



Carelessness and its Drawbacks as Seen through Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*

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Abstract: *The present article aims at examining and exposing carelessness and its drawbacks as seen through Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. Before the advent of colonisation, African societies were well-structured and had a sound social and political organisation with kings or monarchs at the summit. There was no room for mistakes such as carelessness on the part of traditional rulers. However, things have changed with the advent of colonisation and traditional rulers no longer behave in accordance with social norms. They indulge in social vices, including carelessness towards their citizens. Hence the necessity to carry out this study in order to unveil the ins and outs of this phenomenon through a study of the chosen work which is a play. The literary theory that we have used in this study in order to carry it out with success is sociocriticism which focuses on the norms and values of the society and on how those values are reflected in literary works. The study has found that carelessness is dangerous for a kingdom or nation, especially when it is perpetrated by the leaders themselves, and needs to be eradicated.*

Keywords: *Carelessness, drawbacks, colonisation, African societies, traditional rulers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

African societies are witnessing another wave of disillusionment with the constitutional arrangement that has followed the end of colonisation. They are made up of many cultures that have positive and negative aspects which influence the lives of people. *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* is a play in which the playwright, Yaw Asare, has dealt with themes related to African societies to show the weaknesses and neglect of some leaders. Through the play, he draws people's attention to the carelessness which prevails in African societies. Hence the necessity to carry out this research work based on the play in order to examine and expose this phenomenon and its drawbacks. The purpose of this study is therefore to examine critically and to expose carelessness and its drawbacks through a study of the play.

The theoretical framework of this research work has to do with sociocriticism which focuses on the norms and values of the society and on how those values are reflected in literary works. The methodology that we have used falls on documentary research, including books and internet source, especially online articles. The pertinence of the theories and methods used resides in the fact that they will lead to an understanding of the theme under study and to a literary appraisal of carelessness through a study of the chosen play. The paper is divided into three aspects, namely carelessness in the play, the causes of carelessness, and the consequences of carelessness and ways to get out of this phenomenon.

2. CARELESSNESS IN THE PLAY

Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* is designed to caution the exploited peoples of the world, especially Africans, on the premium they place on visitors and strangers who come into their midst and the kind of reception they usually offer them. This story takes place in the village of Dim-Nyim-Lira as Ananse arrives there. The Dim-Nyim-Lira clan practises tribal traditions, the worship of gods,

sacrifice, war and magic. In the community depicted in the play, leadership is based not only on a man's personal worth but also on his contribution to the progress of the community or tribe. Pootagyiri stands out as a great leader of the tribe depicted in the play. This can be deduced from what Akpala says about him in this quotation: "You are surely out of your senses, Ananse. The Princess is betrothed to the ferocious Pootagyiri, the most ruthless warrior and wrestler in our time" (p. 34). Indeed, tribesmen respect Pootagyiri for his many leadership achievements. Referring to Ananse (the spider) as trickster or an imposter in African folklores, A. Arko-Achemfour (2013) & P. Ngulube (2017), as quoted by E. Asante and S. O. Yaw (2021, p. 3) state:

One of the most popular characters in African and African diaspora folklores is Ananse (Spider). Ananse is described as a trickster, an imposter who is cunning in all his ways, sometimes considered as man, other times as a god. In much the same ways, sometimes Ananse is seen as a good character who tries to help society by the application of historic kery and cunningness, but mostly, he is known for duping those he comes into contact with and getting away; jumping into his web of lies, mistrust, and deceit with the fortunes he makes. Ananse stories are primarily stories about Ananse among the Akan people of Ghana. However, because of the significance of Ananse in the folk stories, the term goes beyond the stories about Ananse to encapsulate folk stories in general among the Akans.

Yaw Asare has written this play not only for his fellow Ghanaians, but also for people beyond his native country. Through it, he intends to explain the truth about the effects of losing one's culture and following other cultures. One of the major indications is derived from how the King has disobeyed the voice of the gods through the Priestess as shown in this excerpt: "(Charging towards Ananse) You you you've ruined that sacrifice you've stopped the passage of sacrifice to appease evil spirits. You are an evil soul Great King, this man must die, he must die instantly..." (p.12). The play describes the tragic demise of an African prince named Pootagyiri. Initially, Pootagyiri rises to become a powerful leader in his village. However, as he climbs the ladder of success, it becomes apparent that his strengths and position become a curse for him. His self-confidence becomes pride, his manliness develops into authoritarianism and his physical strength eventually turns into uncontrolled rage. Referring to the predicament that African traditional rulers create in their communities, Y. C. Aguessy (2020, pp. 190-191) writes: "Asare has satirized the careless behaviour of the traditional ruling authorities of the community and drawn human consciousness on some social evils that have names [such] as carelessness, egoistic interests, psychological manipulation, corruption, [and] betrayal."

In *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, when the protagonist, Ananse, breaks a taboo in the village by eating the sacrificial food, he is first brought to the King who is supposed to judge him as seen in the quotation below:

Akpala (indicates a spot to the left of the King's platform). Sit down there. (Ananse attempts to bring down bowl from his head). No, do not remove the bowl from your head. The king must see you carrying this defilement. (Calls out) Is any guard out there? (Guard rushes in). Go in and tell the King I've brought a thief... (p. 6)

From the above quotation, one can clearly notice that the royal authority is seen as the supreme personality whose decisions are unquestionable and positively or negatively impact the whole community. So, for every problem the community faces, its people have to refer to their king for a suitable solution as prescribed by tradition. The king is therefore the custodian of the tradition of the community. J. Bossuet (1678, p. 2) corroborates the idea when he asserts:

Royal authority is sacred. God establishes kings as his ministers and reigns through them over the nations. All power comes from God. It is through them that he exercises his rule. It appears from all this that the person of kings is sacred, and that to try to harm them is a sacrilege... Kings must respect their own power, and only use it for the public good. Their power coming from on high, they must not believe that they are masters of it to use it according to their own will; but they must use it with fear and restraint, as something which comes to them from God, and for which God will call them to account.

Nowadays, most leaders are manipulated every day and consequently think about their own needs and interests, rather than thinking about the welfare of their populations. They are careless about the poor people who need their support to survive. The kings who are supposed to be the custodians of royal

customs and tradition do not care about people's destiny when it comes to their own interests. The spilling over of private interests into the public sphere and decision-making is widespread in society as it is the case in *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. In this play, King Dosey is everything but regardful to the needs of the community. After Ananse has broken the taboo by eating the food destined to the gods and claims to be Odomankoma's Head weaver, the King feels apparently vexed and declares that Ananse is a captive and sends for the priestess who is the spiritual custodian of the kingdom. This excerpt reveals this fact:

Enough! Surely Odomankoma didn't send you to defile our ritual feast! (pause) Now Listen! Whoever you claim to be; however lengthy your chains of praise names, you are now a captive. You have perpetrated a gross defilement by intercepting the passage of evil destinies, among them that of my daughter, the sole princess of Dim-Nym-Lira. I suppose you don't know what that means... yet. (to GUARD) Hey, you... in and call the High Priestess of Kompi. She must tell this man the enormity of the taboo he has broken. (p. 9)

The excerpt shows that King Dosey seems to be interested in the wellbeing of his people. As soon as he summons the Priestess of Kompi, she declares Ananse must be killed to prevent any calamity in the community as recommended by tradition. However, the King capriciously sidesteps this traditional practice in exchange for a commodity to satisfy his selfish desire. This can be seen through his behaviour in the following excerpt:

Well Ananse... we will give you a chance to prove your worth... yes, just one chance, though the priestess is not in favour of it. If you prove yourself a genuine and talented weaver as you claim to be, and if you are able to accomplish the task I shall set, that may buy you your freedom. If not, then of course the priestess shall have her way... you will die instantly! (p. 13)

The decision that King Dosey has taken in the foregoing excerpt is a decision that will destroy the whole power of the kingdom and the destiny of the whole community of Dim-Nyim-Lira. Before committing his carelessness, he was so infuriated at the culpability of Ananse, scolding: "You've broken a prime taboo and, in so doing, put the destinies of a whole generation of worthy maidens to great risk" (p. 9). "But if the seriousness of what he says is compared to the speed with which he hushes the looming danger in replacement for Ananse's kente, one is left confused" (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 158). Through this action, one can infer that the King does not feel concerned about the wellbeing of his people, only his own interests matter first. T. A. Van Djik (1987), as quoted by P. Arthur (2020, p. 158) posits:

One is inclined to believe that what he has said about a generation being at risk is false. This assertion lies in the fact that one wonders why the King should risk his throne, his people, and their convenience for just a mere kente band. Ananse's approach, pretending innocence and naivety, elicits the thinking and the ontological disposition of the King. This approach also gives the epistemic of how the ruler constructs power over the ruled.

The aforementioned quotation clearly reveals that the King dominates his people and "that domination is keeping the dominated in the dark" (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 158). Efua T. Sutherland (1975) quoted by P. Arthur (2020, pp. 158-159) buttresses the idea that the King dominates his people in these terms: "Indeed, the King ignores the so-called demands of the gods for his personal gains. Still in the rising action and still in the palace, Ananse has now established that the people are weak in thinking, he takes control of the plot and starts acting as a stage manager." The King succeeds in intructing all the characters around him to do his bidding, which proves that he is a very cunning and wicked king. As P. Arthur (2020, p. 159) puts it: "One sees *Anansegoro* casting a shadow of meaning here, an intertextuality that helps one to fully understand what is happening in this narrative. In *Anansegoro*, Ananse weaves the plot both from within and without. In thisplay, heconstructs the plot by orchestrating the actions of the other characters."

The elders and royal guards have also indulged in carelessness in the play. The criteria of wisdom and weighting, associated with the experience of age, are particularly valued, especially in lineage societies, and West African communities are obviously no exception. In a village, the council of elders is a customary institution bringing together the oldest men in the village. It is because of this deference due to age that tradition confers the elders the right to intervene in the framework of mediation or conciliation processes. They most often intervene to solve conflicts falling within the

competence of the traditional chiefs or kings whom they generally support. In *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, the King consults the Elder on almost all matters. He is the only person in Dim-Nyim-Lira who could stand up to say that he has flimsy memories of the name Kweku Ananse. He even claims that Kweku Ananse is a legendary hero and identifies him as *Odomankoma's* head weaver as shown in this quotation: "I know that name. Kweku Ananse... a legendary hero of distant lands... Kweku Ananse... Odomankoma's Head Weaver..." (p. 9).

The Elder fails in his duties as a counselor insofar as he urges the King to plunge the whole Kingdom into disaster. He is an elder who is too loose, cheap, not firm, hopeless, and greedy. D. Dorling (2015, p. 12, as quoted by Y. C. Aguessy, 2020, p. 194) posits: "Greed... is good. Greed is right. Greed in all its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind." However, greed as it occurs in the play under study is neither good nor right insofar as it is geared toward the destruction of the Kingdom of Dim-Nyim-Lira. P. Arthur (2020, p. 160) denounces the Elder's complicity in the drama taking place in the kingdom as follows:

Ananse is still in the court where he exposes a more serious rot in the King's court, namely the Elder. The Elder recalls faintly the mysterious Ananse. He is supposed to be the adviser to the King in matters of tradition; and yet, he has a faint knowledge of Ananse, the metaphorical ethics, morals and philosophy of the people. When Ananse has advertised the kente, the Elder has seen it and is charmed by its beauty. Then he has collaborated with the King to take the band, and damn the so-called sword of Damocles that hangs in the neck of the nation. If the concept of Ananse being the ethics and the morals of the people are anything to go by, then the Elder's ignorance of ethics is more dangerous than the flippancy of the King. His ignorance of the philosophy of the culture makes him lose his senses easily. He adds to the levity of the King as revealed in this quotation: "This is surely the work of a master craftsman" (p. 12). The adverb "surely" demonstrates his sense of totally being encapsulated in the charm of the band. Certainly, he has also lost control of his senses. The Elder's role is to straighten up the King when he goes off course. In this context, his words rather influenced the King to deviate further from the norm.

The playwright sets this play to the end of the nineteenth century when Europeans first began colonising this region of Africa on a large scale. By so doing, he establishes a parallel between Pootagyiri's personal tragedy and the tragic destruction of native African cultures by colonialism. As written by D. Dorling (2015, p. 12), the 1980s and 1990s were "a period in which the individual focus was on self-concern, personal survival and greed. This personal focus was aided and abetted by a conservative, probusiness administration that somehow made greed seem moral and corruption an everyday fact of political life." So, what the playwright denounces in his play mirrors what is happening in African communities at large.

Akpala is seen as a character who holds the key to the success of Dim-Nyim-Lira in the play. He is a respected guard who is entrusted with the vigilance of no less an important prisoner than Ananse. When Ananse is measuring the Princess in an awkward manner, Akpala protests: "Excuse me Ananse... I think you're over stepping your bounds. She is a betrothed woman, you know..." (p. 25). Akpala betrays the entire community by conspiring with the stranger, Ananse, in his bad project of killing Prince Pootagyiriso as to take his identity. Ananse devises the assassination plan and discloses it to Akpala in the quotation below:

Good I shall invite the prince here, to take his own measurement tomorrow. When he arrives, I shall make him leave his bows, arrows, amulets and necklaces here, and then stretch his arms across the cloth. You will hide in the bush there. Then when you hear me whistle you will shoot your arrow right through his heart. And that will be all, a very simple task, and you would have won yourself a chieftain and unlimited wealth pleasure... power. (p. 32)

The above quotation shows that Ananse sets a plan to kill the prince in order to satisfy his will and it is obvious that Akpala will play an important role in the success of this plan. However, he has refused to take part in it, although he has raised an important worry in the tradition of his people, and by extension in African tradition, through what he has already started doing. It is a question of blood and a kinsman should not kill another kinsman because this is an abomination. He says: "That sounds simple... but he's my kinsman and... that would be murder..." (p. 32). But Ananse tries to find another way to convince him to take part in his diabolical plan in these terms: "Kinsman? Isn't he a

privilege prince while you're a servile guard? And... are you not a soldier, to talk of murder when you kill an enemy and claim your booty?" (p. 32). Through this quotation, one can see that Ananse is manipulating Akpala who, as a weak person, falls into the trap and helps Ananse. The following excerpt informs us about the murder: "Ananse hurries off towards down center, whistling an incidental song. Suddenly Pootagyiri emits a loud and long wail and collapses at the base of the rafter. Ananse rushes to his side and starts examining the prostrate prince. Akpala also emerges, a fresh arrow pulled and aimed at the prince" (p. 40).

It is clear that both Ananse and his accomplice have succeeded in their plan of murdering the prince and this is confirmed in the following quotation: "No need, friend, spare your arrow. He is cold dead" (p. 40). For better living conditions, Ananse and Akpala have assassinated the prince and have thus changed the course of things in the kingdom. In the end, Ananse successfully gets married to Princess Sodiziisa and now possesses all the wealth destined to the real prince whom he has murdered. The excerpt below illustrates this fact:

Pootagyiri, son of Pootaguo, whose totem is the prowling bush cat! Today I hold your hand in marriage to Sodiziisa, sole princess of Dim-Nyim-Lira. May the gods bless this marriage! May Naa Buruku bless this marriage, so that it may yield fruit and forge greater harmony between our two clans (cheers and flourish of drums) I bestow to you the Pootagyiri, son of Pootaguo and my daughter, the entire island of Boyile, beyond the Kpeyi river as custom demands. I bestow to you all the people, the lands, the cattle and food barns of that island (more cheers). May you live in endless happiness! (p. 45)

The above-mentioned excerpt refers to the tragic colonisation of the kingdom depicted in the play. The playwright sees the colonisation experience of Dim-Nyim-Lira in tragic terms. As a representative of pre-colonial Ghana, Akpala is vibrant, sophisticated, complex and has a high level of cultural decency. However, all these qualities are undone by the arrival of the coloniser (Ananse) with his own very distinct sense of social administration and absolute disregard for tribal society. Ananse has indulged in corruption to reach his goal insofar as he has corrupted Akpala to succeed in murdering Prince Pootagyiri. This quotation reveals how Ananse has corrupted Akpala:

ANANSE: Aa! How tired I am! Now this is refreshing. (pauses) Have you two ever tasted honey?

AKPALA: What is that? Honey? Never heard of it.

ODUDU: Nor I.

AKPALA: What is it? A fruit juice?

ANANSE: (Laughs scornfully) You mean there is no honey in these parts? No bees?

AKPALA AND ODUDU: We know nothing of the sort in these parts.

ANANSE: Poor you! The gods passed your land over when they distributed the greatest pleasure to mankind. Here, stretch out your palms. (p. 28)

It is indeed important to acknowledge that prior to Ananse's coming, the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira were really living in harmony without both the taste of sweet honey or liquid gold and the awful stings from horrible bees. When Akpala and Odudu stretch their palm in search of sweet honey, Ananse pours some little drops of honey for them to taste. After tasting by licking their palms clean, they stretch out for more. This is a clear indication that they are hunting for more. The taste of honey makes Akpala's mind blow as shown in this quotation: "If you show me, I shall relax my vigilance over you" (p. 29). In this sense, Akpala can be seen as a honey hunter and as such, he should have tried to realise that tigers will devour him, that bees will sting him and that other possible dangers could befall him. Through Akpala abrupt change from a decent person to a honey hunter, the playwright denounces the Africans' lust for sweet things that they do not possess as a result of foreign interference.

Another lesson from this scene is that what gives balance and stability to the society has been corrupted by honey which, interestingly, rhymes with money. There are tensions between individuality and communal concerns and the individual fights for his own honour, success and reward. However, if his actions are excessive, or if they might inflict damage on the greater

community, they are checked by law and by religious principles. It is perhaps a flaw in Akpala that his desire for personal eminence and prosperity is paramount. But in the end, for him and for Dim-Nyim-Lira itself, as the veteran Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe (1958), has put it, "the centre cannot hold" and "things fall apart." It should be indicated that Akpala's central flaw is his inability to achieve a patriotic balance. His whole life is an attempt to make up for what Pootagyiri meted out to him when they were young boys as it can be seen in the following excerpt:

AKPALA: All right. Let's see again half of everything... chieftom, cattle, food barns, land everything, as well as the secret of the honey. (Dreamily). And as for Pootagyiri... aa! I haven't forgotten how the fool humiliated me during our seclusion as initiates into manhood. Maybe this will be my rightful revenge...

ANANSE: Your rightful revenge! Sure...sure. That is the spirit. (pp. 33-34)

Akpala's greatest mistake is that he is a witness to the truth about the murder of Prince Pootagyiri, but betrays the whole community for riches and fame. The flaw of Akpala, and to some extent of the whole society, is that he gives way easily. The actual division of the play corresponds to the changes within this society both before and after the coming of Ananse. It is the clan which is important, and not the individual. So, with Ananse's coming, the clan has suffered just because of a few men's guilt. The sweetness of honey has enticed Akpala and Odudu and the beauty of Ananse's kente strap has enticed King Dosey and his elders, despite the warning from the high Priestess of Kompi. In the ultimate analysis, it is the attraction of foreign materials (kente and honey) that has defeated them. The priestess herself refuses the kente cloth from Ananse. Customarily, it is religion and the good or ill will of the gods and ancestors which keep this society together. The people have to obey the Priestess of Kompi unquestionably; but for the first time, they have disobeyed her and the kingdom is consequently in crisis.

3. CAUSES OF CARELESSNESS

Selfishness is the first cause of carelessness in *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. According to A. S. Hornby (1989, p. 1148), being 'selfish' is the fact of "thinking first of one's own interests, needs, etc. without concern for others; not sharing what one has with others." It primarily appears in the play through the King's attitude to Ananse's kente band. Although he is the King he first thinks of his own interests or needs without concern for his people. Their welfare does not matter to him. In the play, after eating the food destined to the gods, Ananse is sentenced to death, but he offers his kente band in exchange for his life. Surprisingly, the sight of the band suddenly changes the King's demeanour, "You mean... you... wove these yourself? With your own hands?" (p. 12). Unexpectedly, the King recants his earlier decision to sentence Ananse to death because of the kente band. The literary theory that we have used in this study, namely 'sociocriticism' is applied at this level. Its relevance lies in the fact that the norms and social values of the society on which it focuses here are mostly carefulness, the absence of greed and corruption and the rejection of egoistic interests. However, those values are badly reflected in the literary work under study. Instead, the opposite of those values, that is to say carelessness, the presence of greed and corruption, and the pursuit of egoistic interests, are noticeable in the play. Most of the characters have indulged in these social evils. After a consultation with the Old one, he instantly decides to trade Ananse's life for the kente band. P. Arthur (2020, p. 159) condemns the King's reaction to the taboo that Ananse has transgressed in the following quotation:

After eating the food, Ananse is condemned to death but he offers his kente band in exchange for his life. The sight of the band suddenly changes the King's demeanor, "You mean... you... wove these yourself? With your own hands?" The King in consultation with the Old one decides to trade the life of Ananse for the kente band. Instantly. [...] it is important to point out here that a good king seeks the interest of the people first. He is expected to have conducted the necessary research on Ananse before starting to do business with him. For a development that can negatively affect the livelihood of his people, just consulting the Priestess and the Old one is not enough. The people ought to have been consulted.

The sudden change of the King's demeanour as referred to in the foregoing quotation is a token of his carelessness. Ananse succeeds in deviating his death sentence through cunning or rather the manipulation of King Dosey as he says: "[...]. Great King, with all humility... I wish to make three modest requests" (p. 14). As a matter of fact, such a decision should not be taken off one's feet. However, the King easily accedes to Ananse's request without any investigation, as revealed in the following excerpt:

Well.... That is a simple request indeed and modest too. Idiots abound in our land, and you'll have one readily. (*pauses*) Now Ananse, I have granted your three requests. However, so you won't sneak off while in the forest, this guard here, Apkala, will keep watch over you, day and night. If you attempt to escape, he will pierce a hole through your heart with an arrow. Do you accept that Ananse? (p. 15)

Through the King's awkward behaviour in the aforementioned excerpt, one may think that Ananse has charmed him. However, there is no evidence for that, at least not in the narrative. The King simply lacks vision for his kingdom and gives way to Ananse's manipulation. Y. C. Aguessy (2020, p. 194) corroborates this fact when he writes: "The playwright through his artistic universe has ridiculed this irresponsible and despotic behaviour which shows that the royal authority lacks vision for his community." P. Arthur (2020, p. 159) comments on the King's awkward behaviour as follows:

A beautiful kente band only appeals to one's sense of art. Hence, considering the issue at stake, a personal sense of art comes nowhere near the danger the people are likely to encounter. Again, he needs it to show off his wealth during his daughter's wedding. Maybe, he is so powerful that the people will even not dare to make him accountable for his action. The aggregate of all these is power; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Again, it is Ananse's engagement that has brought out all these details about the King. He has studied the King and has realized the intelligence of the King is malleable and can be manipulated to satisfy his (Ananse's) needs.

The root cause of the King's carelessness is undoubtedly the absolute power that he exercises over his people, coupled with the malleability of his intelligence. The King's mental malleability is highlighted when Ananse tempts him with a material offer. The King punctuates his speech with a lot of exclamations as shown in this quotation: "Hey! Let me see that one... yes, yes!" (p. 12). The quotation clearly reveals that the King is delighted to see Ananse's kente band and examines it with admiration. The language that the King has proffered is very revealing and is a testimony that he is beside himself with admiration. So, there is no wonder if he takes any wrong step or makes any error of judgment since his sense of sobriety is compromised. He further displays his admiration: "Ah! This is splendid" (p. 12). P. Arthur (2020, p. 159) refers to the King's use of a predicative adjective instead of an attributive one in the quotation in these terms:

The use of the predicative adjective instead of the attributive belies the significance of the construction of that sentence. It is no accident that he chooses the absolute adjective, 'splendid'. His sense of imagination cannot contain this beauty; so, he goes for the kind of adjective that characterises its referent in a manner that is beyond description. The kente has now captured his sense of admiration and this has affected his mood and because his thinking is compromised, his mental state has suddenly changed from the state of being worried to that of appreciating beauty, which, of course, makes him relaxed. Thus mesmerised, he intimates: "Never seen anything so beautiful" (p. 12). At this stage, he reveals having surrendered his mental strength to the sight of a mere kente.

In the third stage of the plot, Ananse is now very confident of his mental superiority and starts manipulating his entire environment. In the court, the King has failed the intelligence test. The Elder has also failed. "The Priestess is part of a plot revealed by the King's negligence because silence means consent" (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160). Ananse "instructs the King to send him to the forest where his muses could be in their elements" (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160). He even asks for a guard and requests that the Princess should come and dance to inspire his creative sense as shown in the excerpt below:

First, that I may be given an isolated spot somewhere in the forest to undertake my task. That tomorrow afternoon the princess and her peers come to dance and sing while I weave... that, Great king, a certified idiot is made my messenger, to run errands between my secret workplace and this palace. (pp. 14-15)

The above excerpt clearly unveils the trick which Ananse has devised in order to reach his goal. Through this attitude, the playwright further highlights Ananse's cunning and at the same time the King's mental malleability. One wonders how a king of his calibre can so easily trust a mere stranger. While acceding to Ananse's request through an unconditioned acceptance, the King illustrates that his

kingdom is really a land of idiots as suggested by the title of the play. Needless to say, he is the first idiot of the land and his idiocy mirrors the idicocy of the land as a whole. He has given Ananse the opportunity to carry out his Machiavellian plan as P. Arthur (2020, p. 160) reveals it in the following quotation:

When Sodziisa arrives, Ananse sends everybody around them away, with the exception of Akpala, whom he has already evaluated to be of a weak mind. He takes advantage of the naivety of the Princess and establishes a body contact with her. That is so compromising and even though Ananse goes beyond ethical limits, the Princess is obviously more interested in the new dress she is going to have than the scandal Ananse is perpetrating. She is also not interested in the aftermath of the scandal and this is a reflection of the King's negligence with regard to the repercussion of taking bribe from a stranger. The King and the daughter are only interested in the glamour and the beauty of the kente; just what meets the eye.

The quotation shows that Ananse has wittingly used the naivety of the Princess to succeed in his trickery. He flatters her as soon as she refers to the beauty of the cloth that he is weaving in order to trap her easily. The quotation below illustrates this fact:

SODZIISA: Ooo! Agua Ananse! The beauty of this cloth takes my very breath away... Ooo!

ANANSE: This is only the beginning, charming princess. Just you wait until I weave in the hues the toning hue that would hold the eyes like glue. And that is why I invited you to dance... so the art in the cloth will synchronise with the contours and vibrations of your body. So you must dance your best...

SODZIISA: I will dance the dance of my life, Agua Ananse. I assure you. (pp. 22-23)

The above quotation shows that both the King and his daughter are only interested in the glamour and the beauty of the kente rather than trying to decode the message imbedded in what Ananse is driving at. This also ties in very well with Akpala's intimation to Ananse in this quotation: "If you show me, I shall relax my vigilance over you..." (p. 29). Ananse is in full control over their faculties and Akpala is ready to risk his (Akpala's) life for the sake of honey and consequently put the entire nation into jeopardy. E. Asante and S. O. Yaw (2021, p. 3) refer to Ananse in these terms:

Ananse, an imposter and a wanderer is arrested for committing a sacrilegious act by defiling a ritual meal meant to appease spirits of evil destinies in his Kingdom of Dim-Nyim-Lira. As the judgment of the gods delivered by Priestess of Kompi, the sentence for Ananse's inconsiderate action is his death as a sacrifice to appease the offended spirits. However, out of greed and corruption of the King, Elder, Akpala and Odudu in what Ananse offers in exchange of his life which alone could pacify the gods, Ananse is able to deceive the entire kingdom for his life by giving the elders trips of colourful cloths he had in his possession and drops of bee honey he pours into the palms of some of the citizens of the wealthy kingdom. With the promise of showing Akpala the secret of honey making and half of the wealth he will gain by marrying with the princess. Akpala kills Pootagyiri; the princess' groom, and assists Ananse to impersonate Pootagyire in order to marry Princess Sodziisa. While Ananse greatly succeeds with his trickery, he fails to give any share of his ill-gotten wealth to Akpala and even tricks the king to kill the poor greedy aide to Ananse.

Greed and love for cheap junks prevail in *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. Greed is one of the human imperfections that can lead to total self-destruction. The strong desire to accumulate the maximum of material goods and the daily will to get easy profit from any activity or action is very remarkable, especially among the youths. If one does not take care, it can lead to a no-return door and to inhumanity. Greed is known as an intense and selfish desire for something, especially wealth, power, or food. According A. S. Hornby (1989, p. 546), "Greed" is the "excessive and selfish desire for wealth, power, etc." The more wealth, power, etc. a greedy person attains, the more he or she wants and is never satisfied. The quotation below further describes the King's greed:

Now listen! Three days from now... that is on the morning of the day following tomorrow, my daughter, the princess Sodziisa whose puberty rituals you so unwisely ruined, is going to be married to Pootagyiri, a valiant prince of one of our clans. Your task will be to wave for the royal couple clothes that have no match in splendor and dazzle anywhere, so they can wear them for the marriage ceremony. (p. 13)

Through the above quotation, it is apparent that King Dosey is more interested in showing off his wealth or achievement during his daughter's wedding. He is also aware that those who will see his daughter in the resplendent kente will only be interested in what they see. And just as he does not care as to how he has managed to get the kente, he is also confident that the people will not question how he got the kente. In other words, the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira are more interested in what they see than in the morality behind what they see. The playwright illustrates their naivety in these terms:

The drummers strike a lively tune, and the MAIDENS gather and start a romantic dance. As the music becomes more and more vigorous six warrior dancers join the maidens. The two groups begin a dodging dance in pairs, the girls eluding the aggressive male dancers. The music increases progressively into a dizzy tempo and stops as the males make a final plunge... (pp. 44-45)

The foregoing excerpt clearly shows that the people are more interested in celebrating the King's wealth rather than thinking about the actions that have led to the wealth. This accounts for the reason why the people fail to question the source of the King's wealth even when they have witnessed the fact that he uses dubious means to acquire his wealth. P. Arthur (2020, p. 160) denounces the characters' awkward behaviour as follows:

[...] there is something that runs through the behaviour of all the characters mentioned in this paper: greed and its accompanying selfishness. Here, too, Ananse has been able to prove that opportunism which does not take into account the wellbeing of others is weak thinking and the results can be nothing but disastrous. Hence, greed and selfishness take the reader to the climax in this narrative. Just for the sake of knowing the source and owning something as little as important as honey, Akpala betrays his compatriot, Pootagyiri, and he, Akpala, personally takes the responsibility of killing the Prince. Ananse is able to continue the manipulation that leads him to marry the Princess.

Rather than rewarding Akpala accordingly, "Ananse deceives him into smearing glue all around his mouth, thus making it impossible for him to talk. Ananse has done so to accuse him of the kind of evil spirit possession which if not drastically eliminated by eliminating the medium could bring disaster to the nation. So, Akpalais painfully killed, the price he pays for not thinking right" (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160). The excerpt below unveils Ananse's betrayal:

AKPALA: Well...?

ANANSE: Well what?

AKPALA: Your promise... my reward. Now that everything is over...

ANANSE: Good. Swallow it again. Now, open your mouth again. But this time, do not swallow. Keep your mouth open until I have smeared your lips with honey. Then I will tell you what to do next, right? (*Akpala nods anxiously. Ananse quietly places the gourd of honey back into its strap and brings out the gourd of gum. He begins to pour its contents into Akpala's mouth*) [...]. (*Ananse begins to smear some of the gum on the lips of Akpala*). (pp. 48-49)

The above excerpt shows that Akpala has been murdered by Ananse who had earlier promised to reward him for helping him reach his goal. The reward which Akpala is waiting for has turned into a capital punishment due to Ananse's betrayal. His decision to get rid of Akpala despite the good he has done to him is a proof that he is a wicked character. Referring to the resolution of the plot in the play, P. Arthur (2020, p. 160) posits:

This takes the reader to the resolution of the plot. Before Ananse's arrival in Dim-Nyim-Lira, the people knew no evaluation and everything was good. But his arrival has deteriorated the good atmosphere in the village. As a result, people have realized that the problem with the political hierarchy from his arrival onwards is weak thinking that leads to greed and selfishness. Ananse has finished his work and has to punish the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira for not considering thinking as a very important ingredient in their daily affairs. They realize the punishment only too late, and Ananse escapes with the Princess to an island where he is supposed to enjoy his booty of being a new chief. And for a greater measure, to enjoy the company of the Princess as well.

The foregoing quotation shows that P. Arthur denounces Ananse's arrival in the peaceful Kingdom of Dim-Nyim-Lira and his disruption of the peace which has prevailed so far. Ananse's arrival therefore

is the modifying element which has perturbed the normal course of things. This disruption is fuelled by the idiocy of the inhabitants of the kingdom. So, the playwright has chosen the title of the play on purpose. E. Asante and S. O. Yaw (2021, p. 3) corroborate the playwright's choice of the title of the play as they declare:

As Ananse leaves Dim-Nyim-Lira for the Island of Boyile which had been reserved for Sodziisa and her husband, he finds a wrecked kingdom which does not have the capacity to pursue and overtake him because, he leaves with all the three boats the kingdom owned which were built within a decade. It is for no reason but a critical fact that Yaw Asare was right to call the Kingdom of Dim-Nyim-Lira as the Land of Idiots.

As P. Arthur (2020, p. 160) puts it, "this narrative as presented in the drama is representative enough of Akan social expressivity. Indeed, it is the political narrative of the entire African continent. It can be referred to as an allegorical expression of hidden meaning, the type found in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress*." He goes on to add: "This narrative, like any other Ananse story, shows the epistemology of the Akan identity, the community's characteristic way of life" (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160) "to which members stand in dialogical relation" (P. Coetzee, 2002, p. 322, quoted by P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160). He also refers to the social meaning which has to do with "shared understandings and interpretations of events to which members have access through their participation in the creation of their commonality" (P. Coetzee, 2002, p. 322, quoted by P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160). After Ananse has requested the Princess to dance for him in the forest, he has devised a stratagem to capture her attention as revealed in this quotation:

When Sodziisa arrives, Ananse sends everybody around them away, with the exception of Akpala, whom he has already evaluated to be of a weak mind. He takes advantage of the naivety of the Princess and establishes a body contact with her that is so compromising and even though Ananse goes beyond ethical limits, the Princess is obviously more interested in the new dress she is going to have than the scandal Ananse is perpetrating. She is also not interested in the aftermath of the scandal and this is a reflection of the King's negligence with regard to the repercussion of taking bribe from a stranger. The King and the daughter are only interested in the glamour and the beauty of the kente; just what meets the eye. (P. Arthur, 2020, p. 160)

Ignorance and poverty are other causes of carelessness in *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. Odudu is a certified idiot because when Ananse requests for a messenger to run errands for him in the bush, King Dosey has landed on no other idiot in the whole Kingdom than Odudu. His idiocy becomes evident when he blindly believes Ananse who tells him that he can fetch water with a perforated gourd. So, when Ananse hands him the gourd, he turns the gourd up and down and happily runs away with it to the river. He virtually comes back with no water and disappointedly complains for having failed in his duty. After Potagyiri's death, it is Odudu whom Akpala calls for help for the burial. However, as if he were unaware of the plot about Potagyiri's death, Odudu finally reveals the truth to King Dosey, proving to be the only sensible person in the entire Kingdom. The noble African leaders do not generally involve the poor and down-trodden in their decision making. Although those people have a lot up their sleeves, they are always ignored. An example of this occurs at the end of the play. When King Dosey asks Odudu why he is not informed about the plot, his answer is very appropriate: "Nobody asked me, my lord" (p. 59). Although Odudu's idiocy may be attributed to illiteracy, his answer to the King is full of sense. Divine justice has judged and condemned King Dosey for his carelessness towards his people.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF CARELESSNESS AND WAYS TO GET OUT OF THIS PHENOMENON

The consequences of carelessness occur in the play. King Dosey's carelessness has led him to put himself into the hands of Kweku Ananse without taking any precautions as suggested by the priestess. He has plunged a whole kingdom into disaster. Throughout the play, King Dosey does not give serious thought to the moral aspect of his action and its implications. He is a leader who is prepared to exchange a whole sacrifice of the purification of the land for an act considered to be an abomination because of a piece of ornamented cloth (a kente band). He also puts more premiums on personal interest. As a result, at the end of the play, he loses his only daughter to a stranger. He boldly and publicly confesses that he has a lot of idiots in his Kingdom. However, he eventually proves to be the biggest idiot in the whole Kingdom. King Dosey is a greedy, selfish and materialistic dictator; and, indeed, he is not fit to be called a King.

It is obvious that 'one reaps what one sows' and the evil one does to others, sooner or later, one pays it cash. Who would have imagined that instead of rewarding Akpala for his good service, Ananse would punish him and that this punishment would even become fatal for him. The following quotation shows how Ananse has dealt with Akpala:

Good! Swallow it again. Now open your mouth again. But this time, do not swallow. Keep your mouth open until I have smeared your lips with honey. Then I will tell what to do next, right? [...]. By the powers given me by the timeless gods, I give you, Akpala, this secret of honey, as token of your untainted loyalty, help and kindness to me. Let it be with you forever. Any time you want honey, may your very spittle become honey just on the thought.

Now, do not swallow... you hear me? Do not swallow! If you do so, it will turn to crocodile bile, and you will die this very moment. Slowly, close your mouth... good. Now press your lips tight so your mouth won't open to let off the spirit. Now open your eyes and take this good. Run back to the crossroads and there, think of honey. Tell yourself you want honey. Then open your mouth and you will see honey filling this gourd and smiling over! Ha! Now you have the secret of the gods! Go! When you return, we will work out the details of the other rewards. (pp. 49-50)

This quotation reveals how human beings are wicked at times. Even Akpala could not imagine the bad reward that his co-conspirator is preparing for him. He has not realised that this ritual is another trick to keep him away from the expected reward. After sealing Akpala's mouth with glue so that he can no more speak and denounce him, Ananse convinces the King to kill him under the pretext that he is cursed. Ananse's skilful precaution is shown in the quotation below:

Aa!... I understand, Greatking. The dead craftsman gave us his two gourds of honey as parting gifts before he died. But I suspected the sweet stuff contains an evil spell, considering what everyone knows about his gusty ways. I told Akpala we must bury those gourds and he agrees. A while ago I made my wife fetch me those gourds and I went to bury them in the bush. I am sure Akpala hid by and thought he must have two for himself. This is one of the gourds, and he has drunk all the stuff no doubt. Ananse warned that one should taste it on Friday else the one would have his mouth sealed forever, and then go mad. Today is.... (p. 51)

The above quotation reveals that Ananse is great liar who distorts reality to suit his desire. Instead of abiding by his promise, he opts to his co-conspirator. To make it worse for him, when Akpala reappears apparently mad and dumb, Ananse warns the King and the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira: "Now if you allow him to touch someone with his mouth, that person will suffer the same affliction" (p. 52) and then makes a suggestion to the King, a dreadful one. His fatal suggestion appears in the following excerpt:

Great king, it saddens me to make this suggestion, Akpala being my best friend, companion and peer during initiation. But if this empire is to be saved from the scourge of dumbness and madness, I'm afraid he'd have to be killed immediately. For one must not endure the pain of pulling out one rotten tooth, to save the rest from infection. (p. 52)

This excerpt clearly unveils the way Ananse rewards Akpala, a bad reward indeed. This is the consequence of betraying the entire community just for the sake of meaningless things. One has to keep in mind that the evil a person does to others always return back to him/her sooner or later. Of course, this is what Akpala gains by helping a stranger to make the entire kingdom fall into a crisis. He has never thought that he would suffer from this situation and even meet with death. The King also suffers from his desire to put his interests before those of the population. In fact, King Dosey himself feels foolish and therefore unworthy of wearing the royal crown. He laments: "Naa Buruku! What a land of idiots I preside over!" (p. 59). So, it is clear that the King is suffering emotionally and regrets his action.

To get out of this phenomenon, women's role is capital. "This African world resonates with the concept of motherhood since in many African societies motherhood defines womanhood which is therefore crucial to women's status" (C. B. Davies, 1986, p. 243). Motherhood aggregates as an identity, a socio-historical construct and a social institution. C. B. Davies (1986, p. 243) amplifies it in this manner:

The most important factor with regard to the woman in traditional society is her role as mother and the centrality of this role as a whole. Even in strictly patrilineal societies, women are important as wives and mothers since their reproductive capacity is crucial to the maintenance of the husband's lineage and it is because of women that men can have a patrilineage at all.

We perceive motherhood as a central fact of the female existence because it is most connected to nature (mother earth) and biology. A woman's role in reproduction far outweighs that of a man. In *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, Yaw Asare also portrays women as the solution for the daily problems of Africans. In the play, if the people had given women like the priestess the chance to be decision-makers, none of the problems that hinder the people of Dim-Nyim-Lira would have occurred. Among all the members of the royal palace, the priestess is the only one who is strict about her decisions. For her, Ananse has to be killed because this is what tradition suggests and nothing less. Her position is unveiled in the quotation below:

You... you... you've ruined that sacrifice... you've stopped the passage of sacrifice to appease evils spirits. You are an evil soul... an evil soul... an evil soul. Great King ... this man... must die... he must die... instantly... he must die... ai... ai... ai... ai... ai... wipe out this evil soul from the land of dying sun ... ai... ai... ai... ai. (p. 10)

The quotation above refers to Ananse's death sentence that the Priestess has pronounced as a consequence of the abomination he has committed. Ananse must die according to the tradition of the village and this is what the priestess has suggested to the King. He tries to make the King intervene on his behalf so as to get the indulgence of the priestess for the cancelling of the penalty for his misconduct. He laments: "Is there no reprieve Great King? Plead with the priestess on my poor behalf, Old One, you who recall my presence in times of yore... plead on my behalf" (p. 10). Despite his plea, King Dosey orders the execution of the prisoner, Ananse, as shown in this excerpt:

Take him guards and hang him over to the executioners! Let them take him to the very crossroads where he committed his abomination. There, they must allow him to eat all the sacrificial food, every morsel of it, to fatten him for the offended spirit. Then let his blood spill over the mound to quench the thirst of the spirits. (p. 11)

From the a fore mentioned excerpt, it is clear that King Dosey was about to respect the tradition and execute Ananse. However, the prisoner decides to negotiate his life and to reach his goal, he starts manipulating everyone, starting with the King himself. The prisoner says: "Er... one last word, Great King, I have one proposition to make... an offer you'd find of great benefit..." (p. 11). R. Kwakye-Opong (2001, p. 19) refers to the deal between Ananse and King Dosey in these terms: "Ananse is sentenced to death but just before he is sent away, he pleads with the King and promises to weave the most beautiful cloth that anyone has ever seen when his life is spared." As a result, the King falls into his trap, together with the other tenants of the palace his trap like 'idiots', even though the priestess seems to be the only smart person in the palace. She is even against the King's decision to accept the deal that Ananse has proposed. Her opposition to that decision appears in the King's own words in the quotation below:

Well Ananse... we will give you a chance to prove your worth... yes, just one chance, though the priestess is not in favour of it. If you prove yourself a genuine and talented weaver as you claim to be, and if you are able to accomplish the task I shall set, that may buy you your freedom. If not, then of course the priestess shall have her way... you will die instantly. (p. 13)

King Dosey accepts Ananse's suggestion even though the priestess, the one who is the custodian of the tradition of the kingdom, is not in favour of that decision. The King awkwardly decides to recant his earlier decision to condemn Ananse to death sentence because of the trickster's cunning. The King has thus become a puppet in the hands of Ananse who manipulates him as he wishes. Through the King's reversal, the playwright denounces African traditional leaders' inconsistency which leads them to jeopardize the lives of their people because of greed.

One thing which one can keep in mind from the attitude of the priestess is that women have an amazing potential to lead a community. Men have to implicate them more in decision-making in African countries. So, their voices have to be well considered for the welfare of their communities. If the King had taken the suggestion of the priestess into account, the kingdom would not have been in

its present situation. From the analysis of *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, it clear that Yaw Asare draws people's attention to women's importance in African societies. Gender inequality should disappear in African so that gender equality should prevail. The female gender should therefore have the same chance as the male gender in ruling and decision-making in African societies. To get out of this phenomenon which prevails in the kingdom depicted in the play, the King has to play his role as the custodian of tradition. His main role is to conserve with authority the social order, he conciliate the function of judge, chief of war and chief of social cohesion, like a custodian. Custodian can be defined as a person with responsibility for protecting or taking care of something or keeping something in good condition. Every kingdom has his law, beliefs, culture and tradition. The King tries to protect and guaranteed the perpetuity of different ideas or principles of the tradition. According to A. S. Hornby (1989, p. 294), the term 'custodian' refers to "a person who takes care of or looks after something." So, in the play, the King is the person who takes care of or looks after the tradition of his people. As such, he has the heavy responsibility to protect the traditional heritage of his kingdom and reign until death or abdication. The king has not only the power of decision, the power of imposition, and the power of punishment but also the duty to respect the customs and tradition of his kingdom, to be just, to be right and to lead his kingdom with humility.

The King reigns with some Elders who help him and remind him when he wants to violate the custom. The King is the person who is supposed to be nearly of the ancestors, he is the frontier between the ancestors and people on earth he is the person chosen by dead to drive the people to their salvation. In this case the power of the King becomes limited. In the play *The Legend of Aku Sika*, the King decides to be just patient and right as revealed in this quotation: "I swear with this ancient sword in hand that I shall rule with justice, truth, and humility as my guide. That I shall protect, defend and safeguard the rich heritage and rich of all our people" (p. 10).

In every traditional community, the King is supposed to be the only one who is close to the gods, and because of that, he is supposed to be just and impartial. And above all, he should put the interest of the whole society before his own life. In *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*, people have the right to dislike the King because he does not care for the welfare of the community. The King has thus wronged the ancestors who have blessed his stool. In the same vein, he has broken the allegiance which he swore to his people while taking power. T. M. Aletum (2001, p. 206) notes:

If the transfer of power in the [...] societies did not follow the customs and traditions dictated by the ancestors, the usurper after sitting on the ancestral stool suffered a serious mishap such as sterility, madness or even death. This also was true for a rightful chief going against the decision taken by the people while at the same time drinking from the ancestral cup to which he swore allegiance to the people.

The reign of a particular king, however loved or despised, is never more significant than the endurance of the kingdom itself. Iterating Brutus's declaration of loving Rome more than away ward Caesar, G. Tangwa (1998, p. 3) observes that when the ruler is perceived to be a political liability, "in some traditional African Kingdoms the King/Queen could even be quietly executed or asked to voluntarily drink poison if his/her continued reign is considered dangerous for the survival and/or well-being of the Kingdom." Auxiliary authorities, often of a highly respected religious and/or elder status (for e.g., the Queen-Mother, traditional councils, healers, shamans and secret societies) bestowed and/or removed kingship and continually advise the king in roles that mediated the autocracy of the kingdom. The following quotation refers to this fact:

[...] while the King or Queen generally appeared very powerful and his/her word could frequently condemn anyone to death, s/he was, nevertheless, subject to very strict control, not only by means of taboos but from institutions and personalities of very high moral authority and integrity whose main preoccupation was protection and safeguarding of the Kingdom as distinguished from the King, the interests of the ordinary person, the land, the ancestors and the unborn. (G. Tangwa, 1998, p. 2)

The distinction between the role of kings before, during and after colonialism is important and goes toward the broader issue of the appeal of kingly authority in the Diaspora imagination. The main preoccupation of kings as mentioned in the quotation should be the protection and safe guarding of his Kingdom through good practices without carelessness or greed.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article has consisted in examining critically and in exposing the carelessness and its drawbacks in Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*. The paper has dealt with three aspects, namely carelessness in the play, the causes of carelessness, and the consequences of carelessness and ways to get out of this phenomenon. It has disclosed the carelessness and its drawbacks in the chosen play. The study has found that carelessness has a lot of drawbacks and has to be eradicated. The playwright has used many literary techniques to convey his message. He has mainly had recourse to the poetic use of language in the play which is also characterised by the use of simile and metaphor which gives the audience the challenge not only to watch but to think as well. He has succeeded in impacting his readership by drawing his readers' attention to the drawbacks of carelessness. The findings of the study show that carelessness is a phenomenon which seriously affects individuals and society at large.

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