

# Jonsonian Stylistic Modes in Sutherland: A Study of Jonson's *Volpone* and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*

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## Abstract

Jonsonian dramatic theories gained notoriety during the Renaissance period and most dramatists and critics (of that century and beyond) have appropriated those theories in the construction of their literary crafts and criticisms all within the Eurocentric tradition. Limiting literary creativity and criticism to the Western tradition raises a question that this essay seeks to interrogate. Drawing inspiration from Wa Thiong'o's (1997) advocacy for a metaphor of a flower garden to represent the wholeness of Literature and Borowy's (1983) model, this paper studies Jonsonian stylistic modes in *Volpone* (1605) and compares them to Sutherland's artistic choices in *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975) to make a case for a refluence of aesthetic energies among the two artists despite the fact that four centuries elapse in the exhibition of those artistic skills.

**Keywords:** Archetype, echoes, gull-knave pattern, moral legators, semblances, trickster.

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## 1. Introduction

Jonson's influence as a dramatist during the Renaissance and later periods in literary history has been quite enormous, and writers such as Marston, Field, Sheridan, Ibsen, Dickens, Moliere and other comic dramatists in the European tradition, both past and present, have exhibited some degree of reception of the comic theories Jonson developed. Several critics, such as Harris (1895) Baskerville (1911), Kerr (1912), Graham (1947), Donaldson (1985), have pointed out the characteristic features of Jonson's comedy of humours and his defining comedic traits in the works of other playwrights within the Western literary tradition. It is important therefore to examine Jonsonian theories and skills, in the broader context of literary discourse, on other dramatists outside the English tradition. This is the point of interest in this paper which seeks to examine some Jonsonian stylistic modes as appropriated in one of Sutherland's comic plays.

Sutherland's artistic choices in her dramatic works and experimentation in blending both European and African dramatic traditions have endeared her to many admirers. Scholars such as Greenwood (2008) and Gibbs (2009) have pointed out the contribution of Sutherland to world literature in terms of her stylistic modes, thematology, and especially her adroit handling of the comedy genre in the ludicrous portraiture of society. Ultimately, her major concern in drama, similar to Jonson's epistemological stance in most of his comic works, is to uphold standards by attacking immorality and folly, and teaching society on acceptable contemporary mores. Critical perspectives, however, on Sutherland's works have focused on her relationship with other writers both within the European and African traditions but not on a comparative study between Jonson and her.

Most criticism on Sutherland's works, such as Brown (1981), July (1987), Ankumah (1998) and Rotimi (2003) focus on her pioneering role in the evolution of modern West African drama with special emphasis on her skill in blending traditional tropes with Western theatrical models to reflect the social vision of her work, and the interest in the woman's role in helping to deal with societal problems. Adams and Sutherland-Addy (2007) provide a comprehensive collection of essays in memory of Sutherland. The essays discuss Sutherland's works as "a midwife to many a publication" and serve as the "legacy of Pan-African cultural activism" which abides in the "experimentation with the persistent presence of the trickster figure" in literary works (p.16). These essays and others do not point to any relationship with Jonson. The trajectory of directions in the criticisms on Sutherland establish the fact that no attention has been given to studying Jonson in a comparative work with Sutherland, and this essay exploits the gap in scholarship to provide a justification for the paper by examining Jonson's *Volpone* (1605) and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975).

The mode of analysis adopted for the examination between Jonsonian stylistic skills and Sutherland's, in the afore-mentioned texts, is conducted to embrace the universal literary tradition proposed by Wa Thiong'o (1993) in what he refers to as "a world flower garden" (p.12). Wa Thiong'o's proposal of moving the centre of literary creativity and criticism from a purely Eurocentric West to include other regions in the world and his metaphor of a flower garden to illustrate the variety of world literature is relevant to any discourse on literary studies. He is of the view that a world literature should not have flowers of one kind (European) but must have a blend and a variety of 'flowers' (which should include African, European, Caribbean, etc.) to represent what he regards as the "wholeness" of Literature and the richness of criticism. This paper, therefore, provides the

refluence between Jonson and Sutherland in response to Wa Thiong'o's advocacy.

Armah's advocacy in "The lazy school of literary criticism" provides a guide to direct this study. He opines that in studying two writers' works, critics should "... address themselves to the author[s]' works; their conclusions and insights ... backed up with serious textual spadework and analysis" (p. 335). The mode of analysis in this paper is: first an identification of similar tropes or ideas, dramatic structure, and other stylistic features as textually presented in Jonson's *Volpone* and studied alongside Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*, and second, an examination of how the identified features of Jonsonian comedy (or a variant form of them) are utilized in the play of Sutherland.

The perspective adopted for studying the afore-mentioned texts will draw on Armah's advocacy and Borowy's (1983) theoretical formulations which outline some categories in studying the relationship between two writers in literary studies. In his essay, "On influence and dependence in literature", Borowy discusses five categories which are *ideational*, *technical*, *thematic*, *stylistic*, and *phraseological*. Ideational, Borowy explains, deals with the recurrent ideas or archetypes reflected in the received works. Technical is the structure and how a work is composed. Thematic obviously deals with recurring themes. How a writer exhibits his/her artistic skill constitutes the domain of stylistic, and phraseological discusses particular instances of intertextual relations. This paper, therefore, adopts a perspective of reading Jonson's *Volpone* and Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*, focusing on the first four categories of Borowy, and determining whether Jonsonian elements are reflected in Sutherland's text.

A careful reading of Jonson's play and an analysis of his thematology and dramatic structures reveals a certain pattern. This pattern manifests in the following forms: the gull-knave structure, the antics of the witty parasites, the satire upon professional personalities, the legacy hunting motif, and the judgement on human folly. The gull-knave structure is the dominating quality of Jonson's plays. This structure provides a system in which a group of characters (or an individual) act in concert as a knave to deceive and defraud an individual or group of individuals who invariably are portrayed as dupes and unthinking. The ability of the knave through wit, subtlety and flattery to outwit the gulls is the essential quality of this structure and the dramatist creates the impression that the gulls readily degenerate into beasts and incurably lose their distinctive humanness or virtue. In *Volpone*, Jonson's portrayal of the relation between Volpone and Mosca, on the one hand, and the four legatees – Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio and Lady-Would-Be – on the other, illustrates the gull-knave structure. This pattern also features in Sutherland's portrayal of the relation between Ananse (aided by Christie) and Anansewa on the one hand, and the four chiefs – Sapaase, Akate, Mines and Chief-Who-is-Who.

Closely connected with the gull-knave structure are the antics of the witty "parasites" whose fortunes are intimately tied to the knaves. The reader is entertained not only at the reveling exchanges between the knaves and the parasites but also at the display of wit, dexterity and pretentious behaviours of these "parasites" whose presence in the plot provides laughter and complicates the schemes designed to exploit the gulls. Jonson's portrayal of Mosca, Androgyno, Nano and Castrone in *Volpone* manifests the antics of the witty parasites. Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* reflects the portrayal of these parasitic characters in the roles assigned Christie and Anansewa.

Another pattern that emerges in Jonson's dramatic skill is the deliberate ploy to satirise revered personalities whom society adores and accords great respect. These personalities apparently are the same gulls upon whom the knaves inflict their knavery and thievery. In *Volpone*, all the four legacy hunters are satirised and "abused" for exhibiting vices which the dramatist portrays as emblems of stupidity and daftness. This element in Jonsonian comic play also features in Sutherland's play in which the four revered chiefs, or their councillors, are cozened and exploited by the hero and his accomplices.

The legacy hunting motif, as utilized by Jonson in *Volpone*, draws inspiration from the works of Lucian and Horace. It is a practice in which greed and avarice propels some humans to offer "gifts" to a sick rich man with an intent of enticing him to name them as successors to his wealth. Jonson's use of this motif portrays the extravagance of Renaissance Europe, their hypocrisy, greed and lust for wealth which apparently Jacobean moralists severely criticized. Sutherland's dramaturgy also exploits some tropes from within her socio-cultural environment, the quest of the revered chiefs to marry a new wife, to reflect the voracious and evil propensities in humans that attract the dramatist's censure.

Jonson's dramatic skill provides that the human eccentricities of the characters will have to be appropriately punished. Sutherland's stylistic modes in her play also manifest a punishment for the gulls, upon whom the dramatist designs a kind of a moral judgement to deal with their eccentricities. These skills provide a pattern that this essay exploits in studying the stylistic modes of Jonsonian skills as manifested in Sutherland's play.

The content of the essay is structured into four sections. The first section discusses how Jonson and Sutherland utilize the archetype of a trickster as the mythological sub-structure of their plays and how the dramatists' choices and artistic skills reflect both the timeless tradition and the realities of their distinct socio-cultural environments. In the second and third sections, the essay examines the dramatists' handling of themes, stylistic modes, and how they manipulate these elements to present their views on the ridiculous posturing of

humans in the comedic genre. The final section concludes the essay making a claim for convergence of aesthetic skills rather than influence to describe the relationship between Jonson and Sutherland.

## 2. The Trickster Archetype as a Mythological Sub-Structure

Jonson and Sutherland select the trickster archetype as the mythological sub-structure for the construction of their plays. Jonson exploits the ancient Aesopian legend of the death-feigning fox and the pedagogies of the Medieval beast fables which present the trickster as a hero to construct the mythical structure of the play in which the fox's predatoriness, cunning and sly traits are exhibited to take advantage of lesser or baser creatures. The character of Volpone, the hero, represents the wily and greedy aristocrat who like the fox devises ways of fleecing the voracious birds of prey characterized by Jonson in the personalities of the four legatees. Jonson presents the analogy between the trickster figure of the fox (in the personality of Volpone) who sustains itself by cunning (and deceit), and the ancient Roman practice of legacy hunting motif to portray the realities of the socio-economic conditions in Renaissance Europe. The dramatist's vision is to present various trickster figures and gulls who exhibit traits such as self-centredness, buffoonery, daftness, mischief, gullibility, and fraud in contemporary England.

Jonson exploits the fox as a suitable semblance for a trickster hero in the personality of Volpone in the play. His skill portrays the hero to exhibit a life-style of playing tricks on the capitalist personalities and utilises roguery as the dominant image in the play. This skill is not so new to Renaissance dramatists who following in the dramatic tradition of the Ancients – Aristophanes, Plautus and Terence – portrayed the figure of the trickster as a romantic hero. However, Jonson presents his hero as a masterful trickster who manifests a new order of greed.

Sutherland's greatest success as an artist, within the geo-political space of the West African sub-region, is manifest in her innovative dramatic form that utilizes some elements from the Ananse storytelling tradition. These elements are blended with Western theatrical models to reflect what she describes as *Anansegoro* (or "spider play"). The various simulations in the craft of Sutherland as dramatised in *The Marriage of Anansewa* focus on her portrayal of the universal archetypal trickster hero whose cunning, intelligence and wily traits are definitive elements this essay utilizes to examine the relationship between her art and that of Jonson's in respect of their treatments of themes and stylistic choices with intent of pointing out the parallels and semblances the former receives from the latter.

In Sutherland's play, the dramatist presents a trickster figure, Ananse, whose origin (though commonly associated with the Akan group) is not exclusive to the Akan oral tradition in Ghana. He is an archetype that reflects several groups from West Africa and even the Caribbean. Basically, these groups view the Ananse figure as exhibiting two basic features of creating mirth and instructing society on the acceptable mores by challenging the status quo and at the same time drawing attention to the preservation of the moral codes. Sutherland's choice of the Ananse trope and its recreation as a reflection of the lovable rogue within the geo-political space of the Akan community manifests the ridiculous, the absurd, and the farcical posturing of humans. Her dramatic skill in the portraiture of the Ananse-figure in *The Marriage of Anansewa* is similar to Jonson's trickster figure in *Volpone*. In developing this trope of the trickster-figure, Sutherland's artistic choices share some semblances with the Jonsonian images of the trickster as reflected in the gull-knave pattern in which the characters exhibit varying degrees of an imposter, a buffoon, an absurd, and a downright stupid personality.

Both dramatists exploit the universal trickster hero to portray basic human instincts, impulses, weaknesses and the duplicity associated with human existence. Their exploration of similar themes and artistic skills in making the trickster hero (Volpone in *Volpone* and Ananse in *The Marriage of Anansewa*) a master schemer in roguery, wit and intelligence to outsmart fellow humans suggest a kind of a "filial" relationship between the sixteenth century dramatist and his twentieth century counterpart. Though four centuries elapse between the two dramatists, the latter's craft echo the former's craft with some surprising parallel affinities in their handling of the trickster hero.

### 2.1 The contextual Relevance of the Archetype in Jonson and Sutherland

Both dramatists exploit the universal archetypal trickster hero recreated from mythology in their respective plays, *Volpone* and *The Marriage of Anansewa*, to make distinct statements about the reality of the human condition in their specific socio-cultural environments dramatized in the plays. While Jonson selects the figure of a fox to reflect the image of the trickster in Renaissance England, Sutherland chooses the image of the spider to portray the same trickster figure in West Africa. Though the choices of the trickster image (as reflected in the varied animals selected) differ, they both exhibit clearly a common observable characteristic which by association unifies the artistic skills of both dramatists (but at the same time, distinguishes them). The two animals – the fox and the spider – are characterised by extremely solitary habits. Unlike most carnivores, foxes are not always pack animals; they are known to be solitary of all mongrels.

In a study conducted by Burrows (1968), he observed that foxes in the wild do not move together as two

adults. Foxes, according to Burrows, generally are known to live solitary lives for several years. His suggestion provides that the solitary habitat of the fox, as an image of the trickster, naturally confers on him the traits of cunning, selfishness and deceptiveness as the fox explores all possible means to satisfy its cravings despite societal inhibitions. Jonson's portrayal of the fox image in the character of Volpone, in the play, captures notions of the solitary habitat with its manifestation of the traits of cunning, deceptiveness and selfishness.

Spiders are also associated with solitary habitats. Several Ananse tales, as studied by Rattray (1927), present the trickster hero full of greed and lechery with the inescapable result that he ends up in a humiliating position seeking refuge in far-away solitary confinements outside the habitat of humans. Carroll (1984) observes that "spiders generally associate with members of their own species on only two occasions – when they are born and when they mate" (p. 116). Aside these two occasions, adult spiders generally spend their entire lives in seclusion. By associating the trickster with these lonely animals, both dramatists seek to establish the fact that though the trickster heroes – Volpone and Ananse – seem to act "outside the culture" of humans they live within the confines of human society to manifest the unattractive inside culture of human life as exhibited in greed, lust, lies, deceit, jealousy, etc. Both trickster figures, therefore, must be seen as Deandra (2004) describes tricksters as "taboo-violators" because they act consciously against social rules by being selfish, deviant, vulgar, mean, hypocritical and excessively full of wit and intelligence primarily with the intent that their only goal in life is the immediate gratification of their biological and psychological needs (p. 2). Both dramatists utilise these animal figures, by association, to reflect the trickster image which destabilises the social order by creating havoc in society and at the same time becomes agents of moral censures.

Sutherland's recreation of the trickster hero in *The Marriage of Anansewa* reflects the realities of the socio-cultural and economic imperatives in the Ghanaian (or West African) society which by the middle of the twentieth century obviously has become extremely materialistic and greedy as manifested in the characters of Ananse, Anansewa, Christie and the artisans. The dramatist's portrayal of these social contradictions, greed, moral depravity and economic exploitation in the play reflects what obtains in most post-independent African societies in which the anxieties of urban living compel individuals to devise varied means of survival.

The socio-economic realities in the Ghanaian society as presented by Azindow (2008), and Fosu and Aryeetey (2010) paint a bleak socio-economic condition in the Ghanaian society. Life of the ordinary individual was quite difficult during the mid-seventies as the economy suffered a significant deterioration and there was unevenness in the political and economic growth of the country. Prices of goods and services increased sharply and there was a general malaise of hopelessness in the society as the affluent and newly-rich middle class exploited the proletariat class. Sutherland's artistic skills capture these socio-economic realities in the treatment of the theme of greed. She portrays the harsh effect of nascent capitalism arising from the pressures of post colonialism on the African society with its debilitating and devastating consequences on the African psyche to reflect the socio-cultural realities in the Ghanaian society. The dramatist's portrayal of Ananse's poverty, deprived socio-economic conditions as evident in his poor leaking roof, straw mattress, his inability to pay the daughter's school fees, and even enjoying the benefits of an average life-style are images that reflect the reality of the harsh effect of the economic situation on the ordinary individual. Indeed, as the Players intone, "...life is a struggle, / Oh life is a pain. (*The Marriage ...*, p.1). The dramatist suggests that the poor economic conditions, as dramatised in the play, are traceable to the "wrong at the beginning of things" (p.1) where failed political leadership and bad economic policies of the past have resulted in what Ananse describes as "going-and-coming" (p.2) syndrome as a necessary attitude to deal with the grim conditions of life.

The dramatist superficially seems to be justifying Ananse's roguery and cunning ways of exploiting society as the best option to respond to the negative economic down turn. She makes the hero appeal to the reader (at the beginning of the play) to suggest any other option, if there was, after much "thinking, thinking and thinking.... Won't somebody who thinks he has discovered the simple solution for living this life kindly step forward and help out the rest of us? ... Brother, could it be you? Mother, how about you? Nobody?" (p.2). The series of rhetorical questions implicate the reader and make them complicit in Ananse's decision to change his socio-economic status to an appreciable middle-class status where he also could attend social events and live an average good life. Perhaps, the artist's intent here is to provide a broad framework within which roguery, deceit, lies, cunning and knavery become acceptable ways by which Ghanaians respond to the socio-economic pressures in society, especially if we view the Ananse-figure as "a kind of Every man, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination" (*The Marriage ...*, Foreword, p.v).

Sutherland's portrayal of these images of greed shares some semblances with Jonson's portraiture of the socio-economic conditions and extravagance in sixteenth century England. The socio-economic realities in Europe served as the background against which Jonson portrays the greed and avarice in England as expressed in *Volpone*. Curtis and Hale (1981) provide an elaborate background of the socio-cultural and economic realities in England, which has a bearing on Jonson's artistic creation in the play. They point out that by the end of the sixteenth century, the optimism of the Renaissance temper together with individual accomplishments waned, creating a kind of pessimism and a rather harsh outlook on life manifested in themes which suggest what



Baskerville (1911,1977) describes of “England developing too fast for stability, that she had allowed the same zestful ferment in economic and civic affairs as in international pursuits and was now being forced to take reckoning” (p.21).

The English society, prior to the death of Queen Elizabeth I, had become extremely materialistic and bred varied forms of behaviours such as greed, hypocrisy, lies, deceit, and gulling. Jonson exploits these socio-economic realities to create a rich but egocentric rogue who is driven by passion to satisfy his appetite and greed, while attracting equally greedy people to his personality. From the opening scenes of the play to the end, Volpone is portrayed as a self-centred rogue whose thievery, and manifestation of the foxy traits over-run the reader to an ecstatic point of comic bliss that we rejoice at the hero’s successes rather than condemn him. The revelling exchanges between his parasite, Mosca, and him, and his assistants – Nano, Castrone, and Androgyno – manifest the roguery of the hero’s capacity to deceive the birds of prey “letting the cherry knock against their lips/ And, draw it, by their mouths, and back again” (*Volpone*, 1.i. 89-90). Volpone is impertinent of his victims’ pitiful plight or the gullibility of the entire society represented in the roles of the dupes. He glories “more in the cunning purchase of [his] wealth, /Than in the glad possession”; for he gains by tearing “forth the fathers of poor families/ Out of their beds, and coffin them alive/ In some kind, clasp[ing] prison, where their bones/ May be forth-coming, when the flesh is rotten”. He also loathes “the widow’s or the orphan’s tears ... or their piteous cries” (*Volpone*, 1.i. 44-47).

The imagery employed by the dramatist, coupled with the metaphor studded with irreverently fleecing, portrays a hero whose moral codes have been turned upside down. He seems free from all the restrictions of both the legal and moral consciousness that regulate society’s conduct. The dramatist invests a binary nature into the hero’s freedom to make him both the predator and the hunted prey similar to the portraiture of Sutherland’s Ananse as a trickster rogue.

Sutherland’s creation of Ananse’s exaggerated greedy sensibilities as a father who has given his daughter the best of education (by standards of the mid-sixties and seventies) and now desires to marry her off to the highest paying suitor as a bid to live a comfortable life and overcome the pressures of life introduces the theme of greed, avarice and selfishness in the play. This nascent greed is amplified in Ananse’s understanding of “this world’s ways” (p.12) similar to Volpone’s appreciation of conditions in Renaissance England where the clamour for gold is the most desirable thing. Ananse’s greed drives him to interact with the four ‘greedy’ chiefs around whom he organises the ‘contest’ for the daughter’s hand in marriage; and as he explains, the four chiefs metaphorically “covers North, South, East and West” to suggest the pervasive nature of the greed (p.11). Similarly, Volpone’s greed propels him to deal with the four legatees. These manifestations reflect the pervasive nature of greed in humans, its capacity to permeate all aspects of human life including the very choices and decisions that humans make. Both dramatists express the theme of greed in the heroes’ (Volpone and Ananse) capacity to defraud their clients’ (the four legatees and the four chiefs) varied reasons for pursuing the gold and marrying Ananewa respectively.

The dramatists’ portrayal of the theme of greed expresses the negative mad rush among humans for the gleam and an inordinate evil concupiscence for materialistic gains similar to what Armah expresses in his novel, *Fragments*, as suggesting that the entire “society is dominated by an ‘Anansean’ rush for material acquisition” (Deandrea, 2004, p.4). Ananse’s cunning and greed, therefore, in seeking several suitors for his daughter as a condition to enrich himself and also enjoy the benefits of the middle-class society as well as the chiefs’ insatiable desire to marry a new wife to boost their ego must be seen as Sutherland’s critique of the social evils in the Ghanaian society. Similarly, Volpone’s unbridled quest to extort more gold and wealth to maintain his bourgeoisie status as well as the legatees’ mad rush to be named as Volpone’s inheritor should be interpreted as Jonson’s criticism of the English society. Ananse’s greed, therefore, in “selling off” the daughter and the chiefs’ willingness to “buy off” the ‘prize’ as well as Volpone’s greed in “fleecing off” the wealth and honour of the legatees and their “willingness” to be duped should be interpreted as the artists’ vision of educating society to get rid of humans’ suppressed desire to imitate the ways of the characters.

Both dramatists are aware of the socio-cultural realities in their societies and they structure their plays to reflect these realities. Sutherland, conscious of the patterns in Ghanaian (Akan) thought, creates Ananse as the hero of the play, and makes him free from all the restraints of both the legal and moral psyche that regulate society’s conduct similar to Jonson’s portraiture of his hero who reflects the bourgeoisie in England. Ananse and Volpone are invested with a double nature and liberty which give them the laxity to scheme, hunt and plunder their ‘victims’. Though they are portrayed as operating outside the codes of society, their actions and inactions shame their victims into conformity to society’s codes. They exhibit a posture that bears a semblance to that of a prophet (who predicts the victims’ behaviours) and a renegade who knows both the ways of the world and human nature. This inter-relationship of opposites is what both dramatists manipulate in their heroes to achieve their artistic successes.

### 3. Manifestation of Jonsonian Skill in Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*

Jonson and Sutherland, in developing the theme of greed within the structural composition of their plays, devise a pattern which forms the basis of their dramatic success. The pattern manifests in the gull-knave configuration which dates back to antiquity in some plays of Aristophanes. These plays present the trickster as a harmless rogue who acts the role of an imposter out-smarting the dunce and foolish hearted (mostly professionals) who act the role of buffoons and gulls. Jonson's craftsmanship in portraying this gull-knave pattern is predominantly revealed in his choice of the character names in *Volpone*. The character names evoke the beast fable of the sly fox, Volpone, who feigned death to attract the carrion birds - Voltore (vulture), Corbaccio (raven) and Corvino (crow) – who are duped. The actions of these birds are portrayed as voracious not for flesh but for the fortune of Volpone. These character types are used by Jonson to expose the moral distortion, the debased state of humans and their avaricious attitudes. All the characters, therefore, in Jonson's play are vested with animal imagery to reflect both the knavery and gulling mode of society.

Sutherland devises a structural pattern similar to Jonson's gull-knave model of comic episode in which both professionals and the highly placed in society are made a subject of ridicule and gullibility. In the Jonsonian model, as dramatised in *Volpone*, the dramatist exploits the prevailing socio-economic realities in Renaissance Europe to express the theme of greed as the necessary condition that invites the exhibition of wit, intelligence, cunning and the roguery acts on the gulls. In the Sutherland model, the dramatist also exploits the realities of the socio-cultural imperatives in the Ghanaian society, that of striving to attain the glories and exoticism of the rising middle-class status. The attainment of this middle-class status insidiously invites the exhibition of crookery, cunning and witticism on society with a debilitating effect of gullibility.

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

The dramatist's skill in portraying the gull-knave pattern is particularly evident in her choice of the characters whose assigned roles in the main action manifest the hero gulling his dupes. In the play, Ananse and his daughter, Anansewa (aided by Christie Yamoah) act the role of the knaves while the four chiefs (Sapaase, Akate, Mines and Chief-Who-Is-Chief) act the roles of the dupes, though society expects them to be wise-hearted. The choice of the character names for the gulls evokes the flowering glamour associated with the upper middle-class personalities in the Ghanaian society, whose excessive love of praise-names and appellations set in motion an inducement to be deceived and manipulated. This skill echoes the Jonsonian model in which the sixteenth century dramatist selects four characters as the gulls – a lawyer, a magnate merchant, a fabulously rich old man and a flirtatious elegant woman - to reflect the upper middle-class personalities in the English society, whose avowed inclination to get rich at all cost attract a censure from Jonson.

Sutherland's selection of the four chiefs as the gulls is carefully crafted to reflect the greed in the entire chieftaincy institution in Ghana. Chiefs are revered, honoured and permitted to marry as many wives as they wish since in the performance of this act (in addition to other political, economic, religious and social functions) their ego is manifested. The dramatist does not censure this desire in the chiefs to marry a new wife, but it is the motive and the purposes for which the marriage is contracted and the perverse symbolism invested in the praise-names which obviously reflect both the knavery and gulling mode of society. The dramatist invests the knaves – Ananse and Anansewa - with a quality of wit, intelligence and cunning to take advantage of the privileged position of the gulls who are portrayed only as "adore[rs] of their appellations" to the neglect of wit and intelligence (p. 6). Ananse is clearly aware of this "nature of humans" and he exploits it to his benefit. In the four letters he writes to the chiefs, Ananse infuses the salutations with periphrastic language, studded with metaphors of benevolence which ironically betray the recipients' selfish and perverse natures. Later in the play, during the mock-death-scene, the resourcefulness and knavery displayed by Ananse, Anansewa and Christie on behalf of the dramatist in contriving ways of exploiting the gulls, weaving intricate webs in and out of difficult situations in the plot, scheming appearances and acts and the fulsome praise involved in the gloating exchanges between the Messengers (of the Chiefs) and Ananse on the one hand and the buffoonery exhibited by the Councillors and him on the other hand serve as useful insights in the dramatist's artistic design which echo Jonson's stylistic modes as portrayed in the same mock-death-scene in *Volpone*.

In *Volpone*, Jonson's gulls are so gift-wrapped up in becoming Volpone's heir that they really forget all sense of honour and dignity. They clamour for a jump ahead of the other with an unnerving he-goatish slippage. The dramatist wedges the *carpe-diem* motif into the main plot to reflect this insatiable desire among the gulls who are in a hurry to outdo one another. This motif is infused to link the various episodes and scenes in the trickster comedy structured to reflect a parody of a tragedy. Events and actions seem to move with a dizzying speed towards a denouement. Sutherland also employs the *carpe diem* motif with the portrayal of the four chiefs, one after the other, hastily announcing their intent of performing the head drink ceremony for Anansewa's hand in marriage on the same day, and on the occasion when the Messengers of the four chiefs quickly desert their object of interest during the mock-death-scene.

Sutherland's skill in the portraiture of the gulling of the Messengers of the four revered chiefs through the parasitic role assigned Christie shares a semblance to Jonson's skill in the scenes where Mosca itemizes the properties in his notebook as Volpone "lies in state dead" while the four legatees throng Volpone's home to claim their prize as the named inheritor of the hero's wealth. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Christie produces *a sheet of paper and a pencil from her clothes... reads it and speaks like one suppressing tears*. Unlike the Jonsonian model where Mosca itemizes the physical holdings of the "dead man" (Volpone) as evidences of the inherited properties in the presence of the legatees, the Sutherland model of the mock-death-scenes translates the physical tangible properties to revered chiefs reduced to objects of mockery as they come one after another to "claim" their "prize".

Sutherland's skill in manipulating these scenes to make all the Messengers of the four chiefs believe Ananse and Christie's antics (as exhibited in the feigned quivering voices, Ananse's buffoonery and repeated groans, coupled with the conspiratorial whispers between them) reveals the gullible state of the dupes who believed Ananse's tricks. Christie's song, "Oh really clueless one ... / Oh really clueless one" (p. 69) repeated all through the scenes further suggests the gullible state of the Chiefs' Councillors who tradition expects of them to be wise, discerning and intelligent. However, they all seem to be in a hurry to attend to other issues in life rather than focusing on the funeral of their supposed beloved, Anansewa.

Ananse's successes and excellent exhibition of wit at this point in the plot finds a comparison in Jonson's hero, Volpone, who gloats over his successes in exploiting the legatees of their gold, diamond plates and other valuables. Unlike Volpone who is portrayed as an imposter and a rogue fleecing his clients off their wealth, Ananse is here presented as a lovable rogue whose exhibition of wit is applauded by the dramatist.

#### 4. The Knaves as Moral Legators

The gull-knave structure as Jonson and Sutherland devise it allows the knaves – Volpone and Mosca (in *Volpone*) and Ananse, Anansewa and Christie (in *The Marriage of Anansewa*) – to triumph over the gulls because of their superior know-how. In Jonson's play, the knaves are presented as exploiting the inadequacies and idiocies of the gulls. The dramatist portrays the defect in Renaissance thinking as manifested in the unthinking attitude of the gulls and the rot in the justice system wherein humans place value in the acquisition of wealth to the detriment of pursuing acceptable values of honesty and truthfulness, which are the hallmarks of a just system.

In the play, Jonson presents the gulls as dunderhead "clients" of Volpone outdoing one another through the skill of Mosca's wit, subtlety, cunning and blazoning boldness. Mosca, on behalf of the dramatist, convinces the gulls to initiate acts which society considers despicable: Corvino is tricked to prostitute his wife, Celia, as Volpone's mistress; Corbaccio is also subtly coerced to part with a bag of pearls and to disinherit his son, Bonario, without considering both the legal and moral implications; Voltore is made to prostitute his profession and education without exhibiting a restraining order on his legal brains; Lady Would-Be is cozened to accept the role as a false witness against her own husband (himself a buffoon), Celia and Bonario, and also cozened to defile her marital vows to Sir Politic. These events in the plot are worked out with a web of complexity to simulate a tragic denouement in which the "clients" strive to outdo one another, goaded on by Mosca who deceives them to believe his tricks of putting them in the first position on Volpone's list.

This mad rush for the first place in the patron's will generates complicated, tricky and frightening exploits which pave way for the greater risks of the gulls to be duped. Self-confidence and assurance blind both the gulls and the knaves invariably leading them towards error and betrayal at the denouement of the play. Mosca's roguish contribution to the satiric exposure of the gulls serves the artist's interest of expressing the moral imperatives in the play. The dramatist takes on the role of a Renaissance playwright interpreting the craft of the Ancients to a sixteenth century society that believes that Literature must both amuse and instruct, and that the fact that comedy is a portraiture of characters of inferior status does not suggest that comedy should portray only the ridiculous and funny aspects of humans. In Jonson's view, as expressed in *Discoveries*, "jests that are true and naturall, seldom raise laughter ... for that is right and proper". However, the further these pranks and laughter "run from reason, or possibility with them, the better it is" for the artist (1641/1891, p.14). Jonson expresses realism in his art as he blends the instruction aspect of poetry with the pleasurable aspect. He portrays the mad craze for wealth and materialism in his society and how societal admirable values in human relationships are

trampled upon.

The relationships between father and son, and husband and wife are sacred and almost every society reveres them. But once Corbaccio and Corvino are mesmerised to believe that the surest means they can become heir to Volpone is to disinherit a biological son and to prostitute a legal wife (respectively), Jonson, by implication, is criticising the upside-down values of society. Primarily for these reasons does Jonson's artistic vision in the play allow the knaves (themselves, though charlatans) to execute the moral judgement on the gulls. This is probable not because of their loftier knowledge of the moral punitive code but for the fact that trickster plays such as *Volpone* must allow the tricksters to triumph over the gulls.

Sutherland's skill also portrays the gulls as irreverent and unthinking as they hastily, one after the other, besiege Ananse's home to announce their intent of performing the head drink ceremony for Anansewa's hand in marriage on the same day. The dramatist's special role assigned to Chrisite in the play (similar to the role assigned Mosca in *Volpone*) as a cunning and amusingly ingenious parasite later during the mock-death-scene contributes substantially to the exposure of the gulls. Her role as a chief linguist mourner carrying a staff of the Asona clan, her dexterity in ushering in the Messengers around the "corpse" and chaperoning Ananse during the "mock death scenes" manifest a touch of comic villainy which ultimately convinces the Messengers of the Chiefs to dole out more money. The dizzying speed with which the dramatist introduces and dismisses each of the emissaries of the first three Chiefs (Mines, Sapaase and Akate) serves as a pointer in establishing her criticism of the dupes. These dupes are "willing and eager to oil the wheels of customs... for the maintenance of the object of [their] interest (p.13) so long as they gain by way of objectifying their selfish ends (as revealed in their intents for initiating the marriage to Anansewa) but they are not fully committed in following the tenets of tradition since, as one of them declares: "this is a case of no-sale-no-payment" (p.71).

The dramatist highlights this metaphor of "no-sale-no-payment" mentality to portray not only the selfish and greedy nature of humans but to reveal the pitiable and pathetic state of humanity that thrives on dissimulation and devious intents. Superficially, the metaphor suggests a fair playing ground upon which human interactions are anchored, but the dramatist goes beyond the physical appearances to explore the inner motives that drive actions and behavioural patterns. The four chiefs have an objective interest in "oiling the wheels of custom" by sending gifts to Ananse for specific self-centred egoistic desires, perhaps not for charitable purposes of helping the poor and needy in society. Since the object of their interest does not survive (as dramatised in the mock-death scenes), the question inadvertently posed by the artist is whether they will continue sending those gifts to Ananse. Obviously not, since no human marries a corpse. Sutherland's skill therefore justifies Ananse's knavery in exploiting money from the chiefs and organising the "lively competition" since "there isn't any law to oblige Ananse to return to them any of the gifts he has received from their hands so far" (p. 65).

Thus, the logic emerging from Sutherland's play suggests that the rich and the affluent in society can become objects of gulling if they are motivated by selfish desires and do not seek the general good of humanity. Perhaps, this may sound a harsh suggestion to be delineated from Sutherland's play but the Storyteller intimates that "As for some people! They do not pause to enquire/ how true a thing is before they believe it, and so/ it's easy to deceive them" (p. 60). This is the essence of Sutherland's Anansegoro. Sutherland is well aware of her role as an African writer committed to interpreting the mores of her society to readers. This privileged position, similar to Jonson's, endears her to structure her art to both delight and teach admirable traits that enhance society's progress. Her portraiture of the Chiefs' display of wealth by "merely doing what it is beautiful to do" in oiling "the wheels of custom" and their willingness to follow the revered customs and practices of society in paying the customary head drink is commendable but the artist focuses on how cherished traditional values in human relationships are trampled upon in pursuit of personal egoistic desires. In the mock death scenes, the dramatist provides sustainable reasons for which the first three Chiefs (Mines, Sapaase and Akate), do not deserve a win in the competitive bidding for the hand of Anansewa in marriage.

The vicious but derisive judgements that Ananse (and Christie) executes on the three Chiefs share a semblance to Mosca's judgements on the gulling of the legacy hunters in Jonson's *Volpone*. Jonson's skill, however, focuses on both the heartless and malicious manner in which Mosca executes the treachery and judgement on the one hand and the daftness and stupidity of the gulls on the other. Sutherland's skill focuses on the potential social imbalance that the three Chiefs' actions and inactions are likely to cause society because of their failure to completely uphold the expectations of Akan mores as far as marriage is concerned.

Sutherland's structuring of the play is similar to Jonson's in respect of the moral sensibilities which both dramatists uphold. Jonson's skill, we had established earlier, allows the knaves to prevail over the gulls primarily because of the knaves' superior knowledge of the moral code which makes them exploit the weaknesses of the gulls, whose inability to regulate their desires and cravings according to the acceptable mores of society make them buffoons. This structuring enables Jonson to achieve a level of satiation in the reader who admires the knaves in spite of their immoral deeds of gulling the dupes. Unlike the Jonsonian model which allows the knaves to completely dupe all the gulls for varying reasons of greed, irreverence of societal mores as expressed in Corvino's marital unfaithfulness to his wife (Celia) as well as Lady Would-Be's perjury and infidelity towards



her husband (Sir Politic), and a distorted father-son relationship (as exhibited by Corbaccio towards his son, Bonario), the Sutherland model permits the knaves to vindicate one of the gulls and spare him further gulling possibly for his tenacity in ensuring that the mores of society are upheld.

Sutherland's art, analogous to Jonson's, recognises the fact that in trickster stories, the best approach is one in which the hero is made to do his "worst" but in these acts of perversity in the hero a kind of "good" is created for society's instruction and benefit. Jonson's portrayal and handling of the rogues in the gull-knave pattern in *Volpone* enable the reader to identify with them in their knaveries primarily because of the fascination with their intrigues, the buffoonery and the near-escapes experienced by them on the one hand, and the sheer stupidity and mental opacity displayed by the gulls who society expects them to behave uprightly on the other hand. This approach provides the fertile ground to initiate the "Jonsonian justice system" in which both the knaves and the gulls are punished.

Sutherland's skill recognises the need for Ananse to prosper in his roguery deeds which apparently excite the reader who endorses his wily ways in extorting money from the chiefs and organising the "lively competition". Ananse's scheme, exhibited on behalf of the dramatist, in the mock-death-scene and the skill of selecting the best suitor for Anansewewa obviously produces a "good" highlighting what really constitutes the best acceptable practices among the Akans. In addition, Sutherland recognises that Ananse's successes are predicated on the fact that there is a gullible society the trickster can spot with, ultimately creating the expected good. Though the hero sports with society by destabilising the socio-cultural foundations of it, his actions and inactions regenerate the norms of society creatively. The dramatist's vision, therefore, is to portray the unchanging nature of the hero, Ananse, whose tales recount the heroic deeds of the trickster prospering, but at the same time his actions and behavioural patterns challenge societal beliefs and aspirations despite the fact that his actions arouse laughter.

## 5. Conclusion

Situating both Sutherland and Jonson's art within the framework of Wa Thiong'o's advocacy, one observes that the twentieth century writer's work manifests a matrix of relationships with the sixteenth century writer's work within the timeless universal tradition. The framework provides the basis to suggest the convergence of their aesthetic skills rather than imitation. Sutherland's portrayal of the absurd and ridiculous posturing of humans to express the gull-knave pattern, her artistic choice of the lovable rogue and the handling of the trickster hero in *The Marriage of Anansewewa* bears a semblance to her sixteenth century "elder's" skill. The reader of Sutherland's play 'remembers' some similar scenes and patterns: in the selection of the hero, his antics and wily ways, the personalities who are portrayed as the gulls, the dizzying speed with which the gulls announce their intents to annex the trophy, and the dramatist's moral sensibilities of valorizing wit and intelligence in the trickster hero to triumph over the gulls as echoes of Jonson's skill.

Sutherland's success in reconstructing the image of the archetypal trickster hero, Ananse, to reflect her uniqueness as an African artist contributes substantially to the universal discourse on the comedy genre. Her skill in the construction of the structure of the play, coupled with her handling of the theme, motif, characters and general moral sensibilities "remembers" a similar skill exhibited by Jonson in his play, *Volpone*.

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