni o se*" (Èṣù, do not tempt me or make me fall into errors; tempt others). In Lear's case, Èṣù redefines the meaning of both the ethics surrounding the saying and the social imperative attached to it, for s/he "lures the powerful [Lear] to commit transgression [and] expects maximum sanctions" (Falola10). Hence, although Lear achieves his aim of becoming the king, the sanctions by Èṣù manifest in the form of his (Lear's) insanity.

Insanity brings to the fore the problem that cannibalism constitutes in Lear's flawed process of kinship as a reflection of the turbulent political process in Trinidad. It also leads us to view, albeit superficially, the Yoruba crowning system. Mark Kinkead-Weekes contends that the Yoruba crowning system and the assumption of office by a traditional ruler entails a process of dismantling, of fragmentation out of which "growth" expectedly emerges. At a king's transition, his demise signifies the fragmentation of essence, of the destruction to the spiritual body that his position represents, his death creates a vacuum in body temporal and spiritual. But, the vacuum is filled by another person after undergoing initiation into the mysteries in which case, his ascendancy signifies renewal, fertility and growth. In that entire process we have "a visionary idea of transformation, linking of man with divine power and forging radiant form out of chaotic opposition" (Kinkead-Weekes 234—5).That is why, at the demise of a king among the Yoruba, one does not say "A King is dead" but "The King has joined his ancestors" or "The King sleeps."

In this play however, the Yoruba sanctified process and its signification that Kinkead-Weekes describes tellingly, is replaced by a perverted version---a horrific act of cannibalism, stench and abuse of office. Ananci captures this scenario while introducing to the audience the nature of Malick's political system:

> When a king did die, the person who became the next king, was the one most willing to eat the rotting carcus [carcass] of the last, with salt; he had to suck the dead king's bones free of its juices and belch loudly in celebration of having devoured the stinking flesh…would-be kings practised slurping on dead men's intestines like children feasting on the season's first mango. (7-8)

Lear Ananci uses Lear's assumption of office through this perverted process to highlight two of the major problems with Trinidad and Caribbean politics: how society destroys itself by giving power to over-ambitious individuals in an equally flawed system of power acquisition, and how power-hungry individuals go to any length to acquire it. Whereas this is specific to Caribbean, the same occurs on the African continent even if in different dimensions and magnitude. But in Malick, the system allows antisocial perpetrations at the highest level to go unchecked to the detriment of the society. According to Ananci:

> […], men grew horns according to their behaviour; the worst behaved had the largest horns, while the best behaved were properly horned. Women's horns remained unseen, located in a most private place. They could commit murder and still maintain a spotless forehead...such was the politics of Malick which had become overwhelmed with men who grew large horns but had painfully broken them off to hide their ill intentions. (7)

The effect of Lear's perversion of the kingly process is further seen when he challenges the divine right of kings and subverts it without remorse, "What the ass is this divine right business and how does one come about it?" (35), and then, he goes ahead to bear children

contrary to the rule that says monarchs should not have children, albeit in a bid to prevent the perpetuation of the monopoly of power and tyranny by an individual. Considering that the essence of succession to a throne is continuity and growth, the rule that Thomas creates in his adaptation is a misnomer, which suggests faulty leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. In this case, the first "Èṣù moment" is a commentary on the author's society.

The perverted process of Lear's acquisition of power has its consequences, "The eating of the last king's festering corpse was by no means a test but the beginning of a long squalid journey" (8). The imagery of violence and cannibalism is presented in many scenes in the play: Lear refers to ravens, blood-suckers and flesh-eaters and the likes; he thinks his daughters are going to devour him; Edmund kills Cordelia's bodyguard; Cordelia is also hanged (54—7). Lear also recognizes that he is the chief-protagonist of the squalid journey, "I am king here, for there is none worse here than I'' (12). While Lear symbolizes what is wrong with the society, the scene also suggests that the people are complicit in their own failure and impoverishment. This is shown through the Sailors and dancers who celebrate Lear's ascension to the throne with fanfare (12), even though they are aware of the flawed system that brought him to power.

In the second "Èṣù moment"we have Ananci playing the role of Èṣù who toys with people's emotion in order to set them up. Ananci meets Cordelia whose portrayal also diverges from Shakespeare's Cordelia. When Cordelia enquires about her father, Ananci does not give a straight-forward answer, but only tells her enough to whet her appetite to know more. She is thus persuaded look for him at the castle where she is not supposed to go in the first place:

Cordelia: Fool?
Ananci: Yes
Cordelia: Where's my father?
Ananci: big question.
Cordelia: Eh?
Ananci: Would you like to know where your father is, or do you prefer to know where he thinks he is? If it's the latter, I must tell you Cordelia that you should not go there.
Cordelia: Why?

Ananci: Because it is an insane place.
Cordelia: Fool.
Ananci: Yes.
Cordelia: I want to know where my father is.
Ananci: Honestly?
Cordelia: Sincerely
Ananci: Lear is where Lear is and no amount of thinking can change that.
Cordelia: Where?
Ananci: Why in his own head.
Cordelia: And where is Lear's head?
Ananci: You really are the best of the bunch. Governor plum, King Lear's head is in the chapel and the Chapel is in King Lear's head. It's the first time in a while that both he and his head are in the same place...at the same time (*exits. Cordelia goes to find Lear*). (13—4)

Ananci's cynical response to Cordelia's question—a silly rant from the Fool as it seems—is also part of Èşù's way of putting humanity to the test through words/actions that initially appear to be illogical and/or nonsensical. Toyin Falola reminds us that Èşù "engages in both a dialectical relationship with those who encounter him" and manipulates the dialogue which he controls and resolves on his own terms (Falola11). Èşù wants the listeners to fathom on their own terms the sense that the dialogue contains, even though s/he also wants them to do her/his bidding. In this case, Cordelia does exactly what Èşù/Ananci expects: she goes to the chapel to find Lear, sees him clutching his left foot with a missing toe that he claims was "devoured" but on a close look he is insane (15). Visibly shaken by the sight, Cordelia leaves hurriedly but returns in the following scene where she insists that Ananci must tell her what he knows about her father. Ananci warns her about the knowledge she seeks and how it can both shock and devastate her but she remains adamant:

Ananci: Who's baggage are your requesting?
Cordelia: My father's
Ananci: Lear's baggage? Heavy, heavy burdensome load

Cordelia: was it painful?
Ananci: oh yes. Yes indeed and not for every back
Cordelia: Please tell me.
Ananci: I shouldn't.
Cordelia: why not Fool?
Ananci: the Burden would become yours and I'm afraid your...back seems inadequate. (16-7)

Ananci describes everybody's (mis)demeanour as "baggage" which they bear while on earth. He also considers the secrets that Cordelia wants to acquire about Lear as part of his (Lear)'s baggage and thinks it's too heavy for her to bear. But she insists on knowing. When he finally whispers into her ears, she is shocked and slumps to the ground (18). From that point, Cordelia changes her attitude towards Lear. She decides not to say anything while he divides his kingdom among his daughters:

Lear: Fairest Cordelia, what do you say?
Cordelia: Nothing.
Lear: Nothing?
Cordelia: Nothing.
Lear: Nothing? Then, nothing will come of nothing. (*He grabs her by the arm*) out! Out! Stinking suzie, pretty pretty, upsetting smell!!!
Goneril: he's going mad.
Regan: going mad, he was mad. He's either sane now or much worse. (25-6)

As Ananci predicts, Cordelia is saddled with Lear's "baggage" to the extent that she begins a gradual process of transformation like Èṣù but, in her case, it is a descent from honour to dishonour, compassion to aggression. In short, she transforms from being the compassionate young lady that we meet at the beginning of the play into a brutal and callous (wo)man[3] who declares war on her two sisters: Goneril and

[3]In the manner of the duality of Èṣù, Cordelia transforms and it is impossible to understand whether she is still a woman or that she has become a man, in terms of her psychological framework as her actions ultimately show. We may relate Cordelia here to Lady Macbeth who invokes the spirits to possess her, upon reading Macbeth's letter,

Regan, whom she heard are planning to kill their father, "Your sisters heard that Lear went to Gloucester to shelter...they are going to kill him" (34). In response, she raises an army to disrupt her sisters' plans and possibly kill them. She also orders the palace guards and soldiers to pick up arms against anyone who opposes Lear's monarchy, although she also says she hates him because of the brutal fashion in which he earlier seized the crown from his friend, King Henry.

Cordelia seems conflicted: at once sensible and irrational at the same time. Clearly, she is different from her Shakespeare counterpart in terms of the brutal manner in which she responds to the opposition to Lear's authority in Malick.Unlike Shakespeare's Cordelia whose "tongue-tied love conceals (and so reveals) true emotion" (Maguire 40—1), the Cordelia that we are presented in *Lear Ananci* revels in irrationality and violence. She is also different to the way the Yoruba perceive their women as the symbol of "*ero*" (coolness/compassion) which is an essential aspect of the supposed female attributes. Although at first Cordelia rejects her father when she becomes aware of how he got the crown, "What could I say to such a man? I've unmasked the devil and found that he is my father...from this day forth, all that King Lear shall hear from me...is silence" (18); she turns around later, and even demands for weapons to crush any opposition to his monarchy (35). She insists that her father is divinely chosen to rule, "despite the difference with him, we [will return] King Lear to his rightful place on the throne" (35), and she commands the palace guards to assemble and be ready to fight and die to ensure her father seizes the crown. At that point in time, Ananci is confused and wonders aloud, "What a contrary woman. You refuse to speak to your father because of the horrible way in which he became king. Now you're more than [willing] to fight to the death to give him back the ignominious throne" (35). Apparently, Cordelia's humanity is "destroyed" by birth and association with Lear. Her sense of womanhood and compassion is replaced by uncanny cruelty and sadistic temperament similar to her sisters whom she plans to kill. Cordelia speaks unabashedly and does not hesitate to mete out punishment on her father's subjects or push them beyond their limits (53). Thus, Thomas's reworking of Cordelia can readily be seen as an indictment of his society.

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and sets off a series of deadly actions that culminate in her, and Macbeth's, eventual death.

Indeed, the Yoruba saying, "*Omo t'éyá bá bí, eyá ló maa jo*" (The baboon can only produce its own species) or "*Omo t'áyé bábí, l'ayé ngbé jó*" (The circumstance of birth often determines temperament, or even more specifically, society produces its own kind of people), describes Cordelia in the context of the play. Like her sisters, Cordelia is the product of Lear's violation of Malick's irrational social/cultural/spiritual law which stipulates that Malick rulers should not raise children, apparently in a bid to prevent self-perpetuation and tyranny while hoping for benevolence in leadership. But Lear's love affair with three different women produced three daughters named after their mothers. Lear, in changing that status quo, also does it through immoral means, for the women are mistresses and not legal wives, and "each as arrogant as the court itself" (12). The aforementioned law, a creation of Thomas, negates the real essence of the spiritual signification of the throne or even the way the Yoruba perceive life wherein marriage and procreation are a system of continuity. Lear's ascension to the throne through a perverted, albeit, horrific cannibalistic process, suggests the kind of person that Cordelia could possibly grow up to become, knowing that she is the product of a spiritually and mentally polluted person. Thus, Cordelia is presented as the most vivid example of how the perversion of the political process impacts negatively on individuals in the society.

What *Lear Ananci* also presents in Lear and Cordelia's relationship beyond the father—daughter configuration is the perversion of the *ako àt'abo* (male/female) principle, which indicates a breakdown of both cosmic and mundane sense of order that governs the castle, the seat of power and Malick as a society. There is thus a dangerous alliance between Lear and Cordelia especially because Lear's "*ako*" with which Cordelia's "*èrò*" should have a correspondence has been fouled when he, "places his mouth securely upon Malick's anus and sucks hard...and then belch[es] loudly in celebration of having devoured stinking flesh" (7—8), thereby polluting the air and throwing the society into dis-equilibrium.

The third "Èşù moment" shows how we can understand the play as an indictment of the colonialists in the socio-political failure in the Caribbean. Although *Lear Ananci* suggests that Trinidadian (and Caribbean) leadership is responsible for the failures that characterize postcolonial socio-political life in that region, it also indicts Shakespeare (colonialists) in Caribbean affairs, through Shakespeare's

characters from *King Lear* that it retains: Gloucester and his two sons, Edmund and Edgar.

Essentially, the actions of the Shakespearean characters' recall the brutal economic and political activities of British companies in the West Indies. These companies, notably the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa (and the West Indies) and its successor, Royal Africa Company, controlled economic activities, especially Sugar, Sugarcane and Slavery (the three 'S'), from around the 1660—1698. Following the exploits of the British trading companies, also came the Portuguese, the Dutch and French respectively. The French Company of the West Indies was established in 1664 prior to officially seizing what has come to be known as the "French-Caribbean" shortly before the abolition of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade (Dunn 1972; Heuman 15—6). Expectedly, these foreign super-powers through their companies fought for control over the natives' resources. In the play, both Edgar and Edmund fight over the land, swear to kill each other and claim divine right over it. Ananci comments on this brutal exchange between the "colonial" characters when he assumes the role of the Shakespearean Fool.

As such, the "Èşù moment" here deals with the call to people by Èşù that an attitude of mind must necessarily be cultivated to create a situation where they are not led into assuming (encouraging/doing) what they cannot control; that is, the temptations to engage in self-destructive acts (Falola 14).As the *orisa* who whispers into the human mind to cause confusion, Èşù is shown at play here when Edmund, who had earlier been disowned by his father, Gloucester, manipulates him to believe that Edgar is planning to kill him. When Gloucester, worried that he has not seen Edgar for a while, wonders if he has gone back to the library because he loves reading, Edmund quickly tells him that Edgar is actually reading the story of Oedipus. He reminds Gloucester of how Oedipus killed his father. Gloucester suddenly becomes afraid thinking Edgar plans to kill him (19—22). Edmund succeeds in pitching Gloucester against Edgar. While Gloucester proposes to banish Edgar, Edmund suggests, "He has to die. Banish him and like Oedipus he will return to sever your head. He must die" (22). As with Shakespeare's characters in the Bard's play, Gloucester also thinks that Edmund is helping him to get rid of his problem, but cannot see that Edmund is acting in self-interest.

Gloucester tells Edmund how he was abandoned by his mother, "the blasted woman" who left him (Edmund) at his doorstep with a note, "illegitimate relations bring legitimate guilt in swaddling garment" (20). Gloucester insists that Edmund's claim to his (Gloucester) property is unfounded and baseless. Whereas Edmund thinks "this bastard thing" is "like the wind you never know it's there until it affects you" and he decides to fight for his right as the first son, "I will master the wind; I will be the *legitimate illegitimate*" (22—3; emphasis added) Edmund also accuses Gloucester of killing his own father to become Earl (21), and trying to rob him (Edmund) of legitimate claim to land and property in favour of Edgar, who also swears to do anything to claim the contested land, "This land is mine. It is my divine right...because it belonged to my forefathers, God knows they fought the devil for it" (30). Meanwhile, Lear watches them from a distance and plans to outwit the family, "like Raven they wait on my throne...I need to...to give them a share before they devour me...give them a small corner to govern, dull their ambition...whet their carnivorous appetite" (23). In order to outwit his father and brother, Edgar aligns with Lear. Yet, the conflict involving the Shakespearean characters and Lear's with his people are not resolved. In fact, what is suggested at the "end" of the play is that the actors have returned to the point where they started, even as the situation that is dramatized reflects what happened in the Caribbean past, "I'm afraid the situation here today is very much the same as before" (65).While *Lear Ananci* depicts Lear's flawed process of ascension to Malick's throne as a metaphor for the dystopia in Trinidad & Tobago, the conflict involving the Shakespearean characters shows the negative effect of external interference and the diversity in the country's politics and the Caribbean socio-political system in general.

Diversity brought economic and political consequences that Thomas dramatizes in *Lear Ananci*, such as increased instability, fragmentation of all sorts, uncertain economic future etc., despite the huge presence of globalization that is itself a result of the activities of powerful external economic and political forces in conjunction with local competing interests. Colin Clarke contends that the resultant effect of this complex, and dangerous, competition can be seen in the manner in which the Caribbean society in general has been divided into Plural-stratified societies, Plural-segmented societies, Class-stratified societies, and "Folk" societies respectively (Clark 1991).

Presenting this typology or social stratification as some sort of "imaginative collaboration" (Ogunba 22), Thomas uses Yoruba performance tradition and Shakespeare as a strong gesture that both underscores the fact that "Yoruba" in this sense, is "less about a place and a people than it is about a base of knowledge" and that of "telling one's story" (Jones 321—2). According to Jones, to tell one's story "is an act of self-determination and self-representation that challenges the dominant narratives of race and politics" (327). It is, however, a task that involves the òrìṣà given Thomas's narrative strategy of conflating Ananci's features with that of Èṣù. Diasporic performances that rely on rhythm, sounds and movements that are identified with the òrìṣà, Katherine Hagedorn notes, could be seen as "divine utterances" since they seem to show that the "divinity of any given expression remains nearby, if not at the forefront of, the performance" (Hagedorn 117). Meanwhile, the play does not end for it is suggested that the actions continue well after. This is perhaps to point out that the issues being treated are ongoing, current, and still unfolding; also as an expression of longevity in the very nature of the òrìṣà and Shakespeare.

Conclusion

Every age has adapted and appreciated Shakespeare in ways that are in consonance with their own interpretations, and as influenced by their experiences. While some adaptations have emphasized the stories, others focused on the characters; and some others engaged the thematic analogy of the Shakespeare texts to their own realities. In this essay, in which I discuss one of such adaptations of a Shakespeare text, I argued that *Lear Ananci* uses Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the Yoruba (diasporic) tradition about the trickster Ananci, who assumes the personality of *Esu,* to address the postcolonial political failures in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean as a whole. I emphasized that the play also uses a number of Shakespearean characters to illustrate the adverse effect of continued colonial influence on the Caribbean society. While Thomas demonstrates the interface between oral tradition and written "sources" in *Lear Ananci,* he also illuminates the significance of repeated decontextualization or recontextualization of written "sources" such as the Shakespeare canon. While the storytelling device represents Yoruba aesthetic tradition that Thomas has inherited, that Shakespeare uses similar trope shows how the Bard is used to make something new. Importantly, Thomas shows that the

political and didactic contexts of traditional narratives in which trickster figures such as Ananci and Esu appear, can serve as a reflection of the complexity of human conditions and situations. Through these mythic figures, he shows the capacity of traditional narratives to address and/or handle current social situations.

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