

A BIG BOY/ANANCY TALE: THE TRICKSTER MOTIF PROPELLING A NARRATIVE OF RESISTANCE IN OLIVE SENIOR'S "ASCOT"¹

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Abstract: The influence of the oral tradition and culture in contemporary Anglo-Caribbean literature accounts, to a notable extent, for a strategy of sociocultural self-articulation of these peoples against cultural domination deployed in literature. As the literary analysis proposed in this article shows, the popular trickster figure of Anglo-Caribbean folktales recreated in Olive Senior's short story "Ascot" offers a thematic vehicle for the celebration of an attitude of resistance that is mirrored in the formal context of this text with an oral narrative exercise that defies the conventional literary canons of fictional writing. This modern, *scribibilised* trickster tale ratifies, then, a narrative praxis of cultural resistance.

Key words: Postcolonial Anglo-Caribbean Literature, Jamaican Literature, short fiction, Jamaican oral tradition and culture, storytelling, trickster motif, narrative/writing of resistance, sociocultural self-articulation.

Resumen: En la literatura contemporánea del Caribe anglófono, el rescate y la celebración de la tradición oral, históricamente denigrada, se convierte a menudo en estrategia para contrarrestar el legado colonial de dominación cultural europea y hacer frente al imperialismo cultural americano en la era postcolonial. La narrativa de la escritora jamaicana Olive Senior corrobora la connotación política y sociocultural que reviste la influencia de la cultura oral en esta literatura. El emblemático héroe cómico oral del *trickster* recreado en su relato "Ascot" funciona como motivo temático para criticar la realidad jamaicana a la manera de los cuentos orales, y para la creación de un discurso narrativo transgresivo que socava el *anglocentrismo* de esta literatura. En este sentido, ésta se convierte en una narrativa de resistencia cultural.

Palabras clave: Literatura Postcolonial Anglo-caribeña, Literatura jamaicana, relato corto, tradición y cultura oral, tradición de contar cuentos, *trickster*: motivo temático y formal, narrativa de resistencia cultural, expresión de identidad sociocultural.

"Cunning better than strong".
(Jamaican proverb)

The short story "Ascot", awarded in the 1974's Jamaica Annual Literary Competition, proposes a humorous and brilliantly crafted instance of *resistant* narrative within Olive

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Senior's creative writing, so frequently committed to the celebration of her native Jamaican oral culture. The "celebratory tone" of many of Senior's short stories (Brown: xxviii) responds to a militant authorial attitude in defence of traditional culture as a strategy to counteract American cultural imperialism in the English Caribbean. As Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine S. Fido corroborate:

The greatest threat to Caribbean life at this time comes from a denial of the spiritual/intuitive/emotional strengths which have developed to sustain the culture in the past. This denial takes the form of adherence to materialism, of attraction to the world of fast foods, video recorders, cars, multi-channelled television stations, and attendant attitudes of more concern for the superficial and literal than the deeper meaning of social tradition. (Davies and Fido 1990: 16)

Consequently, and regardless of her expatriate Caribbean-Canadian experience, the Caribbean oral tradition and culture, as well as the Caribbean experience and sociocultural reality are usually validated in Senior's narrative. Thematically, such validation has frequently taken place in her texts through the "writing in of resistant subjects" that oppose the order and values of the dominant culture or group (Donnell 1999: 124). It is a strategy that defines the thematic line in several of Senior's adaptations of the trickster figure like the witty and irreverent girl child Becca in "Do Angels Wear Brassieres?", one of Senior's best known short stories. Also in "Ascot", the trickster motif has favoured the celebration of an attitude of resistance within the Caribbean society (before the adverse: poverty, social distress, and neocolonialism). But this *postcolonial* resistance operates, most importantly, in the formal context of this text with the realization of a highly culturally-conditioned narrative that certifies, in the field of literature, the positive validation of Caribbean culture and the assertion of cultural identity. It becomes, then, a literary or *scribilled* form of trickster tale, which ratifies the importance of the cultural practice of storytelling in these overwhelmingly oral cultures and that has so greatly influenced Caribbean writers. In effect, the literary analysis of this text here proposed is focused on the influence of the oral tradition in contemporary English Caribbean fiction, specifically through the trickster folktale.

At a first level, "Ascot" celebrates Jamaican oral tradition through a narrative re-adaptation, in Creole (the language of Caribbean oral culture and tradition), of a contemporary Jamaican trickster, Big Boy³, or the emblematic trickster figure of Anglo-Caribbean folktales, the spider Anancy⁴, which places it as a modern and literary Big Boy or Anancy

³ As Jamaican critic Hyacinth M. Simpson notes, sketches of Big Boy that often accompany Big Boy tales recorded in the field of Jamaican folktales "picture him as a giant boy who slips between the worlds of childhood and adulthood with ease" (Simpson 2004: 836). And Daryl C. Dance's description of Big Boy in *Folklore from Contemporary Jamaicans* reveals him as a trickster figure: "Big Boy is often pictured as very much the fool, the moron; but even in his ignorance, he usually succeeds... He is absolutely lacking in moral and social values and is motivated purely by his own desires, appetites and passions" (Dance 1985: 54).

⁴ *Anancy* or *Anansi*, the notorious spider in Caribbean folklore, derives from the Ashanti Ananse in West Africa, a trickster figure "both fooler and fool, maker and unmade... the High God's accomplice and its rival" (Dance 1985: 11). In Caribbean folklore, Anancy retains its dual character-figure: it is wily and stupid, immoral, greed and deceitful; but it remains a popular figure nonetheless. As Daryl C. Dance notes, "Anancy is generally a figure of admiration whose cunning and scheming nature reflects the indirection and subtleties necessary for survival and occasionally victory of the Black man in a racist [and colonial] society" (Dance 1985: 12).

tale. Similar to Andrew Salkey's re-interpretation of Anancy according to modern times –*Anancy's Score* (1973), in this short story the archetypal myth is adapted to the Jamaican economic and sociocultural context of the seventies, embodied by the persona of Ascot, the protagonist of the story. Ascot borrows some of the behavioural traits of his folk counterpart (Anancy), such as slyness, greed, deception, immorality, and selfishness. Benefiting also from his closest oral counterpart (Big Boy), Ascot appears to draw physically from this giant and childish character through his also *big* physical measures: “Described as ‘tall no langilalla’ with ridiculously big feet and ‘a mouth so big that when him smile him lip curl’ (*Summer Lightning* 26), Ascot is literally a ‘big boy’” (Simpson 2004: 836).

Ascot is a *mestizo* boy from some site of rural Jamaica singled out, physically, by having the biggest feet ever seen around the place, and “fair skin and straight nose” (26). But he is also singled out by his deceitful behaviour, that eventually serves him to fulfil his dearest ambition: “[T]o dress up in white clothes and drive a big white car” (29). His trickery is conveyed in this narration through several stories or episodes of Ascot's life relating, for instance, his shameful theft of a bunch of banana from Papa's house; his lying to Kenny (Papa's son) on his willingness to work as a gardener in May Pen; his dropping out of farm work in Florida –a job planned and granted by the government, and thus entering the United States illegally; and cheating his wife on the truth about his origins and real family while disowning his family.

Firstly, Ascot's theft of Papa's bunch of banana reveals him as an ungrateful glutton who shows no remorse at having robbed the person that provides for him. He daringly tries to deny his crime and has no shame at all in continuing to frequent Papa's house after the incident. Later on, Ascot asks Kenny to give him a job as gardener, but it is really an excuse for doing what pleases him. As Kenny reports to his family in a letter, “Ascot dont want do nothing round the yard and all he do all day is jump behind the wheel of motor car the minute people back turn and make noise like say he driving” (29). His dishonest and selfish attitude goes on here as to leave May Pen for going to Kingston, taking with him other people's belongings, and without saying a word to his relatives back home. After that, Ascot cheats the government as he enrolls for farm work in the United States, which he shortly afterwards deserts in the pursuit of his ambition. In the final stage of Ascot's cunning enterprise, he is revealed as a lying husband, careless glutton, selfish and ungrateful son, and a dishonest person in general. However, at the end of Ascot's misleading story from adolescence to manhood narrated in this short story, he is portrayed successful –like the trickster usually, leading an economically improved and married life in the United States, and relishing his *whitened* driving dream.

Placed within the context of a trickster tale, Ascot's life-narrative of upward mobility can be interpreted as the several adventures of the trickster character trying to outwit others while seeking survival in a hostile environment. His cunning and tricky behaviour is explained, then, as strategic acts of resistance to the adverse. As if imitating this mythic heroic figure of their folklore, black slaves managed to survive slavery and preserve their sociocultural cosmos through subversion: carrying out a radical resistance to colonial cultural domination, camouflaged as apparent consent and submission. Such indirect strategy of resistance was also crucial, as Michael Dash notes, in the “unprecedented cultural transformations” leading to the formation of these creolised/hybrid societies (Dash 1996: 47), guaranteeing

the permanence of the colonized subject's denigrated cultural traditions. The protagonist of this story, seen as a (post-colonial) descendent of the black slave, tricks always to the favour and improvement of his situation toward achieving his goal/dream. Such improvement necessarily implies a journey –from that rural site to Kingston, and then to the United States– as the way to escape from an economically depressed environment.

Certainly, the economically-motivated journey has been a natural factor of Caribbean life from pre-Columbian times, through colonization, and until the post-colonial era. It is, as Edward Kamau Brathwaite has asserted, “a permanent part of our heritage”: a physical inheritance from Africa, and a spiritual inheritance from slavery, the Middle Passage, and the slaves' rootless sojourn in the Caribbean sea (qtd. in Howes 1971: 9). It becomes, also, a psychological inheritance from the entire process of creating and developing a new life in the Caribbean, which points at a permanent dichotomy between the desire to stay or belong and the desire to leave or not belong. As Brathwaite explains, “[t]his dichotomy expresses itself in the West Indian through a certain psychic tension, an excitability, a definite feeling of having no past, of not really belonging” (qtd. in Howes 9). The migrant nature of Caribbean people is determined, then, by this psychological sense of being rootless, motherless. In this short story, Ascot is singled out as having the strongest bend toward movement. His restless, travelling spirit is probably determined by the divided, in-between condition of his experience: his fair skin, straight nose and big mouth speak for his hybridity. He is neither black, not white (his hybridity is what dictates, in the views of many in his community, his possibilities of success). And his fatherless family situation reinforces his divided sense of belonging to his rural social milieu. Therefore, his journey and exile appear to be conditioned by the *liminality* of his racial/colour experience,⁵ and his insecure sense of belonging. But they are revealed in this text, above all, as a physical and sociocultural inheritance of Caribbean people, with a serious economic imperative. It is precisely through the notion of the journey –indicating movement in the geographical and social contexts– as a necessary factor in the Caribbean subject's upward mobility that Ascot's community forgives and even appraises his tricky/fraudulent behaviour, an appraisal suggested in the opening phrase: “That Ascot going go far” (26), and that becomes the motto of Ascot's life-narrative of success.

Even Ascot's abandoning of his homeland pursuing his ambition in the rich Western metropolis can be interpreted somehow as a *trickifying* act, because he leaves the Caribbean for the United States not precisely lured by the trappings of fulfilment of the American Dream, but to make his personal dream come true. In fact, Ascot's life-ambition is centred on his white fantasy and not in achieving success and economic progress following the

⁵ The idea of liminality in postcolonial theory implies an in-between position in terms of sociocultural milieus for the expression or construction of cultural identity. It has been defined by Homi Bhabha in a transcultural context pertinent to most colonial and postcolonial experiences all over the world: “These in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal– that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 1994: 1-2). Many of the child-protagonists in Senior's short stories move in a universe marked by liminality: between social classes, along racial/colour lines, and between sociocultural milieus, from which they negotiate their identities.

self-made man prototype.⁶ But fulfilling this ambition necessarily requires an improvement of his economic situation, only possible, in his case, through enrolling in farm work and journeying to the developed Western metropolis. Once there, Ascot's process of economic improvement and social mobility confirms the American Dream ideal, but it is always conditioned by his white-driving ambition, as indicated by the extremely brief letters he sent to his mother –through which the reader is informed about Ascot's experience in America:

Dear Ma wel i am her in New York is Big plase and they have plenty car I an going to get one yr loving son Ascot... Dear mother wel here I am in Connecticut... I driveing car two year now but is not wite yr loving son Ascot... Dear Mother Chicago is Big plais I drevein wite car for a wite man but he don make me where wite is black uniform so I mite leave yr loving son Ascot. (30)

When the narrator (Lily) relates Ascot's return to Jamaica, the elements of his ambition (white car and white clothes) are the first things to notice in Ascot's brandishing of his success: "Next thing we know a big white car no draw up at the gate and turn into the yard... Ascot dress in white from head to toe and though him plenty fatter him teeth kin same way" (30-31). With this humorous and indirect comment about Ascot's ever-hungriness despite the surfeit implied in his increased weight, the narrator relocates Ascot within the rural experience of his childhood, discarding his supposedly rich experience in the American Dream and reaffirming his former identitarian/behavioural *ways* from his Jamaican experience.

In effect, this short story reveals a narrative intention uninterested in the story of Ascot living the American Dream. It is concerned, rather, with the story of Ascot living his personal dream as a postcolonial Caribbean subject, with the agency of the economic advantages of the American Dream only reached, in this case, through the journey or exile. And the journey itself or the *idea of foreign* becomes only a thematic axis in the story as Senior wanted to describe how it has traditionally affected Jamaican urban and rural communities: "[T]he idea of 'foreign' or 'travel' that so many Jamaicans even in the remote countryside then had and which seemed so romantic. And the way in which the returning travellers were expected to show that they had been changed by the experience"⁷. This narrative intention interested in and thus crediting the local experience is corroborated by the fact that the narration, being produced by a Caribbean (Jamaican) resident, remains in the Jamaican context, and the narrator diverts the reader's attention from Ascot's exile experience (Ascot's life in foreign is merely documented by his three brief letters to his mother).

Ascot is then portrayed as a true trickster figure and his (seemingly celebrated) *trickifying* attitude for fulfilling his white-driving ambition can be mirrored in the author's narrative

⁶ The Jamaican social prototype of the self-made man is defined by a personal social and economic growth achieved by oneself. It underscores a Western individualistic conception of the human being in his/her social development, in contrast to an African and/or Afro-Caribbean conception that reinforces the collective or communal nature of the individual's social experience. References to the self-made man in a Jamaican social context appear in Velma Pollard's *Karl* (1994) and Senior's short story "The Glass Bottom Boat" from *Discerner of Hearts and Other Stories* (1995).

⁷ These remarks of the author in relation to her short story have been taken from a brief exchange of ideas conducted via e-mail on June, 2006.

attitude, which appears to *trick*, in content and form, the canonical Caribbean literary tradition. Senior offers in this short story an instance of the experience of exile, so common in Caribbean narrative, but one in which the foreign experience is de-emphasized. Moreover, her protagonist is not the honest, bright fellow with a compulsion to learn, to leave and improve him/herself, socially, in the Western metropolis, frequently found in canonical Caribbean fiction. Senior's protagonist, in this case, does not really accommodate himself into the developed, Western (American) societal ideal. As Alison Donnell comments, "Ascot has not grown or developed as a result of his journey but remains arrested in his 'white' fantasy" (Donnell 1999: 127).

Explained within an ideological context, Ascot's life-narrative subverts the conventional life-narrative afforded to the Caribbean subject singled out by intelligence, resourcefulness, or cleverness: to work or continue education in the metropolitan centres and become a Westernised (educated) individual or self-made man. Although some of the American cultural ways have been appropriated by Ascot –indicated in his brandishing of his improved economic and social position (seen through his white new clothes, the rented big white car and hotel room in Kingston, his educated wife, and his notably improved speech with a *thick* American accent), his personal identity has remained unchanged. It is suggested by the girl narrator in her allusion to Ascot's gluttonous nature. And this suggestion is ratified at the end of the story where Ascot is portrayed as the same unfeeling, deceitful boy from his early youth or a "good-fe-nutten", as the narrator Lily angrily declares referring to Ascot's selfish and shameless behaviour toward his family and hers (35).

The inherent deceptive character of Ascot's personality is sanctioned by Papa, through a metaphorical saying, when Ascot's journey of upward mobility is about to begin: "No matter how hard yu wuk an how much money yu make yu will nevva find shoes for dem doan mek in fe yu size" (29). The very size of Ascot's feet, that denounced him as the thief of Papa's banana, would stand as an allegory of the clear fraudulent nature of Ascot. Then, Ascot's supposed accommodation into the *respectable American way* can be identified as a strategic act of compliance with the dominant order toward achieving his goal: the outfit can be American-like but the essence is still from the Caribbean. Trickery becomes here not only a strategy of survival in a hostile environment, but also a valid weapon for gaining empowerment and securing self-determination within the hegemonic social and cultural order. It becomes an indirect weapon of resistance.

As a matter of fact, the resistant subjectivity of many of Senior's characters is constructed around the trickster philosophy as an indirect form of resistance. As Alison Donnell notes, these characters':

acts of strategic submission are not only significant resistant strategies which present moments of empowerment that destabilize the orders of power and of agency upon which colonial cultures depend, but they are also mechanisms by which those who live in colonial and neo-colonial cultures manage to survive and, importantly, to remain. (Donnell 1999: 126)

Ascot's life-narrative of successful survival and permanence within the dominant, neo-colonial order is made possible with an emphasis on Ascot's cunning to resist determination

from others or the imperial Other, an emphasis afforded by the trickster archetype. Therefore, the trickster functions in this short story as a trope for the inscription of (cultural) resistance through the delineation of an attitude of subversion toward an imposed sociocultural order and perspective. Ascot's life-narrative that subverts the conventional life-narrative of the intelligent Caribbean subject successfully self-*becoming* abroad through his cheating and slyness and his Caribbean-bound life-ambition ratifies the author's desire of crediting and validating the native Caribbean sociocultural reality and experience. Such validation becomes an important strategy to counter, through fiction, the Western neo-imperial cultural perspective imposing itself in Caribbean societies.

The trickster certainly provides, the guiding motif for the creation of this short story. His cunning, being his only weapon to resist and overcome difficult situations, is what usually allows the humorous part of these tales. In the case of "Ascot", the emphasis on Ascot's cunning reveals an authorial intention of accentuating the comic over the tragic in the story. Such narrative intention favouring humour draws on the storyteller's narrative. Largely corroborated in Senior's fiction, this humorous tone places her narrative in a particular thematic context within contemporary Anglo-Caribbean fiction that discards the so common representation of the suffering (post)colonial individual:

[I]n these early stories Senior begins to establish the practice of validating a world of being and of feeling which exists outside the conflicts and emotions associated with colonialism, conflicts and emotions which are too readily assumed to be the overriding preoccupation of the colonial subject's life. (Donnell 1999: 121)

Senior is not interested in fictionalising the tragic side of the postcolonial Caribbean experience, but in celebrating attitudes of living through that experience while keeping true to your Self. The trickster motif has made it possible here to displace the story of identity crisis or self-alienation, determined by the validation and assimilation of the dominant American or Western culture to the detriment of the local culture observed in many of Senior's stories. It has furthered the story of the resistant postcolonial subject by successfully reconfiguring his place within the hegemonic order, and avoiding being placed or strangled by it.

Senior's representation of the comic trickster hero in this text forces a realignment of her fiction with the canonical Caribbean literary tradition in the sense that the comic genius has been "the prime attraction of the West Indian short story", propelling the development of a narrative of *wit and humour* within the region's short fiction (Salkey 1960: 12). Writers such as V. S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, Andrew Salkey, among others, have cultivated this humorous narrative, in which wit and humour have been frequently used as effective weapons to provoke serious reflection⁸. In "Ascot", the reflection behind the humorous reading would fall on the ideological interpretation of the story, foregrounding Ascot's disavowal of his family (black and poor) and his cultural origins—exemplified in the forced American accent of his new speech—now that he has succeeded economically.

⁸ The serious reflection becomes, seemingly, a common ground to Senior's short stories. It may spring from several levels of meaning implied in her fiction leading to several possible interpretations.

The reader is then left with a case of sociocultural and historical estrangement: “It would seem that in order to possess his dreams, Ascot has dispossessed his history” (Donnell 1999: 127), which s/he might morally judge criticizing Ascot’s conduct, as the girl narrator does at the end of the story.

To a cautious reader examining the short story not only as story but also as text, however, the post-reading reflection would reveal, at the thematic level, the celebration of an attitude of resistance to oppressive socio-economic structures and the established social order derived from colonialism –an attitude procured through the trickster motif as mentioned before. At the formal level, the presentation or *writing down* of a trickster tale in Creole borrowing the storytelling narrative style implies the validation of a historically denigrated part of Anglo-Caribbean folklore (the Big Boy or Anancy tales) and the legitimisation in literature of the local oral culture.

The formal level of this text offers, therefore, a context in which the trickster motif also operates, especially through its potential for subversion. Due to the appropriation of the storytelling narrative style (its form and language) in this short story, it appears as a *scribibilised* oral form, thus defying, thus, the conventions of the literary narrative tradition in English. This culturally-determined text seeks to legitimise a narrative form from the alternative Caribbean (oral) word-culture, corroborating the political and cultural implications of the *told tale* devise in Caribbean fiction (Brown 1999: xvii). The *wit and humour* of the trickster tale become, therefore, the credentials of an apparently innocent but transgressive fiction: behind the natural rendering of a humorous story lies a conscious intention to subvert the *anglocentricity* of Caribbean fictional narrative.

Corroborating the interpretation of “Ascot” as a *told tale*, the formal features of this short story show that some of the structural and stylistic principles of oral narrative have been appropriated, like the opening formula, the participation of an audience, the cyclic mode of narration around the exploits of a leading character, and its formulaic and dramatic idiom.

The opening formula of this *scribibilised* tale is represented by a saying referring to Ascot’s foreseen possibilities of success in his life: “That Ascot goin go far” (26). This is the opening phrase of the text, introducing Ascot’s life-narrative of upward mobility. As a condensed expression of popular wisdom held proper in relation to Ascot, it indirectly reviews what Ascot’s life-narrative will be, and that it will be narrated afterwards. It becomes, seemingly, a guiding motto of Ascot’s story, which is repeated by the end of the short story reinforcing the meanings around the trickster protagonist, his trickery and his success.

The opening section of this narration is formed by the statements of two of the characters (Papa and Mama) about Ascot, introduced by their daughter Lily, who narrates the story. Her voice takes command of the narrative afterwards in a demanding address to the audience: “See here! I don’t think Papa ever recover from the day that Ascot come back” (26). The expression *see here* is commonly used to request someone’s attention when something is going to be said. The narrator uses it here calling the attention of her presumably listening and *seeing* audience. Other instances indicating a clearly solicited audience are found in the phrases: “But mark you, from Ascot small he used to tell me how him life ambition was to dress up in white clothes and drive a big white car” (29), and “But lo [look] and behold. No [now] Ascot! Ascot dress in white from head to toe ...” (30-31). In this impera-

tive address to the audience, one might guess the performative quality of the Creole oral enunciation suggested in these phrases, as probably uttered by the ordinary folk telling a story. A similar consideration can be raised in relation to this other example: “Papa walking bout and threatening to shoot him for him banana though *you know* after a time that Papa enjoying himself so much telling everybody how him frighten Ascot that *you can see* that him don’t mind bout the banana so much after all” (28; emphasis added). It shows a more familiar tone in the narrator’s appeal. Moreover, the inherent performative character of the storyteller’s narrative aimed at entertaining the audience is suggested in instances of address like: “You should hear the noise he make” (27), and “Ascot put down a piece of eating there that I couldn’t describe to you ...” (33). In the former the audience is invited to experience, imaginatively, the situation conveyed; while in the latter, the audience is clearly identified as the receiver/listener of the narrator/storyteller’s humorous story.

Ascot’s life-story narrated in this short story comprises several episodes that might be entitled *Ascot’s robbery of Papa’s Harvest Festival banana* or *Ascot’s robbery and his telling foot*; *Ascot as gardener in May Pen*; *Ascot in the USA*; and *Ascot’s visit*. They appear as interrelated stories in chronological sequence. Probably, the most humorous story is the first one. It is introduced with an evaluative statement about one of Ascot’s physical features: “Ascot have the biggest foot that anybody round here ever see. Especially Papa” (26), which triggers the telling of the story of how the particular size of Ascot’s foot denounced him as the thief of Papa’s bananas. Ascot’s attempts to conceal his theft boldly denouncing a possible robber calls to mind the folktale about Anancy and Brother Goat, in which Brother Goat is tricked and incriminated by Anancy and punished, unjustly, for a theft that Anancy himself committed⁹. Following the formulaic style of oral narration, this first story begins with the so common phrase *One time* and ends with another formula: “And from that day on...” (28). The presence of these interrelated stories about a leading character (Ascot) suggests an adaptation of the cyclic narrative pattern in storytelling for relating, in this case, the several adventures of the trickster protagonist.

Furthermore, the formulaic idiom of oral narration has been borrowed in this text. Connective formulas like: “Then one day” (29), “One time” (26; 30), “*Then* he say to the wife” (31. Emphasis added), “So right then” (35), among others, alternate with other expressions belonging to the idiomatic realm of oral discourse, such as: “*Well, anyway*, one time...” (27. Emphasis added), “Well sah [Sir]” (29; 33), “*Eh-eh*, Ascot him no rush up to my mother and start hug and kiss her” (31. Emphasis added), and “*See here*, he wearing the biggest pair of puss boot that ever make” (29. Emphasis added). They all assist the progression of the narration. Their presence in this text demonstrates that the author is concerned not only with the representation of the traditional narrating voice of the storyteller, but also of her/his informal speaking voice.

Nonetheless, more than in the appropriation of the storyteller’s formulaic idiom, it is in the emulation of her/his dramatic narrative style that this text draws the most on the idiom of oral narration. Above all, the narrator uses a hyperbolic tone to entertain her audience through humour and enticement. Both aims frequently converge in the narrator’s descrip-

⁹ Louise Bennett once made reference to this Anancy tale when interviewed by Daryl C. Dance (Dance 1992: 28); and Dance collected a similar version of the same story in which the protagonists are Anancy and Monkey for her work on Jamaican folklore (Dance 1985: 23-26).

tions, abundant in exaggerations, as the following examples show: “Anyhow this Ascot tall no langilalla and him not so bad looking though him have a mouth *so big that when him smile him lip curl* but all the women *melt* when Ascot smile” (26; emphasis added), “[O]ne time *a whole heap of big thing* start disappear from the buttery” (27; emphasis added), “[W]e children used to run in the buttery and look at the bunch of banana *till we eye water* but none of us would bold enough to touch it for *is the most beautiful thing that we ever see in our whole life*” (27; emphasis added), “But Ascot jump back so braps and fly off like streak lightning” (28), “[H]e wearing the biggest pair of puss boot that ever make. It big so till everybody from miles around run to look at Ascot foot in shoes like is the eight wonder of the world” (29), “Ascot say and his American accent so thick you could cut it with knife” (31), “Ascot put down a piece of eating there that I couldn’t describe to you and when he done the table clean as a whistle” (33), and “So Ascot there chatting and chatting and we all getting hungrier and hungrier and the food smelling better and better” (32). The kind of exaggeration conveyed in this last example is aided by repetition, and is commonly found in oral narrative. Although a similar narrative attitude emulating the hyperbolic tone of oral narration is perceived in other short stories by Senior –like “Summer Lightning,” “The Boy Who Loved Ice Cream” (from *Summer Lightning*), and “Lily, Lily,” its notable presence in this *scribilled* trickster tale points at a narrative intention clearly committed to the representation of the oral narrative in literature.

Corroborating this authorial intention, also, the narration of this short story is not produced, exclusively, by the homodiegetic girl narrator. Instead, as if recreating the collective context of the storytelling practice, the narration is assisted by the community presented in the short story. Thus, the collective nature of Caribbean folk tradition clearly manifest in the communal practice of storytelling is transfused to this text. The collective context of storytelling therein conveyed is defined by the exchange between the storyteller and her audience, but also by the participation of the *talking* community in the telling of Ascot’s story. This *talking* community is apparently given the role of participatory public, assisting the storyteller in her rendering of stories. The community’s participation in the narration occurs through the narrator’s crediting of their spoken discourse in relation to the persona of Ascot and his history.

The importance that this collective perspective is given in this text is ratified from the beginning, because the narration of Ascot’s story commences with Mama’s and Papa’s differing moral considerations with respect to Ascot:

“That Ascot goin go far,” Mama say, “Mark my word”. “Yes. Him goin so far him goin ennup clear a prison,” Papa say... “Oh gawd when all is said an done the bwoy do well Jackie. Doan go on so,” Mama say. “De bwoy is a livin criminal... Look how him treat him family like they have leprosy. Deny dem. Is so you wan you pickney behave...” and with that Papa jam him hat on him head and take off down the road. (26)

Further on, the narrator relies on the also differing discourses of men and women in the community in her description of Ascot: “[A]ll the women melt when Ascot smile and say how him bound to go far. But all that the men remember bout Ascot is that Ascot is a real ginnal and also that Ascot have the biggest foot that anybody round here ever see”

(26). Throughout the narration, the reader/listener knows about different events of Ascot's life-story through the narrator's crediting of other people's narrating voices. Apart from Papa's and Mama's, Kenny's discourse is introduced to refer Ascot's misleading behaviour in May Pen. Also that of the government official sent to find out about Ascot when the latter abandoned the farm job in Florida: "[T]he man say that they going to prison Ascot if they find him for he does do a criminal thing" (30). There is then the discourse of the community, whose comments and gossips would help to advance the story: "Well it look like Ascot dead fe true this time for nobody hear from him... everybody give him up for dead or prison" (29-30). This community amuses itself hearing and passing down gossip, as the child narrator certifies toward the end: "Next day it all over the district how Miss Clemmie have daughter-in-law with Master Degree and how Ascot prosper and hire big car and staying at hotel in Kingston" (34-35).

The collective character of the narration conveyed through these instances of indirect presentation of the community's discourse is strengthened by a narrative attitude that eschews her individual, homodiegetic role in the favour of a plural narrative perspective. Therefore, the I-quality of the narrative act –asserted after the presentation of Papa's and Mama's discourses, and serving the narrator's address to her solicited audience– changes to *we*, as a result of the narrator's intention to add to the leading narrative perspective and voice the perspectives of other children (probably relatives) and her parents. Notice these examples: "[W]e children would tief in there" (27), "[A]nd is sad we think Papa sad" (27), "[W]e all start giggle" (27), and "All we can see is the front door open and two foot stick outside" (30).

The I-quality of this narration is restored in the final episode, in which the child narrator is both eye witness and major character, but also here the collective narrative perspective is what prevails. Mainly, the narrator retakes her individual narrative role at the end to offer her personal considerations on Ascot's behaviour. The significant presence of a plural narrative perspective in this multiple-voiced text suggests that the community therein represented stands as the real narrator of Ascot's story, while the homodiegetic narrator stands as a mediating narrating agent through which the communal telling of Ascot's story is delivered to the listening/reading audience. The presence of this mediating narrative agent accounts for a narrative strategy that pursues a direct communicative connection between the reader and the characters or community in the story through the spoken voice, as it happens in the performative context of oral storytelling.

On the other hand, the fact that this trickster tale appears narrated by the rural community therein depicted explains, more readily, the use of Creole as the language of narration, besides its also clear relation to the tradition of oral narration in the region. Since it is a (Jamaican) Creole-speaking community, the use of Creole as narrative language facilitates the most accurate representation of that sociocultural context which is also the narrator's. The author's favouring of Creole in this text points at a desire to convey and assert a linguistic identity, belonging also to this storytelling and gossiping community. In so doing, she explicitly aims at rehabilitating the Creole language from within the very oral context of folk tradition, counteracting its status of inferiority in relation to the *dominant* standard English in Caribbean fiction. With this linguistically Creole-identified fiction, Senior has wanted to assert the literary possibilities of Creole as narrative language: its adequacy as

linguistic means of communication also for serious purposes –like the writing of fiction, and its crucial role in a culturally-situated narrative that seeks autonomous self-expression.

Certainly, the rehabilitation of the trickster and of Creole taking place in the thematic and formal contexts of this short story furthers an interpretation of Senior’s fiction as resistance writing, for the sake of asserting a cultural identity against postcolonial forms of cultural domination in the Caribbean –through American television, the free market economy, and tourism. Such resistance, showing a clear ideological dimension, can be seen to operate in different but related contexts. It can be explained as resistance, for instance, to use, solely, the narrative moulds bequeathed by the English literary tradition; to follow the ready-made narratives of postcolonialism and a Caribbean literary canon; and to easy categorization by the homogenizing tendencies in the critical agenda of postcolonial literatures in the imperial academic centres.¹⁰

This resistant stance is emblematised in the content of Senior’s fiction in the positions of her characters, who are, frequently, empowered and resistant subjects. The child protagonists of short stories like “Do Angels Wear Brassieres?”, “Confirmation Day”, and “Ballad” (all from *Summer Lightning*) are little, self-conscious beings who resist the orders and values of the dominant culture. In “Ascot”, the trickster figure is celebrated as an idiosyncratic symbol of resistance within an oppressive neocolonial social system. And his cunning behaviour is celebrated as an indirect strategy of subversion of the prevailing order, guaranteeing the survival and success of the poor, peasant folk in a neocolonial, underdeveloped society. This celebration of the trickster is supported by a sociocultural context where the trickster’s archetype represents a psychological inheritance of subversive praxis from the colonial experience in the Caribbean, and by a culture where it remains a “figure of admiration”, despite its selfish and immoral nature (Dance 1985: 12).

In the formal context of Senior’s fiction, this celebrated attitude of resistance is less readily recognized. It is suggested in the transgressive innocence of many of her texts, in which modes of oral narration and cultural elements inherent to the Creole folk culture are appropriated and thus validated. The Anancy/Big Boy tale proposed in “Ascot” is a clear example. The comedy and humour of the Caribbean trickster tale are here the agents for the celebration of the trickster’s attitude of resistance. In the narration of Ascot’s story, comedy usually overpowers the several situations revealing Ascot’s deceitful and immoral conduct. It is the comedy that is highlighted also at the end, when the narrator/storyteller (Lily), in her “dual function of entertainer and social satirist” (Simpson 2004: 835), tries to pass a moral judgement on Ascot’s conduct. It seems that the author wants to divert the reader’s attention from her moralizing critique:

But is only me one Miss Clemmie did tell how *there was not a bite to eat in the house* that day and Ascot *never even leave her a farthing*. This vex me cant done especially how

¹⁰ Analysing the thematic line of Senior’s fiction from an ideological perspective, Alison Donnell has noted how Senior’s accounts of childhood become a strategic fictional domain to criticise cultural neo-colonialism in the Caribbean, and how her apparently innocent but radical texts “refute the ready-made narratives which have been generated by certain post-colonial theories and other Caribbean writers whose works have become institutionalised, as well as those of the more obvious colonial discourse” (Donnell 1999: 139-40).

he did gormandise up all Papa food. So right then and there I start tell her what kind of good-fe-nutten Ascot is. (35; emphasis added)

The narrator's criticism of Ascot's behaviour is finally not even listened or paid attention to by Miss Clemmie, who would presumably be most hurt by Ascot's conduct. Miss Clemmie seems to celebrate her son's boldness to move up: to step out of their depressed economic situation, an appraisal revealed in her eyes "shining like ackee seed" (35) while she re-asserts the statement predicting Ascot's success. The celebration of an attitude of resistance pursued here through the trickster prototype is supported by the fact that social critique in the story is not so much directed at Ascot's conduct but at the women in the community:

But as much as Ascot's behavior is open to criticism, the main objects of social satire are the women in Ascot's community. They cannot or refuse to see, because of their materialism and color prejudice, that Ascot's behavior violates all the codes of conduct that they and their community should hold dear. (Simpson 2004: 837)

It is through the materialist and racially-biased blindness of women in Ascot's community that the author/storyteller raises her social critique to her Jamaican society's reverence for the *foreign* white culture and things American. Her social critique becomes also a condemnation of American cultural neo-imperialism in the Caribbean, which Senior describes in her own words:

[E]ach of our territories is now being subjected to a new form of cultural imperialism that is not only inhibiting the possibility of developing our own natural cultures but of developing a pan-Caribbean culture. Despite all the rhetoric about Caribbean economic integration, a new center-periphery system is evolving which is based in Washington and a new cultural system is evolving located somewhere between Dallas and Hollywood. (qtd. in Simpson 2004: 834-35)

Finally, as if verifying the celebratory tone of this trickster tale foregrounding an attitude of resistance, the moral teaching furthered in this trickster tale is not brought forth in the girl narrator's criticism in relation to the persona of Ascot, but in Ascot's behaviour itself. Ascot, with his forced American accent and his pretended prosperity and pedigree, has made himself ridiculous. By trying to fool everyone, he has made a fool of himself. His story corroborates what Anancy stories generally teach or show, according to Louise Bennett: "[W]hat Anancy is really trying to show you is that you can be tricked by your own stupidity and greed and pretentiousness" (28). Ascot is tricked, therefore, by his own pretentiousness of education, wealth, and parentage. As a rephrased saying would indicate: no matter how far you journey aided by the lie, the truth will always catch you somewhere. In the case of Ascot, his revealed ridiculousness forces him to leave again, hastily, in his rented big white car, to *fly off like streak lightning* like when Papa revealed him as the thief of his Harvest Festival bananas. As it usually happens in these Anancy tales, the trickster remains unpunished, and an admired figure of undefeatable spirit: a continuing symbol of resistance.

In general terms, Senior's fiction affirms the resistance to being determined, culturally, from abroad, and from others. Like many of her resistant subject/characters, her fiction claims the right to self-articulation on Caribbean cultural grounds, and to pursuing a constant dialogue between contesting cultural discourses in a creolised sociocultural space.

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