

ANANSE AS AN ICONIC TRICKSTER IN *THE STORY ANANSE TOLD* BY MARTIN OKYERE OWUSU

Abstract

Folktales are the backbone of African Oral literature. This is especially so in the case of drama as a genre of literature because performance and characterization are core areas for both of them. The study considered Ananse as an iconic character whose presence in the drama isn't merely entertainment but even more serious and important roles. The area of study is significant because a lot of studies have gone into the aesthetic features of folktales but little is heard about metaphorical and iconic characterization. This gap created made this study purposed to look into the role of Ananse as an icon and metaphor utilization in literary theory to study the characterization in folktales. Through the lenses of trickster theory, the study examined Ananse as icon whose trickster nature is metaphorical in the play *The Story Ananse Told* by Martin OkyereOwusu. The use of icon and metaphorical character are examined in the play with content analysis as the approach to not only identify them but to link them to the outside world situation. Through the analysis, the features of a trickster character were identified in not only Ananse but also in other characters in the play. Findings from the research reveal that deceit, greed, lies, trickeries, and flattery as identified with Ananse, the iconic characters, were found with other characters in the play indicating metaphor. The research also came out that these traits in Ananse is metaphorical in the real world because of greed, deceit, propaganda and the like have engulfed our society.

Key words: Folktale, icon, oral literature, trickster, metaphor, propaganda, deceit, greed

Introduction

The trickster tale is a traditional literary genre of storytelling, one of the aspects of oral literature found in many world cultures, and its defining feature is the presence of the trickster character, (Mwinlaaru and Nkansah, 2018). According to Finnegan (2010), oral literature in particular possesses vastly more aesthetic, social and personal significance. Although the trickster is sometimes human, more often than not, he is also portrayed as a little animal, such as the hare, rabbit, tortoise, tsetse fly, or spider (Finnegan, 2012; Owomoyela, 2004; Roberts, 1997; Yankah, 1983). Oral narratives in the form of folktales have existed for generations and have been used in the past to preserve culture, norms and traditions. As one of Africa's most common and popular forms of oral narratives, folktales are told in communities through which customs, norms, values and information are delivered by word of mouth from older generations to younger generations (Aládé, Folaranmi&Odejobi, 2015; Diala-Ogamba, 2015). As a form of storytelling, the true

origin of the stories may be unknown because the practice of folktale composition and transmission is difficult to trace (Das, 2014). Folktales are found in every known culture in the world. However, since folktales are considered as the literary creations of a society, members of the society are regarded as common owners of the stories (Das, 2014). In African folktale, in general, and

Ghanaian folktales, in particular, the most iconic representation of the trickster is the spider (or Ananse). The use of animals as the iconic representation of the trickster allows for creative indirection “because the foibles or vices of some person or faction can be contemplated and discussed without outright confrontation. Trickster animals, as portrayed in plays, have various roles in African and international folklore. They are revered as deities in several parts of Africa, such as Nigeria's Eshu (Asiedu, 2011). They are frequently utilized as allegories to portray people in society.

In several African countries, according to Yankah, the spider is the most well-known animal trickster (Yankah: 1983). The spider is known as Ananse among the Akans in Ghanaian theater. When Ananse appears in a tale, he is frequently humanized while also being permitted to preserve his uniqueness as a spider. As a result, he is both a spider and a man. As a 'Spider-man,' he has the ability to communicate with humans, animals, and gods alike. Because of his dual identity, the folklore character Ananse might be considered as a metaphor for the complicated nature of human individuals in society (example being good and bad). In African folklore, Ananse is thought to be the most famous trickster animal and the curator of folktales (Peek & Yankah: 2004, Yankah: 1983) The question is why would a society honor a trickster with its traditions?

The literary manifestations of Ghanaians and for that matter Africans have long been acknowledged most especially with the studies on folktales. But it has been noted that, ‘practically all accounts to date give only a tiny selection from the manifold literary genres of any one society’ (Finnegan, 1970:80). According to Nkansah (2012), Finnegan (1970), and others have also given a good account on the literacy and orality of interface of folk life. However, despite the volumes that have been written on the aesthetic qualities of oral tradition, an in-depth study of how metaphor is utilized in literary theory on folktales is lacking. This study will not only examine the characteristics of Ananse as an iconic character in Anansesem (folktales) but also discuss the metaphorical occurrences of deceit, trickeries and greed in other characters in the play *A story Ananse Told*. Also, the gap created by the concentration on aesthetic analysis of folktales will gain the attention of the African literary scholars. The impact of folktales on the exposure of societal ills will be exposed through this study to unravel the fact that African literature (oral literature, in particular) is a mirror reflecting the behaviour of man in society.

Specific Objectives Guiding this Study

This study sets out to explore Ananse as a beloved iconic figure in Ghanaian folktales, trace how his traits echo in other characters within these stories, and affirm Anansesem (folktales) as a vivid mirror of societies across Africa and further afield. Drawing on heroism theory, it delves into Ananse not just as a central character, but as one whose cunning ways reflect everyday life and other folktale figures in metaphorical depth. In doing so, the work tackles key questions: What textual evidence crowns Ananse as an iconic presence in Ghanaian folktales? How do his signature deception and trickery show up in other characters? And does lifting Ananse up as a

folk hero truly shape the societies around us? Building on a wealth of prior scholarship, this paper adds fresh insights to the vibrant field of African literature, inviting further exploration.

Methodology

The study employs qualitative paradigm as methodological approach. In respect that this study seeks to explore the iconic character of Akan oral literature (folktale), symbiotic character of Ananse and societal image of a tricker and deceptive character as represented within a literary text, a qualitative paradigm particularly an interpretivist approach is most suitable. This study adopts this paradigm based on its alignment with comments on trickster tales in general observation by De-Souza (2011) who mentions that trickster tales more often end in “a world torn-apart by the trickster’s misdeeds”, and this is exactly what happens in the text under discussion in Amponsah’s (2008) research. The society is torn apart by the activities of Ananse who has been recognized as an icon in the domain of trickery and deception.

In furtherance, the acts and evidences of other characters in this play under study replicate the very character of Ananse reflected in other characters.

Employing the Trickster Theory as a Supposition

Many theatrical and dramatic critics such as Agorvi and Amponsah have focused some of their researches on the search for an authentic Ghanaian theatre for some time. In the quest to learn more about African folktales in the Ghanaian drama or theater a number of studies (Amponsah, 2008; Agovi, 1991) have focused on the search for authentic African theatre as well as expanding the frontiers of Anansegoro. In Amponsah (2008), he relied on Yaw Asare’s *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* to draw on the trickster’s ability to extricate himself from the ensuing challenge while Agovi (1991), on the other hand relied on different African tales to reveal the

103 different names that the trickster is known by in the sub-region and draw on the didactic lessons
104 that can be learnt from the tales. The study seeks to provide a description of the trickster
105 character on the metaphorical representation of the trickster's web in the selected text.

106 In literary studies, thus, folklore, mythology, legend, traditional stories among others, the
107 Trickster

108 Theory can be viewed as a potent and robust framework to situate an analysis. The 'trickster' as a
109 wording used in literary studies has unique connotations, meanings and significances. According
110 to M'Baye (2021), "the trickster is one of the most complex and widespread archetypes of
111 PanAfrican literatures and cultures, such as those from Africa... it is a folk character who
112 involves a multiplicity of meanings, including transcendence of boundaries between good and
113 bad, morality and immorality, truth and lie, and many other entities" (p.2). This view is
114 suggestive of the presence of the trickster character in African literature which includes African
115 dramas. This character is unique in the drama because of certain qualities it possesses and the
116 exceptional roles it plays in the drama. That is the reason why Felfodi (2016), asserts that
117 tricksters who appear in stories or dramas are symbolic and representational of varied
118 phenomenon or issues. He says

119 "humorous tricksters who at the same time often represent serious social issues have been for
120 centuries seminal characters of mythologies all around the world" (p.12). Their appearance in
121 stories across the world hence across cultures is significant because it is an indication of some
122 kind of cultural representation or cultural exposition. In other words, the trickster character in a
123 particular drama from a particular geographical area, will flourish and only wax strong within the
124 cultural environment. Understanding the nature, role and mission of a particular trickster
125 character will be better served only through the spectrum of its cultural milieu or setting. It is
126 therefore logical and understandable when Hynes and Doty (2009) opine that understanding

trickster stories should be majorly rooted in its cultural manifestations, thus either in the local, tribal or historical lines context or in a more generalized human cultural expressions. Since this research paper centers on ‘Ananse’, a sole trickster character that features in the storytelling and drama space, it becomes very appropriate to situate it on the trickster theory as a way of grounding the understanding and cementing the assertions and eventual conclusions that are drawn at the end. Haynes (2009), in firming why trickster theory can be employed as a theoretical supposition, exposes a six point typology which can sustain its application as a supposition. It is even more interesting to note that, an exploration into the numerous trickster characters in countless trickster tales, stories and dramas across many world cultures, there are striking commonalities in all of these trickster characters. These unique commonalities and similarities becomes a phenomenon or the base for any theoretical suppositional exploration. It therefore emerges as a robuststructured underpinning within the literary domains (drama, prose, folklore, etc.), offering a clear film through which the convolutions or intricacies of trickster characters such as Ananse from the Ghanaian storytelling tradition and drama can be understood. The core tenets of the trickster theory are rooted in the six-point typology as exposed by Haynes (2009), and they include; ‘ambiguous and anomalous’, ‘deceiver and trick player’, ‘shape-shifter, situation invertor’, ‘messenger and imitator of the gods’, ‘sacred and lewd bricoleur’. The trickster character is identified as a boundary-crosser, a figure whose actions challenge established rules, disrupt order, and stimulate social reflection and adaptation.

Characteristics and importance of trickster tales

Commenting on trickster tales in general, De Souza (2011) mentions that trickster tales more often end in “a world torn-apart by the trickster’s misdeeds”, and this is exactly what happens in

150 the text discussed in Amponsah's (2008) research. The society is torn apart by the activities of
151 Ananse who has robbed the people of the land of Idiots of both human and material resources.
152 One can imagine the priestess blaming the king and elder for ignoring the voice of the gods and
153 the community blaming the king and elder for entertaining Ananse. This situation created by the
154 trickster, according to De Souza, is because the trickster's motivation often involves the
155 attainment of "short-term gain at the expense of long-term social cohesion" (p.105).

156 In connection with the loss that Ananse causes to society, Vecsey (1981), identifies that Ananse
157 is a character whose presence in the Akan society does not bring any cultural benefit to the Akan
158 society and by extension, all societies but rather he brings death, debt and contradiction and that
159 he is "certainly not a paradigm of virtue" but rather an exceedingly anti-social character. Indeed,
160 Ananse's stay in the land of Dim-Nyim-Lira brought no benefit to the community but rather led
161 to the death of a respected citizen, loss of wealth and human resource. Ananse also introduced
162 confusion between the priestess and the king when for the first time in the play the king
163 disobeyed her warning. Vecsey comments "Ananse violates the trust of the people, breaks
164 societal rules, and often escapes without punishment; sometimes he even prospers through his
165 misdeeds" (p.172).

166 As true as Vecsey's observation above may be, it is also important to indicate that there are
167 lessons that society learns from the actions of Ananse and there are certain virtues that helps to
168 strengthen by his deeds. Ananse is credited with helping to spread wisdom to all corners of the
169 earth. His actions, though stemming out of greed, have made wisdom accessible to all men. In
170 spite of the loss, he causes in Dim-Nyim-Lira, the society learns a lot from the play.

171 Since the trickster tale centres on the trickster figure, he becomes the figure whose presence
172 signifies an ideology. Mwinlaaru and Nkansah examine the trickster as a semiotic figure for the

173 understanding of postcolonial experiences. They attest that “embracing him (the trickster) is to
174 fall prey to his entangling web, and those that dare, ignore or challenge him have to contend with
175 his infinite power” (2018:251). Thus, Ananse could be examined in the Ghanaian context as a
176 symbol of the colonial power in a once colonized country. He represents the external force(s) and
177 influences the postcolonial countries like Ghana have to contend with. His arrival and presence
178 in the land of Dim-Nyim-Lira leads to their being entangled in the web of Ananse leading to their
179 loss. Lynn’s explanation that writers deploy trickster characters to “explore, question, or
180 undermine colonial and neo-colonial norms and structures of power” (p.154) significant guide to
181 exploring how the playwright brings to the audience the presence of the trickster figure
182 representing the colonial or foreign influence and how his presence impacts the society.

183 In analyzing the play, an understanding of the folktale tradition and its importance to the society
184 is very useful. Arko-Achemfuor indicates that folktales are told “by older people to explain
185 various issues and the lessons that children had to learn from them” (p.75). Abrahams (1995)
186 cited by Arko-Achemfuor explains that folktales are basic ways by which cultures and traditions
187 are codified and dramatized to show the rationale behind them (p.77). Arko-Achemfuor adds that
188 Ananse stories “have been used over the centuries in African societies to teach members of the
189 society, especially children and the youth about ethics, morality, and honesty” (2013:75). Pinto
190 (2008) cited in Arko-Achemfuor also explains that the folktale heritage plays a major role in the
191 education system of the traditional African societies as it “enforces conformity to social norms
192 and validates social institutions and religious rituals” (p.77). Arko-Achemfuor mentions that
193 Anansesem are stories handed down to the modern generation and “have a lot to teach the youth
194 in the face of moral decay, greed, and laziness which have engulfed most African societies”
195 (p.77). Arko-Achemfuor adds that these tales are “useful in solving both existential and essential

problems in a society because each tale always ends with a message, a point and a truth to remember as one confront life's problems" (p.77). He states that the messages and the lessons from the folktales are "applicable to the daily lives and experiences of members of society" (p.77). The tales help us to reflect upon the realities of life and this is clear to both the storyteller and the listeners. By adopting the folktale tradition, the playwright could be said to be preserving the above objectives and hoping that the audience would learn the ways of the trickster and be watchful of his advances and presence. The playwright's desire to warn Africans and other exploited people of the inherent dangers in associating with the trickster would also be achieved characters like Akpala in the society would be taught the importance of contentment and patriotism while those in authority like King Dossey and the Elder would realize how their actions and negligence could cost the society.

Propaganda; a feature of Trickster Character

Throughout history, the prevailing social power has consistently employed propaganda as a tool for conformity and control. Ellul refers to this as "propaganda of integration," which he believes is used by all contemporary social structures to persuade all citizens to adhere to and support them (Silverstein, 1987). Propaganda, according to Frankel (1979:130–134), is any organized effort to influence the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of a certain group of people in order to achieve a particular public goal. Frankel clarified his concept by highlighting its fundamental feature. According to him, propaganda is always directed at members of any group within any organization in order to further the propagandist's fundamental interests. Frankel's concept encompasses every domain in which propaganda may be used. This covers both individuals and government agencies. Propaganda, according to Rodee (1983:189), is the dissemination of ideas

219 by means of influence, persuasion, and promotion. According to Rodee's definition, ideas can be
220 promoted and propagated through persuasive methods like lobbying rather than by using force.
221 Regarding electioneering campaigns and other governmental procedures, this is highly pertinent.

222 Truman (1951:223) is also regarded as one of the academics who has conducted a thorough and
223 beneficial analysis of propaganda. Propaganda, in his opinion, is any attempt to manipulate
224 words and word substitutions and, as a result, the actions of several people about contentious
225 issues. According to Truman, propaganda is only significant when the topic at hand is
226 contentious. This is a crisis situation, which could involve either internal or external difficulties.

227 Propaganda, according to Irion (1950:19), is a biased attempt to convey information that the
228 author knows to be at least partially untrue, typically through covert or hidden means. Irion
229 continued by pointing out that these organizations might place a strong emphasis on the
230 employment of strategies like hidden sources, distortion, suppression, or falsification, as well as
231 non-rational arguments that is, appeals to feelings or affections rather than logic.

232 Propaganda is a persistent communication effort used to control opinion, enforce ideological
233 objectives, and formalize the allegiances of target groups, whether they are large populations or
234 particular social groups. Any text or media can be used for propaganda communication; in fact,
235 any modality that is judged most suitable can be used: According to Lasswell (1927, p. 627), it
236 involves the "manipulation of significant symbols." Propaganda is the endeavor to use influence,
237 usually to spread and validate doctrine or to elicit desired behaviors. Propaganda can be broadly
238 divided into two types: gradual, ongoing campaigns and more urgent appeals to action, such as
239 direct response or incitement. Both are intended to create allegiance, indoctrinate, and solidify
240 identity.

The "principles of differentiation and internal cohesiveness" (Lasswell, 1927, p. 627) are essential to propaganda, which is defined as the "manipulation of key symbols" for the purpose of establishing and upholding ideological goals. Ideologies and propaganda produced by nonsuperstructure actors can, in fact, influence economic results through a variety of strategies. There is little doubt that certain superstructure goals and ideologies, particularly in the social domain, may clash with the needs required for institutional and societal cohesion. In order to make the beliefs and behaviors that the propagandist has established in a pre-persuasion (priming) seem normal and self-evident when a direct propaganda message is framed, it is necessary to organize the perception of reality and experience for the people who are going to be persuaded.

Trickster characters like Ananse weave stories that are sweet to the ear to convince, persuade and influence society's decision making. Such act is propagandist approach and the lies attached the propagator of such stories defines him as a trickster. The beauty of the kente cloth Ananse puts across to weave for King Dossey and the Elder set a pace for propaganda that set the pace for Ananse's exploitation of Dim-Nyim-Lira community in the play *Ananse in the Idiots* by Yaw Asare.

Ghanaian Folktales

The art of storytelling or folktale telling is a common tradition among numerous ethnic groups in Ghana. According to Asante and Edu (2018), the Ewes (people from the Volta Region) refer to the art as gli, whereas the Gas (people from the Greater Accra Region) refer to it as adesa. The Nzema call it nwora while the Walis refer to it as h'lima. Among the Akans in Ghana, folktale

264 telling is called anansesem. When translated literally, anansesem means discourse or tales about
265 Ananse, even though some stories do not have Ananse as a character.

266 Ananse is the Akan name for the spider and he is the popular hero of many Akan folktales. He
267 often plays tricks that fail (Ahenkorah, 2011) and is usually portrayed as self-centered, cruel,
268 unscrupulous, vain, unappreciative, lazy, immoral and lawless (Asante & Edu, 2018; Addo,
269 2013). The spider is also a common hero in folktales from other ethnic groups in Ghana. The Ga
270 people call him Anaanu, the Ewes, Yiyi and the Nzemas, Kɛdɛba (Asante & Edu, 2018). Studies
271 have revealed that anansesem was spread throughout the Caribbean, United States and Europe by
272 word of mouth during the era of the slave trade. In these locations, he is sometimes referred to as
273 Anansi,

274 Aunt Nancy, Nanci, Ti Malice, but his character remains the same (Meder&Illes, 2010;
275 Deandrea, 2004; Salm&Falola, 2002).

276 Ananse is sometimes depicted as a human and sometimes as an animal (spider). Traditionally, his
277 first name is Kweku, which is the Akan name for Wednesday born males. As a family man,
278 Ananse's wife, Aso (among the Ashantis) or OkonoreYaa, (among the Fantis) and four children,
279 Ntikuma (among the Ashantis) or KwekuTsen (among the Fantis), Tikenenkenen,
280 Afudohwedohwe and Nankonhwea are also sometimes featured in the stories. Among the people
281 of the Frafra society in the Upper East Region of Ghana, the hare (Aso'ona) features prominently
282 and is portrayed as the most cunning character (Aduko, 2008). Other Ghanaian folktale
283 characters are the tortoise, hyena, cat, dog, deer, leopard, lion, dwarf, the hunter, chief and many
284 others (Aduko, 2008; Salm&Falola, 2002). Inanimate characters such as rock, river and hill are
285 also sometimes featured in Ghanaian folktales (Aduko, 2008). According to Abarry (1999),
286 unlike many ethnic groups in Ghana, Ga folktales differ significantly because they are usually

about legends and myths. Most of the major characters in their stories are recognizable gods, ancestral spirits and supernatural beings.

In rural communities in Ghana and Africa, members of the same family or neighbourhood gather around log-fires or under the moonlight and pass the evening where an adult or an experienced storyteller narrates stories to children (Salm&Falola, 2002). Yeboah-Dankwa (1992) notes that folktale telling can be a community event with the whole community participating as audiences of a narrative performance at the village or market square and listening to an experienced storyteller. Folktale telling usually begins with an introductory or opening formula and ends with a concluding formula by the storyteller or narrator.

The storyteller (narrator) usually begins the narrative by stating the theme and concludes by stating the morale (Ahenkorah, 2011). The narrator may also conclude the story by appointing his or her successor at the end of the tale. When the opening formula has been declared, the narrator and the audience assume their roles. In the course of the narration, the audience usually participates by singing songs, clapping their hands, dancing, and responding to the narrative with appropriate remarks, questions, shouts and applause. The songs are part of the plot and are introduced by the narrator as the voice of the main character. Hence, storytelling is sometimes regarded as performance art (Ahenkorah, 2011) because it is characterized by alternations between speaking, singing and dancing which are prominent features of storytelling.

The Play *The story Ananse told*

The play employs the skill of Ananses3m, a traditional narrative tale that is common among the Akans in Ghana. A popular feature of the African oral literature that is noted to have the audience and the narrator involved in the story in the art of performance. Ananse acts as the narrator of the story right from the beginning of the play. He, Ananse, introduces himself as the

311 narrator of the story meanwhile he is equally a character. He hails himself as a deity (he never
312 dies) though he introduces his name as 'Okontompo' (liar) KwekuAnanse.

313 I am OkomtompokwekuAnanse.

314 For a million years I have lived on this earth

315 I get into trouble always, but I never die.

316 His introduction to the story reveals the character sketch of a trickster as he is. Indeed, he praises
317 himself to be a person of wisdom which has been bestowed on him by 'Nyankopon' (God) for
318 his ability to '...bring alive a dwarf, a python and a lion...'. Ananse, as he claims in the
319 beginning monologue of the play, uses his wisdom and tricks to bring alive the animals required
320 by God which ended him up with his name being used for folktales in the Akan communities: so,
321 the old name 'Nyankonsem' (God's story) is now 'Anansesem' (Ananse's story). Ananse claims
322 superiority in knowledge and wisdom.

323 The main story dwells on a hunter's greed, egoism, and unfaithfulness that lead to his downfall
324 after been raised mystically to become a king. The hunter, by name Osugyani (bachelor) lives in
325 a cottage alone and has been wanting a woman to keep as a wife. At a point in time, he always
326 come home after his day's hunting to find food on his table and his compound swept clean.

327 What? Who has been here? The place is swept!

328 (...) Mmmm ... some sweet-scented stew has been mixed in the passing air. ... (...)
329 Food! And well prepared too! (...) Who has been here? Nobody.

330 Whose food is this? Mine, of course! Shall I eat it? Why not? ... (p. 3)

331 The hunter ponders over this anytime he comes across such situation in his house but eats the
332 food prepared for him.

333 As this continuous, the hunter decides to hide one day and watch the one who comes to his house
334 to sweep and prepare food so that if it is a woman, he will propose marriage. In a flashback-inset
335 story, the play recap an earlier incident of the hunter's encounter with an antelope in the forest.
336 Before the antelope died after the hunter had shot it, it told the hunter to keep the head which he
337 has it hanged on the hall of his cottage.

338 That antelope's head hanging on the wall means a lot to me. It is a strange head.

339 It has not done anything for me so far, but I know one day it will. I shot an antelope dead some
340 years ago, but before it died, it begged me not to eat the head but hang it on my wall; for
341 one day it will do something for me. (p. 2)

342 The above claims of the hunter would not have come a better time for a recap by the hunter than
343 this time the antelope's head has started exhibiting its mythical prowess. It is the antelope's head
344 that turns to a woman who does all the chaos of a wife in the husband's house for the hunter.
345 Upon realization, the hunter comes out of his hideout which stops the ability and will for the
346 woman to turn back to an antelope's head again.

347 The hunter interrogates the woman to find out where she comes from, he had seen her turned
348 from the antelope's head to become what she is now. The woman warns and makes the hunter to
349 swear not to reveal the secrete about her origin to anyone. The hunter promises thus;

350 I promise I shall never reveal your origin to any human being – man or woman,
351 boy or girl, young or old, sick or healthy, fat or lean, ugly or handsome, dead or alive – till we
352 are dust. (p. 8)

353 Another flashback-inset story, this time from the woman who emerged from the antelope's head,
354 unravel the mythical secrete of the antelope head in relation to who the woman actually is:

355 ... I was the prince of Kidu. The great river god Pra wanted to marry me. I
356 rejected the offer, so he turned me into an antelope. A curse was put upon me that
357 I should remain an antelope until a hunter killed me. I would be able to change
358 into my former self again and marry the lucky hunter. And so have I changed, and
359 so am I your wife. (p. 8)

360 The woman ends her story with a great information that can be said to be the blood or spine of
361 the play: the powers that the woman, now the hunter's wife, has can make her do apparently,
362 whatever they wish "... in a twinkling of an eye". She asks the hunter severally to say whatever
363 he wants for it to be provided. However, the hunter cannot point any particular thing he wants in
364 his life.

365 The woman (hunter's wife) reads the mind of her husband and reveals her intentions on what she
366 is going to do for the hunter.

367 ... First, I shall turn this place into a city and make you a great king. There
368 shall be a thousand servants at your service, soldiers to guard your doors
369 and gates, music and dancers for your entertainment, and a host of other
370 things. Then will you rule as a king. (p. 9)

371 All what the hunter's wife conjures through singing are realized; a city, a palace and hunter
372 crowned king. Hunter complains of the city as being empty. There are no people who are the
373 subjects to the throne. The woman brings yet another set of deals of a promise from the hunter
374 without which the hunter will go back to his former self. She states that a drum that hangs on the
375 wall of the palace should never be played or even touched. Secondly, the king should "never
376 cough while sitting" on his throne. The third deal is that the king should "never be tempted by

377 any woman on the land over which” he rules; “... never love another woman on this ... land” (p.
378 10). They conclude this conversation with a promise from the king as a seal of the deals.

379 After the promises have been made, the woman conjures for people to appear from nowhere.
380 From here, the hunter seems to be over ridden by the sudden power at his disposal. He stops the
381 woman who brought everything to reality from appointing councilors as he says, “My queen,
382 leave the appointment of my councillors to me, if you please”. (p. 11)

383 Ananse (the spider), meets the king in his court which surprises the king acknowledging the fact
384 that the presence of Ananse is going to ‘upset things’ for him as a king and his community.
385 Notwithstanding the king’s acknowledged fact, he goes ahead to ask Ananse a sacred question
386 which indeed sets the pace for the spider to start weaving its web. The king asks;

387 Tell me this: my queen says I should never play this drum, not even tough it. Why?
388 (p. 13)

389 Ananse deploys lies in cunningly answering the question raised by the king;

390 The moment you play it you will be superior to her. You’ll be immortal, and gold
391 will be in abundance. This palace, which is merely made of cement and wood, will turn into gold,
392 and oh – happiness shall be yours till I, Ananse, am no more. (p. 11) Gradually, Ananse
393 convinces the king to play the drum with an end note thus, “You’ll be a fool if you don’t” play
394 the drum. Knowing what will happen, Anase exits to leave the king to his own
395 fate.

396 The king plays the drum and a voice of a monster is heard. The drumming only invited the
397 Monster

398 King who claims ownership of the drum. The drumming has woken up the Monster;
399 Who plays the drum

400 And disturb my mind? (p. 14)

401 As the voice of the monster billows, it also seeks entrance into the city and the palace through the
402 gates and doors. It is heard from the voice;

403 Open your doors without delay!

404 Open your gates and show your face! (p. 15)

405 And after this command when the King cannot stand but openly proclaim his fear of the voice,
406 the voice said;

407 Oh, then, I come.

408 I open myself with force and strength. (p. 15)

409 The monster enters and introduces himself as King Subruku, the king of the forest which to the
410 King (the former hunter) is now a city. The monster took the drum and asks the king to follow
411 him. The King's call on his guards to rescue him proves its unusefulness since the guards are
412 equally afraid of the monster. Through the charms, the king follows the monster like a drunk or
413 sleep walking man.

414 Ananse resurfaces and sets a plan for the disappearance of the King and the drum to be revealed
415 to the royals in the palace in a fabricated manner. He wails,

416 ...*Nipa mbra o! Nipa mbra o! Nipambra o!*

417 *Agya e e ... Agya e e* I'm calling for help.

418 *Agya e e ... Nipa mbra o!* (p. 16)

419 Okyeame and Counsellor emerges and enquire whatever the matter is to call for the wailing of
420 Ananse. He requests for the Queen's presence as the matter at hand is serious. After a while,
421 Ananse unveils the missing king and drum. He shows ignorance of what has happened and later
422 declares;

423 Well, he [the King] has been carried off by Sasabonsam. (p. 18)

424 Queen comes in with Guards to be informed that the King might be dead by now. Ananse claims
425 that the King had demanded from him the reason why he, the King, is “forbidden to touch” the
426 drum but denied of providing an answer even after a threat of public execution from the king. He
427 convinces the queen by asking her to go ahead to ask the audience to confirm the truth.
428 The Queen rebukes the Guards. She requests for her magic tail to be able to magically bring the
429 king back. Okyeame is unable to find the magic tail. The queen demands Okyeame to look for
430 the magic tail because it is his responsibility to keep the magic tail secured in the palace.
431 Okyeame, you will be punished for this impudence. Go and find the tail before you are changed
432 into a monkey! (p. 20)

433 It therefore, requires of the Okyeame to go on expedition in search of the magic tail. After
434 sometime, the magic tail is found and the king is brought back to the palace. It is the queen who
435 had forgotten where she had placed it.

436 Oh! I have forgotten. I think I put the tail in my cooking. (p. 21)

437 After the tail has been found, Ananse is denied his request to chase and call back Okyeame who
438 has left the palace in search of the magic tail. With the magic in her hand, the Queen conjures the
439 return of the King and the drum together with the Monster who exits. The dazed king comes
440 back into consciousness; “Where am I? Where am I?”. He pleads for forgiveness thus, Don’t be
441 angry with me, KwekuAnanse deceived me.

442 ... It was he who forced me to do so – he is a trickster. (p. 23)

443 That notwithstanding, Okyeame is still in the forest searching. Ananse meets the Okyeame and
444 misinforms him about the happenings in the palace. KwekuAnanse, after clearing his dented
445 image and character through weeping, tells Okyeame where he could find the magic tail:

446 ... Go to the house of the house of the royal monsters. You will find the tail there.

447 But be careful; those monsters are dangerous... especially the women. (p. 28) Ananse advices

448 him to steal “without drawing their [monsters’] attention” otherwise if they should see him “the
449 gods be with [him]”. Okyeame pleads that Ananse should accompany but he refuses and bids
450 Okyeame good bye.

451 In the palace of the monsters, the Queen Monster complains of King Monster could not get the
452 “little drum and destroy that queen and her king”. While the King Monster tries to defend
453 himself, the Monsters Prince alerts the father:

454 Father, I scent the smell of a human being. (p. 29)

455 Immediately, Prince Monster and Princess Monster begins to argue over who eats that human
456 being. As they argue their hunger erupts to an uncontrollable state that they keep complaining
457 even when they are supposed to be quiet.

458 The monsters capture Okyeame and is asked his mission. On revealing his reason as searching
459 for the magic tail, Monster King formulates a trick to gather information about where he can
460 equally get access to the whereabouts of the magic tail. The monster declares to Okyeame that
461 they are no more hostile to human beings because they have all turned to be vegetarians and
462 therefore very friendly. The monster framed that the king and the drum has been returned to the
463 King’s palace and that the king went back with a lot of wealth in form of gold;

464 ... - the king now swimming in wealth - ... (p. 32)

465 Okyeame by his statement wants to quit the search for the tail because what he wanted the tail for
466 has been resolved, and in addition wealth and happiness has reached the king’s palace. He
467 therefore, sees it wise to go back to the palace of his king. But after he seeks permission to go,
468 the Monster King insists that he waits a while to take the magic tail along and get gift orf gold
469 for his personal use. Okyeame, flattered to believe that he is going to be rich accepts the wait a
470 while:

471 Now I'm going to be rich. I'll build a big house and stop this nasty business of
472 going up and down serving ordinary human beings who are no better than me. (p.
473 33)

474 The monster requests the Okyeame to bring the drum, which belongs to them, back to them from
475 the king's palace. The Okyeame does not agree at this request but is further persuaded by the
476 monster as he asks whether Okyeame will not want to be a king instead of the hunter or remain
477 as Okyeame serving the king. The Okyeame is lured into revealing certain secrets in the palace;
478 the jealous queen would not accept the king loving another woman and the king not to cough
479 when seated on his throne.

480 In no time, the monster turns his family into human beings with the Princess very beautiful and
481 attractive, Okyeame is warned not to reveal the real identities of the monsters. The Okyeame
482 promises to keep the secret as long as he has his gold.

483 You can count on me. (p. 35)

484 In the King's palace, the king informs, particularly the Queen, the troubles created in the palace
485 due the vacuum created with the absence of Okyeame, the King's linguist. He declares;

486 Now I am certain he's killed by the beasts of the forest

487 ... and if that Okyeame ever comes back, which is highly improbable, almost impossible -
488 Executioner!

489 ... You'll do your work, won't you? (p. 35)

490 By the King's conclusion, the Okyeame is prosecuted in absentia awaiting execution as and when
491 he arrives.

492 The Queen nominates Councillor to be the next okyeame (the king's linguist). The king accepts
493 and claims that Councillor remains the Okyeame till the original Okyeame arrives. However, he

494 is reminded by the Executioner of the execution that await the Okyeame he comes to his senses
495 and says,

496 Ah, I forgot. Kings always forget. You are my Okyeame for life. (p. 37)

497 After the Okyeame is installed, the King calls for entertainment and a human sacrifice. Debate
498 exhumes as to who should be used for the sacrifice; a guard or Koo Kra, the King's palm wine
499 tapper. The nod falls on Koo Kra who is sacrificed amidst dancing. Queen sees such sacrifices as
500 brutal. The King describes the Queen's comment as that of a nature of women; 'weaklings'.
501 Okyeame and the monsters who have changed into human beings, arrive at the palace. The King
502 immediately calls for the arrest and execution of the Okyeame. Okyeame questions whatever he
503 has done wrong comments that "there must be a mistake". However, the King receives the
504 monsters (strangers) with warm words and praise,

505 Welcome, friends. The stature of your men and the beauty of your women....

506 Your women are certainly beautiful. (p. 39)

507 This statement is made disregarding the Queen's intermittent dislike statements. The King is
508 overtaken by the beauty of the monster Princess and addresses the strangers through 'Okyeame'
509 without showing distinction; is it the former Okyeame or the Councillor recently made
510 'Okyeame'. Therefore, both of them respond turning the whole scene into a confused
511 atmosphere. The Okyeame is reminder of his awaiting execution but the Monster King steps in to
512 save his life with the following words:

513 Great king, mighty queen, a stranger does not taste palm-soup. But I beg your
514 pardon. I've one request to make. ...I entreat you to free your former Okyeame;
515 for he's really a man. My family and I nearly lost our lives, but he kindly saved
516 us. (p.

517 41)

518 The Monster follows up with the following praises that woos the King;

519 I asked him how he a quired such wisdom. And his answer, great king, was to
520 your credit. (p. 42)

521 The Monster wittily uses words that frames a picture of flattery which moves the King to free the
522 Okyeame.

523 Instead, he calls on the Executioner to rather execute the First Counsellor. The Executioner
524 protest saying the First Counsellor has not done anything to desire execution. By this protest, the
525 King calls on the Guards to “Arrest the Executioner and the Counsellor” which due to the
526 position, strength and treats from the Executioner, the Guards are not able to do. The King and
527 Queen go in to rest as the others also leave the palace leaving Okyeame with the monsters.

528 Okyeame and his allies alert each other to play their parts well after exchange of promise of
529 loyalty. The monsters deploy their plays to trap the King. All of them leaves remaining the
530 Monster Princes who beauty and attractiveness are been used as a bait to capture the King in the
531 web of promises he has made with the Queen.

532 The Monster Princes begins her plan of luring the king with love song which the King hears from
533 his room. The strong lyrics of the long song of the monster Princes attracts the King to find out
534 who might be singing such sweet song and who is the song addressed to. Monster Princes
535 pretends to be reluctant though she says she loves the King too says “...I admired you the
536 moment you came here...”. The King sermons her to come and sit on his throne which she does
537 reluctantly. The Monster Princes points to the fact that the Queen is there to be the wife of the
538 King. Here the King tells her not to worry:

539 Don’t you worry about her. I’m the king, and I am entitled to seventy-two wives.

540 If she [the Queen] doesn't like it she can go away. Will you marry me? (P. 45)

541 Immediately the King has ended his statement with a question, the Queen entered with the magic
542 tail in her hand. The King pulls the Princes Monster off his throne, sits on it and started coughing
543 with the mind to divert her attention from what was going on between the Monster Princes and
544 himself. The Queen bursts in response to the King's denial of any wrong doing even when not
545 asked and reaction, and says,

546 You unfaithful, ungrateful wretch! Is this my reward? You have broken all the
547 promises you said you would keep. Now hear this: Your days of happiness have
548 ended. You'll be a poor lonely hunter once more, living in a crooked cottage
549 amidst a dangerous forest, sweating before you eat. (p. 46)

550 On hearing this from the Queen, the King declares to the Queen that he is going to reveal her
551 origin to the world. Queen tries her best to stop him but he refuses and calls everybody to come.
552 When the citizens arrived the King then says,

553 Your queen was once an antelope's head. (p. 46)

554 Just after this revelation, all the citizens disappear remaining the King and Okyeame. The city
555 turns back to the old isolated cottage in the middle of a thick forest.

556 Right after the disappearance, the monster come in in their natural form as monsters and hide
557 from the King and Okyeame who engage in a reflective conversation. As the King sees recalls
558 kingship as good while the Okyeame accuses the king of greediness which has brought his
559 downfall.

560 The monsters seize the King and his Okyeame. Okyeame tries to save himself by reminding the
561 Monster that he is supposed to be rewarded instead been killed for the supper but the Monster
562 King says,

563 Your death is your reward.

564

565 **Analysis and Discussions**

566 Ananse, as a character in the African (especially, the Akan) folktales, is an epitome of the
567 revelation of tricks and deceptions in society that evolve a societal misconduct and bring to bare
568 the flaws that retard societal progress. In the text under study; *A Story Told by Ananse*, the iconic
569 characteristics of Ananse is revealed in the behaviour and actions of other characters in the play.
570 This study looks beyond how Ananse acts to reveal how other characters (in plays and society at
571 large) display trickster nature and frame deceptive stories to achieve their selfish personal
572 ambitions at the expense of a good thing for all the society.
573 The onset of the play *The story Ananse Told* by Martin OkyereDanso draws a vivid picture of
574 Ananse as known in the spectrum of the Akan oral literature. Vecsey (1981), identifies that
575 Ananse is a character whose presence in the Akan society brings death, debt and contradiction
576 and that he is “certainly not a paradigm of virtue” but rather an exceedingly anti-social character.
577 These are some unanswerable features that African society affiliate to spirits we humans cannot
578 control. An icon in the African literature context, incorporates a figure recognized as a deity:

579 For a million years I have lived on this earth
580 I get into trouble always, but I never die. (p.1).

581 A statement of a sort to have come from Ananse portrays the fact to give evidence of his
582 acceptance as not just an icon but a deity as well. He often plays tricks that fail (Ahenkorah,
583 2011) and is usually portrayed as self-centered, cruel, unscrupulous, vain, unappreciative, lazy,
584 immoral and lawless (Asante & Edu, 2018; Addo, 2013). Notwithstanding, he prevails in most
585 folktales of the Akans in Ghana. The reason why this icon is used in folktales in Ghana is to
586 teach morals values as against the unaccepted social conduct. The consequences of a reverse

587 societal norms and values on the youth who intends to practice vices of a community are
588 revealed through folktales that use Ananse as a trickster character.

589 Ananse has been an icon not because of his role play in folktales but also his activities that
590 reveals human behaviour that exist with the society for the purpose of guidance on moral
591 rehabilitations to change society. An eternal existence of a character be it good or bad reflects a
592 deity ether good or bad.

593 In the play, *The Story Ananse Told*, Ananse is seen as the narrator as well as a player (character):

594 Today I shall also tell you a story.

595 So I entreat you all not to worry

596 ...

597 Once upon a time,

598 There was a hunter. (p. 2)

599 In the lines above, Ananse himself come out to let the audience be comforted for he is not part of
600 the story so no mischief is expected in the play. We however see him hiding behind his role as a
601 narrator to turn events in his own ways. The actions of those he influences in the play are replicas
602 of his fraudulent behaviour. This also batteries the fact that there are people in society who also
603 have the character traits of OkomtompokwekuAnanse.

604 The dramatist designed the play to showcase Ananse not only as a character but predominantly,
605 an eye-of-God narrator who knows whatever goes on both in the minds of the characters and the
606 entire society. He is indeed everywhere and aware of what has transpired there. On these bases
607 he crafts his actions to craft the actions of characters and outcome of events in the play.

608 Ananse claims himself as owner of 'Nyankonsem' (God's story), now 'Anansesem' (Ananse's
609 story), and superiority in knowledge and wisdom. His presence predicts a fore knowledge of

610 what already exist. Ananse sets the pace with the subject matter of the story and directs the plot
611 to unfold.

612 Ananse sets the pace by convincing the king (hunter) to play the drum forbidden to be touched:

613 ...The moment you play it (the drum), you'll be superior to her (the queen). You'll be
614 immortal, and gold will be in abundance. (p. 14)

615 He, Ananse, turns around to signal the calamity that has befallen the kingdom. A hypocritical
616 nature of a trickster. The trickster nature of Ananse as exhibited here indicates not envy but a
617 desire to destroy the King (Hunter) and an established kingdom. In the play, there is no evidence
618 of Ananse having interest in becoming a king but rather he makes inputs to put a society asunder:
619 distractive anti-social character who is devoid of social virtue (Vecsey).

620 Indeed, Vecsey comments "Ananse violates the trust of the people, breaks societal rules, and
621 often escapes without punishment; sometimes he even prospers through his misdeeds" (p.172).

622 This is linked with the present-day propagandist who seeks on their interest at the expense of
623 society. Significant among the plot in the play is the state of the hunter before he became a king.

624 He is a lonely person seeking not more than a life partner - a wife. He gets what he wants and
625 through that gains an extension of kingship to lead and organize a society to progress. Greed and
626 desire to gain unlimited power sets in when Ananse deceives him to be assured of absolute
627 power by playing the drum he is forbidden to play.

628 An insatiable feature of human kind sets in. This action of the King reveals him as self-centered,
629 unscrupulous, unappreciative, immoral and lawless which are traits associated to Ananse as a
630 trickster (Asante & Edu, 2018; Addo, 2013). He becomes over ambitious and power drunk. After
631 ruling over a kingdom, what else do you need?

632 Other characters in the play also exhibit some features of Ananse's trickster nature. Clearly, such
633 characters are mimicking Ananse's traits and ways of life that exalts him to be an icon in the
634 Akan (Ghanaian) folktales.

635 Monster King deceives Okyeame to be able to gain entry into the palace with dubious intentions.
636 He lies to Okyeame with a framed story of how the King has become rich all of a sudden after
637 his interaction with him. This deceptive act is not just a replica of Ananse as a trickster but also
638 paints a picture of some political propagandists on their political platform in our society.
639 Promises and deception lie within the mind and mouth of people whose character is crafted in the
640 actions and deeds of the Akan's iconic character, KwekuAnanse.

641 The desire to become rich by any means necessary or uncalled for has taken over the youth of
642 our time and this is a replica of Okyeame'sbehaviour. Okyeame wanting to get gold to make him
643 rich or becoming a king himself agrees with Monster King to lead them to the palace. Presently,
644 in the society, many are of the interest of seeking miracle that after being made known to them
645 (be it magic or tricks) give in to the direction of the miracle bearers. If Monster King has all the
646 powers to do what he wants, why then should he seek Okyeame's assistance? The play conveys a
647 strong idea of human fallibility due to self-interest, propaganda and greed.

648 Again, Monster uses flattery and lies to convince the King to accept the demoted Okyeame just
649 to be able to achieve his desired destruction of not only the king but his entire kingdom. He says
650 good thing about the king that present Okyeame in the King's good book,

651 I asked him (Okyeame) how he acquired such wisdom. And his answer, great
652 king, was to your credit. (p. 42)

653 These words from Monster king are not only full of lies but amount to flattery as well.

654 Such same flattery words and extreme beauty of Monster Princes is employed to seduce the
655 King's love that ends him up in his fall:

656 *If love were like a stone*

657 *I would throw it at him*

658

659 *Come my king, my love, my dear;*

660 *Can't you see I sing for you?*

661 *Can't you see I long for you?... (p. 44)*

662 These crafted pieces of poem are used by Monster Princes to disarray the reasoning of the King.
663 The king in the end loses everything he had due to his self-centeredness, inappreciative nature,
664 lawlessness, and following his heart desire after being seduced by the flattery words and beauty
665 of Monster Princes.

667 **Conclusion**

668 Ananse as an icon in African literature cannot be doubted. As it were, modern African literature
669 has its roots or backbone to be oral literature. Folktale is one of the richest pieces of literary art
670 that African literature beholds. In many African cultures there are animal iconic characters in
671 their folktales, popular among them in West Africa is the spider. In the Akan language, the spider
672 is called Ananse and that name is reflected in the name of Akan folktales; Anansesem (Ananse's
673 story). This Ananse is always seen as a trickster character in the folktales. This study looked at
674 how the characteristics of a trickster is reflected in the play *The Story Ananse Told* by Martin
675 OkyereOwusu. The study reveals that though Ananse is a narrator of this play, he sets his web
676 for the characters in the play to entangle themselves with. This has therefore revealed Ananse as

a metaphorical character in folktales. The revelation indicates that the trickster traits of Ananse as an icon reflects in other characters in folktales and even members of our present society making Ananse a metaphor to the society as well. In Ghana, especially the Akan communities if someone is referred to or nick-named KwekuAnanse then be sure no one will wish to do business or do anything with him. The study also reveals the consequences of lack of good virtue, morality, greed, and unappreciative nature of man. Through the lens of trickster theory, a clear appreciation of Ananse character's ability to endure across generations, underscoring the view that Ananse is not simply a vehicle for entertainment but serve as spirited cultural discussor. Based on elements such as subversion and satire, Ananse is able to celebrate cleverness and resilience, offering alternatives to rigid social hierarchies. These gains notwithstanding, Ananse's failings warn against the pitfalls of moral transgression, creating a dynamic interplay between order and disorder that is central to communal well-being. Therefore, the revelation reiterates folktales as a resource material to teach moral values and good characters to the youth.

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